

# 6. Reproduction and Emigration

Mariarosa Dalla Costa  
1974<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

### 1.

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

The other side of the problem was that *population was growing in inverse proportion to its level of well-being*, thus a rise in the standard of living was leading to a drop in the fertility rate<sup>2</sup> allaying Malthusian fears of overpopulation but at the same time undermining government hopes that economic development would be made secure through the adequate reproduction of labor power.

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

---

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

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

– *has been a growing tendency* and not a particularly surprising one. In fact war after the war the State suffered a loss of credibility in the eyes of the average man and woman. If to this loss of credibility one adds the increasing awareness of parents that they could offer little else to their children than the prospect of a future in the factory, it is clear why women's reactions to State demographic policies were far from diffident. They and the State have unrelated, completely diverging interests, a divergence which is particularly visible in countries where the State wants to maintain high fertility and birth rates. It is not hard to see how the capitalist class in Italy found it had won many advantages from population growth during the years of Fascism. We can confirm as sure that women had only managed to combat and evade Mussolini's demographic policies by contravening the laws of both the Church and the State. Their success in evading those laws can be measured in terms of the relatively low increase in the number of births<sup>6</sup> and the tens of millions of abortions that were carried out during and after the regime.

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

Was this situation any different from the flow of labor power into Germany in the period between 1939 and 1942? A flow which was organized by the Heads of States<sup>7</sup> and which people were forced to accept given the high level of unemployment in Italy.

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

### 2.

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

During the second half of the Sixties, all European countries registered a dramatic fall in the birth rate<sup>8</sup> that cannot be wholly attributed to the increased availability of contraceptives.<sup>9</sup> The birth rate fell particularly steeply among those sectors that formerly had proved to be less successful in controlling their fertility<sup>10</sup>

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

---

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

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

<sup>10</sup> See again, Roland Pressat, *op. cit.*

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

First of all in the agricultural context:

### a)

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

---

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



## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

**b)**

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

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

**3.**

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

In his very original reading of workers' struggles during the Resistance in Italy, Romolo Gobbi<sup>14</sup> cites the following important data, he says, "during this period the real wage was systematically eroded to the point where in 1945 it was only 22% of the real wage in 1913, thus it was only one fifth of the already low wage of 30 years before."<sup>15</sup> Moreover he continues, "During World War I, taking advantage of the growth of the workforce employed in war production, the working class had launched a powerful attack on that earlier wage level, and by 1921 had succeeded in raising the wage level to 127 taking 1913 as 100 on the index. During this cycle of struggles the workers also won other victories, such as the 8 hour day and the recognition of worker's representation in the factory at the shop floor level."<sup>16</sup> By contrast, in 1945, not only had the real wage fallen to one fifth of its 1913 level, but also, during the war itself, the workers had clearly failed to achieve a level of power in any way comparable with that won during the First World War. This indicates that the Second World War was based on a very different set of imperialist relations, qualitatively different, from those of World War I.

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

---

<sup>14</sup> Romolo Gobbi, *Operai e resistenza*, Torino: Musolini, 1973.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

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



## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

<sup>20</sup> Romolo Gobbi, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

<sup>23</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, op.cit., p. 167

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

abortion – and by venereal disease and high infant mortality.

As for women's role in the Resistance, there is not enough space here to go into such a complex subject. However, just to mention some of the biggest contradictions in their condition caused by the war, one point should be made, that their role in the Resistance becomes clear if one looks at it from the point of view of their work. Women *as well as* working in the home, the fields and the factories often performed the *most risky political work*, just like their Vietnamese<sup>24</sup> and Algerian<sup>25</sup> sisters. At the

---

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

same time though, they had almost no voice in political organization.<sup>26</sup>

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

In Italy both the expulsion of women from waged jobs and the soaring cost of living were more extreme. In Turin, 10,000 women wanted to throw the Prefect out of the window in 1946.<sup>28</sup> The Communist Party accepted the Lateran Agreements; meanwhile in red Puglia Salvemini reports that women were attacking religious processions with stones and in the North there was a general air of rebellion even in the prisons. The Italian State's response was repression. Repression started out by hitting at the weaker sections of the class: women, youth and others and then moved on to hit at those sectors that the Christian

---

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

<sup>27</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, 169-170.

<sup>28</sup> Liliana Lanzardo, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

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

<sup>31</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

---

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



## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

instead of protecting women condemns them to powerlessness.

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

Women headed the flight from the rural areas into the towns; from rural small landowners (share croppers or smallholder families), from family owned and managed firms<sup>33</sup> from the villages and smaller towns. And did so, moreover, despite the restrictions on residence imposed by fascist laws that were still in force. It was a widespread, very broad movement which, as will be seen later, revealed women's lack of identification with their social environment, their refusal to bear the costs of, or accept the quality of life that this environment imposed on them. *Marriage itself will be used as an instrument for rejecting that environment.*

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

---

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

<sup>34</sup> See Massimo Livi Bacci, *op. cit.*

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

outside the home i.e., in waged work, rendered the Italian situation anomalous in comparison with other European countries. Hence the *rebellion against their situation as women* could not have been simply a refusal of marriage<sup>35</sup> even if their situation within the family had been revealed to them during the war and in the postwar period.

The increase in the workload of housework during the war, the result of the difficulty of obtaining and of the high price of goods, has already been described. Rationing continued in the postwar period until 1947<sup>36</sup> and at the same time national income that had been halved in the period 1938 to 1945 “never rose above the pre-war level until 1949”.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, despite the fact that by 1948, production had reached 1938 levels again, and that by 1960 both national and individual income had almost doubled, “the *national per capita income in Italy was still one of the lowest in Western Europe*”.<sup>38</sup>

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

---

<sup>35</sup> See Leopoldina Fortunati, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Shepard Bancroft Clough, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 378.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

order to make sure others, husbands and children, ate<sup>40</sup> and would stand too many hours and spend too much time with their hands in water.<sup>41</sup>

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

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

---

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

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

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

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

### **a) The Italian Case**

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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



## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

### **b) The French Case**

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

---

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

<sup>48</sup> Giorgio Mortara, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

<sup>51</sup> See William J. Goode, *op. cit.* p.53.

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

tion. The real problem was not simply one of the quantitative restoration of the working class, it was rather more an attempt, on the part of the State, to neutralize women's struggles which were threatening reconstruction plans. The connection between the orchestration of France's demographic policies<sup>54</sup> and female employment<sup>55</sup> after the war and the "structure" of Algerian emigration is clear. Algerian emigration was, as we have said, described as a policy of repopulation: it would be better to call it a policy for the restoration of the working class: Algerian women came with their husbands and children, and continued to

---

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

The path taken by women’s struggles in France is, as we said earlier, very like that taken in Italy. The exodus from agriculture was massive. From 1910 to 1954 one in four agricultural laborers left the land. The same percentage holds true for the period between 1954 and 1962. After 1962, the pace speeded up.<sup>58</sup> In 1962 there were 1,272,000 female farmers and agricultural laborers, in 1906, there had been 3,329,000.<sup>59</sup>

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

---

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

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

<sup>58</sup> *Les travailleurs immigrés parlent*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 206.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

be treated more like servants instead of “Queens of the Fireplace”.<sup>60</sup>

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

The flight from the country was more than a flight from personal isolation and slavery, from backwardness. It was a flight from dual work from which even the new agricultural nationalization couldn't save women. The state tried once again to send women back into the house and the countryside and to demand a reproductive function that none of the well known economic incentives could induce them to provide. In this context, it's worth noting that because the laws passed in 1920 – which prohibited abortion and advertising of contraceptives – had failed to raise the birth rate significantly<sup>61</sup> from 1932 on, the French government had been forced to set up a *system of family allowances*.

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

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

attitude toward procreation, something that had deteriorated at an international level.<sup>62</sup>

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

<sup>65</sup> François Lantier, *op cit.*, graph XIII, p. 45. Evelyne Sullerot, *op cit.*, p. 208.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

### **c) The Algerian Case**

We cannot close an analysis of France in the postwar period (the 1950s) given the close relationship between demographic policies, female employment and immigration, without considering what this meant for Algerian women. We need to examine whether the impact of immigration on areas such as the Maghreb or Turkey is in any way similar to that in the Italian South. In Italy’s case we said that immigration tended to set in motion forces that could break up the community, in particular the new experiences women gained in managing remittances and minimal wages of their own<sup>69</sup> which gave them moments

---

<sup>66</sup> François Lantier, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

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



## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

---

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

Marriage is still a bargain contracted by the parents<sup>72</sup> even among the better off strata, although it has repeatedly been contested by women. The possibility of being repudiated still exists, even though now it is called divorce, and given the condition of Algerian women it always was and still is a tragedy.<sup>73</sup>

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

---

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

<sup>77</sup> The first wave should be calculated from 1935 to World War II.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

The way in which Italian women used the wage as a means of rejecting the patriarchal peasant family, or the extended family in general (also in the South albeit with some differences) and chose instead a smaller family that could live better on a given wage<sup>78</sup> was simply not possible for the Algerian women in France. They could not use the wage in order to improve the quality of their lives or the lives of their children because they had to reproduce an entire community and substitute for the women still in Algeria.

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

### **d) The German Case**

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

---

<sup>79</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>80</sup> See OECD, *Labor Force Statistics*, Paris, 1970, pp. 96-97.

<sup>81</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 230.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

---

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

<sup>83</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

finding employment on equal terms with German men. The fact that a flow of Italian immigrants had already been guaranteed during the 1930s<sup>84</sup> and then again during the war<sup>85</sup> by joint agreements made with Italy shows that the reproduction of the national working class was already inadequate even then.

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

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

---

<sup>84</sup> See on this subject *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany*, op.cit.

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

<sup>86</sup> Bruno Groppo, *op. cit.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, graph no. 4.

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



## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

<sup>89</sup> Evelyne Sullerot, op.cit., p. 231.

<sup>90</sup> See above, footnote 9.

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

As we have seen, this fall in the birth rate expressed the level of power that women had won and is not an “event” that can be explained by this or that factor. A level of power built up through a process of struggle that has tended to offset the general “backwardness” to which every postwar or post-revolutionary government<sup>91</sup> has always tried to confine women; a *lever of power* that increasingly allows women to bargain for a new quality of life.

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

---

<sup>91</sup> We refer here specifically to the Algerian situation to which we will return.

<sup>92</sup> See above, footnote 53.

<sup>93</sup> Leopoldina Fortunati, *op.cit.*

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

---

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

<sup>99</sup> See, in general, OECD, *Labor Force Statistics*, Paris, 1970.

<sup>100</sup> Bruno Groppo, op.cit.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

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

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

---

<sup>104</sup> The first slow-down of emigration took place after 1962.



## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

---

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

---

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

Yet despite all this it has still proved impossible for the British government to persuade British women to take factory jobs and replace West Indians, Africans, Indians or Pakistanis. British women have already shown resistance to accepting the discriminatory jobs they are constantly being offered, thus it seems unlikely that they will quietly accept jobs such as secretary, typist etc. which<sup>110</sup> are the ones offered as a result of the talk about the need for more widespread employment of women at a certain skill level. Also the struggle around the costs of reproduction, for a wage for housework has already begun in Britain and has reached a national level in the campaign around Family Allowances.<sup>111</sup> Not only was the govern-

---

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

---

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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

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

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

## 6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

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