

THE WORK OF LOVE

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**UNPAID HOUSEWORK,
POVERTY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE
AT THE DAWN OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

GIOVANNA FRANCA DALLA COSTA

The Work of Love

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The Role of Unpaid Housework as a Condition of
Poverty and Violence at the Dawn of the 21st Century

Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa

with a new Introduction by
Mariarosa Dalla Costa

Translated from Italian by
Enda Brophy

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PREFACE

Enda Brophy

At last *The Work of Love*, a text in which are condensed key questions of feminism and autonomy, is available in English. It joins the already-translated work of Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Leopoldina Fortunati and others from the Italian feminist-autonomist tradition, taking its place alongside radical critiques of housework by Anglophone feminists, including the more or less contemporary work of Betty Friedan, Ann Oakley, and Lee Comer. With its publication we are brought back through the long and rich genealogy of Italian radical feminism to a very specific historical conjuncture and offered a renewed perspective on the forces animating our own.

It is not a coincidence that the women's movement in Italy during the Seventies produced such a complex and rich combination of forms of direct action and analyses of the domination and emancipation of women. These were carried out within a patriarchal State that, in its alliance with the Catholic Church, enforced the prohibition of abortion and divorce, and, as Giovanna Dalla Costa outlines in this text, sanctioned a seemingly endless condition of subalternity for women. This in itself constituted a formidable adversary, one that was faced by the Italian extra-parliamentary left as a whole in the immediate period in which this book was published. Yet this text, like the movement it emerged from, directed its antagonistic critique beyond the role of State to the male-dominated Italian left, including the rad-

ical workerist left: they denounced the violence of the male comrades as they did that of their bosses. Nor was the response they received a gentle one. The most symbolic and public moment occurred in Rome on December 6th, 1977, when the male stewards of *Lotta Continua* and of the *Comitato Autonomo di Centocelle* attacked a feminist demonstration and its vindication of a woman's right to separate from a man.

The Wages for Housework movement in Italy therefore faced patriarchy in all of its articulations and on all of its terrains. It moved from the home to society and back again, becoming a machine that turned private and public spaces alike into explicitly political ones. But how will this text be taken up now, in a scenario that is both very different yet, as Mariarosa Dalla Costa suggests in her introduction, also very similar to the Fordist world confronted in its pages?

Certainly the flexibilization of labor in developed countries has meant that an increasing percentage of women are now forced into two jobs, adding one outside of the home to the unwaged domestic labor they have always performed. This text offers a starting point, with its incisive analysis, for understanding this condition. Today's labor precarity, which is suffered disproportionately by women, is a new and subtler form of social violence. The statistics that constantly speak of the single mother as the most consistent figure of the working poor in our "developed" economies bears eloquent testimony to it. Where the terrain has shifted, groups like the Spanish feminist collective *Precarias a la Deriva* are responding through their activism and research to what Giovanna Dalla Costa suggested, all those years ago, was a vital task: "the need on the part of women to construct, with the goal of organizing their struggle, a broad inquiry into their overall conditions of life, and specifically of the violence they experience as the defining index of their quality of life."

While the analysis of these shifts is important, they must not however obscure the deep continuities connecting this text to our time. Giovanna Dalla Costa's book offers unwavering rigor in its analysis of how the state rendered its repressive apparatus ineffective when it came to confronting the widespread violence committed against women. Thirty years later a random look at the news shows us how little things have changed. In Ontario, former Premier Mike Harris took away an allowance for pregnant women on wel-

fare and joked that his government did not want them to spend it on beer. Meanwhile, in the United States during the years of George W. Bush's presidency, the liberties women fought hard to achieve (abortion and welfare above all) have been subject to intense attack, with a strong discursive emphasis placed once more on the family and the implied role within it for women. The complex relationship between capital and patriarchy discussed in this book is therefore alive and well in this part of the world.

It goes without saying that women have, since this book, fought back against these systems. One thinks of the power and levels of organization achieved by queer women, of the greater visibility gained by organizations of sex-workers, and of the general intensity of activism around gender issues in general. A part of this has been the steady invention of ways of living and understandings of pleasure that collectively strike at the heart of what Giovanna Dalla Costa calls the "ideology of love," one which tells women they must be married to a man, stay faithful to him their whole lives, and work for him in the home. Meanwhile, radical feminists still fight their double battle within movements, seeking their autonomy both from established systems of domination and the men they organize with.

A note on some terms that are frequently used in this text and their translation: The Italian term "mansione" has been translated, depending the context of its usage, as "task," "job," "duty," "responsibility," "function," and "role," among others. "Prostituta" has been translated literally as "prostitute," rather than the more current "sex-worker," in order to retain something of the time in which this text was written. "Orchestrazione ideologica," in reference to what is carried out by the State, has been mostly translated as "ideological orchestration," but occasionally as "ideological arrangement." While both are overly literal, they remain closest to both the strategy employed by the state and the musical metaphor the author is employing.

Introduction

Mariarosa Dalla Costa

It is no accident that the English translation of this text, first published in Italian in 1978 and which appeared in 1991 in Japanese (*A no rodou*, Tokyo, Impact Shuppankai), comes at a political moment when the debate over housework — that is, the labor of the production and reproduction of labor-power — and the debate about violence have re-emerged with particular insistence at the international level.

The text published here poses at the center of its analysis the relationship existing between physical, and more specifically, sexual, violence against women, and the role of performing housework to which they are primarily assigned in the capitalist division of labor, a role that defines the whole of their existence. What emerges here is that the first level of violence lies in the labor relation itself, which the woman experiences to the extent that she is commanded to perform unwaged labour in a wage economy. The disciplinary function that physical violence assumes in her regard is explained through the peculiarity of such a work relationship.

Violence and the labor of reproduction form the two extremes of a relation which emerges as a determinant one, not only regarding the origins of capitalism where it gives substance and form to what in this mode of production would be defined as the sphere of reproduction, but as a constant in its history and one that has been emphasized in a progressively dramatic manner in recent times.

As feminist authors Leopoldina Fortunati and Silvia Federici have insightfully suggested, it is not only on the witches' pyre that the new female proletarian individuality upon which the figure of the isolated wife evolves, subordinated to her husband and above all working merely in exchange for the dependence of being supported, would be forged; significantly, because of the withdrawal of any means of subsistence deriving either from the preceding economy or the new mode of production, the female proletarian individual is born into the period of primitive accumulation fundamentally as pauper and prostitute.

The relation between the labor of reproduction, poverty, prostitution and violence emerges today as an increasingly obvious constant typifying a form of development whose origins go back five centuries, and that still endures.

Reproductive work and violence constitute two topics characterized today by a revival of discussion, an extension of "in the field" investigations and a surge of initiatives against them practiced by women of both the global North and the South, not to mention by those of an emergent East. The NGO Forums which have increasingly positioned themselves as parallel and alternative to the most recent global conferences of the United Nations have testified to the growth of women's commitment toward these subjects as they relate to the question of the environment (Rio de Janeiro 1992), to human rights (Vienna 1993), to social development (the Copenhagen Summit 1995), to population and development (Cairo 1994), and to that of women (Beijing 1995).

With regard to the *labor of reproduction* (already raised at the Nairobi Conference of 1985 as a fundamental part of the unpaid work women perform across the planet, contributing to every aspect of development, and which ought to be calculated therefore in the gross domestic product of every nation. A series of economic strategies, especially since the 1980s, have dramatically worsened its conditions. The virtually global and increasingly drastic application of the policies which have characterized the management of the international debt crisis, that is the policies of structural adjustment, have compromised or made impossible even the merest subsistence for ever-larger segments of humanity. Significantly, the 1980s were years characterized in

almost all of the "developing" countries by the "bread revolts" as those policies, which were part and parcel of the imperium of economic liberalism characterizing the new world order and the new global economy, were filling the world with crowded refugee camps, multiplying prisons and causing the swelling of migrants' movements to almost biblical proportions. In the wake of these migrant movements, the labor of reproduction has not only been rearticulated and transferred to diverse regions of the planet, but has also been restratified to the point of encompassing conditions of slavery. These conditions correspond to the new division and stratification of work commanded by structural adjustment policies. With respect to this it is worthwhile to remember how in the 1970's, within considerable sections of the wave of movements and struggles that emerged at the international level, a feminist movement developed which questioned the obligation on the part of the female gender to perform unpaid housework. The response to its demands, spanning from the end of that decade into the eighties, and on into recent years, was a wave of political repression and increasingly restrictive economic strategies intended to weaken a female front which had found in the bargaining over the conditions of reproduction its strongest moment of unity. It was exactly this deterioration of the conditions of life in "advanced" areas, in "developing" areas, and in those "in transition" — as much so for people dependent on the formal economy for jobs and services as for those dependent on the unwaged labor of the woman, since both were affected by market deregulation and the reduction/dismantling of the social welfare state — that seems to have provoked in various countries a reconsideration of the labor of reproduction. This work "sustains the world but suffocates and limits the woman," as we said in a well-known poster of the 1970s. Then, at least in Italy, the part of the movement which had made this work the focal point of its analysis and the perspective of its struggle, was countered by another discourse, one that was more emancipatist. This discourse, which was prevalently developed at the institutional and academic level, had seen the rise of female employment (which was compatible, in the view of the scholarly promoters of this perspective, with the burden of family and children) as the index of a potential advancement for ever-greater numbers of women. I would indicate this discourse as characterized by the literature of the "double presence"¹ and as representative of the positions of the institutional left.

As far as the male extra-parliamentary left is concerned, it does not seem to me to have ever expressed a particular commitment to the theme.

The course of events in the 1980's would appear to have led to some uncertainty within the perspective of the "double presence." And in nineties (we are referring to Italy here) it seems to have also led to a renewed consideration of the centrality, the importance and the accomplishments of reproduction work (that very terrain which previously was thought of as surpassed), of the beauty and virtue of life outside the laws of the market, and of the positive opportunity which unemployment finally offered to men to put themselves to the test in the sphere of reproduction, expending some effort but also savoring its joys. Today these reflections are carried out at a time when the irreversibility of a rising unemployment is accepted as inevitable, as is the creation of precarious and flexible work and the progressive dismantling of the social welfare state. But to ignore the problem of the lack of money, in the face of spreading unemployment (including that of men), as has already happened with housework, means to assume that suicides due to unemployment, or because of blackmail by usurers (facts increasingly reported by the media) are not problems that concern reproduction. With such an approach one comes full circle, returning to the point of departure but transforming that departure into a sad homecoming. Such sadness does not take into account the fact that from the analysis of the terrain of reproduction irrepressible struggles and worldwide movements grew, which, far from accepting as inevitable the fate of a deterioration of the terrain of reproduction, made it the primary terrain of struggle in another kind of development.

It is not by chance that structural-adjustment policies, which seek instead to perpetuate this development model through ever-harsher methods, are attacking principally the terrain of reproduction. They tend to weaken women's demands and struggles, as the bearers of a crucial axis of social conflict at the global level. The emancipationist discourse of the seventies, which still remains with us despite its increasing tenuousness, was at fault for not having sought, within the given context, a perspective that opened for women of both the global North and South the possibility of a life beyond mere social climbing. The discourse of the "sad return" I described above is also guilty of this. Both tendencies fail to recognize the centrality, with respect to all of

life's aspects and the conditions of women and men, of the controversy that was opened in Italy with the demand of wages for housework, for a drastic reduction in work time for all men and women and for an increase and an improvement in the services available. This controversy was opened in order to radically modify the conditions of human reproduction. Similarly, these discourses failed and continue to fail to recognize the debate and the struggles over housework and the conditions of reproduction that are increasingly prevalent in the so-called global South. It would be enough simply to notice the role women have played against structural adjustment measures in India, Egypt, Morocco, and in so many other "developing" countries, or the role they have had in Mexico in the Zapatista revolt and the teachers' revolt which preceded it, or the heroic commitment they have displayed within their organizations in Guatemala and its refugee camps, or the role they have played and the entirety of the initiatives they have organized at the social, civil and political levels during and after the Eritrean liberation movement, or the struggles conducted in Nigeria alongside students and other sectors of the population against the dismantling of the education and health care systems, against the cost of living, against environmental disaster, or more simply against the deterioration of the conditions of reproduction brought about by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It would have been sufficient to understand that the only remaining way to advance across the terrain of reproduction, in Italy as elsewhere, is not that of the sad return. On this terrain, feminism throughout the world and not only in Italy, must, with necessary depth and rigor, take up once again a debate and an initiative for which they have already paid a high price because of political and economic repression. To do so, it will be necessary to have an international perspective. Such a perspective must be directed especially towards women's movements and struggles occurring in the global South, including the South which is growing in developed regions, if it is to construct a path that can unify. First and foremost this perspective must turn its attention towards the struggle against the continuing production of poverty and extermination. The problem is not the feminization of poverty, which, were it more masculinized, would still be no cause for celebration: the problem is poverty. The problem is not so much the relapse into violence, above all that against women, that war provokes: the problem is war. It must be opposed. To struggle against it is a

primary goal. We cannot simply assume that such phenomena will be inevitable aspects of the world scene for many years to come. No serious discussion of reproduction can take place today that does not confront these as key questions. So neglecting such problems, which constitute fundamental aspects of the kind of development we are experiencing, and that are reproducing themselves not by accident on an ever-larger scale, means it is impossible to fully confront the problem of violence.

This is due to the fact that *violence* is above all the legacy of capitalist accumulation. Violence is the continuous deadly exploitation such accumulation imposes. Violence is the destruction of every possibility of subsistence which does not depend evermore firmly on the laws of a waged economy, the compulsion to be unemployed, the compulsion to accept conditions of work which are increasingly inhuman, the compulsion to accept an increasingly total insecurity of life. Violence is the terribly high price that is paid for struggle. Violence is the strategies of war, devised essentially to crush the rebellion growing in the world against this type of development and the racist and sexist practices and cultures that such strategies are bearers of. Violence is the decision to enact all those policies of war and "peace" that tend to transform those seeking to be citizens of the world into corpses, into those condemned to death, into the incarcerated/imprisoned, the deported, the migrant and the resident of refugee camps. If we do not hold the micro-practices of violence up to the light and the fundamental processes that generate it then we risk separating the discussion of reproduction from that of violence. *We risk not seeing that the struggles over the conditions of reproduction are at the same time struggles against the violence with by which such reproduction is commanded.* We also risk *not understanding why the repression* inflicted upon such struggles *is increasingly violent*, as much in its more subtle and mystified forms as in those that are more overt. *This mode of production is in fact advancing its own development by underdeveloping evermore the sphere of reproduction on a global level.*

The text *The Work of Love*, written and published as part of that pressing theoretical practical activity that characterized a part of the feminism of the seventies in Italy, poses, in a sober and rigorous style, some problems that concern us because of the preceding observations and those which follow below.

Beginning with the analysis of the fundamental dynamics traversing the working class family at the interpersonal level and the relationship between this family and capital and the state, the author offers us some very useful keys for reading the relationship linking the sphere of production with that of reproduction and the relationship between the formal and informal economy, as well as for understanding the role of the state, as political power, in relation to the problem of violence. In doing so, she offers us a set of tools that is also useful for beginning to reflect on the role which, in the context of the weakening of state power, is increasingly played by small and large-scale international organizations and trans-regional structures that are growing throughout the world.

The author begins by pointing out that violence is fundamentally inherent in the relationship of exploitation (to which oppression corresponds, but which is not merely a relationship of oppression) that the woman as the unwaged producer and reproducer of labor-power lives. She compares the peculiar violence of this relation with the violence inherent in the relations of waged work and slave labor. These three relations are compared under all fundamental aspects in order to demonstrate that the labor condition of the woman as reproducer does not correspond either to that of the worker or to that of the slave. Therefore a different definition is coined: the woman is a "houseworker."

The other central element of the argument is to show how the wage of the husband commands the length of the working day of the woman, the speed of her work, and determines the standard of living of the family's reproduction. Starting with the microcosm of the family, the text brings to light how capitalist accumulation works to extract surplus value not only from the work performed by the man but also from the woman's unpaid work which the man's wage commands. The law by which capitalist accumulation extracts surplus value not only from directly waged work (or from self-employment which today largely constitutes a transfiguration of the former), but from the work which from the beginning has been, and remains commanded by waged labor, functions not only within the male-female relationship in the worker and proletarian family, but at the level of the relationship linking the formal economy to the informal one (of reproduction, of subsistence) at a planetary level.

As for the *forms of discipline* which hold together the three labor relations which are considered, those of the free worker, the slave and the houseworker, the author asks: under what whip does the woman work? She suggests that within the working class family the woman works under the whip of needing to satisfy the elementary needs linked to mere subsistence. Yet because, in comparison with the male worker, far more is extorted from her in exchange for far less of a wage, the threat of *physical violence* becomes an "essential" part of the male "treatment" that she is subject to inasmuch as such violence is the additional disciplining factor meant to make up for the lack of a wage itself, in regard to her struggles and rebellions. We will not enter any deeper into the analysis here but will rather leave the reader to see how physical violence constitutes only one moment albeit a fundamental one and an ever present risk of a treatment that knows how to modulate itself and use varying tones. And we also leave the reader to understand more precisely how to interpret rape and incest on the basis of the division of labor existing within the family.

The other axis of the discussion upon which it is necessary to pause in order to underscore aspects of the analysis that we are illustrating here are the author's reflections on the position of the state with respect to physical violence in general and to that perpetrated against women, as well as the attention she devotes to showing how women are more often the target of this violence and, more specifically, to the type of sexual violence represented by rape and incest.

Regarding the general physical violence man inflicts on woman, the author argues that the attitude of the state is a result of its relation to the organization of work in the family. "*The state*," the text suggests, "*is the guarantor of the violence which exists in the capitalist relationship of exploitation of women*, because it has codified the family on the basis of unpaid work itself." The state, it continues, sanctions for women the position of unpaid worker within the family by codifying it in the marriage contract. This explains, according to the author, that with respect to the general physical violence of man against woman, the state institutes a kind of *laissez-faire*, offering a tacit encouragement to men to exercise this violence through the effective neutralization of its repressive apparatus. The state in this way secures for itself the woman's labor discipline, ceding to the man

the position of foreman and judge of her work and also, where necessary, that of the executor of sanctions. Physical violence as a latent menace or as practice exercised by men serves therefore to keep the woman subordinate and working. Nothing remains except to ascertain how much work the feminist movement had to carry out in order to bring this reality to light, to build networks of defense and to make it possible for women to go to the courts with at least some success.

Regarding physical/sexual violence in particular, beginning with a definition which stirred up so much commotion, namely, *that making love is housework*. Indeed that is its *central task*. The author, after having examined the place and significance of rape and incest within the division of labor and family roles, discusses this topic by paying specific attention to the activity and role of the state. With respect to rape in general, argues the author, apart from the more vibrant admonishments it reserves for the more aberrant cases, the state's attitude is one of unenthusiastic reprimand. If rape occurs within marriage, the state's position is, on a basic level, not to give it any importance. If instead it occurs outside the family, against women who are not wives, the practical neutralization of the state's repressive apparatus we mentioned above (keep in mind that today we are separated from the situation recorded in the text by roughly twenty years of women's activism and struggle) contributes to the effect of encouraging a sexist culture and practice that serve to intimidate the woman, to keep her disciplined and oriented towards the acceptance of marital protection. The state, therefore, is not overly concerned with effectively preventing the risk of rape, nor with punishing the culprit too severely. But it is concerned with making it known that rape exists, and for this reason it provides news of it, advertizing precisely the risk every woman runs, especially when she is "alone" and in "places" and during "times" that are not "suitable" for her.

Even if some decades separate us from the drafting of this text, one cannot fail to see how its analysis, beyond the changes which an extensive series of initiatives by women has produced, still corresponds to the configuration of and an attitude held by institutions that are largely still in place. As far as Italy is concerned, the famous bill against sexual violence, after its wandering vagabond life beginning with the first bill proposed in 1979, has since concluded its journey, becoming Law Number 66 on February 15, 1996. Yet

the core of this law ought not to have aroused such hesitation, since the point was to define and correspondingly inscribe within the penal code crimes of sexual violence as crimes “against the person” instead of ones “against public morals and good custom,” along with a new set of norms. Two women, of whom only one survived, were at a bathing resort in Lazio in 1975, where they were tortured and sexually abused. This led the following year to a night demonstration in Rome where thousands of women participated. But there had been numerous demonstrations in the previous years in various cities, particularly in 1973, when for the first time in Italy the feminist movement in Padua had transformed a trial for abortion into a trial sustained by a large mobilization of people seeking to decriminalize abortion, as well as to protest against the violent conditions in which women were forced to seek abortions, and against the violence of the attitude of the judges and lawyers in these trials. The feminist movement from across Italy converged on Padua to support and participate in the actions. Immediately afterwards there were feminist demonstrations against violence in numerous other cities. In these years, due to the power expressed by the movement, increasing numbers of women had found the courage to bring to court incidents of sexual violence and to transform the judiciary trial into an instrument of political mobilization, to make it a site of political battle against the state’s responsibility, the attitude of the judges and lawyers, and the conduct of men in general. These were the years of the torch-lit nighttime demonstrations under the slogan “Take Back the Night!” In 1978 in Rome there was an international feminist conference on the subject, and 12% of the women present declared that they had been subject to violence. In 1979 a committee of women was formed that presented a bill immediately after the election of the new parliament. Between 1979 and 1980 all of the political parties made their own proposals, but the years of the large feminist demonstrations against violence were already behind us. The political repression was sending the feminist movement “back home” as it struck out against all of the other social movements. From that point on the bill against sexual violence would have to wait many years to become law. It is certainly true that later, through women’s own initiatives, which found partial institutional support, some centers against violence, shelters for battered women, and hot lines were organized to provide front-line aid and comfort for those who had experienced violence of every kind. It is equally the case

that the progressive reduction of public expenditures on services for citizens is placing the very continuation of these initiatives in doubt. Yet, during the peak of the movement, when houses for battered women and other initiatives of defense were fundamental parts of our demands, *together with and in the context of* demands for the removal of women from the constant threat of poverty and violence, the state and its institutions remained silent. In making elementary requests inspired by civil and social rights, whoever sought to struggle in an effective manner paid the price of criminalization. Later, outside the tension and force of the movement’s peak, a partial welcome was extended on the part of the institutions to the question of violence. This resulted in some support for houses for battered women and some telephone hotlines that they could turn to, but the state still treated such occurrences as isolated, as separate from the economic weakness of the woman, from her dependence on the man, matters which instead are at the very root of her risk of experiencing violence. In the 1970s came the response that there wasn’t any money for women because the state didn’t have any. Today the proffered argument that is implicitly and explicitly linked to this separation of the issues is “How can you expect money in this time of obvious fiscal crisis from the state? Especially given a kind of international competition in which men and women working for a wage are forced to accept ever more difficult conditions if they want to retain any waged work at all?” And, as we have been told more recently, “How can you ask us to pay for these women’s centers, women’s shelters and phone lines if we are already struggling to find the money to send troops to Bosnia where there is much worse violence than what you experience?” The sequence (and not only in the Italian case) is to first repress, then divide, then concede something only marginally better than tokenism that confronts only one side of the problem, and then retreats from that as well, in the name of some more important “mission” called for by the state. All of this defuses the attention and the combative energy women devote to their own needs, common to those of other women in the world, by transforming them into a simple solidarity for “poor women” struck by disasters as inevitable as they are indecipherable.

Moving on from this to consider the analysis of *incest*, the author shows how fundamentally the state’s attitude is to ignore it or refuse to admit its existence, despite a situation already emerging at the time of this book’s writ-

ing that testified rather to its widespread diffusion. The penal code punishes incest only if it leads to a "public scandal." While, as the author maintains, at the ideological level the state considers incest to be much more serious than rape, it tends, unlike in the case of rape, not to publicize instances of it in order to pretend that it doesn't exist. The state's response to the problem appears to be that if incest has occurred, the circumstances of the case must be so exceptional that it would be absurd to inflict additional punishment. To admit and to divulge the widespread existence of incest would risk revealing the potential for violence within the family and would therefore have an opposite effect to that of convincing the woman to see the family as the ideal space for her sustenance and protection. It was only the actions of the feminist movement in the 1970's that tore down the thick cover that obscured the existence of incest and developed support for the victims of such crimes.²

While in recent years some initiatives have been developed on this terrain, such as telephone hotlines, to which the young people who are frequently the victims of this crime, can turn, nevertheless such initiatives have not had any effect on one obstacle, which remains a constant. That is, especially at a proletarian level, the major impediment preventing the victim from escaping the violence, in the 1970s as now. It consists in the fact that the family will remain without economic sustenance if the father is arrested and charged. Here too the approach of the state is to separate the issues. To not confront the problem of woman's economic dependence leaves unresolved and unresolvable those types of violence which the state itself, at least ideologically, considers to be most aberrant.

Another axis of this analysis which interests us, regarding the use of its main interpretive categories to confront current problematics, is the distinction between the position of the state towards women who do not embody deviant tendencies with respect to the role of wife and mother imposed by the capitalist division of labor, and its position towards women who are deviant with respect to these roles, such as *prostitutes* and *lesbians*.

As we have said, concerning those considered non-deviant, the state's attitude regarding physical violence, and sexual violence in particular, is officially one of unenthusiastic reprimand, containing only a minimal commitment to punish such instances, because the fundamental control over housework discipline for women is devolved to men, and the threat or exercise of

physical violence constitutes a disciplinary tool that is essential for this function of control. The state's position regarding prostitutes and lesbians is different. These two typologies of women place the sexual division of labor in crisis, above all with respect to the assumption of the unwaged nature of the central task of housework — namely making love — because prostitutes expect money in exchange, offering such services only sporadically and not as part of a continuum which includes all the other tasks of housework. Lesbians, on the other hand, withdraw themselves from the obligation to perform such tasks within the heterosexual relationship, which is frequently codified as a religion with respect to the goals of the productivity of the capitalist family.

Criminalization and ghettoization are the trademarks of the prostitute's condition. Heavy penalization and attempts at ghettoization are also the trademarks of the lesbian's life. The risk that the state wants to avoid is of this behaviour entering into competition with the roles of wife and mother. This is why criminalization, penalization and ghettoization become necessary. Yet in this framework it also becomes important to publicize, even emphasize, incidents of violence against these women to demonstrate the risk they run by deviating from the assumption that the family is their location of choice. The author highlights the fact that, in the case of the prostitute, the self-neutralization of the state's repressive apparatus reaches the point where prostitutes are discouraged from bringing charges of violence to court, and often risk undergoing violence on the part of the very same male police.

Beginning in those years, we saw a transformation take place in Italy and elsewhere, through the creation of committees for the defense of prostitutes and prostitute organizations (many of which remain active) and a growth in strength of the lesbian movement. Yet institutional power has a stake in maintaining the lines of this division among women. And the recent ascent of global powers which seek ever-more-warlike forms of development, to suppress material needs and moments of individual liberty, can only accentuate such lines of division.

Moreover, as far as the female prostitute is concerned, and with respect to the violence which she in particular suffers, and even though during the wave of power expressed by the 1970s feminist movement prostitutes had created forms of organization which gave them more power and defended

them in the course of performing their work, by the eighties and nineties prostitution grew exponentially at the global level, due to international economic strategies. On the one hand, prostitution became a necessary choice for ever-greater numbers of women, children and starving and/or threatened parents, who had to sell their daughters on the global prostitution market (or in any case accept that this is the only real way to make a living), or who couldn't protect their daughter from being kidnapped for the same market. On the other hand, prostitution became a profitable terrain for larger criminal groups that frequently sustained the trade by kidnapping women, adolescents and children from poverty-stricken areas all over the world, or making promises that were not maintained. From Asia, Africa and Latin America, women's activism has produced a broad documentation of these facts, and of the living conditions prostitutes experience once they reach their destinations on the street or in brothels. But it has also built internationally coordinated organizations for the support of these women, both in their countries of origin and in those where they arrive. Of the utmost importance in this regard is the Filipina organization Gabriela. The growth of these conditions and these forms of prostitution offers a snapshot of the violence of poverty and of its impact on women.

It is the merit of this book therefore to have brought to light above all the *strong connection between female poverty and violence*, because poverty is above all the condition of being assigned, as women are, unwaged work in a waged economy. This condition carries the consequent risk of even greater poverty because it is already a violent one in itself — housework has been and remains both constructed and maintained by violence. In addition, to the degree that the woman performs reproductive work in an unwaged economy, she is subject to poverty and violence inasmuch as these economies are continually pressured and upended by capitalist development. It is a further merit of this work to have demonstrated in a relational way the *responsibility* and the *ambiguous role of the state* in establishing and sustaining both female poverty itself and the violence that underlies it and maintains it.

In light of this, I will consider in a cursory manner two additional questions: the risks run today by women's commitment to the large-scale efforts at the global level (and to world conferences called by international organizations such as the United Nations), and the growth in importance of inter-

national organisations or transregional structures in the face of the weakening functions of the national state.

First, it is already evident how the policy of the state has proceeded with respect to violence against women, repressing the movement, separating the issues at hand (the demand for women's economic autonomy from that of their defense against the violence that they experience), putting into place negligible measures in order to address the most obvious individual cases of violence, only to then to retreat from the commitment even to these issues by turning women's attention towards others.

Let us consider the demand of payment to women for the work for which they are primarily held to be responsible. Here, too, the sequence in Italy was to repress the movement, to separate the issues, to put into place a few face-saving policies much later, and in the meantime to pursue economic policies which accentuated the problem of poverty for both men and women. Stories increasingly surface about suicides because of lack of money or jobs, not to mention attempts to sell one's own organs (even though such sales are often illegal), and of the abandonment and murder of newborn infants by mothers. Particularly relevant with respect to these occurrences, considering their frequency, is the government's initiative to inform women by means of television advertisements that in cases where they do not want or cannot keep a child, they have the legal right to refuse to recognize it as theirs and leave it at the hospital where it is born.

What has been discussed above is an accurate depiction of the social conditions that recent macropolicies have assigned to ever more women and men. While the fundamental demand by women for money, beginning with the first work they perform, remains unmet, token policies have multiplied, thanks largely to institutional efforts at both the state and regional or municipal levels. One example of this, in Italy as in other countries, is the institution of "equal opportunity" policies. These policies were only useful, if at all, in their creation of commissions that supported the production of a literature investigating the female disadvantage relative to the male condition. Rarely did these inquiries or research projects bring to light some unfortunate, previously unnoticed condition suffered by women. Such commissions also financed some women's gatherings and cultural initiatives. Yet they never

made so much as a dent in the relation between women and poverty, nor have they significantly affected the conditions of outside work, the conditions of political participation, or even proposed to contest the aggravation of female poverty. The resulting paradox was that, apparently, there was a lot of feminism around at the time, since on the basis of the availability of funding to carry out women's cultural production (one that was unimaginable even in the 1970s), more women's voices could be heard. Yet at the same time a type of cultural activity prevailed that avoided genuine political debate, or any initiatives that were incisive. The kind of women's culture that predominated in the 1980s and which was still largely present in the nineties found space in the context of the suppression of a particular political feminism of the 1970s. As a consequence, while the general female condition in the new global economy was reflected in the increasing presence of female domestic workers and prostitutes, a female intellectual strata was growing (especially in developed countries) which, while being involved in women's conditions, never treated the policies which generated all of this as a political priority. Instead, it applied itself to the question of how to eliminate the discrimination between women and men (but which men?) within the given context.

If, then, we wish to look at the demands of women regarding work outside the home — given that this remains the only real means of obtaining money — we will see that at this level, too, the state's initiatives have only been token ones. Take, for example, a problem common to many women: re-entering the job market after being absent from it for years while taking care of children. We find that the state's policies have been completely inconsistent. Publicly funded training courses were offered with no proportional relationship between the investment made and the real possibility for a significant number of women to find or create a job. As a result female unemployment, together with the reduction of the welfare state, continues unabated, without any serious discussion or initiatives intended to fight it. Likewise, only ambiguous results have come from the state's activity in sustaining and financing the initiatives (and in Italy they are many) intended to address on a "therapeutic" basis the hardship deriving from the impossibility of finding work, the lack of access to decent education, or the inability to satisfy the fundamental needs of existence. Money was allocated to take care of the symptoms in some fashion, while at the same time other policies were put

into place that aggravated the problem. As these policies deepen poverty as a problem characterizing Italian society both now and in the foreseeable future, they correspondingly deepen class conflict, the conflict between the sexes and between ethnic groups, favouring a resurgence of racist and sexist attitudes and behaviors.

If we look at the growing activism on the international scene and at large, global conferences, we cannot help but notice a few things. The worldwide conferences have become, especially in recent years, a great occasion to organize meetings among women in the forums organized parallel to these conferences and thus for encounters and for the sharing of knowledge about the reality of violence and poverty which women endure in every region of the planet. In this sense they are occasions for encounters and for the sharing of knowledge on an incomparably larger scale than those of the 1970s and 1980s. The same conferences which earlier were frequently attended almost exclusively by a female intellectual elite — thanks to new funding sources and the growing knowledge of and engagement with procedures for participation — have now become events attended by increasing numbers of women. At the same time, the lower barriers to attendance for women of the North, compared to those of the global South, is doubtless still a problem. The preparatory activity required for participation in these events (including debates and other types of meetings), similar to the process of "bringing it back home" that follows (including discussing and implementing the strategies decided upon at such events) favors the growth of networks between women, as well as their taking ownership of some global thematics at the local and international levels. Here the role played by large political organizations and international financial agencies is, on the one hand, *responsible* for causing the great problems of the world, poverty and violence above all. On the other hand, it is *ambiguous* because of how such institutions take on the responsibility of addressing these problems — as if they themselves were utterly unrelated to their creation — and then proceed to propose measures to solve them which are absolutely irrelevant. The political approach of these international organizations is one which corresponds to the process we have noted at the national level: to keep the issues well separated. Meanwhile, the efforts of increasing numbers of women in both the global North and South are dedicated to demonstrating how they are organically linked, and to car-

rying on a discussion and a struggle against those institutions that provoke them — above all the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Let us recall, in this regard, the ambiguity with which the World Bank addresses poverty, the environment and women.

As far as the United Nations is concerned, we can see this ambiguity in the way it assumes for itself the role of promoting the rights of the people, including women and indigenous peoples. Yet due to the particular hierarchy of power it works under, the United Nations could not impede the massacres and atrocities committed against populations during the Gulf War, in ex-Yugoslavia, Darfur, Rwanda and Burundi, to mention only the better-known cases. After witnessing such events, it is difficult to imagine a role for the United Nations in the promotion and defense of the rights of peoples, and of women in particular. The risk which is always latent in these forums is on the one hand that of addressing issues — such as reproductive work, poverty, violence — separately, and, on the other, of investing an absurd amount of energy into modifying official documents, or in requesting procedures and institutions for protection against violence, if we can believe that violence could be combated through procedures put in place by the United Nations. This means accepting the direction of energies into procedural mechanisms demanding long-term commitments and offering little efficacy, ones which treat violence as a phenomenon that is unconnected to broader macro-conditions, and certainly not as the fruit of policies that emanate from the very same institutions that claim to be protectors of women — policies against which it is instead necessary to unify our efforts of analysis and struggles. The United Nations literature, analyzing women's conditions globally (see, for instance, the 1991 UN publication, *Women: Challenges to the Year 2000*) tends to misdirect the efforts of women's struggles against the policies causing poverty. In its discussion of dramatic cases, such as that of baby girls in some regions of Pakistan who are starved by their mothers and left to die, the literature blames the mothers' behavior on poor education, orienting activism towards the goal of better education for Pakistani women. Such claims are deeply unfair to women from developing countries, as they have the effect of making them appear inferior to the women of the North, who are then invited to teach them the correct way to live their lives. The analytic grid offered by these organizations tends to include an interpretation of violence which is

not only disconnected from its macro-causes, but which sees it as caused by problematic cultural traditions, or a malfunctioning relationship between men and women which can be solved through better education for both sexes. The woman is supposed to defend herself by bringing her case to the attention of an ever-multiplying series of institutional bodies, due to the fact that more and more organizations, large and small, are created to monitor the violence, but not really to combat the policies that generate it.

To make more specific observations regarding how reproductive work is treated by these organizations, we must note the peculiar way in which the issue has been considered. It is certainly the case that, thanks to women's activism, which provoked something of a response in Nairobi, a greater welcome was extended at the national and international level towards women's efforts to calculate reproductive work as part of the Gross Domestic Product, a response that ought ideally to result in an eventual restitution. Yet, while appreciating such activism, it is important to note that the reason the state did not respond to this demand in the 1970s — at a time when the struggles, at least in Italy, were very fierce and widespread — was not the difficulty in calculating such work. That is, the state has never responded by devoting more resources (like money or services) towards the labour of reproduction in order to allow women to reduce the length of their domestic workdays. This is not because the peculiar nature of such work makes the problem of calculating its performance insurmountable, even if this was among the reasons the state provided. The state has always managed to be quite timely and punctilious when it comes to calculating the amount by which the income of citizens is to be reduced. Likewise, it has never been overly concerned about the disproportionate relationship between its large investment and the poverty of its results when it has managed public affairs in a distorted way, wasting citizens' money. Yet it apparently encounters insurmountable difficulties which force it to postpone a response indefinitely when it is a matter of allocating funds for genuine social needs, particularly when it is a matter of alleviating the burdens of women. When housework emerged as an issue, and as a rebellious element in the struggles characterizing the seventies, through the repression of the movements that sought a better quality of life and a different model of development, there emerged a political and economic strategy

which — in the name of the free market and of the most extreme competition imposed by the new globalization of the economy — *has further sacrificed the sphere of reproduction to that of production*, and has therefore *underdeveloped reproduction in order to further develop production*. This led to the disappearance of individual and collective rights achieved through hard struggle in the preceding decades, and to the withdrawal of resources available for the pursuit a life that would not be “all work” in a context of increasing precarity and uncertainty.

The openness, however narrow, on the part of national and international organizations towards the goal of measuring housework and calculating into the GDP that percentage of work performed by women, might well lead once more to the draining and dispersal of women’s energies in the long run, and with respect to a goal of dubious value. When will these calculations be made in a manner that is satisfactory to all concerned, and therefore be followed by an effective response? Women’s energies are thus sapped, channelled away from the struggle against those economic and political agencies that make their voices heard through the governance of states, aggravating misery in the world. *These organizations are the very ones that assign a large part of the wealth produced by social labor at the global level to capital expenses which continually threaten the latter’s very possibility of subsistence*. This is true above all for investments in the military-industrial sector, together with those in bio-technology, fish-farming, large dams, and other technologies and practices which through their steady destruction of natural resources increasingly threaten the possibility of reproduction for humanity and its habitat, since they kill the natural processes of reproduction for life and biodiversity. If these remain the basic, existing political-economic trends, we can with confidence assume that while women calculate how to factor in housework, the advancement of such policies are eliminating every basis for such calculation. The growing investment in the military sector, and in technologies that are devastating every conceivable ecological equilibrium, coupled with the increasing expropriation of the few natural resources which still remain available to portions of the world population, and the reduction of investment in social consumption, can only lead to the continued intensification and immiseration of that same housework.

In conclusion, then, it is the merit of this book to have pointed out the causal relation between the foundation of unwaged reproductive work and the generation of poverty and violence. It shows the relation of command between the waged and unwaged economy, and the ambiguous responsibility of political power in establishing poverty and violence on the one hand, and for “combating” them on the other. This role is increasingly dislocating from the level of the nation-state to that of international institutions, or, as is increasingly happening, to that of transregional structures. This book understands the particular utility, as well as the ambiguity, of the frenetic growth of women’s initiatives, globally considered. Such an analysis can help avoid a dispersion and waste of the energies belonging to this broad movement of women. It can help, instead, to concentrate our potential strength on those processes and politics upon which it is most important to focus our debate, and to develop our commitment towards action and struggle.

NOTES

- 1 By “double presence,” I am referring to the presence of women in domestic and non-domestic labor, and the sociological literature which in Italy devoted its energies to women’s ability to take on both forms of work, a stream which became the dominant discourse within sociology. Yet focusing attention only on this ability risks making the denunciation of the burden of domestic labor by the feminist movement of the seventies an exaggerated one (if indeed it is possible to carry out both forms of work). In reality, as I have suggested before, such a perspective is silent about the two strategies undertaken by women in order to sustain both forms of labor: the first being the drastic and progressive reduction of child-bearing, and the second the dependence on the labor of another woman, generally a nanny, but also a babysitter or the unpaid labor of a relative.
- 2 It now constitutes an important component of crimes against persons in the new law on sexual violence.

Chapter 1

WOMEN: SLAVES OR HOUSEWORKERS?

Since its origins the feminist movement has charged that the relation between men and women in capitalist society is founded upon violence. Indeed this was the first terrain upon which the movement constructed both a wide-ranging debate and a high degree of organized struggle (even though this took a form which the traditional Left, accustomed as it was to only noticing “visible” struggles, did not immediately understand). This debate was primarily articulated through the witnesses of such violence, public accusations of violent occurrences, and pointed analyses of the specific characteristics that male-female violence assumes today. We now need to go beyond such a debate however, and define the specificity of this violence in an attempt to identify the causes and the mechanisms which provoke it and examine its most significant forms.

Male violence against women is certainly not born with capitalism, but rather has a long history. Yet even if some aspects of this form of violence remain relatively unchanged (women were beaten, raped, killed, genitally mutilated, and forced to abort pregnancies or to bear children well before capitalism), with capitalism male violence against women was re-established and endowed with a function that is, as we shall see below, entirely internal to the labor which women are destined to perform: that of housework. Such work is the work of the production and reproduction of labor-

power, its fundamental site is the home, and the primary unit within which it is performed is the family.¹ Let us specify immediately that in the following observations we are referring to the working-class family, and therefore to the type of marriage and organization of housework dating from the second half of the 19th century in advanced capitalist countries. This is because it is within such family structures, which even today directly concern us, that women are destined to perform such work without pay under the command of a male wage.² Not only is she within capitalist exploitation — itself a form of violence — but she is specifically subject to that intensified violence confronting those destined to work for capital without receiving a paycheck in exchange. Such workers receive, in fact, only “maintenance” from the man who benefits from, and controls, their work. The extreme violence in the relationship between capital and women is reflected in the violence of the male-female relationship: one which is necessarily violent on the part of men against women.

In this essay, in seeking to fully explain the causes of violence suffered by women, we do not intend to linger on each of its forms, but rather to concentrate our attention on examining male physical violence against women, and, more specifically, some forms of physical-sexual violence which are emblematic of the male-female relation. To interpret this physical aspect, or more precisely this physical-sexual aspect of violence that men exercise both inside and outside the family, it is necessary above all first to define the condition of women in the family itself. This brings us to the need to address the theory — a recurring one within feminist debates — according to which the condition of women is “like that of the slave.” It is certainly also true that such a theory registers a somewhat diffuse awareness among women of being in some way “slaves.” Who has not heard their mother exclaim “I live the life of a slave!” or “He treats me as if I were a slave” or also “One works like a slave here!”? Confronted with such sentiments, which like all women we felt viscerally, we responded that we are “houseworkers,”³ and that “every woman in the home is a worker without pay!” From the moment we began to define ourselves in this manner, those on the Left who wanted to charge us of being “old-fashioned workerists” raised their voices,⁴ demonstrating their confusing of a completely new concept such as that of the “houseworker” with that of the “worker,” as

well as their readiness to attribute to us political theories which we had never formulated.

These voices lament like a broken record, so much that even young people, the so-called “the new proletarian youth,” play the same tune against us. This refrain from the male front does not come as a surprise however: for men who cannot see or hear women, the only possible avenue is to speak to one another.⁵

In the feminist movement, on the other hand, this analysis of the condition of women — who are seen as unpaid houseworkers — was theorized in its political specificity and this consequently opened a broad discussion on the forms of its translateability into organization. The recognition of women as unpaid houseworkers has therefore become a common legacy. Even the sections of the feminist movement that do not share the strategy of wages for housework define the condition of women in substantially similar terms: primarily as performers of unwaged housework. Indeed, the literature produced by the movement since its origins has been both substantial and meticulous. As far as the commitment of the area of the movement adopting the Wages for Housework approach, this too has resulted in quite a broad output.⁶

To return then, to the theme of the debate which we are about to address, namely the violence of men against women, the comparison between the condition of the houseworker and that of the slave can, in our view, be of particular importance in enabling us to better define this practice. This discussion is needed more than ever due to the surge of political mobilization on the part of the feminist movement to fight violence against women. On the one hand, in fact, the form assumed by the violence of men against women — physical violence — would seem to indicate a relation of slavery more than one of waged labor. On the other, the growth of this violence is obviously linked to the ever-growing rebellion of women, and to the ever-increasing willingness of the state and the bosses to suppress it. To confront this aspect of the debate, then, within the general discussion of the physical violence to which women are subjected at the hands of men — namely, whether they suffer this violence because they are in some way slaves or because they are houseworkers — is important in order to better understand the organization of their exploitation by capital and the state, and therefore also the dynamic of their struggles.

Slave or houseworker? To untangle this issue let us take up once more the perspective which we indicated as a legacy of the movement, that is, that in capitalist society women are primarily destined to perform housework. Regardless of the fact that neither bourgeois nor Marxist economists ever noticed it, housework exists. Therefore there also exists a market for such labor, and a contract regulating it: marriage.⁷

Let us at this point consider the basic conditions in which the purchase and sale of the labor-power of women as reproducers of labor-power through the performance of housework takes place, and compare these conditions to those in which the purchase and sale of the slave and of the free laborer occur.

We can anticipate that the requisite conditions in which men (as possessors of a wage) encounter women's labor-power on the market as a commodity are, as we will see, very different from both those necessary in order to allow the possessor of money to meet labor-power as a commodity on the market and those necessary for encountering the slave as a commodity on the same market.

a) *Women, unlike slaves but similarly to free workers, have their own labor-power at their disposal.*

The slave cannot sell his labor-power since it is not his to dispose of. He is only purchased together with his/her labor-power as a commodity which one master sells to another: "But since no bargain is struck between him and his master... no acts of selling and buying are going on between the two parties."⁸ "The slave did not sell his labor-power to the slave-owner, any more than the ox sells his labor to the farmer."⁹

On the contrary, the *first essential condition* enabling the possessor of money to meet labor-power in the market as a commodity is that the latter can "appear on the market as a commodity only if and so far as, its possessor, the individual whose labor-power it is, offers it for sale or sells it as a commodity. In order that its possessor may sell it as a commodity, he must have it at his disposal, he must be the free proprietor of his own labor-capacity, hence of his person."¹⁰

The woman, unlike the slave but like the free worker, is able to dispose of her own labor-power, is its free owner, and therefore may sell it as a commodity.

b) *The woman as seller of her own labor-power is not juridically equal to the man as a purchaser of labor-power.*

Let us examine at this point what type of relation is founded through the market between the free worker and the woman as sellers and their respective buyers, leaving aside for now the slave who — as we have seen — being himself or herself a commodity, cannot institute any kind of market relation with his or her buyer.

As far as the free worker is concerned, "he and the owner of money meet in the market, and enter into relations with each other on a footing of equality as owners of commodities, with the sole difference that one is a buyer, the other a seller; both are therefore equal in the eyes of the law."¹¹

The woman also encounters the possessor of money in the market, but the two enter into a reciprocal relation *as possessors of commodities, not of equal rights*. The woman, in fact, as reproducer of labor-power, does not dispose of this as a commodity that is exchangeable for a wage. Not even at the formal level, therefore, is the woman juridically equal to the man.

c) *The woman, in marriage, sells her labor-power for her entire life.*

"The slave, together with his labor-power, was sold to his owner once for all. He is a commodity that can pass from the hand of one owner to that of another. He himself is a commodity, but his labor-power is not his commodity."¹² The slave therefore does not sell his labor-power, but is sold together with it "once and for all." From that moment, it is the master who decides how long he will keep the slave at his disposal together with the labor-power of that same slave.

As for the free worker, his relation with the possessor of money means that "the proprietor of labor-power must always sell it for a limited period only, for if he were to sell it in a lump, once and for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity. He must constantly treat his labor-power as his own property, his own commodity, and he can do this only by placing it at the disposal of the buyer, i.e. handing it over to the buyer for him to consume, for a definite period of time, temporarily. In this way he manages both to alienate his labor-power and to avoid renouncing his rights of ownership over it."¹³

On the very basis of such a limited sale, the free worker can enjoy the rest of his time as "free time." That is, as time in which he does not alienate his labor-power, but rather comes back into possession of it. He consumes such time in places that are very different from those where his work is carried out.

The woman, instead, with marriage, tends to sell her labor-power for the remainder of her lifetime; she thus finds herself in a condition that at first glance is very different from that of the free worker, and much more similar to that of the slave.

In fact, the indeterminateness of time, the "once and for all" with which the labor-power of the slave is sold together with him, is also a condition of the purchase and sale of the labor-power of women within the market for housework, in the sense that the woman, selling her labor-power "once and for all," consequently sells it for an indeterminate period of time, until a date that cannot be established a priori, that is, until the end of her life.

The condition of purchase and sale of the labor-power of the woman differs radically from that of the slave with his labor-power in the fact that — while for the slave it is the master that decides the period of time during which he will be kept at the master's disposal, and in this sense the latter can decide to sell the slave just a short while after he has been bought, or to keep him until the end of his life — in the case of the woman, it is she who decides to sell her labor-power *for the rest of her life*.

Having her own labor-power at her disposal puts the woman in a position to break the sale-for-life contract of her labor-power and to come back into possession of it through divorce, separation, or the de facto leaving of her husband. In fact, whether he sells it for a determinate period or for an entire lifetime, the free individual has the capacity in any case to come back into possession of it, inasmuch as it rests in the body of the individual himself. Therefore the woman, having with marriage alienated her labor-power until the end of her life, has the ability to retake possession of it at any moment, withdrawing it from the man's consumption and of that of her children in the process of reproduction.

d) *The woman, within certain limits, can choose her master but has few possibilities for changing him with another.*

The slave, considering the fact that he cannot dispose of his own labor-power, cannot choose his master. "The slave is the property of a *particular master*."¹⁴ Instead the free worker, disposing "freely" of his own labor-power, can choose, within certain limits, to whom he sells himself. He "must indeed sell himself to capital, but not to a particular capitalist."¹⁵ Rather, as Marx stresses, "this liberty distinguishes a slave from a free laborer."¹⁶ The woman can also, within certain limits, choose the man to whom she sells herself. Therefore with respect to "choice" of master the situation of the woman is more similar to that of the free worker than to that of the slave. Because linked to this "choice" is also the possibility of changing masters.

The slave, the free worker and the woman are all in a position to be able to change masters; the slave because, being a commodity, he "can pass from the hands of one owner to those of another;"¹⁷ the free worker because, having his own labor-power at his disposal considering the fact that he can choose, within certain limits, to whom he wishes to sell it, can also "change his master."¹⁸

The woman, having her own labor-power at her disposal, can also occasionally change masters. Yet the possibility of this for the woman is considerably reduced due to the particular conditions under which she is forced to sell her labor-power. Fundamentally, the fact that she does not receive her own wage in exchange gives her very little power to negotiate the conditions under which housework is performed, and therefore also little possibility of changing masters.

This analysis is not intended to ignore the fact that today, in relation to the growth of the women's movement against the family, and with it also the necessity on the part of capital to render such struggles functional within its own development, there exist ever-greater possibilities to change masters within the institution of marriage. That is, a woman can get separated or divorced and not only be "abandoned."

Yet these new possibilities have never led to a discussion on the permanence of the conditions that fundamentally characterize the marriage contract.

e) *The woman receives "maintenance" in exchange.*

Let us now turn to a discussion of what the slave, the free worker and the woman receive in exchange for their work. "The slave receives the means of subsistence he requires in the form of *naturalia*, which are fixed both in kind and in quantity i.e. he receives *use-values*."¹⁹ The free worker, instead, receives the means of subsistence in the form of exchange values, that is, of the wage.

The free worker receives them in the shape of *money*, *exchange value*, the abstract social form of wealth. Even though his wage is nothing more than the *silver or gold or copper or paper* form of the necessary means of subsistence into which it must constantly be dissolved — even though money functions here only as a *means of circulation*, as a vanishing form of exchange-value, that *exchange-value*, *abstract wealth*, remains in his mind as something more than a particular use-value hedged round with traditions and local restrictions. It is the worker himself who converts the money into whatever use-values he desires; it is he who buys commodities as he wishes and, as the *owner of money*, as the buyer of goods, he stands in precisely the same relationship to the sellers of goods as any other buyer. Of course, the condition of his existence — and the limited amount of money he can earn — compel him to make his purchases from a fairly restricted selection of goods. But some variation is possible as we can see from the fact that newspapers, for example, form part of the essential purchases of the urban English worker. He can save or hoard a little. Or else he can squander his money on drink.²⁰

The woman, unlike the worker, does not receive a wage. And unlike the slave, she does not necessarily receive the means of subsistence in a natural

form. In exchange for domestic work, the husband guarantees her maintenance, providing her with a part of his wage so that she may acquire the means of subsistence for the entire family, or he can give her the means of subsistence in natural form. In either case, however, the fact that she does not receive a wage in exchange for her work does not change.

In addition, the quantity and quality of the means of subsistence that she receives, whether in natural form or in the form of money, is *not fixed* as it is for the slave, where it is determined purely in relation to the possibility of the latter's survival. The standard of living within which she must reproduce the entire family instead depends on the level of the wage of the husband, and on the balance of power between herself and the husband.

f) *Under what whip does the woman work?*

As we have seen, the conditions of the purchase and sale of the labor-powers of the slave, the free worker and the woman are radically different, and consequently the motives and compulsions under which the slave, free worker and woman work are also different.

The slave must choose "between hard labor... and a good whipping,"²¹ the free worker instead "must choose between hard labor and starvation." That is, "the slave works only under the spur of external fear, but not for *his existence*, which is *guaranteed*, even though it does not belong to him. The free worker, however, is impelled by his wants."²² Therefore, "The motive that drives a free man to work is much more violent than what drives the slave."²³

The master generally has an interest in protecting the life of the slave, inasmuch as he has acquired him; that is, he has paid a price and now the slave is part of his property. In fact the slave-master, reports Marx, "understands too well his own interest to weaken slaves by stinting them in their food."²⁴

The free worker must instead each day achieve the right to exist because it is to him that his life belongs. He must daily achieve the right to exist in the only way this is conceded to him: by selling his labor-power.

Therefore, while the slave works essentially under the spur of external terrorism, the free worker is instead spurred on by his own needs. His needs drive him to organize his struggle in such a way as to guarantee his survival,

but above all to make that struggle proceed in such a way as to achieve a standard of living that rises over time.

Marx says that the free worker "*learns to control himself, in contrast to the slave, who needs a master.*"²⁵ And this is because, being his own master, the defense and improvement of his standard of living depend upon him. Consequently the free worker does not need to "be whipped" inasmuch as it is the necessity to satisfy his needs that, within certain limits, compels him to "self-determination," that is, to "self-discipline."

What compels the woman to commit herself to the marriage contract and perform work until the end of her life?

Unlike the slave who works under the whip of external terror, and unlike the free worker who works under the whip of his own needs, the woman works under the whip of the needs basic to her existence. Indeed, she cannot aspire to satisfy her own needs — if not those elementary needs linked to mere survival — inasmuch as such needs bear no relationship to a wage, which she does not receive. She can guarantee her own survival only inasmuch as she reproduces the whole family. This requirement of women to work in exchange for their mere survival was mystified from the moment that the working-class family came into being (largely since the second half of the 19th century in developed capitalist countries), through a specific ideology of "love" that can be defined as a romantic-love ideology.

Since that time, it has become of fundamental importance to represent "love" to the woman as the unavoidable necessity, for her own survival, of satisfying through her work the needs of the entire family, and above all those of the husband.

We say that such a necessity to satisfy the needs of others in order to satisfy her own was mystified in the minds of women as "love" because it is a specific ideology of love that capital established and sustained to justify housework as unpaid work. And to the extent that it concerns our analysis here, we can synthesize this ideology of domestic work as that of a "labor of love."²⁶ It is "love" first of all, and not work, that the woman openly commits herself to offer the man in the marriage contract. The assistance and care which are mentioned in the same formula of the wedding vow — which

has been very similar across all developed capitalist countries since the second half of the 19th century — appear as a logical corollary of love, as a logical expression of love instead of an obligation to perform a particular labor as the primary purpose of the contract. The mystification reaches the point where a "mutual" exchange of love is mentioned, concealing behind the image of a fair exchange the fact that the man acquires the labor-power of the woman as his worker.

Under capitalism, therefore, love, far from being "a many splendored thing,"²⁷ is the heaviest of ideological mystifications imposed on a labor relation, namely housework, in order to force women into performing this work without getting paid. As Silvia Federici points out, "It's important to recognize that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job like other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and deceptive violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class."²⁸ Furthermore, "Not only has housework been imposed upon women, but it has been ascribed to us as a natural attribute of our physique and female personality, an internal need, an aspiration, which supposedly emerges from the depths of our nature."²⁹ "Our role as women is to be unwaged but happy, and above all *in love* (italics are added by the author), with male workers, i.e., that strata of the proletariat to which capital was forced to grant greater social power. In the same way as God created Eve to give pleasure to Adam, so did capital create the housewife to serve the male worker physically, emotionally and sexually."³⁰

g) Some specifications with regard to the tasks, the time and the location of housework.

We have considered above, point by point, the conditions under which the sale of women's labor-power, as the reproducer of labor-power, takes place. Such conditions, as we have shown, are radically different from both those of the slave and of the free worker. The woman, therefore, once the sale of her labor-power — in her role as reproducer of labor-power and therefore as performer of housework — has taken place, is neither a slave nor simply a worker.

To describe her condition a new term is required. She is, as we have said, a houseworker. Now without wanting to confront in all its complexity the life of women as houseworkers, let us address some crucial aspects of housework, upon which it is important to spend some time in order to subsequently be able to single out the mechanisms, or the causes, which trigger male physical violence against women.

Let us retrace once more, this time within the labor relation (that is once the sale has taken place), the comparison between the slave, the free worker and the houseworker, bringing into view the key elements of novelty that the tasks to be performed and their temporality represent with regard to housework. The slave, as we said, once purchased, is at the disposal of the master, together with his or her labor-power, for their entire life. The slave, therefore, does not sell his labor-power, but is sold together with his labor-power and this happens "once and for all." From that moment, the time during which the slave with his labor-power is at the master's disposal tends to be the rest of the slave's life.³¹ The range of tasks within which the work of the slave will be expressed is linked to the cultivation of the plantation, or to a lesser degree, factory work or other specific labors. In the case of the female slave there is the added work of reproducing other slaves. A limited number of slaves will carry out tasks connected to the master's house. In the case of the slave therefore, the labor-power of an entire life is at the master's disposal, from the moment of its acquisition until death, yet this fact has no particular importance in relation to the slave's tasks, which are rigidly determined and do not vary significantly across different periods of the slave's life. It is the type of work — which for the great majority of slaves consists in the cultivation of the plantation — that determines the quality of those tasks. Regarding labor time, we ought to further specify that the master's work was carried out from dawn to dusk. The slaves worked "for themselves," for their survival and for their community from "dusk to dawn," that is, "outside" of the time which they had to spend working for the master.³²

We certainly do not wish to deny with such an observation that the availability of the slave's labor-power, of the slave himself, to the master, also continued from dusk to dawn. What we would like to highlight is a *de facto* separation between the time spent for oneself and that spent for the master. Corresponding to the division of time was a division between the

place where production for the master was carried out and that where the reproduction of the slave community occurred: the slave quarters were counterposed to the fields.

As far as the free worker is concerned, as we have said, he disposes of his labor-power, selling it for a determinate period of time. To this determinate period of time there corresponds a determination of types of tasks for which the worker is held responsible in relation to his specific occupation. With respect to the determinate time of his work, and to the equally determinate set of specific tasks that he is obliged to carry out by his specific contract, the free worker can enjoy the rest of his time as "free time." In addition, he consumes such time in places that are altogether different from those where he performs his work.

Yet what is the condition of the woman with respect to the temporality of her work and her tasks? The woman, as we have said, with marriage sells her labor-power for the span of an entire life. In this way, the condition she finds herself in is at first glance very different from that of the free worker and more similar to that of the slave. When looked at more carefully however, the import of the span of "an entire life," during which the labor-power of both the woman and the slave tend to be available, is very different in the two cases. Here the discussion brings us to the diversity of tasks to be performed, and to the specificity of housework itself. Indeed, the lifespan of the slave is important to the maximum possible use of his or her labor-power, but in extreme cases, if he or she dies young or is sold to another master, it is irrelevant except as a loss of a portion of the master's possessions. He or she always works together with other slaves, and therefore if he or she dies this only means one less slave, a quantity of work less than was available before. The tasks he or she performs are identical to those performed by other slaves. The lifespan of a woman, acquired as a wife, is instead *qualitatively* relevant as "the span of her entire life." "Entire" that is, in the articulated continuity of particular periods, each one of which is characterized — within the virtually infinite expansion of the relatively determined domestic duties — by the emergence of particular tasks. Of "her" life, specifically, because unlike the slave, the woman in the role of houseworker — therefore as wife to one man in the role of husband — is destined to work alone. The slave, instead, works with other slaves for a single master. The span of "her" life as houseworker,

then, is qualitatively relevant, because if she dies, or if she leaves, or (today we can say this) if she demands a divorce, her lost labor-power cannot be immediately made up for through the intensification of the work of other wives — who do not exist concurrently — but only through the achieving of a new marriage contract with another woman. Regarding her tasks, as we said, the condition of the woman differs both from that of the slave and the free worker. While for both of these, in fact, the tasks are determined and limited, for women as the performers of reproductive work, tasks are relatively determined and numerically unlimited.³³

Housework in fact, as a “labor of love,” is necessarily “infinite” in its tasks. We will return to this point as well further on. Yet if this is partially true, it is equally true that different tasks will emerge, as we have said, in relation to different periods of the woman’s life. Some tasks that the woman is able to perform during the initial period of marriage she will no longer be able to perform at a later time. Because of this she tends to have to sell herself at a young enough age to be able to carry out all of the subsequent functions to which she is held. A worker or a slave, once aged, will only be more tired from performing all of the tasks that they performed while young.

As for the woman slave at an age where she is no longer fertile, she will not eliminate the possibility of the master having other slaves reproduced because there will be other women slaves to guarantee it. On the other hand, a woman who enters into a marriage contract after menopause will deny forever to her husband the possibility of having children. An older woman that leaves her older husband, ending the marriage in some fashion (whether by separation or divorce), will not be his “insurance” anymore during that particularly crucial moment in which state assistance will be unwilling to take care of him because he is old and therefore unproductive.³⁴

As we said above, housework as a “labor of love” can only be infinite in its functions, a continuum of work. From this, for the woman, there also derives the fact that unlike the slave and the free worker, there does not exist a separation between “work time” and “free time.” “A woman’s work is never done,” “a woman is always on shift:” sayings like these, which are repeated every day, express the entirety of the female comprehension that “all of a woman’s lifetime is work time.” And consequently, every place for the woman is a workplace. Her own home, which for the free worker is the

primary location of his free time, is for the woman her primary place of work. In that very home where she spends most of her life, and therefore performs most of her work, by tradition she does not even have “a room of her own.”

NOTES

- 1 The discussion of the home as site of the production and reproduction of labor-power, on the family as the primary unit in which such work is performed, on housework as the specific form of the work of reproduction, and on the woman as the subject of this work was defined for the first time by Mariarosa Dalla Costa in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (with *A Woman’s Place* by Selma James), Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1974 (original copyright Marsilio, Padua, 1972).
- 2 A useful survey on the family today at the international level is found in William Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, New York: The Free Press, 1970. In addition, see Robert Winch and Graham B. Spanier Hold (eds.) *Selected Studies in Marriage and the Family*, New York: Rinchart and Winston, 1974, and regarding the American family, the now-classic M. Komarovsky, *Blue-Collar Marriage*, New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- 3 This definition appeared for the first time in Italy in Collettivo Internazionale Femminista, eds., *Le operaie della casa*, Padova-Venezia: Marsilio, 1974. The expression, since 1 May, 1975 when its first issue came out, became the title of a bi-monthly journal of feminist autonomy.
- 4 Among others, see: Furio di Paola, *Per un dibattito su militanza e organizzazione proletaria in Bisogni, crisi della militanza, organizzazione proletaria*, *Quaderni di Ombre Rosse* n.1, Rome: Savelli, 1977, p. 98.
- 5 We take this way of defining their response from the Lotta Femminista (Feminist Struggle) activists, who described it in 1972. See *L’Offensiva*, *Quaderni di Lotta Femminista*, n.1, Turin: Musolini, 1972, 1974, p. 21.
- 6 In chronological order, the following appeared in Italy after *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* and *L’Offensiva*, cit.: *Il Personale è politico*, *Quaderni di Lotta Feminista* n.2, Turin: Musolini, 1973, 2nd ed. 1974, and, in the collection *Salario al Lavoro Domestico*:

Strategia Internazionale Femminista edited by the Collettivo Internazionale Femminista, Marsilio, the volumes *Le operaie della casa*, 8 Marzo 1974, *Giornata Internazionale di lotta delle donne*, 1975; *Aborto di stato — Strage delle innocenti*, 1976.

The Naples Wages for Housework (S.L.D.) Collective and the Committee for Wages for Housework in Padua edited and published the translation of Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework*, New York 1975.

Within this list of the Movement literature of the area of Wages for Housework in Italy, we should also include the bi-monthly news-magazine, *Le operaie della casa*.

- 7 L. Fortunati defined this concept in Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Leopoldina Fortunati, *Brutto Ciao*, Roma: Edizioni delle Donne, 1977, p. 85. The treatment of this concept in relation to a new definition of a female labor market was developed also by L. Fortunati in a talk entitled "Marriage and the Labor Market for Housework," given to the Political Science Faculty at the University of Padua as part of the interdisciplinary seminar, and again to the Magistero Faculty in the 1976–77 academic year, entitled "Women's Struggles and State Command during and immediately after the Second World War: Brief thoughts on the direction of Women's Paths at the European level in the last 30 years." An earlier version entitled "The Family and the Labor Market," as part of the interdisciplinary seminar "The Crisis and Restructuring of the Family in Europe," was given also to the Political Science Faculty in the 1975–76 academic year.
- 8 K. Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital/ Wages, Price and Profit*. New York: International Publishers. 1995. p. 43.
- 9 *Ivi*, p. 19.
- 10 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, New York: Penguin, 1990, p. 271.
- 11 *Ibidem*.
- 12 K. Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital/ Wages, Price and Profit*. New York: International Publishers. 1995, p. 43.
- 13 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 271.
- 14 K. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, Book I, Appendix, "Results of the Immediate Process of Production," p. 1032.
- 15 *Ibidem*.

- 16 *Ivi*, p. 1027, note 26. Here Marx takes up the definition of P.R. Edmonds, *Practical, Moral and Political Economy*, London, 1828, pp. 56–57.
- 17 K. Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital/ Wages, Price and Profit*. New York: International Publishers. 1995. p. 43.
- 18 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Appendix, "Results of the Immediate Process of Production," p.1032.
- 19 *Ibidem*.
- 20 K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Appendix, "Results of the Immediate Process of Production," p.1033.
- 21 *Ivi*, p. 1028.
- 22 *Ivi*, p. 1031.
- 23 *Ivi*, p. 1028.
- 24 *Ibidem*.
- 25 *Ivi*, p. 1033.
- 26 Concerning this ideology, see note n. 2 above.
- 27 "Love is a many splendored thing" was the title of a successful film of the 1950's. This approach, which has so completely permeated the culture of romance from films to songs, reveals through its permanence how profoundly capital's ideological orchestration is rooted within housework.
- 28 Silvia Federici, *Wages against Housework*, p. 2.
- 29 *Ivi*, p. 2.
- 30 *Ivi*, p. 3 (italics added by author).
- 31 We say "tends" because the slave could obviously be sold to another master in the course of his/her life.
- 32 There is currently a broad debate over the reproduction of the slave community as such, and in particular over the existence or not of the Black family during the period of slavery in America. Regarding this, see George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972, and Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, New York: Pantheon, 1976. Gutman emphasizes that, against the current thesis of American sociologists, the Black family existed. The "great disasters" for this family form would have begun, if ever, with the Great Depression and in the metropolitan areas.
- 33 We say "relatively determined" because while a certain type of determina-

tion was required according to the quantity and quality of labor-power that the woman was commanded to reproduce, its also true that along with such a determination there exists always a noticeable quantitative tendency towards indeterminate tasks.

- ³⁴ During the campaign for approval of the divorce law, Amintore Fanfani said: "The family (read: women) is the only social security which accompanies you from the cradle to the grave."

Chapter 2

MALE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the conditions of sale of the slave, the free worker and the woman are radically different. As a result, so too are the productive relations different with respect to the slave, the free worker and the houseworker.

Violence in the slave-labor relation consists of the fact that it is the slave himself who is reduced to a commodity, one the master disposes of without any limits, save for those naturally inherent in the commodity-individual. To ensure for himself the work of the slave, the master must intervene from an external position with his "treatment" of the slave, that is, with that particular combination of physical violence and paternalism typical of the slave relation.¹ Physical coercion ranges from whipping to various kinds of brutal torture. Paternalism ranges from tacit recognition of the slave as a "bastard child" to the "pat on the shoulder" which implies a beating, and which in any case makes up only the most infinitesimally small component of the slave's treatment as a whole.² The slave's treatment is therefore the *specific* form of violence — whether direct or latent — that the master uses against the slave to make him work. It can exist because of the violence of slavery's relation of production.

Violence in the situation of a waged labor relation differs because given that the worker is “free,” and therefore his own property, it coincides with exploitation. Violence coincides, that is, with the difference between necessary and surplus labor. The capitalist does not have to intervene from without in his treatment of the worker, and therefore through specific forms of physical violence, because within that labor relation it is the *wage* that will discipline the worker and consequently his family. This is broadly the case. It is also true that within the waged labor relation one finds that worker “treatment” plays itself out in terms of the extra-economic coercion of the worker, ranging from paternalism, to police control inside and outside the factory, to dismissal.

Violence in the housework relation as an unwaged work relation is as different from that inflicted upon the slave as it is from that inflicted upon the worker. The woman, in fact, is a free worker, but as reproducer of labor-power she is not free to sell her own labor-power for a wage or a determinate period of time. She sells her labor-power for “maintenance.” These serious limits to her “liberation” mean that the violence in her work relation is determined by the fact that, compared to the worker, more work is extorted from her as a houseworker for much less of a wage. In fact, what she receives in exchange for her unlimited work is only a portion of the basket of goods that may be acquired with the husband’s wage. “Maintenance,” therefore. Because of this the man needs — like the slave master — to intervene against the woman from without. He must use a different kind of “treatment” however, one that corresponds to the different work relations between himself and the woman, and which ranges, in this case, from the latent but ever-present threat of leaving her (together with her children) to specific forms of physical violence. These forms of violence, as we shall see, will differ from those the slave is subject to, because the relations of production lived by the woman are different than those lived by the slave. Therefore the kind of relation of production that, with capitalism, is lived by the woman (as a houseworker) can without a doubt be described as much more violent than that lived by the worker. In other words, if the waged-labor relation is violent, then housework must be considered much more violent, quantitatively and qualitatively, since it is unpaid. This violence to which women are subjected

in their relation with capital, one that is broader and deeper than that to which the worker is subjected, is mystified by a specific ideology of love. It is with love, in fact, that capital justifies the monstrous level of work done by women in exchange merely for survival: she who loves offers herself without measure.* It is also with love that capital justifies the fact that — given the indeterminate time in which the labor-power of the woman is available to the man, without receiving in exchange a wage and “independence” — she consequently finds herself in a position of continual personal dependence on the man as master. Yet this dependence does not exist if we see marriage as “two souls but one flesh.” Beyond this Catholic religious formula that looks at the spouses as being “one flesh” (which expresses very well the negation of the woman as a laboring subject within the relationship), lay the general belief, deeply rooted until very recently, that the man is not the boss and the woman is not the worker because they are “lovers.”

The ambiguity of the egalitarian condition that this definition contains is obvious. From this, the fact that the relation of production (the woman lives as houseworker) is a relation of “labor of love” for a man and for his children, comes the further violence of having to love her boss. The man, in fact, as the main beneficiary and recipient of housework, is the primary master of the woman, and therefore the link mediating between the woman and capitalist exploitation. Consequently, it falls to him to be the direct discipliner of the woman’s work. And his “treatment” of her, the instrument of such discipline on the part of the man — as we will see further on — consists largely of physical violence.

a) *Why physical violence?*

Whenever the woman’s struggle against housework transgresses the “love pact” within which her work and her maintenance by her husband is exchanged, the husband as master cannot attack her wage, which does not exist. Nor can he attack her by seeking to lower the level of her maintenance, which, if further reduced, would compromise the possibility of reproduction

* Trans. Note: The original expression, by Sant’Agostino D’Ippona (Saint Augustine of Hippo), is: “La misura dell’amore è amare senza misura.”

and therefore of survival for himself and for the children. For these same reasons he cannot “fire her.” In fact, as we have already said, to obtain once again the labor-power of a wife would mean starting a new marriage contract — a possibility which it is neither likely to be fulfilled on short notice nor guaranteed of success.

Therefore the only means of coercion remaining to the husband is physical violence. Let us be more specific. The husband, as recipient of the “labor of love” — the recipient that is, of duties which must be performed “out of love” — is for that reason, always justified by love, in the position of having the right to demand it. Consequently he is authorized to exercise a continual pressure that we can certainly describe as psychological violence. Every time that the psychological pressure fails to be effective, every time, that is, that the “love pact” is transgressed, he is authorized to use physical violence, because “he loves his wife” and therefore has the right to demand that the wife “love him back.”³ That is, unlike any other master, with respect to whom class hatred on the part of the exploited is a given, the man is covered by an “immunity of love.” In fact, it is precisely because of love that he is authorized to exercise physical violence against the woman. He hits her not because “she won’t work anymore” but because “she doesn’t love him enough” (meaning the type of love to which he has an unquestionable right), a rule which she cannot violate according to the terms of the contract itself. In a labor of love one cannot engage in slowdowns or a strike. The woman who dares to do so will be “rightfully” beaten by her husband. The man, in his position as the direct recipient and exploiter of housework, is within the family above all the agent of control over the woman as houseworker. It is the very relation of his work to hers that determines his function. As Selma James wrote as far back as 1953, the housewife’s “first boss” is

her husband’s work. Everything a woman has to do is dependent on the job her husband has. Whatever her husband makes, that is what the family has to live on. How many clothes she buys or whether she has to make them,

whether clothes go to the laundromat or are washed by hand, whether they live in a crowded apartment or in a house with enough room for the family — all of these things are determined by the kind of job her husband has. The hours that her husband works determine her whole schedule and how she will live and how much she will have to work.⁴

The husband therefore, through his work, will command the domestic work of the woman, and, being its direct recipient and beneficiary, will necessarily find himself in the position of being her foreman. As long as the woman’s love for the man lasts, in the sense that the woman “readily” guarantees determinate levels of housework, the man’s function as her controller remains in the shadows. The man repays the woman’s love for him, “lovingly” permitting her to survive on his wage. When the woman instead does not act towards housework as if it is a work of love (therefore being willing to perform it limitlessly), but instead as work *tout court*, infringing on the love pact that holds together the marriage, then the man reveals his true position as discipliner in an obvious manner. He turns from “love” to physical violence. Inasmuch as the man is completely arbitrary with respect to how and when he engages in violence against the woman, he assumes the function of judge. Indeed he will come to unleash his violence, in his role as judge of the perfection or imperfection of the housework, of the adequacy or inadequacy of the woman’s discipline. As for the “penalty,” every man is authorized to decide in a completely arbitrary fashion upon the forms and timing of repressive actions against the woman. Yet after having judged and determined the sanction, it falls to the very same man to apply it. It is he who will apply it, acting as a policeman after having carried out his role of judge. That the husband comes to assume the function of foreman, judge and cop with respect to the wife was until recently a generally uncontested point of view in every country. Even proverbs, from the West to the East, were mirrors on this point of view. From the Eastern, “beat your wife three times a day: even if you don’t know why, she will” (a Chinese proverb) to our “Women, donkeys and walnuts require savage hands” and “For a woman having a fit one needs a

stick.”* With respect to the frequency of occurrence of such proverbs, which reveal an agreed and homogeneous perspective on what we have been discussing, the saying that “one does not even hit a woman with a flower”** is the mystification at the level of proverb that corresponds to presenting housework as a labor of love.

After having described the repressive functions carried out by the man with respect to the woman, we will now see why, with regard to housework in particular, the man appears to capital and the state as the “ideal” agent of control for such work, and also therefore for the consequent repression of the woman as houseworker.

The first reason lies in the fact that housework, as a labor of love, comprises some specific tasks, such as emotional, psychological and sexual reproduction, which would be impossible for capital to extort through a repressive agent other than a husband. Only the husband, again because he is her “partner” in the love contract, with respect to which certain tasks are otherwise unobtainable, has the right to drive the woman to her labor of love. It would be impossible for capital to otherwise extort these tasks through a juridical-police control exercised by the usual state institutions. Where the woman’s refusal of housework as a labor of love, in particular with regard to tasks such as these, has reached “worrying” proportions for the stability of the family itself, the state has sought to provide them. But to the extent to which such tasks cannot be imposed through juridical-police control, a different means has become necessary, one that is much more expensive: that of entrusting them to hired agents, who are mostly women. In the United States, where this sort of refusal from women has been extremely widespread and evident for some time, the introduction in the realm of social assistance of Title 205 (amendment to the Social Security Act) which provides home care

*Trans. Note: Original expressions in Italian are “Donne, asini e noci vogliono le mani atroci” and “Per la donna in convulsione ci vuole il bastone.”

**Trans. Note: The original expression in Italian is “Cui la donna non si colpirebbe neppure con un fiore.”

for senior citizens, husbands and children in some cases where there is not a wife to provide them, is significant.

But the first problem with solutions such as this, from the point of view of the state, is exactly the enormous cost; from the point of view of the recipients, the costs consists of the very heavy level of blackmail and control which they pay for such “care,” beyond the “quality” of the care itself. A second set of reasons consists in the fact that housework, in its complexity, is not only, as we have previously specified, a continuum of work, but as work performed by a single woman as wife to a single husband, it is *de facto* atomized in the home. With regard to this continuity of temporal extension and to the atomization of housework, the husband, because he is present in every house, and given the specific position he has with regard to the woman, is still the ideal agent, insofar as he is the only one who can command and discipline her. In this respect as well, it would indeed be impossible for capital to extort such work through the customary state institutions. There would have to be millions of police officers and every one of them would be employed in his disciplining function continuously.

With regard to the female refusal of such tasks, the state, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the country in question, has attempted to train teams of agents as mobile units on the ground. Such agents cannot function as if they were police with regard to women. Since this is a function that cannot be accorded to anyone other than the husband (and to varying degrees, the other men in the family), they are, rather, substitutes who perform the role themselves.

But not only is the cost of this exceedingly high for the state, but finding somebody willing to perform such tasks, even if paid, is no simple matter. Caring for others, in fact, when it is not sustained by an ideology of love, is an extremely demanding form of work. This is the case above all because it is very difficult to extricate oneself from the object of caring labor. And the measures taken in countries like the United States, which have tried to resolve the particularly explosive conflict between care provider and recipients through public assistance, have merely made it more serious and problematic. Such agents that replace the wife are an army that is anything but easy to mobilize.⁶ Instead, let us remember, the figure of the husband is not only convenient but “ideal,” as he is a daily and physical presence in every

case, even at night, and is therefore able to exercise a continuous and diffuse control in a manner corresponding to the atomization of housework.

The totality of functions which the husband assumes as foreman, judge and cop in regard to the woman's work guarantees the extraction of domestic labor for capital. But this is only one side of the coin. The other, which is just as important, consists in the fact that, by asking the man to perform these functions in relation to the woman, capital also guarantees a continuous deterioration of class violence against itself. In fact the man's violence directed against the woman, a violence linked to carrying out these functions of his, is on the one hand an easy safety valve for the daily violence to which the man is subject in his labor relation, and, on the other hand, functions as terrorism against the organization of struggles by the women against housework. As a whole, through the terrorist-romantic relation it has constructed between man and woman, capital tends continually to redirect the man's violence away from capital itself and towards repressing the woman's struggles. It is a wedge that continually pushes in the direction of deepening the stratification of power within the class.

b) Specific Forms of Physical Violence

Now let us analyze the specific forms assumed by male physical violence against women. Let us say right away that such violence ranges from a slap to murder. But at the general level the most common form is beating. Slapping is the first link of that chain of violence that women know men to be capable of carrying out to its extreme point. Already with slapping we have a warning of the potential unleashing of a much greater level of violence, one that is capable of murder. The woman understands this. And it is only through the repression of her own violence that she avoids the unleashing of an even greater violent outburst on the part of the man. It is therefore only the self-repression of the woman that limits the man's physical violence to a blow as the instrument of discipline over the woman. In this sense the blow directed by the man toward the wife is different from that directed by parents towards children. In fact, the physical violence that children undergo at the hands of their parents begins with a blow and, at least in the majority of cases, also ends there.⁷ Generally, children are not subject to the threat of

death; in other words, in the beatings that parents give them, there is no intention of warning them that the former could unleash a level of violence powerful enough to kill them. This is because there is not a significant level of work that the children must guarantee to the parents. On the contrary, the parents' physical violence tends if anything to impede the children from making more work for the parents than they can sustain. Beyond this, more generally, it functions in preparing children for the work discipline that will be expected of them in the future. Obviously, the fact that the violence children experience is halted at a lower level than that reached by the husband toward the wife also depends upon the relatively minor physical force which children have at their disposal to fight back.

Instead, blows directed by the husband at the wife and from parents towards children assume the same meaning in the ideological assumption with which they are justified. In fact, the woman with respect to the man, like children in relation to parents, is regarded as a "minor" in the sense that both, albeit in different ways, are not seen to possess the capacity for reason. Their lesser political power brands them as "minors." Consequently, whenever the wife or children "don't get it" through reason, they will understand — hopefully — with a beating. When the carrot does not work, out comes the stick.

It is considered so legitimate for the husband or for parents to use any corrective means whatever in dealing with "minors" that violence against women and children is not even considered violence as such. Instead the man must keep the minors "in line," even at the cost of a beating, because as head of the family they are his responsibility. In this way, as far as specific forms of physical violence are concerned, the situation of the slave, which we compared above with that of the woman with respect to the fundamental conditions of the sale of labor-power, is completely different.

If women and children with their lesser political power are considered minors, and as minors are subject to beatings as a specific form of physical violence, the slave (unlike the women and children, because he lives different relations of production) is considered as less than even a minor. The slave in fact, being himself a commodity, is considered in the same category as an animal, and as such is forced to work or be punished. Whipping represents the most common form of physical violence inflicted upon slaves. "The whip" says Rawick "was part of the internal social structure of slavery."⁸ It

will generally be the whip that strikes the slave, with all the distance it puts between him or her and the master, widened by the fact that it will be the overseer who wields it. There is no direct physical contact between master and slave. In the familial violence directed against women and children, however, such direct physical contact is present, indicative of the minority status of those who are subject to it, and does not degrade whoever enters into physical contact with them by exercising it.

We have already said that the slap in the relation between husband and wife is a way of suggesting that the husband can unleash a much greater violence. When the unleashing of such violence is avoided, this is essentially due to self-repression on the part of the wife. The limit of this violence — which can extend even to murder — is set by the fact that the woman is *indispensable* to the reproduction of the man and of the children. This would amount to the loss of something (or someone) that the man has acquired, and which, as we have seen, is neither guaranteed nor easily replaced on short notice. The loss of the wife is much more serious than the loss of the slave. Due to the two completely different types of sale experienced by the slave and the houseworker, not only are they forced to perform different work but they are within different labor relations, with the master and the husband respectively; thus the violence inherent is different.

From all this derives the fact that the woman's death at her husband's hands is extremely inconvenient for the husband himself; although the slave's death is inconvenient for the master, it is much less serious. Let us repeat it one more time: there is only one woman who as a wife works for only one man as husband. To kill her obviously means to leave the reproduction of the man and his children completely unattended. The murder of the wife by the husband, precisely because for him it is anything but convenient, tends therefore to occur in a situation that he considers to be an "extreme case." The arbitrariness of this conclusion is evident; it derives directly from the position of power in which the husband is placed in relation to the wife.⁹

From the slave-labor relation, instead, there derives for the slave the condition that his killing is not as much the result of an "extreme case," but rather the result of a series of moments that can generally be defined as cases in which his behavior sets a "bad example" for the others. The only limit to

this possibility of being killed is the generic inconvenience for the master of losing a part of his estate. But such a loss will not interfere with the flow of work itself, since the slave always works with other slaves and there will merely be two fewer arms amongst hundreds of others. And, above all, there will not be any problem in replacing them.

The difference in the labor relations that the slave and the wife live, therefore, influence their respective chances of being killed as well. And not only that, but the different kind of violence inherent to the woman's role as houseworker and to the slave explains also the difference in form that the physical violence of the man against the woman and the master against the slave takes in murder as the most extreme moment of attack. Corresponding to the greater violence in the slave relation, the murder of the slave takes forms that are much more brutal than those which the woman usually undergoes as a wife.¹⁰ C.L.R. James gave a description of this with regard to Haitian society before the victorious slave revolution:

Mutilations were common, limbs, ears, and sometimes the genitals, to deprive them of the only pleasures which they could indulge in without expense. Their masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling cane sugar over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gunpowder and blew them up with a match; buried them up to the neck and smeared their heads with sugar that the flies might devour them; fastened them near to nests of ants or wasps; made them eat their excrement, drink their urine, and lick the saliva of other slaves. One colonist was known in moments of hunger to throw himself on his slaves and stick his teeth into their flesh.¹¹

But the murder of the slave is not only *brutal*, it is also *public*. This is because it must have the effect of terrorizing all the others. Each of them must have what they have seen well impressed in their minds so as to know

exactly what could happen to them on any day. Obviously, the maintenance of a relation as violent as that of the master to the slave as an individual reduced to a commodity requires the use of a physical violence which, when the latent violence of paternalism does not work or is not even attempted, must immediately reach terrorist proportions. Only by exercising a brutal physical violence ranging from daily punishment (where the whip is combined with various tortures) to murder (we have just seen above what forms this took) can that form of command over labor be maintained.

The woman as homemaker instead is usually killed by stabbing with a knife, or is shot with a gun, or poisoned. Obviously brutal deaths of women are also not unheard of. Women are burned, mutilated, and tortured in various ways until death. But the death inflicted by the husband on the wife as a rule comes in the form of a "sudden event" as is the case with the methods — the knife, gun or poison — we indicated. Although the woman's murder, unlike that of the slave, does not occur publicly, but inside of the home, that does not mean that it is not intended to "set an example." The example in this case is given in an indirect way, because instead of witnessing it, other women will only know of it from the news. But murder is in any case the extreme sanction imposed by the man as foreman-judge-policeman for the woman who will not obey anymore, who does not work anymore, or who, in his opinion, does not obey enough and does not work enough. It is at the same time a warning for all the others, as every punishment has always been.

c. 2) Sexual Violence

Within the debate on physical violence, an analysis must be made of the specifically sexual violence that women are subject to within marriage. This is because the specifically sexual character of the violence that she faces at a mass level within and outside the marriage derives from the position that the woman occupies within marriage with regard to sexuality.

The centrality of the woman's sexual duties in the marriage, and therefore the iron discipline which capital has placed upon sexual work, derive from the fact that capital has needed to guarantee the reproduction of labor-power through such duties specifically. And because under capitalism the

reproduction of labor-power occurs within the family, capital has also guaranteed through such labor the reproduction of the family itself. For the woman, making love is therefore housework. She either does it to procreate new labor-power or to sexually appease, and therefore physically and psychologically reproduce, men.

This is because the *woman* is with the *man* — more specifically the *wife* is with the *husband*, and therefore at a mass level *all women* are with *all men* — in a *labor relation*. She is his wife inasmuch as she is a *houseworker for him*. And in the moment in which she makes love, she certainly cannot escape this relation and become "freely in love" in a relation of the "free exchange of love."

Housework has neither a timetable nor holidays; she is wife at whatever time of the day and night, every day of the year. Therefore, she cannot consider making love "after" punching out, or "on the weekend," or at the "end of the workweek" on a Friday night. *But the more making love is the central task of the unpaid work that the woman is obliged to perform for the man, the less there can be love. To make love therefore is housework.* And as such for the woman it is always necessarily a *violent* thing, *as are all work relations*. It would always and in any case be a violent thing even with the kindest husband. It is not by chance that the latter is not even an exception that proves the rule, at least not as long as one avoids confusing the question "why aren't you smiling darling?" with a real concern for the woman and a true intention to take care of her outside of a directly utilitarian dimension. What master has ever concerned himself with the well-being of his workers beyond the point where it would interfere with production?

To speak then of "consent" by the woman within the sexual relation is even more absurd than to speak of the consent of the worker to work in the factory. To ask if the woman does or does not consent in a sexual relation is to pose a false problem. This is because, as we have said, within marriage the woman does not even have the "freedom and necessity" which the free worker has to use the wage to satisfy his own needs. The woman, as we have already seen, sells her labor-power in exchange for survival.

From the centrality of sexual duties within marriage derives the fact that *for the woman to become a wife she must perform such tasks* as an unavoidable priority with respect to the others. Otherwise, she will not sat-

isfy the conditions under which the man will agree to guarantee her survival through his wage — agree, that is, to “support” her. It is performing sexual tasks for him that defines the position of the woman-wife within the marriage against that of the other women in the family. It is the sexual duty that the woman is obliged to perform in the marriage in order to have access to a portion of the male wage. Regarding the aspect of sexual duties, therefore, which we have seen is the wife’s central and exclusive task, with marriage it is the *woman’s body* itself that is put at the disposal of the man, and, with this, the work relation reaches the height of its violence, and here approximates that of the slave relation. The slave together with his labor-power is a commodity, the woman in the sexual act with all her person is at the disposal of the husband-master. She is forced to also love, carnally, with her own body, her master.

From this, then, derives the fact that the obligation to perform sexual tasks represents the height of violence in the woman’s work relation, because in that moment she must put herself “completely” at the disposal of the man. And from the fact that at the same time, however, this task is the central, indispensable duty, the following derives: firstly it is around such duties that an iron discipline is established so as to guarantee them at any cost; secondly, such discipline becomes much more harshly dependent on violence than that surrounding the other tasks, through a physical violence on the part of the man that is here directly sexual.

As for such discipline, we do not believe any doubts persist about the extent to which it is one of iron. We are still referring to the history of the working class family in developed capitalist countries since the second half of the 19th century. But, if we want to discuss Italy specifically, one might consider women’s pre-matrimonial virginity, which was inexorably demanded of them until only a few years ago (while it was a good thing for the man to be “experienced”), or the absolute matrimonial fidelity (always only for the woman obviously), or the light penalties that the legal code reserved for husbands, fathers and brothers who, in as far as their honor was tarnished, have executed wives, daughters and sisters.¹² This much emerges even if we pay attention only to our own context. This is a condition that has been very difficult for women to begin to subvert, and is something for which they had to pay a high price when they did.

We will focus instead, particularly, on the aspect of physical sexual violence as the instrument of such discipline. The most violent discipline — let us underscore — to ensure the most violent obligation. Yet *just as housework, and to an even greater extent its sexual duties, were not and are not considered to be work, so the sexual violence exercised by the man to extort sexual work from the woman within the marriage relation has never been considered violence, has never been considered rape.*¹³ And because no one escapes the reality of the family — whether it is in crisis or re-modernized — as long as the family exists, it is not enough for women not to get married in order to shake off housework, not to be above all a wife in relation to men. Always and in any case the sexual relation between man and woman is housework for the woman. And this relation is, because of this, in itself violent and, at the mass level, inside and outside of marriage, largely extorted through physical violence.

All housework, and particularly the sexual task, because it is the most violent, has seen a long history of refusal by women.¹⁴ Consequently it has a long history of various “coercions” on the part of men. *Every husband uses sexual violence against his wife.* In marriage, the man resorts directly or indirectly to violence, almost always obliging the woman to have sexual relations when she does not want to, asking her to do things she does not really want to do exactly because they do not give her pleasure, or imposing on her a way of making love which for her is — as women themselves say — like taking medicine. *This notwithstanding, all of these mass behaviors by men are never considered sexual violence towards women.* It is openly allowed to the man to exercise sexual violence in the marriage relation, every husband having the right, codified at the legal level, to the use and enjoyment, through the marriage contract, of the sexual availability of the wife — that is, of that specific task of domestic work. In the legal code as well, which is very similar in all the developed capitalist countries, this right is primary with respect to the other rights the husband acquires in marriage. In fact, according to law, the marriage contract is “stipulated but not consummated” and therefore contestable, as long as the woman has not performed her sexual duty, even if she has performed all the other tasks of domestic work.

NOTES

- 1 "Treatment" is the term used by historians of slavery to indicate the particular kind of coercion employed against slaves by the master.
- 2 On this, see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the St. Domingo Revolution*, New York: Random House, Vintage, 1963.
- 3 As far as the authorization of the Italian state is concerned, L. Remiddi (*I nostri diritti*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976) comments: "Without referring to antiquity, but rather only to before the new reform, the married woman was subject to the authority of the husband who was head of the family; she assumed his surname and was obligated to accompany him wherever he wanted to settle. The man even had the right to 'correct' the wife, to control her actions, to punish her for failure to do something; she was subject, in short, to the status of belonging to the husband, something that noticeably limited her rights and established a profound juridical difference between the status of the married woman and that of the single woman. Even the freedom and the secrecy of telephone conversations and of correspondence, a right which was guaranteed to all citizens by constitutional norms, by laws, by international treaties, was often put in doubt in the case of the married woman, since the husband could withhold her letters and even intercept telephone communications in order to oversee her conduct." (Court of Appeal of Milan, 9.7.1971).
- 4 Selma James, *A Woman's Place*, in Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, p. 63.
- 5 This amendment was passed in 1975.
- 6 The current debate in the USA around restructuring welfare is significant in this respect. On this question, see M. Dalla Costa, "A Proposito del Welfare" in *Primo Maggio* n. 9, 1977, where among other things the tendency towards computerization of welfare by the state is interpreted as an obvious consequence of such conflicts. See, specifically on this point, the important article "City Opens Computer Center to Check on Eligibility of Welfare Recipients," *New York Times*, February 28, 1975.
- 7 We say "in the majority of cases" because it has been noted that an ever-greater level of recourse by parents to physical violence is developing in every country — violence that goes beyond striking the child. It even

includes forms of torture. Against this, in the UK and the USA for example, the first "Children's Bill of Rights" has been drawn up. Such behavior by parents is evidently the result of the stress under which they are placed, on the one hand by the monstrosity of work, on the other by the ever more radical struggle of children against family discipline. A "Children's Bill of Rights" has also recently been proposed in France. There, the Ministry of the Interior's statistics reveal that in 1975 charges were brought against 26,000 kids for being runaways, and of these, 8 out of 10 are recidivists; that in 1976 over 8,000 children died due to mistreatment, malnutrition and neglect on the part of their parents. The suicide statistics are also astounding. According to the best estimates, there are about 4,800 suicides per year. The French committee on the study of suicide has asserted that in the city of Marseille alone, in 1975, 4,317 adults and children were recovering in the hospital due to suicide attempts.

- 8 George Rawick, *op. cit.*
- 9 If the refusal to be disciplined, to work, was always in the end the reason for the wife's murder by the husband, until a few years ago the same event was given different explanations — "emotional" reasons corresponding directly to the "labor of love" which was no longer being performed in the necessary fashion. Yet in recent years the love contract has been so profoundly infringed upon that the obvious adoption of an "emotional" explanation is no longer useful, and the husbands now declare — as for some years now one may read in the Italian dailies — that they have killed their wife "because she refused to do the housework."
- 10 On this point, see C.L.R. James, *op. cit.* On the subject see also George Rawick, *op. cit.*
- 11 C.L.R. James, *op. cit.* pp.12-13.
- 12 The penalty ranges from 3 to 7 years (art. 587 c.p.) compared with 21 years of imprisonment for murder. Laura Remiddi comments, "It is almost a case of a special immunity, you could say a license to kill.... The concept which characterizes the crime of honor is that the sexual ("carnal") relation is illegitimate. Every relation outside of the husband-wife relation is so, and therefore is a source of dishonor which must (or at least can) be cleansed with blood. For the married person the "honorable motivation" is reciprocal, that is, it is recognized as much for the husband as for the

wife. But outside of marriage it is expected that the family honor is contained in the woman's womb, the daughter's or the sister's, and the man, father or brother, must assume the position of avenger." *I nostri diritti*, *cit.*, pp. 26–27.

- ¹³ Since the first, feminist writings women have insisted on this near impossibility of distinguishing between the sexual violence that the state is also prepared to recognize as such and what instead is treated by the state as a part of the normal conduct of a "good citizen." Germain Greer, in *The Female Eunuch* (1970), put forward a distinction between big rape and small rape, in the sense simply that the first was the case in which one could lay charges against a man in court. But the distinction is not very helpful because, as all women know, the terrain between what the state protects and does not protect is a very slippery one. It was only the power of the Movement that in recent years constrained the state to judge cases which, because of the state's own position, women had been discouraged from bringing before the courts. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) remains a classic in the description of violence — latent and overt — in the sexual relation between man and woman. And the long-running polemic between this author and Norman Mailer regarding this issue is well known.
- ¹⁴ This refusal by women was carried out through subterranean forms at first, through a thousand excuses, a thousand sicknesses invented in order to avoid making love. Then it burst out into the open laying of charges and the openly declared and hard-fought struggle over the conditions of sexuality, seeking to transcend it as a form of work. But the destruction of sexuality as work, which is the only viewpoint which can solve the "sexual problem," has obviously never been put forward as the point of view of the most noted contemporary investigators of sex: from old Kinsey, author of the famous *Report*, to the more recent Masters and Johnson, to say nothing of the most recent work of Michel Foucault, who has dedicated a monumental work to sex, expected to run to six volumes, of which the first has appeared as *La volonté de Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). In Italy, a book that has raised a fuss in male sensibilities, and which offers a quick reminder of female sexual (dis)satisfaction (albeit not an exhaustive treatment), is *La donna sposata*, by Lieta Harrison, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1972).

Chapter 3

RAPE AND INCEST

From what we have suggested above regarding the sexual relation between wife and husband we can derive that the first form of rape occurs within marriage. This ranges from cases in which, some would say, there is consent on the part of the woman to cases in which to speak of the woman's consent means to make the assumption directly, following the expression coined by men, that "when a woman says no she really means yes."

But let us consider more closely here the mechanisms and the causes of rape within its currently accepted definition, that of sexual violence against women other than the wife, nor other family members. We will discuss the sexual violence against the latter, relatives who are not the wife, when we deal with incest.

We have seen that within marriage the man is implicitly authorized to exercise sexual violence over the wife because the sexual task is his by right, one that is more fundamental than any other. Yet why does the man who exercises violence against women, outside marriage as well, perpetrate sexual violence at a generalized level?

Let us begin by making the observation that the man who perpetrates rape is experienced by women as a "complementary" figure with respect to the man who carries out sexual violence within marriage. It is significant that in the same rape trials in which the Feminist Movement has in recent

years been politically engaged, the accused rapists were ignored by the women in the room. That is, the political trial represented a fundamental moment of the growth of political organization necessary in order to build, by women's hands, a power that could strike at the roots of the very possibility of unleashing such violence. Yet the women were far from seeing the accused as "monsters." That is, the women knew that there is no such thing as "the monsters and the rest," but that all men are in part monsters because of the relation in which capital has placed them with respect to women: the relation of housework. Let us consider this relation, in order to arrive at an understanding of why male sexual violence is so entrenched outside of marriage as well, specifying also some aspects of the conditions in which the sexual duty is performed.

Having placed in the wife, and only in her, the obligation to perform the sexual task, capital guaranteed, but also restricted, for the man the possibility of extorting free sexual work within the family, unlike the "room for maneuver" which he is allowed in extorting all the other tasks of housework. The husband can count on the preparation of food, the washing of clothes and other such tasks, by the wife, by the children, by the mother, in an almost interchangeable way; but for the unpaid sexual acquiescence he can count only on his wife. Indeed, the husband's own role, we must stress, is founded above all on the fact that he is the only man who can legitimately receive the sexual task on the part of the wife, guaranteeing her survival in exchange. Therefore, in order to seek such a performance outside of what the wife guarantees him, the husband will have to take into account his wage, and self-discipline his sexuality accordingly. Due to this specific capitalist disciplining of sexual work, from which the other women (other than his wife) in the family are exempt, the man risks finding himself less assured of this free performance of reproduction than of all the others. Within marriage he will constantly tend, therefore, to reserve a "robust" treatment for his wife, but at the same time he will look elsewhere.

His possibility of remaining unfulfilled with respect to this task has been "aggravated" in recent years for two reasons. The first is that, thanks to the force constituted by the emergence of the Movement, women have found that within the family itself they have considerable power to negotiate their conditions of domestic work. And the sexual duty is among the first to be reject-

ed. Women's protest against a life consisting only of work exploded with the rise of the Movement, and this means first and foremost a drastic reduction in domestic work. But this reduction is accompanied by the expectation that women should have a sexual life outside of work and the need to satisfy men. What exploded, therefore, was the demand not only for sexuality as pleasure, and above all as for *her* pleasure.

The lesbian movement is without doubt a determining moment in such struggles. Women, married or not, have achieved an ever-greater power to refuse themselves, to choose themselves another sexual companion, to choose to be with a woman. The latter choice in particular has constituted the most massive attack on heterosexuality as the religion that capitalism imposed.¹ It constitutes a break with the obligatory passage through the man and his violence as the only way to have some kind of sexual life. This overall power represents a primary barrier for the man in easily obtaining his sexual pleasure. "Easily," in the sense that it is achieved at the sole expense of the woman.

The other aspect of this rise of female power and therefore the other barrier for men was the massification of and rise in cost of prostitutes.² That is, as we will explain more fully below, not only have a growing number of women decided to engage in prostitution, but ever-increasing numbers of them have raised their prices and bargain over their conditions.

The male response to all of this was an increase of rape.³ In proportion to the decrease in the possibility of having the sexual service guaranteed by the partner due to the increase in women's power, and to the decrease in the possibility of raping women in the family itself and of accessing a prostitute at a low cost, men sought to assure themselves of the carrying out of the sexual task by raping women outside the family.

We can define *rape* in this sense as being a genuine *theft of housework*. It is a theft which, from outside the family, breaks the organization of domestic work on the part of whoever commits rape. It strikes, therefore, at the very reproduction of the family itself. Yet the terrorist act of rape seeks not only to achieve sexual service without paying for it. It also constitutes a warning to undisciplined and rebellious women. It shows them, that is, the risk they continuously run by refusing discipline and family work, by refusing to remain "under the protection" of a man.

This is how it is intended. Without doubt the sexual task is not only the central task of domestic work, but is also the task upon which women have guaranteed survival as wives or a price as prostitutes (which increasingly tends to rise). Thus rape represents the most ferocious attack on the conditions under which the woman performs the work of the reproduction of labor-power. If sexual work is for women always and in any case violent (and it is through physical violence that the work of both the wife and the prostitute are often disciplined), rape represents the pinnacle of violence, because for the woman it constitutes forced labor in exchange for nothing. The woman is literally robbed of her work. A ferocious attack, we repeat, as much for the woman-wife as for the woman-prostitute. But, we might ask, does the great increase in rape suggest that the power of women, as much as it has increased within and outside the family, still leaves them unarmed in the face of the most profound form of male abuse that rape represents?

In our opinion it does not. The fundamental difference to be grasped, in fact, is that compared with before the Movement, not only can men not calmly rape women with whom they have a family relationship, but they must organize themselves in bands, or arm themselves, to carry out rape itself.⁴ This is because women charge them with rape, as well as defend themselves directly with force. One man alone, unarmed that is, cannot hope to get away with it so easily any more. Women respond strongly, and in more than a few cases have killed their attackers.⁵

When rape occurs within the family, except in the case where it is carried out by the husband against the wife, we are speaking more precisely of incest. Incest is also *a theft of housework. It breaks with the organization and division of housework within the family, violating it at many points.*

The man that as a father commits incest against the daughter breaks simultaneously the relationship of domestic work that existed between himself and the wife and that which existed between himself and the daughter, and therefore breaks at two different points with the division of housework and its discipline. Furthermore, with respect to the women — who are in any case destined to work for that man and over whom therefore the man has direct control — incest, especially because it occurs within the family, *can be more easily repeated against the same women who are blackmailed against defending themselves.* In the specific — and more common — case of incest by the father

with regard to the daughter, the blackmail is extremely heavy because the daughter herself depends on the father for her survival. Because it robs women in the family of the sexual task they are not beholden to perform, *incest breaks directly within the family organization with the division of housework upon which are based the different roles of wife, mother, daughter, sister.*

As we have repeated many times, only the wife must perform the sexual task within the family. Every female role within the family, the role of wife, of mother, of daughter, of sister, is based upon a determinate quantity and quality of housework. But the housework on which the role of the “wife” is based is qualitatively differentiated with respect to all the others principally by the sexual task that it includes. It is the wife, that is, who not only performs the greatest quantity of housework necessary to reproduce the family, but who is also specifically held responsible by the man for performing the duty of sex. Such tasks are not asked of the sister by her brother, just as the sister is asked to do a quantity of housework which is undoubtedly much less than that expected of the wife by the husband and of the mother by the children. Let us not linger on an area which has, in its key features, been clearly delineated for some time, namely that of the foundation of the female roles in the family upon different quantities and qualities of domestic work.⁶ Let us stress instead, to the extent that it concerns us here, that in regard to the division of housework, the incest committed by the father against the daughter or by the son against the mother consists of a theft of housework.⁷ As far as the daughter and the mother are concerned, it is forced labor in exchange for nothing. Indeed incest is not exchanged for anything in addition to that maintenance of the mother by the husband and of the daughter by the father, to which they are entitled without being obliged to perform sexual work respectively for the son or the father.

As we anticipated earlier, however, incest is tending to diminish notably in every country, and a notable decrease has occurred in recent years in Italy because of the new level of power that women have acquired due to the emergence of the Movement. Consequently, women’s behavior with regard to this fact has also changed. While earlier they tended to keep it hidden, as a shameful family secret that would certainly not have been in their interest to make public, today they publicly denounce it, organize the struggle against it, and also work within the courts to put an end to it.⁸

NOTES

¹ "Capital, while it elevates heterosexuality to a religion, at the same time in practice makes it impossible for men and women to be in touch with each other, physically or emotionally — it undermines heterosexuality except as a sexual, economic and social discipline." Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: The Falling Wall Press, p. 30.

² As far as Italy is concerned, *Corriere della Sera*, in a series of articles, declares that women engaging in prostitution number around 1,200,000, and that the "people involved" would include about 10 percent of the Italian population. For years now, the newspapers have deplored the fact that ever more women, even from the middle class, engage in prostitution "certainly not because they need the money." Referring again to the same articles, some data indicate that the amount spent "on the street" daily in the largest cities amounts to 20 million lire in Genoa, 50 million in Milan, 300 million in Rome and in Turin more than 400 million. Recently, two articles appeared in *La Repubblica* (July 14 and 15, 1977) by Natalia Aspesi in which the very large number of minors who decide to engage in prostitution outside of anyone's "protection" is brought to light.

³ That rape has increased at the world level is an incontestible fact and has been declared so by the Movement. In the USA, notwithstanding that only a small percentage of raped women press charges, in 1974 there were 60,000 charged with sexual violence. But the psychologist Ralph W. Masters, of the Boston police department, maintains that the unreported cases number a million. *L'Espresso*, October 19, 1975.

To give a European example, in the German Federal Republic, according to the declaration of the Interior Minister, sexual attacks reported in 1974 numbered beyond 40,000.

A notable assembling of data regarding rape and sexual violence in general was furnished by Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will*, 1975.

Further, see Susan Griffin, *Rape: The All-American Crime*, New York, 1971. It contains a wide range of testimony on rape in America

from the point of view of women. Regarding Italy, a collection of journalistic materials on the increase in rape in recent years is Maria Adele Teodori, *Le violentate*, Milano: Sugar, 1977. And an interesting anthology of Movement writings is found in Emina Cevro-Vulkovic, Rowena Davis, *Giù le mani*, Roma: Arcana, 1977. Among Italian feminist journals, "Effe" dedicated the entirety of Number 8 (Oct.–Nov. 1975) to violence against women and specifically to rape, and "Le operaie della casa" has dedicated various articles in every number.

4 Consider, in Italy, the cases of rape around which the Feminist Movement built political trials, from the rape-massacre of Circeo, to the case of Cristina Simeoni (the trial was held in Verona), to the rape cases in Ravenna and Ferrara around which the Movement mobilized in the course of 1976–77.

5 Among the more famous cases, around which international mobilization occurred, was that of Joan Little, a Black woman held in prison in the USA for theft and possession of stolen property who, in order to avoid being raped by a prison guard, killed him. In the pamphlet which the Committee for Wages for Housework of Los Angeles distributed, calling for freeing her, we find: "Joan Little found herself in a powerless position, exposed to the risk of undergoing sexual violence, because she was in prison; she was in prison because she was powerless. She was powerless because she's Black, and is a woman. Imprisonment is the extreme expression of the lack of power of all women. Pushed by the need for money, to maintain ourselves and our families, we marry, we prostitute ourselves, we put ourselves on welfare, we work 24 hours a day (at home and at second jobs) and we steal. Capital profits from our work, which is controlled by the state."

6 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, *op.cit.*; *Collettivo Internazionale Femminista* (ed.), 8 Marzo 1974, p. 26.

7 Of the forms of incest, these are the most common. Irrelevant, or better, almost non-existent, are forms of incest by mothers against sons, of daughters against fathers, etc.

8 The heaviest impediment regarding going to trial with charges like these, was often — as women themselves declared — that once the father was in jail, the family did not know how it would eat. It is precisely on their

role of feeding the family, that the fathers of the poorest parts of Italy have built an authority, which until yesterday in a big way, and even today to some extent, led to their right to deflower their virgin daughters.

Chapter 4

THE STATE AND MALE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1. Encouraging violence through the neutralization of its own repressive apparatus

The attitude of the state with regard to violence against women is a consequence of its role in the organization of work in the family. *The state is the guarantor of the violence inherent in the capitalist relation of women's exploitation*, because it has codified the family on the basis of women's unpaid work. The state sanctions the condition of women as unpaid workers within the family, codifying it within the marriage contract. In this way, the state legitimizes the disparity between the material conditions of life, and therefore in the relations of power, between men and women within the family and at the social level. Because this relationship cannot be based on anything other than such treatment, which, as we have seen, always tends at least towards verging on or including male physical violence, the state must also assume for itself the role of making its repressive apparatus function so as to sustain such an order of things. For that very same reason it must also institute an ideological arrangement bent on sustaining it. Specifically, it must support, and therefore justify, the male exercise of physical violence against women.

Let us consider this. The first thing to note here is how the state in practice neutralizes its repressive apparatus with regard to male violence against women. In other words how it assures, almost unconditionally, the *impunity* with which men can exercise physical violence against women. The police do not intervene and the judiciary does not hand down sentences. Paradoxically blind in its seeing of the phenomenon and slow in its intervention, the state in practice gives complete license to men to beat women at a mass level. Every man can consider insulting, blackmailing, mistreating, and hitting his own wife and daughter in the near-certainty that the police will not come to the house and stop him, nor will he be prosecuted by the state apparatus for the "physical and moral damage" incurred by the woman as a result of the violence.

Every man can consider the use of sexual violence against his own wife without being troubled by the worry that by doing so he will find himself facing the law, or will be incriminated for rape. What is normally recorded by the state as violence against individuals, as an offence against their physical and moral integrity (including just blackmail and threats, in the absence of physical violence, since even these render any contract null and void), assumes a completely different dimension when it is exercised against women, within the domestic walls, in defense of family values, that is, with respect to the organization of work within the family.

When, as has increasingly been the case in recent years, the state is obliged by women's struggles to press charges and to intervene in their defense against men (rapists, child molesters, husbands guilty of various forms of violence, doctors, etc.), its behavior tends in general not to overly discourage the use of violence against women. Instead it aims to get women to give up on taking their charges all the way (through varying methods of intimidation, humiliating interrogations, etc. that tend to transform women "from victims into perpetrators"). It seeks to impede by any means their bringing to light the real violence which they are subject to, to water-down their charges qualitatively and quantitatively through its juridical-repressive apparatus, limiting to the greatest possible extent the cases of violence that are punishable by law in order to be able to characterize these as exceptional and to deny that male violence against women is a mass behavior. As for those cases — ones that are rare with respect to violence against women —

that are "brought to justice," the state refuses as much as possible to acknowledge male guilt, offering reasons, always narrow ones, for their guilt, and regularly handing down extremely light penalties to the very few men found guilty in order not to discourage the mass practice of violence against women as a form of control of their work.¹ And it does so equally in cases of violence within the family as for those outside of it. Indeed, *the violence exercised against women outside the home*, on the street, in public places, in all of those places that could represent for them a social life, *is also directly functional* to controlling the rhythms of housework and to the space within which they are constrained during their workday. Because it contributes towards keeping them confined to their workplace and to maintaining their expanded work hours in such a way that these continue throughout the day, including the evening and the night, violence keeps them far away from every form of social life. The latter is for women an indispensable tool for organizing themselves against their conditions of work, namely domestic work, which is atomized and hidden in the homes. *For the woman to need to remain at home* because the city is dangerous, off limits, *is directly work because the home is precisely her workplace.*² The time she spends at home is not, as it is for the man, "free time," but rather entirely work time. Even to be in front of the television for a woman is not like being at the movies, since if the doorbell rings she's the one who must go and answer it, if the children are sick she's the one who keeps one eye on the TV and another on how the sick child is doing. And this is fundamentally because it is she, and her physical presence in the home, that contributes towards emotionally and psychologically reproducing the other components of the family. *Her own presence is work.*

Regarding all the violence, therefore, perpetrated by men against women, in whatever place and in whatever form, the state adopts the broadest "*laissez faire*" approach with respect to men in order to encourage them to act as mediators and as the direct agents of its violent relationship with women. It does so because such violence tends to tie the woman down to the home, and therefore to chain her to her work. At times, instead, the state, due to the pressure of women's struggles, is forced not only to appear as a direct party in the case, but also to assume in the courtroom the role of women's "guardian" and "defender" against male "abuse." If on the one hand it can no longer, at least

occasionally, avoid assuming such a role, on the other it is evident that this is a mystificatory attempt to distinguish itself from the man, who is presented as the "real" and exclusive counterpart to the woman.

Indeed, as long as it can get away with it, the state will try not to identify violence with the man as such — something that would undermine the authority of the head of the family which it needs to keep stable — but with a few monsters who are responsible for the brutality against women. As for the state itself, seeing that by now it must walk the walk of being the defender of women, it seeks at least to create a democratic veneer in its confrontation with them. At the same time, it seeks to unburden itself from the class revolt of women, which has already exploded against the conditions of work and therefore often openly against the state itself (beyond that revolt which is directed against men) so as to direct it only at the direct agents of violence. It seeks to make men — or, better, a few monsters among them — appear as those directly and solely responsible for what women undergo, and therefore to salvage the seeming importance of the state and all of its institutions, especially the family, for the physical survival of women. But to the same degree as the struggle of women increases, so the capacity of the state to mystify its relationship with them by posing as their "guardian in exceptional cases," as the defender of the victims from these monsters, decreases. As for women, the more they discover the mystification that lies behind the state's adoption of this position, the more they verify that it does not function as the dam holding back the violence that they are subject to at a mass level and struggle within the trials themselves, engaging at times in accusations and organization against the state.

A few points are worth mentioning here to add to our discussion, even if they are not specifically part of our concern: that is, the role of the state with respect to male physical violence against women. At the general level the state does not intervene directly, in order not to appear to discipline and repress women openly, because it has already given the man the task of occupying and appearing in this role. The state can therefore usually depend in tranquility on the actions of men, whom it has already licensed to use violence. There are, however, cases in which men's actions are not enough, and the state must reveal itself, exercising its own violence directly, through its own organs. Which cases are these?

First of all they are the more or less isolated cases of "extreme" rebellion on the part of houseworkers. They are the cases of women throwing children out the window, of women killing their husband. There are also other cases that belong in the same category of the refusal of housework and family discipline that these express. The direct response of the state is then the prison or the psychiatric hospital, where no avenue is ignored in the enactment of experiments seeking still to extort domestic work from the rebels, by this point reduced to human larvae.³ Finally we arrive, as we will see, at the cases of women — ones which by now are no longer isolated, but rather ever more mass behaviors — who withdraw themselves from their "destiny" and constitute therefore a very serious threat to the state-family complex, negating the fundamental laws of the "love contract." We refer to women prostitutes and lesbians.

Beyond these individual cases, which represent a type of rebellion that can be considered as "isolated," or, in the case of prostitutes and lesbians, one which is becoming widespread to the degree that it constitutes a threat to the models imposed by the state-family, we can generally say that the state intervenes directly, unleashing its own violence, when the mass behavior of women critically compromises the interests of capital and the state in the reproduction of a determinate quantity and quality of labor-power. That is, therefore, where the man's control is clearly insufficient in order to maintain a degree of behavior on the part of women that is adequate to the state's interests. It also ought to be pointed out that in some of these cases, where the interests of the state come into conflict to such a degree with the immediate interests of all of the members of the proletarian family, including the man, that the state can no longer count on male control over the woman. In this circumstance, to offer some examples, we can cite all those articulations of demographic policy, such as enforced sterilization, which, only in recent years and due to the Feminist Movement, has been denounced and exposed, elevating it to the level of a "political scandal."⁴

2 *Ideological orchestration*

The state, in sanctioning the woman's condition as unpaid worker within the family and codifying it in marriage, must, beyond making its repres-

sive apparatus function adequately, also take on the ideological orchestration that reinforces the woman's discipline and therefore guarantees the possibility of extracting unpaid housework.

Given that the guarantee of a basic level of discipline derives directly from the lack of a wage and the dependence of the woman on the man's paycheck, the next method by which the woman is kept in line, and against which (notwithstanding her powerless situation) she rebels and struggles, is what we have referred to as her "treatment" on the part of the man. A treatment in which the husband's threat, whether latent or explicit, of abandoning the wife (with the children) constitutes a sword of Damocles hanging over the woman's head every time that she tends to "cross the line" of behavior that the man is prepared to tolerate.

Such treatment, which accompanies the woman throughout her day, is like a sonata with multiple tones, from those professing love to those of direct physical violence. But certainly the state, having codified marriage as a "love contract," also needs to ensure that it survives, at least for a certain period. It therefore remains to the state to reinforce the discipline already generated within the material conditions of marriage. It becomes necessary to engage in an ideological orchestration which functions through a duality of tones, from that of love to that of physical violence. The state also fosters and encourages direct physical (and to a large extent specifically sexual) violence by assuring male impunity. But this impunity continues not to be a very scandalous fact, especially considering that in a situation where the state manages to keep women's power at bay, that same ideology allows the violence to appear legitimate.

So as to circumscribe the discussion very briefly to that portion which here directly concerns us — how the emphasis moves between love and violence according to the structural conditions of the family, and, therefore, to the specific conditions within which the woman finds herself living as a worker — the first observation to make is that, at the global level, an important factor determining this movement is the difference between areas where the man does not have a guaranteed salary and those where he does.⁵ That is, generally speaking, between those areas of the planet considered as developing, and those that are considered developed.

Let us first consider the former. In the imperialist division of the labor for the reproduction of labor-power, these developing areas consist of those where capitalist command is more massively concentrated in the reproduction of labor-power, and at a low cost. They are the areas, therefore, where capitalist and statist violence is more heavily and massively concentrated against women.⁶

To the extent to which the labor-power required is destined — and it has been so destined for a very long time — to function purely as unskilled labor-power, and where at the same time the disciplinary power of the man's wage is lacking with regard to the woman, capital and the state will largely encourage physical violence.

On the one hand, since such labor-power is destined to be unskilled labor, the work required for raising it is extremely simple. Consequently it is not necessary for the state to stress love very much, since that type of cooperation between husband and wife is not necessary as it is in the raising of more skilled labor-power.

On the other hand, the power which the man does not hold directly, because in such areas he is not destined to enjoy a wage on a mass scale, must be restored to him by capital and the state through the only remaining means: encouraging male violence.

A particular argument needs to be made for those areas in the world which in the international division of labor are destined specifically towards the production of labor-power. Such is the case, for example, in the South of Italy. In these areas capital has not hesitated to use any form of violence in order to keep women in a state of uninterrupted maternity. The custom which was practiced in the South, of exposing the blood-stained bed sheet after the wedding night — in the eternal protection of female chastity — is an indication of the level of repression that capital has orchestrated against women in order to impose upon them their role as producers of human capital.

In this context, every infraction of the rules was punished with complete social ostracism, or even with death, with the executioner being the husband/father, to whom was offered the legal loophole of the "crime of honor."

The death penalty for sexual infractions directly administered by the father/husband/brother, or, indirectly by the butchers to whom the women were forced to run off in order to get abortions, is typical not only of areas

specifically assigned to the sale of labor-power, but of all those areas that enact intense demographic policies in order to leap forward in the process of accumulation.

This is currently the case in countries of the Middle East, where the woman who dares present herself without a veil in public today is still publicly whipped, and the adulteress lynched. We need also to add that in areas like Southern Italy and some Arab countries, where the man does not traditionally have the family power which derives from access to the wage, capital has had to defend the role of the man directly as head of the family, and above all of the woman, with violence. The cult of virility, the celebration of the penis, has had to be exaggerated not only because an abundant procreation was required, but also because the true basis of male authority was missing, that is, the wage.

An analogous phenomenon was recently witnessed in the United States, when American capital, alarmed by the explosion of the Black ghettos, proposed to consolidate the Black family and above all male authority within it. In a situation where traditionally the man is either unwaged or receives a minimal wage, and where in any case the Black woman must always worry about her own sustenance, capital's weapon was the celebration of Black virility (as for the Black Muslims) which in any case met with little success since Black women had achieved a base of social power (above all *welfare*) which permitted them to refuse the traditional relation of women to the wage, that is, to marriage.⁷

In the areas where the man's power must be directly reconstructed upon the promotion of his violence, this process is also destined to assume more brutal and demonstrative forms.⁸ Correspondingly, then, disciplining the woman must occur almost exclusively through such violence.

The relationship between man and woman here is more violent because the relationship between the woman and capital is more violent. A true regime of terrorism, *tout-court*, must be instituted. Thus, similar to what we have seen in the case of the slave, some atrocities in their general treatment re-emerge, specifically the atrocious and public nature of the punishment that must function here, too, in a manner that is immediately exemplary.

Let us mention, with regard to these areas, cliteridectomy, the prohibition against speaking in public, the obligation to wear a veil, to walk

several steps behind the man, and the stoning of adulterous women, only to give some examples.

In the so-called developed areas, instead, where the command over the woman's reproductive duties is aimed towards the demand for more highly skilled labor-power, and where a first and high level of family discipline springs directly from the man's wage, capital and the state place an emphasis on ideological orchestration: first on "love," then on violence in all of its expressions, from threats to blackmail to physical (and specifically sexual) violence. And obviously (it almost doesn't have to be pointed out), considering the violence that love itself represents in its status as love turned into work, there is a whole range of intermediate forms of behavior (including the usual varieties of threat and blackmail) which mean that categorizing this behavior as one of either love or violence is subject to quite a high degree of discretion.⁹ For this reason we have chosen in this analysis not to illustrate these behaviors, but rather to treat at length physical violence as the ensemble of all those behaviors which lie beyond a very precise point within the "treatment." This particular point within "treatment" then, as we will explain, if only briefly, moves along the scale of treatment according to the regions in question. In those where the man's wage is in short supply it tends — as we have seen — to be frighteningly close to violence. In others it tends to remain just far enough away from violence to leave an adequate space for love.

The adequacy of this space must above all be proportional to the fact that the labor-power to be produced is more skilled. This concerns the husband as much as it does the children. It means that the woman, in exchange for mere survival, must be amenable to a more complex form of work. It is a type of work that requires a deeper degree of involvement in order to be performed. That is, the woman must be pushed to identify to the greatest possible degree with the needs of the husband and the children (and she must therefore love them very intensely) so that she can reproduce them on those levels that are not only directly material, but also affective, and psychic, which they need in order to manage school and work.

And correspondingly, the woman must discipline them and also directly train them.¹⁰ She must also participate emotionally and collaborate in a thousand ways with the husband's own work. This type of family, in fact, man-

ages a lot better when there is a degree of *collaboration* between husband and wife. And this obviously can be based on nothing other than *love*.

As we have already noted, the duties of affective reproduction certainly cannot be extracted directly through physical violence. The state must therefore depend on romantic ideological orchestration rather than the promotion of male physical violence. The type of ideology of love that permeates the family in nearly all so-called developed areas is still deeply marked by the romanticist ideology.¹¹

It is significant that such an ideology was born in the second half of the 19th century when English capital was reorganizing its command over reproduction as much quantitatively as it was qualitatively.¹²

Let us return again to the words of Silvia Federici:

The reorganization of work which occurs in the second half of the 19th century is completely dictated by capital's need to assure for itself a more stable, more disciplined, and therefore more productive working class. Towards this goal, capital plans the construction of the working-class family, and more precisely the construction of a domestic role for the woman that guarantees the production of more skilled labor-power. That means that not only is the production of children imposed on the woman, but so too is the task of guaranteeing their adequate daily reproduction, providing a very precise set of physical, emotional and sexual services.... The idealization of the woman's personality and of feminine "virtues" really begins the moment in which these virtues must conceal unpaid labor, and it is no accident that the highest of these virtues is in fact the sense of *maternity* and of *love*, intended as the capacity for total sacrifice. "Marital love" and "maternal instinct" are themes that dominate the literature and discourse of Victorian-era reformers. But above all the dominant theme is the pernicious effects of factory work on the reproductive role of women. Critics blamed not only the long hours spent far from home, but they also "discovered" the "plague" of prostitution and of

working-class immorality, the battering ram for all the decrees on industrial labor reform which proliferated in the Victorian era. Even the extreme puritanism which characterized the epoch was interpreted in relation to the need to moralize the working-class woman, the future bride/mother, and to construct a feminine role based on sacrifice, that is, on the acceptance of unpaid work."¹³

Officially, the ideology of romantic love is obviously the negation of violence. And, until the power of women reached its current level, it functioned largely through the fact that every woman, in her daily taste of violence in her relation with the man, had difficulty seeing it in its real form, for that which it is: the enforcement of labor. And the ideology of romantic love made it difficult for her to recognize the mass dimension of this enforcement. That is, every woman experiencing violence was led to consider herself as "one of the unlucky ones."¹⁴ And so, between the doubt that the man's violence was, in spite of its brutality, nonetheless dictated by a love which as a "sentimental fact" transcended everything else, and the doubts of being among the unlucky few, the woman was determined at the same time to defend the husband, keeping the brutality hidden, and was wary of allying herself with other women in struggle. She had the feeling of being "ashamed" of her own misfortune.¹⁵

As we have suggested, in developed regions, in order to achieve the collaboration that is required in the family, the state must stress *above all* the ideology of romantic love. But that does not mean that the requisite orchestration is not carried out in the direct exaltation of male violence as well. This is simply the other side of the same ideological coin. The state, in fact, in order to keep the woman in line, both wives and non-wives, must also openly exhort the man to commit violence. In this way the wife knows what will happen when she misbehaves, and all women who want in some way to escape the destiny of wifehood will know what risks they will incur.

Because of the central role the sexual duty has in marriage, the dominant theme of this particular ideological orchestration will be sex as violence — with all the pornographic literature which accompanies this.¹⁶

We do not want here, however, to examine the ideology of romantic love more closely in each of its particulars, and in all of the specific articulations through which it is orchestrated, which together result in the direct promotion of male violence. It is important here to remember only that to have an idea of how these articulations are carried out, there is no woman who, buying the newspapers, turning on the television and the radio, or going to the movies, is not the direct target of the model of a wife that is a houseworker, one that is in vogue according to her social standing and the environment within which she moves.¹⁷ And simultaneously by the model of the woman who, despite working outside the home, still manages to be the perfect wife, a model which is not alternative, but rather complementary to the first one, and one which, according to changing times, is directed at those who are also destined to be called to work outside the home. No woman escapes the message. In a village, a small town, a small or a large city, the state's message is certain to reach her.

As for how such an ideology is articulated, let us try to look at it here only in its fundamental directives. The first is that it must distinguish between the "good" woman and the "bad" woman. The key moment of this is obviously the acceptance or the lack thereof of unwaged housework, that is, of housework as a labor of love.¹⁸

The very stability of the family depends in large part on the extent to which this distinction holds strong. Regarding this ideological operation, and therefore this specific type of violence, the state can firmly count on men as excellent communicators, first-rate channels for diffusion of the message. The solidity of their own position in the family depends in fact on the extent to which they are able to pass on this ideology.

The good woman, we could say, is the woman that works, that gives without reserve, without limits, without asking for anything in exchange beyond her own survival, who keeps her part of the love pact which she has agreed to until the very end. It is the woman, obviously, who must not even consider the possibility of seeing her domestic work as work per se, but who must rather unconditionally assume it to be an expression of love.

The woman who is "not so good," on the other hand, is she who engages in moments of rebellion (which means she takes work breaks) and expects something for herself beyond the mere survival which is functional to the

reproduction of the entire family. Obviously such behavior is "not good" and therefore is inconvenient, because it tends to attack the fundamental conditions of marriage; it tends to raise the level of that which the woman receives in exchange beyond the limits of mere survival, and simultaneously to create dangerous breaks in the continuum of her work. For a woman it is often enough to have a cigarette in her mouth to ensure that she is a housewife who is not well liked, since it is evident that with a cigarette in her mouth she is not going to be washing the dishes or making the beds. But that she also, therefore, spends a certain amount of time every day on things for herself that are not strictly necessary. In domestic work a cigarette represents an interruption in the flow of work, a temporal parenthesis that, if it occurs too often, can jeopardize the appearance of the house, making it messy. For the woman who instead works at a desk, the cigarette does not represent a problem, and therefore does not make her look bad, because it is compatible with the work that she does.

We have singled out a minor activity such as smoking a cigarette because we believe it is quite indicative of how this dividing line between good and bad women begins to work at a low level. A cigarette, which would not be disgraceful in a man's mouth, is in a housewife's the beginning of a set of concerns regarding her character. This concern obviously becomes more serious if, from the reduction of work time due to smoking and the spending of grocery money on cigarettes, the woman moves on toward a direct demand for money. The woman must always justify "what" she needs the money for. And to get the man to take his wallet out for something that is for her personal benefit, such as a coat, even if it is needed for day-to-day survival, requires some months of "preparing the ground."

The woman, because she is still in a relationship of love with the husband and all of the family members, is kept in a condition where she must always think of the others before she thinks of herself. And, since her weak position in the family is not enough to guarantee this by itself, the husband assumes the right to verify if the coat is really necessary. The woman who dares ask for money without justifying what she wants it for is an inconceivable figure.

Let us not linger on a theme such as that of the perfect housewife, the ideal woman, since by now the Movement has written a substantial amount on this. Let us bring to light where, if ever, we can categorize the point

beyond which a woman, in the course of her struggle, crosses an inexorable line. This occurs when a woman openly demands that what is the central task of housework, namely, making love, should cost something to the man, and therefore begins to negotiate in monetary terms over time and general conditions. The woman who seeks this automatically becomes the bad woman *par excellence*. She is the prostitute. This woman is the worst kind of woman because she is the one who, in refusing to perform "for love" that which is the central task of domestic work, thus *strikes at the heart of the ideology of love* upon which domestic work rests. She denies, therefore, domestic work as a labor of love. She withdraws the performance of this chore from the family nucleus within which she should accept its performance in exchange for mere survival.

Because of this she constitutes a menace to the reproduction of the family. She seeks direct payment, outside of family discipline. She controls its times and its forms. It is a direct attack on domestic work inasmuch as the latter is temporally infinite, unpaid, and under a man's control. The threat that the female prostitute represents is such that the state cannot rely solely on a generic social condemnation even when it succeeds in rooting it deeply. But it must instead portray the life of the prostitute herself as a "terrible" one, and correspondingly paint it in the most miserable terms through the mass media so as to discourage any woman from taking that path by stressing the price she would have to pay. We obviously do not intend to contradict the fact that the capitalist family, since its foundation, also required the prostitute.¹⁹ Yet because such ghettoization does not work as a threat, the state must have firm control of it and of the quality of life of the prostitute. Today, as we will see below, these things often exceed its grasp.

As for the female prostitute — because of the gravity of the threat which she represents with respect to the family assemblage, especially when she breaks out of the ghetto conceded to her and if she tends to lower the price she must pay for such a "choice" — the state (since it cannot rely solely on the generic social reprimand to discipline her, and since it cannot on the other hand rely solely on generic male violence even when this is incited in its most brutal forms) must instead *intervene directly*, unleashing its own violence.

The road it takes is fundamentally that of *criminalization* of prostitution, which allows the state to unleash its violence against the prostitute.²⁰ The court not only punishes the prostitute for being such, but will not take into consideration the violence which she is subject to.²¹ The police are authorized to use whatever type of treatment and blackmail they like, ranging from rounding her up to directly raping her. Furthermore, the first consequence of criminalization is that at any moment the state can take the prostitute's children away for "immoral conduct on the part of the mother."

But not only this. In practice a prostitute is denied every type of sociality, since if she lives with a women friend the state assumes that she has organized a bordello, and if she receives a gift from a man the state assumes that he is her pimp. And obviously if this is the case when the state is directly involved, those men, who are not directly "representatives of the state," will have neither conditions nor limits placed on the exercising of their violence. Violence is encouraged to express itself in its most brutal forms.

For a prostitute to bring charges in court of having been raped until recently would have brought only judicial and public laughter. When a prostitute was murdered, in ways that were usually more terrifying than even those by which the husband kills the wife, it was usually stigmatized as "the kind of thing that happens when one chooses that life." Indeed the mass media, the pages of the crime sections of newspapers, serve in these cases to set the record adequately on the chilling risks that are taken on by anyone who embarks upon that path. And it is well known that no established political party will waste even a word over the murder of a prostitute.

The state is firm on this point, from right to left. We will discuss the struggles of prostitutes further below, since roughly during the last two years the struggles of prostitutes have exploded in various countries. Such a Movement will certainly short-circuit the left internationally. Let us only add that until yesterday it was inconceivable for a woman alleged to be a prostitute to go to court seeking justice for having been offended in some way as a woman — for having been threatened, blackmailed, or subjected to violence in some form.

The state's usual strategy when a woman who was seen as rebellious sought justice was to depict her as "not very serious" and therefore to turn the whole trial against her. This maneuver was typical in all of the first trials

organized by the Feminist Movement, from those about abortion to those about rape.²² The diffusion of news about the “horrible fate” that the prostitute was subject to must work as an incessant admonition that is repeated daily to discourage the woman from conceiving of the “horrible thought” of getting paid for the work of making love. That is, the widespread publicising of the “horror” of the prostitute’s life must serve to reinforce the love ideology of the family relationship, to convince the woman of how much better it would be within her own family with a “dominator” husband who nevertheless loves her and who has not yet engaged in that kind of violence towards her.

But the other negative example used in for the promotion of family life, in the imprinting on the woman’s mind the notion of the family as a positive value, indeed as the most important part of her existence and as the real nexus of her interests, is not constructed only by counterposing to the family the morbidly related accounts of the prostitute’s life. The woman who lives alone is already on a bad path. And the lesbian as well is a deserter, virtually as dangerous as the prostitute. Therefore in order to discourage those dodgers of the family draft from persisting in their intended path, and above all to convince other women not to take the same road, the state drums up adequate publicity of the male violence experienced by the single woman, often replete with chilling details and a sexual context.

With one hand it publicizes this violence, with a few choice words, and with another it encourages it. If for the woman who lives alone an episode of brutal violence is not “what she deserved” in the same way as the state suggests between the lines when it divulges news of prostitutes, it is always “the risk she takes.” It is ideological terrorism employed against the rebels, from the prostitute woman to the woman who lives alone, in order to seek to make women internalize in every way that the family is the only site that guarantees them a life “without violence.” It works to crowd out their vision of family violence with the fears of the worse forms of violence that can always happen to them outside of it.

In the case of the lesbian woman as well, particularly in countries where lesbianism has become an open fact, a mass fact, the state must intervene directly. This is because of the additional threat, close to that constituted by

the prostitute, which this woman represents with respect to the family, to the labor of love. It is because such love is much less work, and above all because it is not directed towards reproducing the family. She too is a bad woman, because she wants to make love, but not with a man, withdrawing the making of love from the rigid discipline of the family, withdrawing herself — even if only partially — from the destiny of being a worker in the home. The threat that she represents is also considerable because it infringes upon the myth of heterosexuality as the only sexuality upon which the family can be based.

As in the case of the prostitute, if she has children the state will seek to take them away from her, because she conducts her life in an immoral way. If she has a job, it will seek to make her lose it because it is incompatible with such conduct. Here too, then, lesbian women in ever more countries have organized themselves into a Movement. And this Movement, like that of the prostitutes, is engaged in a struggle with the state that is becoming ever more bitter. If for women to battle openly on these points is to recompose themselves along all the divisions created by the state, for the state it is to find itself up against a process which destroys it in its thousand hearts.²³ But of this we shall speak more fully below.

To summarize: the primary directive of the state’s ideological orchestration therefore is that it must divide the good woman from the bad one and keep them well separated, something which is becoming increasingly difficult when one considers the mass dimensions of prostitution and of lesbianism. To separate, that is, the industrious worker in the home from the “sex mercenary” and the “degenerate.”

The second directive is instead that which, within the category of good women, must unite in a tranquil symbiosis (1) those who must stay at home alone, remaining convinced that it is the ideal “choice” and that every woman who also works outside the home cannot perform her duties sufficiently as a loving wife and loving mother, and (2) those who must work outside the home and be equally convinced of the exact opposite: namely, that their duty is to be women with a husband and children who are in “contact” with the outside environment rather than being “pent up inside.” That is, “the feminine housewife mystique” and the “mystique of emancipation” are two dif-

ferent songs, ones that are nevertheless played to the ears of women every day. Considering the disinterest with which the state makes the same women pass from an emancipated condition to that of "unemployment," we can conclude that the state's goal is that of making every woman assume these opposite viewpoints simultaneously. In this way it will have already trained them for every arbitrary change to which they will be subject.

The thread that links these two fates, however, is the fact that emancipation has never made domestic work disappear. The woman knows that this remains in any case her primary job, the work whereby her success as a woman is measured. Whether during her life she risks emancipation or not, she must nevertheless have well internalized the notion that she is a good woman if she functions first of all well in the family, if she has assumed its values and if she practices them.

Not only this: in the extra-domestic job as well, she will be more highly appreciated the more she carries the load of performing domestic work without pay, this time not for the husband but for the man with whom she works. Here too a firm identification of herself as a houseworker will be the best guarantee of a good external worker. In other words this means that the second directive functions better if the first directive is also working.

The woman who does not firmly anchor herself in family values will tend obviously to conceive of emancipation in a "distorted" way. She will demand, in other words, not to have to do everything, and that a cost be attached to the added domestic chores that even in the extra-domestic job are expected for free. She will be unreliable, because she does not have any marital identification as far as her manager or supervisor is concerned. If in this case, by intervening in a waged-work relation, the state cannot directly authorize physical violence by the manager or supervisor in order to make the woman perform "all" the tasks that she is assigned correctly, it nonetheless encourages *intimidation* as a component of the treatment reserved for her. This intimidation will be successful to the extent that the state delivers women to their various bosses in a condition of extreme weakness.

Having already sanctioned the powerlessness of women within marriage by restricting them to the performance of unpaid domestic work, the state explicitly sanctions their powerlessness in relation to the extra-domestic job.

In any case the woman will be forced to accept the second job already weakened by her unpaid performance of the first. What is more, as has been amply explained in the feminist literature of recent years, since the woman is that much more appreciated in the outside job to the degree that she carries on the job of being a wife, and is therefore amenable to the performance of a series of domestic tasks — always unpaid of course — for the manager or supervisor as well, these feel authorized to expect the same of her.²⁴ The male boss is similar to the husband, with the limits however of the waged relation which runs between himself and the woman, and which therefore is a greater source of power for the woman in relation to him. That is, the moment the state has assigned all women to be above all performers of unpaid domestic work, it has also authorized all men to expect it in greater or smaller measure according to the specific relationship they enter into with the woman. And in this, too, the state's explicit encouragement is not lacking, just as it is not lacking in its encouragement of intimidation.

As for the bosses — and they are not rare — who include physical and specifically sexual violence in their treatment of women with whom they have a waged-work relationship, it needs to be said that here, too, the state's attitude, until a few years ago, would have discouraged any woman from taking her case to court. If today there are cases of women who do so, the battle which confronts them is in any case a very hard one.

NOTES

¹ Regarding Italy, all the case studies of "crimes of honor," crimes of passion, stemming from immoral conduct by women, of kidnapping in order to marry, etc., are particularly significant in this respect. Regarding "crimes of honor" L. Remiddi, *op.cit.*, comments, "Article 587 of the penal code provides for imprisonment from 3-7 years for 'anyone who causes the death of their wife, daughter or sister because they have discovered illegitimate carnal relations and while in an irate state due to the offense done to their honor or that of their family.' This is essentially a special

immunity, one could say a license to kill, if one considers that in general the penalty for homicide cannot be less than 21 years imprisonment.... For married people the "cause of honor" is reciprocal and is recognized as applying to both the husband and the wife. But outside marriage, it is expected that the honor of the family is deposited in the woman's, daughter's or sister's womb, and the father or brother can assume the role of avenger." pp. 26-27. One knows very well, however, that in practice norms like these essentially sanction the right to kill on the part of the man.

² For waged labor, it was always evident that the time spent on the job is work time because it is paid time. This did not, however, appear evident in the case of the woman and her work because housework is unpaid.

³ See as exemplary of this the works on women interned in psychiatric hospitals: L. Harrison, *Donne, povere matte*, Roma: Edizioni delle Donne, 1976 and G. Morandini, *...E allora mi hanno rinchiusa*, Milano: Bompiani, 1977. On how women are lobotomized in greater numbers than men (because such neurological operations do not interfere with their being "first-rate housewives") see A. Pirella, P. Franchina, "Lobotomie terapeutiche e carcerarie," in *Fogli di informazione: documenti di collegamento e di verifica per l'elaborazione di prassi alternative nel campo istituzionale*, n. 02. On the large-scale treatment of women in psychiatric hospitals and in mental health centers, etc. for the USA see Phillis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, New York: Doubleday, 1972. This book offers a notable collection of data, but doesn't offer a political interpretation inasmuch as it does not see women's work as a cause of madness.

⁴ With regard to this question, see the interesting Bonnie Mass, *The Political Economy of Population Control in Latin America*, Montréal: Editions Latin America, 1972. Further, for some significant data on mass sterilization of women in state hospitals, see the article "USA, Sterilizzazione forzata" in *Le operaie della casa*. In this article among other things, we find that, "the number of sterilizations in the municipal hospitals of New York, above all among Puerto Rican and Black women are growing.... An increase of 180% in the sterilizations of Puerto Rican women occurred between 1972 and 1973. In the course of the same period the increase

among Black women was 21%.... In Puerto Rico, 35% of the women of childbearing age have been sterilized.... In the teaching hospital of the University of California at Los Angeles, the practice of hysterectomy as a means of contraception grew by 74.2% between 1968 and 1972. In December of 1974, Chicano women, deceived by the hospital, were part of a law suit... Native American groups have accused the Public Health Service of the United States of having engaged in numerous irreversible sterilizations of young Indian mothers without having previously informed them of the nature of the operation. In 1973, 132 Indian women were sterilized and 100 of these were not for health reasons," p. 13. But the literature on sterilization is very vast. One of the most meaningful examples of "underdevelopment" is the case of India, which the major daily newspapers are concerned with at an international level. For a brief survey see a very timely report (in three parts) on the current political demography of India by Jean de La Guerivière, "Inde: Suicide d'une démocratie," which appeared in the "*Sélection hebdomadaire du journal Le Monde*" in the course of 1976 and 1977. One entire part is dedicated to "sterilization of the poor." Also on this question another article appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, n. 646, 1977, entitled "J'en aurai dix si je veux," where instead there are significant signs of the response by women against demographic politics, among which a struggle against sterilization is mentioned (*nasbandi*), one which began the mass movement leading to the fall of Indira Ghandi's government.

In the other part of the world, in the *New York Times* of March 19, 1976 a debate emerged on forced sterilization in India with the article "India, with Exploding Population, Debates Enforced Sterilization." Already in '75 however, the acts of the Bucharest Conference largely indicated that this Conference was the most overt attempt by the states at the world level to coordinate their command of the woman's uterus.

⁵ This argument is clearly delineated by Silvia Federici in *Sexual Work and the Political Struggle Against It*, (unpublished manuscript) New York, 1975, original in English; translated here from the Italian reference in the Italian edition of *Un lavoro d'amore*.

⁶ On this subject, see Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Riproduzione e Emigrazione" in A. Serafini, et al., *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa*, Milan:

Feltrinelli, 1974, 1977 [Tr. in French: "Reproduction et emigration," Collectif *L'insoumise* (ed.), *Le foyer de l'insurrection, textes sur le salaire pour le travail ménager*, Genève, 1977].

⁷ Silvia Federici, *Sexual Work and the Political Struggle Against It*.

⁸ For an illustration of examples of such violence, see F. M'Rabet on Algeria, *Les Algériennes*, Paris: Maspero, 1969; for the atrophying of Chinese women's feet before the Revolution, Howard, S. Levy, *Chinese Footbinding* (cited from the Italian edition, *L'eroticismo dei piedi cinesi* Milan: Sugar, 1966).

Also on Algeria, regarding the question of women wearing the veil, allowing however for the fact that we do not share the author's approach, see Franz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled" in *A Dying Colonialism*; Yussef el Masry, *Il dramma sessuale della donna araba*, Milan: Comunità, 1964 (which among other things speaks specifically and in a detailed way of clitorrectomy); also see for certain questions pertaining to clitorrectomy, M. Cutruffelli, *Donna perché piangi?* Milan: Mazzotta 1976, p. 187.

⁹ On some of the psychological violence that women are subject to daily in the family in developed areas, see R.D. Laing, A. Esterson, *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1970. And on the same regions, for some of the limitations to which women must submit from the time they are little girls in order to avoid the fate of being raped, E. Cevro-Vukovic, Rowena Davis, *Giù le man*.

¹⁰ Helping children with their homework, bringing them to the swimming pool, and a thousand other tasks come to mind. On this see Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Quartiere, scuola e fabbrica dal punto di vista della donna," *L'Offensiva. Quaderni di Lotta Femminista*.

¹¹ It is interesting to examine the philosophical and ethico-political reflection on the themes of women and of the family during this period. A brief systematic overview of the thought of A. Comte, J. Stuart Mill and K. Marx is offered in Maria Rosaria Manieri, *Donna e Capitale*, Venezia: Marsilio, 1975.

See also, by the same author, *Donna e famiglia nella filosofia dell'Ottocento*, Lecce: Milella, 1975, which offers an even wider survey going from Hegel to Schopenhauer, to Rosmini to Comte to Mill to Fourier to Marx to Morelli, ending with Nietzsche.

On the turn of the century see A. Kuliscioff's article, "Il sentimentalismo nella questione femminile," in *Critica Sociale*, Vol. I, *Politica e ideologica politica*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1959. Further see Clara Zetkin, "Lenin e il movimento femminile," in V. I. Lenin, *L'emancipazione della donna*, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1970.

A notable moment of reflection on this theme was the now classic Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Paris: Gallimard, 1949. With respect to contemporary texts, one can also turn to Eva Figes, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1970. A classic on the romantic ideology, and more specifically on the mystique of femininity as orchestrated by the state in the U.S. during the Fifties is Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, New York: Random House, 1973. See also Vivian Gormick and Barbara K. Moran, eds., *Woman in Sexist Society*, New York/London: Basic Books, 1971. A good starting point for the study of the romantic ideology during Italian fascism is P. Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare, ideologia politica della donna e della famiglia durante il fascismo*, Florence: Guaraldi, 1975.

On the part of feminists, a critique of the phallogocratic ideology which one finds in contemporary literature appears in L. Caruso, B. Tomasi, *I padri della fallogcultura*, Milan: Sugar, 1974.

¹² Some in-depth studies of the history of the capitalist family in relation to the foundation of housework have begun. Also, some histories have been written with regard to the restructuring of the family and the struggles of women during different phases of capitalist development. Among the first to be published in the epoch immediately preceding the period of large-scale industry was Gisela Bock-Barbara Durden, *Arbeit als Liebe. Liebe als Arbeit, in Frauen und Wissenschaft*, Berlin: Courage Verlag, 1977.

¹³ Silvia Federici, *Sexual Work and the Struggle Against It*.

¹⁴ We are purposely using a kind of language that repeats the expressions which women themselves use most at the mass level to express such knowledge.

¹⁵ For a sense of the confusion and impotence relative to their relations with men into which women are indoctrinated by the ideology of romantic love, even in very recent times, see G. Parca, *Le Italiane si confessano*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964. The author takes a look at Italy in the period

- immediately before the rise of the Feminist Movement.
- 16 On the study of pornographic literature in recent years an intense debate of intense has sprung up in Italy. Recently a literature on the subject has grown. Among the first, as far as we know, to bring attention to this question was Giuseppe Bonura, *Tecniche dell'inganno*, Florence: Guaraldi, 1974. For the US, some very insightful pages are found in Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, and Ethel Strainghamps, "Our Sexist Language," in Vivian Gormick and Barbara K. Moran, eds., *Woman in Sexist Society*, New York: Basic Books, 1971, p. 347.
- 17 Again the exemplary work regarding this in the U.S. during the '50's was Betty Friedan. Regarding Italy, Giavanna Pezzuoli, *La stampa femminile come ideologia*, Milan: Il Formichiere, 1976.
- 18 This moment of division, in our opinion, also offers us, at last, the interpretative key to help us understand, from the woman's point of view, what happens outside the family itself. To understand, therefore, as we will explain better in the course of this essay, how the destruction of the family can proceed and is largely proceeding under the thrust of women's struggles that are destroying this moment of division, from the struggle of women that attack housework from within and from outside the family as a work of love. We believe that the revived interest of a great part of sociology and psychology today in the past and present forms of the family are based ideologically on this question, yet they do not make it a central part of their analyses, even when they speak of the death of the family itself. That goes for David Cooper, *The Death of the Family*, London: Penguin Press, 1971, a book that became famous. And the same holds for works like Chiara Saraceno, *Anatomia della famiglia*, Bari: De Donato, 1976 as well; and for the other writers who risk being a bit too "anatomical" and who obscure therefore how the "body" of the family was founded historically, how it is lived, how it has struggled and is struggling.
- 19 Silvia Federici, *Sexual Work and the Political Struggle Against It*. Among the few texts on the history of prostitution see Fernando Henriques, *Stews and Strumpet: A Survey of Prostitution*, vol. 1 *Primitive, Classical and Oriental*, vol. 2 *Prostitution in Europe and the New World*, McGibbon and Kee. As far as the feminist literature on this question is

- concerned, see M. Pia Turri, "Le mogli di tutti," in *Il personale è politico. Quaderni di Lotta Femminista*, n.2.; Kate Millett, *Prostitutione*, Turin: Einaudi, 1975. AA.VV. (Various authors, Italian edition), *La moglie e la prostituta, due ruoli, una condizione*, Florence: Guaraldi, 1975. Beginning with the events in Lyon, an important new space was opened for intervention in the debate on prostitution, in which prostitutes played the leading role, beginning with the biography of Ulla.
- 20 Criminalization is the main path taken by the state at a global level. The system of regulated prostitution that continued until recent times was developed in France in 1802 under Napoleon I. In England such regulation began — at least partially — *de facto* in 1864 thanks to the "Contagious Diseases Prevention Act." In Italy prostitution was regulated by order of King Emanuel II in 1860. In Italy state prostitution continued until 1958, the year in which brothels were abolished by the Merlin legislation.
- Today in Italy the activity of prostitution in and of itself is not considered a crime any longer, at least as long as the woman does not solicit "in a public place that is open to the public," and does not solicit libertine behavior in a "scandalous and harassing way." In this way, the Italian state has maintained intact its power to persecute the activity of prostitution as criminal.
- 21 The knowledge that such things happen, of course, like that of the reprisal on the part of the pimp, was, until a short time ago, such that no prostitute would press charges against a pimp for violence. With the arrival of the Movement, the power of women is changing in an obvious way regarding this as well. In June of '77 the news came on the radio that "for the first time" in Italy a prostitute charged her pimp for violence.
- 22 It is significant that in all of these trials the judge first asked the woman if she was "a virgin." This fundamental question, which was always followed by a series of others, was meant to suggest feminine compliance. Even the type of interrogation that occurred during the trials regarding women who had been the victims of rape was criticized by the Movement as a mystificatory maneuver by the state in its attempt to turn the woman into the guilty party, to transform her from victim into accused.

²³ To consider two of these broken hearts, which are exploding, let us briefly look at what is happening in the families of politicians and of police in North America. The families of high-level politicians are not functioning any more. Alioto, the mayor of San Francisco, was abandoned by his over-sixty-year-old wife, who, upon her return after escaping from the house, told journalists that during her absence she had “breathed a bit of fresh air for the first time” in her life. Another storm — thanks to the even greater publicity which Mrs. Trudeau did not avoid giving it — was that which led the Prime Minister of Canada to admit he had been abandoned by his wife. Regarding the families of police, in the USA, it was the rebellion of the wives, against their very long hours of work and low pay, that were at the origin of the large demonstrations of 4,000 armed police. They won not only a pay raise, but also obtained the cancellation of an increase of one work day per month wanted by the state. See the *New York Times*, September 28, 1976.

²⁴ One of the first journals of American feminism to denounce this was *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, dedicating among other works an entire issue (“*Women as Workers under Capitalism*” vol. 2, n. 3, 1971) to the problems of women in extra-domestic work.

Chapter 5

THE STATE, RAPE AND INCEST

The state, as we have already noted above, has largely entrusted control of the “good behavior” of houseworkers to the male sphere of action, ensuring men impunity with regard to the unleashing of violence upon women and ideologically encouraging them to do so. This exercising of male violence demonstrated up until a few years ago that it could function quite adequately and be unleashed “in the right way at the right time,” thus freeing the state from having to preoccupy itself with keeping tabs on the level this violence reached.

But the family also means discipline for the man, for his behavior both within and outside it. In the family there is a precise division of labor, and consequently there is also a division of labor outside it, which it is taken for granted that even the man, in spite of his position of power, can run foul of. But that is only an assumption. Such infractions, as we have described in the cases of rape and incest, do occur on a wide scale. Only the ever more massive rebellion of women in recent years has forced the state to keep an eye on some of the dysfunctions within the framework of the family and on the extra-familial male “excesses” in the use of physical violence.

These excesses on the part of the male are, as we have explained, forms of theft of the woman’s sexual performance that exceed the cases and conditions according to which men normally benefit from it. But if rape and incest are in reality dysfunctional excesses — even if in different ways and to dif-

ferent degrees — in the organization of housework and therefore in the female roles upon which it rests, why has the state remained so blind and inert in the face of their even sporadic occurrence up until only yesterday?

A different kind of approach needs to be taken regarding rape and incest. The former represents a break with the organization of domestic work in that the man steals the sexual performance outside of the environment and the conditions that are allowed, interfering in this way, if not with the reproduction of his own family, at least with that of other families. But as we have seen, in general such behavior is not at all dysfunctional to the organization of domestic work, nor to the survival of the family itself. Because of this, rape is also encouraged by the state through the exaltation of sex as violence, which will to a certain extent also serve to keep the woman under control. Above all it serves to discourage her from leaving the family “reserve,” from withdrawing herself from the protection of a man.

As the state intends it to be understood, rape will be the violent means by which women will most easily be kept from venturing to see the world “by themselves.” Therefore the position of the state, until a short time ago, was not only to avoid punishing this act, but also to avoid taking on the job of concealing it.

In the case of incest the situation is different. As we have said, *incest breaks with the organization of housework and is an infringement on the division of housework itself within the family on the part of whoever commits it.* It cannot constitute a warning of what can occur outside the family, but is rather a direct example as to what can happen within the family itself. Instead of functioning to reinforce the family, as happens with rape, incest, once it becomes known, by intimidating women to the point that they hold on to the family above all other things, can on the contrary only weaken the family, undermining the security which it must represent to the woman.

The state’s behavior regarding such a possibility could not be other than to conceal the fact that incest occurs and to cover up the massive scale on which it is practiced, because it is the only way of covering up the visibly monstrous scale of domestic violence and how it manifests itself within the family. And it goes without saying that this attitude has meant total impunity for acts of incest. It was not functional for the state to bring to light the meager extent to which the family was a defensive shield for the women against

male violence, nor how it failed to guarantee them any form of male “discipline” against the “abuses” which they would have been subject to outside of it. This would have compromised the ideological pillars of the family too deeply, those fundamental guarantees that emphasize security for the survival of the woman as well as her physical protection, and in the name of which the woman must survive through the family in the condition of unpaid worker.

The woman, that is, as houseworker, must be able to feel herself reassured and repaid by the emotions and the disciplined behavior of others towards her. She must accept the discipline and the violence of the family towards her, as conditions through which she receives physical protection and security for her material survival. The woman must be afraid of the man within the family, but not so terrorized as to need to escape from him.

With fear must come also the knowledge of having avoided a condition that is potentially much worse. She must completely remove from her mind the idea that there could be a real possibility that the father will rape the daughter she will give birth to and with whom therefore she will find herself in sexual competition; that the son may not respect her condition as sexual worker exclusively for the father, which would compromise her access to the father’s wage. If these sole ideological “certainties” should become weakened, the reality of the family would become apparent as it truly is — a place of continuously precarious existence and panic for the woman, from which she must defend herself because her physical survival is constantly threatened.

If therefore in the case of rape the state is to a certain extent committed to making its existence known, in the case of incest it was solely and exclusively women’s own struggles that exposed its existence and its mass dimensions. And if in these recent years a certain increase in rape was the response which many men have offered to the rising refusal of work and family discipline by women, and to the increase in the cost of the work of prostitutes, the cases of incest, because of the greater power that women have acquired within the family itself, have diminished considerably.

Both rape and incest are in any case two facts that are ever more frequently brought to court by women. To limit ourselves to Italy, where in recent years cases of rape and incest are ever more frequently brought to court, and around which the Movement has organized a number of political

trials, let us point out once more: there is a contradiction in the normative and ideological attitude of the state with regard to these.¹ From the *penal* point of view the state hands out a prison sentence of three to five years for carnal violence occurring outside of marriage.² For incest, the usual sentence is imprisonment for from one to five years if it occurs in a manner leading to a public scandal. The penalty increases to from two to eight years in cases of incestuous relations, that is, of continuous relationships.³ "An indispensable element for the occurrence of this crime is that the sexual union between members of the same family become known to other people, that is, that it becomes a public scandal. If incest remains secret, and the couple engage in it discreetly, no crime exists."⁴ In this way, the state at the penal level treats cases of incest more lightly and only in conditions of "notoriety" does it increase the penalty. At the ideological level, incest is instead considered much more serious than rape. This contradiction is explained quite well within our analysis carried out thus far with regard to rape and incest. That rape occurs is something the state can admit, and at least officially, it must declare itself as committed to punish it. But it could not equally nonchalantly admit that incest exists. It is, on the contrary, assumed not to exist. Nevertheless the penal code foresees a penalty for the very exceptional case in which it occurs. Once it has adopted this point of view it is also assumed that if incest has occurred, it must have been such an utterly exceptional case that it would be absurd to administer harsher punishment. But the penalty, obviously, increases if it leads to a "public scandal." It is a normative penalty in apparent contradiction with the "ideological-moral evaluation." The reality is absolutely coherent, however, with the state management of the family, for what it is and how it must appear to be.

NOTES

¹ It was a few years ago that news of a man who received a penalty of five years in prison for having engaged in incest for five years with his five daughters was carried in the papers.

² Article 519, Italian Penal Code.

³ Article 564, Italian Penal Code.

⁴ L. Remiddi, *I nostri diritti*.

Chapter 6

WOMEN'S STRUGGLES AGAINST VIOLENCE

We have seen up to this point how the state, in order to guarantee the unwaged extortion of domestic work for capital, has legitimized the violence that is the organization of domestic work within the family, codifying in marriage the condition of the woman as an unpaid worker in all of her "loving dependence" on the man.

We have also seen how the sexual task is the central duty of such work, because it is that which is indispensable for the reproduction of labor-power and of the family. And we have shown how, given that the woman must through the sexual task put herself completely, with all of her being, at the disposal of the man, (since the Church says the married couple are two spirits but only one flesh), it is in this task that the male-female relation reaches the height of its violence. The woman must physically love her master.

Violence — which is intrinsic to the sexual-labor relation, itself central and unavoidable in the marriage — explains how the discipline of this relation is achieved, even to a degree that is greater than for the rest of housework. We have also considered how, having legitimized all this, the state had to sustain it by orchestrating a massive ideological arrangement that tends to mystify the real conditions of women's work.

Against such state command however, since the beginnings of capitalism, women at a mass level have sought to organize their refusal and to engage in processes of struggle which, to the extent that they have struck at the conditions of reproduction and therefore have compromised for capital the availability of labor-power itself, have therefore directly threatened the very roots of capitalist organization. The history of the capitalist family is filled with this struggle between women and the state: the former is

sometimes the more subtle struggle, working through mass forms of behavior, and sometimes more openly, working in an organized form. These struggles encounter ferocious state repression, which, supported by the micro-mediation of men, manages from time to time to suppress and to beat back the specific struggles of women on this terrain, as well as to destroy their degree of organization.¹

Yet if it is true that the state's repression has been able to destroy in an almost systematic manner the organization of female struggles on the terrain of reproduction, and therefore that the struggle of women within the family seemed doomed to a continual purgatory, since the turn of the century, and more openly since the sixties and seventies, the Women's Movement seems to have achieved for the first time mass power at the international level, and an organizational capacity to attack on a scale that makes it difficult for capital and the state to consider how to repel it.

Women have always, in order to initiate their struggles, had to organize themselves above all against male physical violence. In recent years the Feminist Movement has found itself confronting for the first time at the international level this serious task of breaking through the wall of male violence in order to grow, to expand and to gain strength. The struggle against male physical violence, and in particular against sexual violence, given all that we have said above, and given the centrality of the sexual task in domestic work, constitutes a crucial and at the same time unavoidable moment of women's struggles against housework, as the work which determines her whole life, and consequently against the family.² Against the overall female condition, that is, which perennially condemns her to be above all a houseworker.

We will restrict our discussion for the moment to Italy, a country that is assigned the task of providing labor-power at a low cost to the world's bosses, and one that for this reason has seen the state's command over women achieved with an iron fist.³ It is only with a difficult and extremely costly struggle against male violence that women have been able to radically change the political context. And obviously in a country like Italy, where the Church's authority was profoundly reorganized by capital and the state so as to enact a disciplinary function that was needed against women (and more specifically one that was needed in order to subordinate them to men), this

struggle necessarily brought with it the struggle against the Church itself.⁴

This struggle occurred, and was both a difficult and openly declared one.⁵ We have said: only through such a difficult struggle against male violence did women manage to change the political terrain.

What are we alluding to? Above all to the completely new bargaining environment which women have managed to establish with regard to bosses and the state. And one that begins this time with housework, which women have always been commanded to perform but forbidden to negotiate over. This obviously places negotiations occurring over work conducted outside the home and in services on a new footing. But precisely in order to develop their refusal of housework, from which they developed the ability to self-organize with more power both within and outside the family, women first had to struggle against male violence, and in particular against that of the husband.⁶

The refusal of housework, as we have just pointed out, carried out under such difficult circumstances, led also to a new bargaining position with respect to extra-domestic work. Female-dominated sectors of the economy that were until yesterday ignored by the unions have witnessed an explosion of struggles that have forced unions not only to represent them, but to negotiate over very precise demands. Furthermore, women in traditionally unionized sectors have succeeded in placing housework first on the local and then on the national agenda, either by exposing the unpaid condition in which they are forced to do such work — like all women — and that they must perform in addition to the other job, or by making precise demands.

In all cases, everywhere, in the maelstrom of their refusal of housework, one that was set in motion through their struggle, women have also been able to offload a significant portion of the housework demanded of them in their job outside the home.⁷ This has meant the formation outside the home of unions of autonomous feminist organizations that have forced companies to provide paid assemblies attended by women only. It was through such assemblies that new kinds of demands were put forward, because they started out from a new perspective: from the will to make the double work-shift of women who also work outside the home something that is negotiable.

Such a perspective tended therefore to forge an absolutely new political recomposition between "domestic employment" and "outside employment."

The second change in the political context provoked by women was the great change occurring in personal relations — both in the family and outside of it — and in political relations. In a country like Italy where, beyond the traditional left, a new left began to emerge as a part of the 1968 movement, the authority of both was completely undermined by the public denunciation by women of the daily abuse and violence practised by both its leaders and members.

This violence was obviously intended by the men as a part of the offloading onto women's shoulders of the burden of housework, particularly that involving children, while men expected at the same time to receive love, tranquility and support in order to be able to perform their political work adequately. The *Lotta Continua* conference constituted a climax in this explosion of women "against the comrades."⁸ But the other organizations were not less affected.⁹ Women have obviously jolted Catholic forces as well, since, despite the water cannons unleashed upon the fires of their desire, many Catholic women voted "no" in the referendum on divorce. This was a sign that in spite of the wife and mother's mission of "sacrifice," Catholic women wanted to retain some hope in life, just in case marriage "sacrificed" them beyond certain limits. The vote constituted a decision, in other words, to negotiate something beginning in this life.

But let us look more closely at how this struggle against male violence has been articulated. We can immediately say that on the part of women, the attack, or better, the counterattack against such violence, of which laying charges in court was only one moment, was accompanied by a massive attack against that ideological current that was used by the state daily to reach into the micro-level in order to keep women at work, disciplined, and therefore in the desired roles, while simultaneously encouraging men in their functions as discipliner, oppressor and rapist.

Women clearly felt the need to breach the walls of the commonplaces within which they were forced to suffocate. Public denunciations, feminist courts, and political trials of male violence as well as many forms of ideological contestation exploded simultaneously, including direct destruction of advertising signs, movie posters, and boycotts of shows ranging from films to stripteases¹⁰ to contests such as beauty pageants and those aiming to find "the ideal woman," along with disruptions of various conferences¹¹ which

were aimed at organizing new female roles, ones which in truth were covert attempts to reinforce the family and male dominance on the momentum of the wave of change generated by the Movement in its disruption of stereotypes and commonplaces. It is no coincidence that the conferences that were protested against more frequently were the ones dealing with sexuality. As for political trials, they were an important organizational fact because they were a public and at the same time immediately practical road available to all women, which therefore allowed all of the others to move forward. This not only meant that in the course of just a few years the number of women willing to bring forth complaints about their husbands, and to separate from them because of beatings, grew enormously, but also that the number of women who were ashamed to bring forth charges of rape and incest diminished. And the trials were very often directly political trials. Above all, women brought charges against men to the state. This happened during rape trials, as well as for incest, for "minor incidents," for beatings, threats, blackmail, various forms of violence and so forth, just as they had during the trials over abortion. Out of such trials there grew ever-increasing levels of organization: strikes by women, strikes against schools, demonstrations, committees for the defense and aid of other women. Such practices also occurred in small towns and provinces, and even in villages.

The state not only found itself in the position of having to be a party in bringing such charges, because at the same time it was itself charged by women, but also had to restructure, if one can use that term, the traditional responses it had also made to women's struggles. In recent years, in fact, we see on the one hand state reform of the work which women do in the family, and on the other the tendency to apply the maximum penalty to the rapist in contrast with the custom of guaranteeing impunity through insignificant penalties.¹²

The other aspect of the organization of women's struggles against male violence was obviously direct action. On the one hand, this took the form of defending oneself immediately against being beaten, by striking back. And this was no small thing if one considers not only the education which women receive, which leaves them unarmed and passive in their relation to men, but also when we consider the objective physical weakness and powerlessness in which they find themselves in this relation. On the other hand, organization

took the form of publicizing violence and the names of those responsible for it at the usual places that they frequented, of organizing night as well as day time demonstrations, patrols of women which attacked rapists, invasions of churches, courts, public offices, hospitals and setting up "battered women's shelters." Along with these organizational moments came attempts to guarantee women's ability to carry out actions in the places and at the times traditionally forbidden to women unaccompanied by a man.

Without such a victory, it wouldn't have been possible for women to construct, even at a minimal level, that personal mobility which is indispensable for developing political organization. To win such a victory, we can stress, required taking into account, and therefore organizing themselves against the often monstrous level of physical violence, and specifically sexual violence, of men.

Let us make some observations concerning the rise of such struggles at the international level. This meant above all that with the emergence of initiatives of the Feminist Movement, women felt, and apparently still feel, the need to organize International Tribunals against male violence. We recall, at the beginnings of the Movement, the Tribunal-Conference at "La Mutualité" in Paris, and, more recently the Tribunal at Brussels.¹³

What is the significance of these Tribunals? Above all, in our opinion, they suggest the need on the part of women to construct, with the goal of organizing their struggle, a wide investigation of their overall life conditions, and specifically of the violence which they experience as the defining index of their quality of life. At the same time, implicitly, they indicate a total vote of no confidence with regard to an already existing written political debate in which a globally homogeneous left refuses to recognize not only the violence undergone by women, but the existence of women themselves; a homogeneous world left which is prepared to leave women to the most disgusting fate at the end of every revolutionary process.¹⁴ In short, a male left, trying to safeguard its miserable male privileges against women and therefore the interests of capital against the working class.

But the struggle of women against housework, against their destiny as worker in the home, as servant of the man and of the state, articulated in all its specificity, exploded in these years in the Movement in which the recom-

position of women was evident, breaking every barrier between "development and underdevelopment," between "good" and "bad" women, between "women who stay at home alone" and "women who work outside," which capital, with the aid of the various states, has constructed at the international level. This meant not only that at the Brussels Tribunal there were two thousand women from every part of the world, "developed" and "underdeveloped," but ringing like the undertaker's bell tolling for capital, Black women were also present as an organized part of the Movement. And this fact opened the possibility of autonomous feminist organization of women throughout the stratifications of racial power.

We should immediately say that in our opinion, the strategy of wages for housework was the determining factor that allowed the recomposition of women divided by racial power into autonomous feminist organization which had for the first time a serious level of power, precisely because it was autonomously organized. It is the only strategy, in fact, that by definition can't leave any woman behind. And it is precisely through this strategy, that large sections of the movements of women prostitutes and of lesbian women are recomposing themselves — we are referring in particular to the United States and Great Britain, but the tendency is growing and will manifest itself clearly in a short time in various other countries — just as already women with a second job have politically recomposed themselves.

Women were increasingly interested at the international level to be done with the few, miserable, blackmailed choices offered by capital and the state. This interest has given birth not only to a movement directly demanding money from the state. It has given rise to a struggle in which the Welfare Rights Movement in the United States was without doubt the most advanced point; it also gave birth to the movement of prostitutes, which has increasingly raised prices but at the same time struggled against male and state control over their work and their lives; and to the movement of lesbian women. There are already writings and various other sources on the Welfare Rights Movement and on the other struggles in Europe, corresponding to a certain degree to the form and direction that the latter has assumed with regard to so-called state assistance.¹⁵ Let's be precise here: to the extent that it concerns us, the struggle of single women, and specifically of single women with chil-

dren, to have money directly from the state, was a struggle for putting an end to the daily blackmail by the male wage of the mother and of her children, as well as to the violence of the man who held this wage.

Let us now make some specific, if brief, observations, regarding this discourse on male violence, on women prostitutes and lesbian women which no left even now is disposed to recognize as class movements. Both of these movements are mass expressions of how women, in order to construct choices which are more liveable, had to struggle against male violence.

The lesbian movement represents on the one hand the conquest of a sexuality which was no longer necessarily devoted to a heterosexual religion, to the ends of the family and of reproduction. It therefore demanded in every case the right to a sexuality with a person of one's own sex. On the other hand it represented above all the refusal to have anything to do with male sexuality because of the concentrated anti-woman violence which this represented, to the extent that it continually expected women to work, and to work under rigid discipline at that. As we said above: lesbian love is less work. It is not without work since housework can, like whatever work, only disappear with the end of capitalism. To reproduce oneself under capital is work, even if it's much less work than reproducing a man.¹⁶ And it is much less violence even if it is not without violence altogether. The fact that two women love each other, instead of a man and a woman, doesn't eliminate the differences in power between women. But it is a minor difference in power, because in any case the women have a mass level which is less powerful than men. No woman can ever have with regard to another the specific position in which we find the man under capitalism in relation to the woman. Therefore she will never express, nor exercise, that monstrosity of violence. For these reasons the lesbian movement was and is one of the most massive responses of the refusal of women confronting male violence deriving from the terrain of sexuality as the terrain which is central to it.

As for the movement of prostitutes, it exploded in an open and declared way in France in '75 and in the U.S.A. in '76, after emerging periodically during the preceding years. It was significant that the spark which caused this movement to explode in France was the umpteenth time that a prostitute was murdered. Prostitutes had to decide to directly confront the struggle against male violence in order to be able to organize themselves in a movement and

to attack the state directly. They took to the streets and occupied the churches. Lyon was a historic turning point in the history of the class struggle. Since then, prostitutes are ever increasingly coming into the light, holding conferences, meetings, and press conferences that have broken the state's ideological orchestration of prostitutes as "bad" women, in a way that will not be easily put back together. Being able, that is, to finally make their voices heard in a direct way, the prostitutes have succeeded in bridging the gap between themselves and all other women, showing how their struggle, like that of other women, sought to break with the miserable set of choices to which capital had restricted all of them.

In every country in which this movement emerged, the main demands which prostitutes have made to the state have been decriminalization, and consequently an end to police persecution of every kind and to state control over their lives, and the right to keep their children with them. And currently, the main prostitute's organizations in the United States (Coyote and Puma) demand from the state a wage for housework. In regards to men, ever more prostitutes not only expect and manage to withdraw from whatever male control-protection, but, notably, at the risk of life and of more horrible cruelty, bring charges against the men who mistreat and threaten them.

The response of the State when faced with the emergence of such movements (together with the others of which we spoke above, and with the massification in general of the Feminist Movement), and upon seeing weakened at the grass-roots level the fundamental divisions between women themselves, and consequently the rise of a political power on their part which threatened to overwhelm it, was immediate. Already in '75 the continuous rounding up of prostitutes in France opened the possibility of segregating them in proper houses of prostitution. In the summer of '76, in the city of New York alone, the round-ups were such that 500 prostitutes were arrested in the borough of Manhattan alone, and punished with extremely high fines and imprisonment. Of course a law had already been introduced, the "Loitering Bill," on June 10 of the same year, aimed at justifying the operation. Since then the press of every country, even in Italy where it sought to outlaw prostitutes, has begun a general lament over the consequences of venereal diseases and on the ruination which one sees on the street because of solicitation on the part of prostitutes. Since then also, the various states

speaking ever more insistently of the need to enclose them in Eros Centers or in sex neighborhoods where, beyond being ferociously ghettoized and under control, their productivity would be much higher. Without meaning, of course, any increase in what they can gain for themselves. From that time on, more ferocious attacks have been unleashed against them, such as recently occurred even in San Francisco, where they were newly arrested by the hundreds, imprisoned, fined, and had their children taken away. Every state, alarmed at the ever more massive dimensions assumed by prostitutes, and the fact that they are organized in a movement, is seeking in every possible way to force prostitutes into accepting the control of pimps, to pay bribes to cops, and in various ways also to the state and its men.

But the attempt isn't likely to succeed very easily. As the press continually reports, women today don't want to make sacrifices anymore, they want a lot of money right away, and they are no longer willing to accept being dependent on a man or on an underpaid job outside the home. Today more than ever for women, the desire to have money is at the same time a desire to put an end to family discipline and work discipline in general. The government alarms, which the press of various countries has reported on, over wives who abandon the marriage nest, the rise of divorce, women-headed families, the decline of birth rates, and of births outside of marriage, are all snapshots of a crisis of the family which the sophisticated governments define as the crisis of crises.

The old love contract, with all its love consisting of more or less latent threats, slappings, beatings, pistol whippings, virile organs and sharpened knives in the flesh of the wife, of the daughter, of the mother, of some unknown woman, of the prostitute, cannot hold up any longer. Women all over the world are burning away the monstrous veneer covering the male violence which nestles in every wrinkle of the capitalist state.

NOTES

¹ The literature on this question is immense. To refer only to the witchhunts, as one example, at a macroscopic level, of the cruelty of the state and of male repression against women, among the most recent texts published

in Italy as originals or translated editions we would like to point out: Wolfgang Lederer, *The Fear of Women*, New York: Grune and Stratton, 1968; Luisa Muraro, *La signora del gioco*, Milan: Feltrinelli 1976; Carlo Ginsburg, *I benandanti*, Turin: Einaudi 1966, 1974.

- ² See *The Challenge of Crime in a free society, A report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and administration of Justice*, New York: Avon Books, 1968, third ed. 1972. The data contained in this report, regarding the U.S., is very significant: since 1960 women's violence outside and inside the family has constantly increased (p.149).
- ³ Regarding this, see E. L. Homze, *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967.
- ⁴ The confessional — but we allude here to only one of the more contemporary instruments of ecclesiastical communications with women — has functioned as a true fire extinguisher of their sexuality which, notwithstanding the nature of their love as work, nevertheless broke out in the bodies and minds of women. This function is well illustrated in the book *Il sesso in confessionale*, by Norberto Valentini and Clara Di Meglio, Padua: Marsilio, 1973.
- ⁵ A number of instances come to mind: The feminist demonstration in Trento in February '75, in which the march directly attacked the Curia; the invasion of the Cathedral in Milan by the Feminist Movement on January 17, 1976; and the feminist demonstration outside the Padua Cathedral on the following day. With regard to these events in particular, and all the various phases of the movement and mobilizations over abortion, in which conflicts between the Feminist Movement and the Church are described, see Collettivo Internazionale Femminista, ed., *Aborto di Stato: strage delle innocenti*.
- ⁶ On the relations between husband and wife in the environment of the "Left" see L. Grasso, *Compagno padrone*, Florence: Guarnaldi, 1974.
- ⁷ And — this too for the first time — such refusal was enacted in outside jobs which were extremely precarious and which placed women in a weak position, occupations such as that of personal secretary to professional scholars. In Trieste, a city in which this kind of work takes place on a particularly large scale, for two years now an excellent example of such a movement has grown to massive dimensions.

- ⁸ We are referring to the Rimini National Conference of 1976.
- ⁹ Other than open warfare, the behavior of the women of *Avanguardia Operaia* who systematically went into assemblies to denounce the harassment by comrades, often as soon as these were “discovered,” immediately caused a crisis in the dignity of the male comrade. Many of these, as soon as they were “discovered” and a crisis was provoked within their dignity as men and as comrades, no longer felt like carrying on with their political work. As far as the political parties are concerned, they were placed in difficulty by the rise of women’s committees. But the stormy conflicts within the UDI (the Union of Italian Women — the organization of Communist women) do not suggest calm even within the traditional Left.
- ¹⁰ Among the episodes also reported in the press was the disruption of striptease contests which occurred in Sardinia and in the Veneto.
- ¹¹ Among the more famous disruptions was that which took place at the National Conference on “Psychotherapy: Integration or Liberation?” on March 22–23, 1975 in Padua and that of the “Sexuality and Politics” conference in Milan in November of 1975.
- ¹² The reform of family law (September 20, 1975), the law on family planning centers (July 29, 1975), the not-so-certain law on abortion, etc. can all be understood in this perspective. And, previous to this, there was the decriminalization of information on and diffusion of contraceptives, (with the decision of the Constitutional Court on March 10, 1971 which declared Article 553 of the penal code illegitimate because it contradicted the freedom of thought).
- ¹³ This International Tribunal on crimes against women was held at Brussels on March 4–8, 1976.

Some testimonies given by women of various countries are contained in ISIS (Women’s International Information and Communication Service), International Bulletin, May 1976. At the final general assembly there were 2000 women who voted almost unanimously for the resolution presented by the activists of the Wages for Housework Movement from Italy, Canada, the United States and Great Britain: “Unpaid housework is theft. This work and the lack of a wage is a crime on which all the others depend. This work marks us as the weaker sex

- and sends us powerless to the bosses, to government planners, legislators, doctors, police, prisons, psychiatric institutions, and to men for a servitude and imprisonment for life. This tribunal demands wages for housework for all women to be paid by all governments of the world. We organize ourselves at the world level to take back the wealth that was stolen in every country, and to put an end to the crimes which are committed against us daily.”
- ¹⁴ The fate of prostitutes in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique, where they were “sent by the new governments of the left ‘to be rehabilitated’ in actual concentration camps, constitutes a significant example of this. This came after they were largely used during the war of liberation (like all women) to perform very dangerous missions. And above all after no one was worried about how women would survive economically beyond dependence upon men in wartime or afterwards.” See *Mille fiori sbocciano appassiti*, special issue — document of *Le operaie della casa*, n. 4, January–February/March–April, 1977.
- ¹⁵ As far as chronicles of the Movement are concerned, see *Le operaie della casa*, numbers 0 through 4, for some articles and news on more recent moments of struggle. For what has been published in Italy, see “Editoriale” n. 6 (Winter 1975–76) of *Primo Maggio* and in the same issue the Peppino Ortoleva article, “Da marzo a novembre: a critical adjournment.” See also Mariarosa Dalla Costa, “A proposito a Welfare.”
- ¹⁶ For this reason there are wages for housework groups within the lesbian movement as well.

About the Authors

Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa is Professor of Microcredit and Development and of Sociology at the Faculty of Psychology in the University of Padua where she teaches a cross-listed course on Cooperation in Development. As a feminist theorist, she has made a notable contribution to the analysis of housework, particularly in relation to the problem of violence. She has also written on the furthering of Women's Studies (see G. Conti Odorisio, ed., *Gli studi sulle donne nelle Università: ricerca e trasformazione del sapere*, Rome: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1988). Her primary field of research is women and development. She has continued to dedicate her studies to this theme with particular attention to Latin America and especially to Venezuela, where she has also conducted field research on a number of occasions. Dalla Costa's best-known work in this field includes *La Riproduzione nel sottosviluppo: Lavoro delle donne, famiglia e Stato nel Venezuela degli anni '70* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1989). More recently she has oriented her research towards the practice of microcredit in a number of national contexts (such as Bangladesh, Eritrea, Venezuela, Argentina and Palestine), and particularly towards its implications for women's condition. See F. Zamperetti, G. F. Dalla Costa *Microcredito, Donne e sviluppo. Il caso dell'Eritrea*, Padua: Cleup, 2003 (forthcoming in English with Africa World Press); G. F. Dalla Costa, A. Trivellato, a cura di *Microcredito e crisi. La trasposizione del modello Grameen Bank in Argentina. La rete delle Repliche*, ed. Padua: Cleup, 2007; A. Antonino, G. F. Dalla Costa, *Il micro-*

credito nelle emergenze. Il caso della Palestina, Padua: Cleup, 2007. She has treated particular aspects of globalization in: G. F. Dalla Costa, S. Nardo, M. Menini, *Le zone franche nella globalizzazione. Definizioni, tipologie, percorsi di sviluppo*, Padua: Cleup, 2006; G. F. Dalla Costa, L. Aquario, a cura di, *Codici di condotta e Responsabilità sociale nelle organizzazioni Profit e Non profit*, Padua: Cleup, 2007. She has co-edited two volumes with Mariarosa Dalla Costa: *Paying the Price: Women and the Politics of International Economic Strategy*, London and Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995, which originally appeared in Italian as *Donne e politiche del debito*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1993 and is also available in Japanese as *YakusoKusareta hatten?* Tokyo: Impact Shuppankai, 1995; and *Women, Development and Labor of Reproduction: Struggles and Movements*, Lawrenceville, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1997.

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Enda Brophy has translated this book from the Italian original edition of 1978, as well as the new introduction by Mariarosa Dalla Costa. He is a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

This classic “manifesta” of radical Italian feminism helped define the autonomist-inspired “wages for housework” movement, and identified the capitalist complicity of both the traditional nuclear family as well as the “liberation” of the woman as wage-earner. It is finally available in English translation.



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