

Wages for Housework

Wages for Housework

A History of an International
Feminist Movement, 1972–77

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Introduction

A Political and Personal History

“Our place in any history of the women’s movement, or of anti-capitalist struggle in general, is already assured. Any article written in the past couple of years about the women’s movement has had to deal with Wages for Housework, even where that treatment has been critical ... We represent an attempt to build a new women’s movement, organized internationally, around a perspective that has revolutionary implications for the entire anti-capitalist struggle. What we do with this perspective – how we develop it and how we organize around it – should now be our principle concern.”

– Montreal Power of Women Collective, April 1975¹

“You should title your book ‘The *Desaparecidos* of the Feminist Movement.’”

– Mariarosa Dalla Costa, 1994²

This book is about a subject that has fallen off the radar screen of contemporary feminism, a movement born at the very beginning of second-wave Western feminism. It was called Wages for Housework – or, depending on the country, *salaire au travail ménager*, *salario al lavoro domestico*, or Lohn für Hausarbeit. In this book, I shed light on this movement, through its writings and its struggles, from its origin in 1972, when the International Feminist Collective (IFC) was formed, to its apogee in 1977, after which certain components of the IFC continued their activities under other names.

The ideas and action strategies of this current of feminism, expressed in a pioneering essay by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, “Women and the Subversion of Community,” covered much more than the group of material tasks commonly listed under the label “housework” or “domestic work,” and were deployed well beyond the objective of obtaining a salary for such work.³ I am talking about multi-faceted, invisible, and unrecognized labour, indispensable and wealth-producing, the vast majority of which was performed by women within families and in the community. Until then considered from the angle of being “free” – an act supposedly born of the love and generosity inherent to women – this activity was now seen by certain neo-feminist theoreticians as real work and, what is more, work that was being exploited. The Wages for Housework movement specifically identified this work as being the hidden face of the wage world, its unpaid flip side, created with the rise of industrial society and capitalism, and as

defining the place of women in social organization and the gendered division of labour. This feminist current raised the issue of social reproduction and women's place within it.

Having housework recognized as real – and, moreover, exploited – work constituted one of the most important theoretical concerns for early thinkers of second-wave feminism. The question gave rise to a proliferation of analyses and debates on all sides. However, the idea of basing women's struggle on the specific question of housework and campaigning to demand pay for that work fell to Wages for Housework groups.⁴

Surprisingly, despite the turmoil raised by this debate, both in the academic world and among militant feminists in the 1970s and early 1980s, barely a trace of the issue can be found today. And it is even more difficult to dig up evidence of the current that initiated it. It is almost completely ignored in university curricula, and few historiographic accounts mention its existence. Its contribution to the critique and the deconstruction of the concept of labour is no longer mentioned at all in assessments or reviews of documentation of the topic. It has reached the point that the very theme of domestic work draws almost no interest from scholars.⁵

A TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENT WITH A UNIQUE ALCHEMY ...

This current of thought, which was also an activist movement, was intended to be transnational – a first for second-wave feminism. Starting in 1972, it included groups active in Italy, England, the United States, English-speaking Canada, Switzerland, and Germany. Some called it the “embryo of a Women's Internationale.”⁶

The network also included a wide variety of activists – something unusual at the time. The spectrum of thought was broad enough to accommodate not only white heterosexual women but also lesbians, racialized women, women on social assistance, and workers of all sorts (waitresses [as they were then known], nurses, hospital employees, and even prostitutes [as they were then known]); some were able to form their own groups, on their own premises, within the network, and to develop very original and striking analyses from their respective stances. In some countries, men's study groups were even developed in this perspective. These groups, of different sizes, were active on various fronts in their own countries: invisible aspects of family work and salaried women's work, but also abortion, medical practices, sterilization, childbirth conditions, women's health, sexuality, social assistance, family allowances, housing conditions, education, family violence, prostitution/sex work, and more.

In each of these struggles, activists developed connections with women's invisible and free labour. The struggles around housework and family work were

extended into other aspects of social reproduction, which also became fields of application for the idea of wages for housework. “We saw the fragmented life of women as a totality for the first time,” said one of the activists I interviewed. Unpaid housework constituted a prism through which the multiple facets of women’s lack of power over their lives in society as a whole could be seen, understood, and reassembled. The vast majority of women were not paid for all the work they did, and were permanently available to serve their family: this was the “lowest common denominator” of all women in capitalist societies, although it was experienced quite differently depending on the class, ethnicity, and race to which the person in that position belonged. Their work was that of production and reproduction of labour power, according to the definition formulated by the *Wages for Housework* current at the time.

... AND HOTLY DEBATED STRATEGIES

Although many women and women’s groups agreed with much of the analysis formulated by *Wages for Housework* theoreticians, few of them were prepared to undertake a campaign to demand such wages. In fact, this demand provoked heated debate in the women’s movement everywhere it was discussed; one might say, without exaggerating, that the issue affected all of militant feminism in the 1970s in North-America and Europe to some degree.

The women’s movement as a whole, however, rejected the *Wages for Housework* strategy. It was seen as a step backward in the demand for women’s equality rather than one of its essential conditions, as was claimed by the current’s instigators and activists. The women’s movement saw it as a renunciation of the objective of socialization of domestic work (daycare centres, community services, and so on). In the labour field, the movement preferred to invest its efforts in women’s access to the labour market, improvements to working conditions, the obtaining of parental leave, and the creation of community services to facilitate access to paid labour. The negotiation of demands concerning housework and family work was left to private arrangements between partners, or “task sharing.” In short, the domain of social reproduction was not the strategic choice of the women’s movement; then as today, a strategy of “family-job reconciliation” was preferred.

Given how domestic work and family work have evolved today, we can look back and ask, Was this what we could call a “winning strategy”? And what are the tangible results of this strategy today? Without wanting, for anything in the world, to denigrate the enormous efforts that the women’s movement devoted for several decades to establishing various measures and getting them enshrined in public policies, some of which were considered models of the genre in North America, a quick summary exposes trends that are worthy of examination.⁷

The objections to the Wages for Housework demand:

- The effect of salarization would be to chain or, in some cases, return women to the home and tie them more firmly to their domestic responsibilities. Women's liberation would thus be rolled back.
- The salarization of housework would disrupt any possibility of sharing tasks within the couple and would sanction the practice of home education.
- The smaller size of families (two or three children) makes the demand obsolete.
- Because it is paying for housework, the state would no longer feel obliged to institute community services. Because they receive wages, women would likely have to assume care for patients, people with handicaps, and the elderly. Day centres for the elderly and people with handicaps might close. Thus, the effect might be damaging to women's social demands.
- Once salaried, housework would be controlled in terms of number of hours, quality of work, and so on. Who would exercise this control? The spouse? The state? And under what terms?
- Paid housework would reinforce gendered division of roles, keeping women in their traditional role of wife and mother.
- A salary would isolate women from the community.
- A salary would legitimize their oppression.
- A salary would have no effect on poverty.
- Salarization of housework would probably not lead to this work being seen as valuable, if one considers that salaries have not led to the valuing of a number of jobs performed by women (such as housecleaner, waitress, and laundry worker).
- In the current context of decentralization of workplaces, many people now work at home. How will the distinction be made between paid housework and paid social work?
- A salary for housework would discriminate against those who work outside the home and do housework outside of paid work hours. So, those who "work a double day" would be penalized.
- Paid housework would take away any chance for women to have their right to social work clearly recognized.
- Such a salary would encourage women to stay away from the labour market and would be detrimental to improving their situation in society.

This list of objections to paid housework comes, word for word (our translation), from documents issued by three Quebec trade union federations: Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ), *Travailleuses et syndiquées, Rapport du Comité FTQ sur la situation de la femme*, FTQ 13th Congress, December 3–7, 1973; Confédération des syndicats nationaux, *La lutte des femmes, combat de tous les travailleurs*, 1976; and Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec, *Le droit au travail social pour toutes les femmes*, 27th General Congress, June 26–30, 1980. Also from the women's status "Livre noir" of the Conseil du statut de la femme, *Pour les Québécoises: égalité et indépendance*, Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1978.

“FAMILY-JOB RECONCILIATION”: A WINNING STRATEGY?

Today, in Western countries, young working mothers seem to be exhausted by the “double day,” as they are constantly running between the daycare centre and the workplace – it not being a given that the spouse (when there is one) will share the chores. Recent figures attest to this: “In spite of significant progress with regards to sharing domestic responsibilities, women remain the primary caregivers for children, spending an average of 50 hours per week in this role, according to data from the 2010 General Social Survey. This amount is more than twice the burden that men assume.”⁸ And then there’s the fact that salaried mothers always earn less than salaried women without children, with “maternity benefits compensat[ing] for about half of this loss.”⁹

Stress, burnout, psychological distress, piling on of tasks, and work-based competition seem to be the lot of many women who have children; at the same time, the standards for the “good mother” are always rising. In-depth interviews with young feminist mothers show that they are not sheltered from the trend: they are still “the ones mainly responsible for the work of social reproduction: care for children and dependent family members, domestic work, and family organization.” These young feminists deplore also the fact that “the work of social reproduction is not recognized or valued,” and they note “inequalities in the sharing of tasks and in parental roles, while social gender roles do not change as quickly as one would believe.”¹⁰ They conclude, “Today, work-family reconciliation is not a success.” In this context, they “believe it necessary to relaunch a debate in the women’s movement over the question of social reproduction.”¹¹

Even today, women are still mainly responsible for the work of social reproduction. In Quebec, websites have been created to enable young mothers to discuss among themselves the highs and lows of housework and family care, and blogs written by “unworthy mothers” are very successful.¹² And when money is available, it is most often being used to hire other women, usually poor ones, to perform certain domestic tasks and family care. Some of them come from very far away to perform this work. In Canada, the number of caregivers coming from abroad reached a “record level” in 2014.¹³

SOMETHING NEW: A RELATIONSHIP OF DIRECT EXPLOITATION BETWEEN WOMEN

Thus, today reproductive work has taken on unequalled amplitude worldwide. Women from the other side of the planet, forsaking their own families and leaving them in the care of other women in their community, are called upon to “fly to the rescue” of wealthier Western women, for whom they perform domestic work and family care at prices defying any competition. There is talk

of a “crisis of reproduction.”¹⁴ This phenomenon is also labelled “globalization of maternal love,” “love and gold,” and “care drain.”¹⁵ We are even seeing the appearance of something new in the history of capitalism, the “dualization of women’s work,” which should draw the attention of feminists the world over:

Simultaneous with the casualization and poverty of a growing number of women ... we are therefore seeing an increase in the economic, cultural, and social capital of a sizable proportion of working women. For the first time in the history of capitalism, we are seeing a stratum of women whose direct (not mediated, as before, by men: father, husband, lover, and so on) interests are squarely opposed to the interests of those affected by the generalization of part-time work, by very poorly paid and socially unrecognized service jobs, and more generally by insecurity.¹⁶

Some Wages for Housework theoreticians conceived of the recourse to female labour from poor countries as “a colonial solution to the ‘housework problem,’” as part of the new gendered and international division of labour.¹⁷ Was this the outcome (undesired, of course) or one of the “perverse effects” of the “job-family reconciliation” strategy and “task sharing”?

The importance to feminism today of the issue of reproductive work on the global scale could, in itself, be sufficient reason to reread the analysis formulated by the Wages for Housework current. It offers an opportunity to (re)discover rich intellectual and activist resources that could serve as tools for understanding the issue of social reproduction and how it is evolving, as well as the key role played in it, still and always, by the majority of women on the planet.

Since these texts were written (forty years ago!), the analytical approaches, the vocabulary used, and the context within which women live have changed a great deal, but the revolt against the injustice caused by the growing burden that reproductive work represents for women, to which is now added the organization of care of dependents in the family, has not changed.¹⁸ Some young feminists even believe that it is necessary to “relaunch a debate in the women’s movement on the question of social reproduction.” A (very) few scholars are also returning to this question: “Our governmental programs must be re-examined, but so must the premise of the women’s movement that a woman is fulfilled through work.”¹⁹ This book may contribute by providing the debate with a historical background and interesting resources. I must admit, though, that there were other, more personal reasons for me to reread these texts and write this book.

AT THE BEGINNING, GREAT FRUSTRATION

Although I was old enough, in the mid-1970s, to join a Wages for Housework collective, I never did so for one simple reason: there were no such collectives

in francophone feminist Quebec, even though anglophones in other Canadian provinces – and even, for a time, anglophone feminists in Montreal – had organized them. There were none, and there could not be any, because the vast majority in the francophone women's movement in Quebec didn't want them.

So I was not part of this feminist “internationale,” despite the fact that most women within the group that I was then a member of, Les Éditions du remue-ménage, were in favour of demanding wages for housework. In fact, the primary intention of the founders of this feminist publishing house was to translate and publish texts from the Wages for Housework current. The first book published by Remue-ménage, in 1976, *Môman travaille pas, a trop d'ouvrage*, was a play written and performed by the collective Le Théâtre des cuisines that raised the question of housework and its recognition.²⁰ The play toured throughout Quebec and made an enormous contribution to the discussion, often heated and difficult, on the Wages for Housework perspective.²¹

The affinities of the first Remue-ménage team with this struggle spurred some of us to attend one of the international conferences of the network of Wages for Housework groups, the International Feminist Collective, in Toronto in October 1975. We were there as observers and sympathizers, as we were not, as such, a Wages for Housework group. Nevertheless, we were able to give a presentation in French on the situation and the particular history of francophone women in Quebec.

Having missed the boat on this feminist “internationale,” even though I had anticipated its political and philosophical significance, has always been a great frustration for me. Indeed, for a long time I lived with the feeling of having missed out on something very important in the feminist struggle, something essential in the comprehension of the place of women in society, in both the North and the South, and how it could be “subverted.”²²

AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE BEFORE ITS TIME

For me, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, as well as *Sex, Race and Class, Wages against Housework*, and several other essays, published in translation in *Le foyer de l'insurrection*, were great intellectual discoveries, of a nature to stimulate activism.²³ In these texts, the patriarchy, as it had been conceived by early radical feminists, finally no longer appeared as an eternal, timeless, ahistorical system – on the contrary. Without claiming to explain the “origin” of the patriarchy, these analyses attributed it a specific historical embodiment. Housework, as practised, was seen as a historical form of reproductive work, inherent to capitalist society. It was no longer analyzed as a retrograde appendix to waged work, but represented the gendered division of work established by capitalism. Capitalism had relaunched and reorganized the patriarchy on this basis. In other words, in

the capitalist wage society, the patriarchy was embodied in the free housework assigned to women as a group.

At the time, the analyses of the Wages for Housework current seemed to me to be the patriarchy-capitalism articulation par excellence – that is, a happy linkage between a (non-orthodox) Marxist analysis of production and a feminist analysis of reproduction at the international scale. What was called, at the time, an anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist perspective would be stated today, in sociological terms, as an articulation between gender relations and class relations. The sex, race, and class triad triggered what we now call an “intersectional” analysis, the precursor to a cross-sectional analysis of dominations. The analysis of oppressions and their interdependence – the solidarity among women, despite their differences, that we sought so eagerly at the time – was proposed in the Wages for Housework strategy.

Thus, in the early 1970s, this perspective offered utterly new analyses and a global comprehension of the various components of the oppressive situation experienced by most women. It provided a common thread, which linked a number of otherwise incomprehensible aspects of the situation: women were not paid for all the work they did, even as they formed the backbone of the reproduction of societies.

This focus on work produced, on the subject of (heterosexual) love, analyses that were innovative – and, in the view of many, revolutionary – notably with regard to lesbianism and sex work. For instance, the Wages for Housework perspective shed entirely new light on the work of prostitutes, who were beginning to organize and demand their rights, leading us to feel solidarity with their struggle and even to the creation of surprising “unnatural” – and highly symbolic – alliances with Wages for Housework groups. The same perspective also returned dignity to women on social assistance. From within the Wages for Housework movement, African American women produced texts that were at the origin of Black feminism.²⁴ And this is not to mention that the Wages for Housework perspective prefigured today’s issues of the realities of care work, pay equity, recognition of acquired knowledge and skills, and recognition of women’s invisible work in agriculture and in small companies belonging to their husbands. And finally, there is paragraph 120 of the report of the UN’s Nairobi Conference on Women in 1985 advocating recognition of the contribution (paid and unpaid) of women in all sectors of development and its inclusion in countries’ national accounts.²⁵ This perspective allowed us to move beyond the differences among women by making it possible for them to forge alliances without being subjected to a single standard.

On a more personal level, this idea represented, for many of us, what an activist from the Collectif L’Insoumise called a “way to ‘avenge’ the fate of our mothers, to return dignity to the labour of past, present, and future generations

of mothers and grandmothers.”²⁶ Yes, the Wages for Housework perspective also represented this.

All of this is a roundabout way of saying that my feminism was influenced primarily by this incomparable perspective, and I have always had the deep conviction that there is value in having today’s generations of women and feminists learn about this wealth of thought, as it was formulated in the time of the IFC, and as certain of its main theoreticians have deployed and updated it since, in the context of global economic reorganization.

A BOOK WITH A LONG JOURNEY

All history books have their own history: that of the context in which they are written. So here is the history of this book. Although it simmered in my mind for a long time, this research first took shape in the context of a post-doctoral project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council from 1994 to 1996. The project took me to the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy, in the fall of 1994. That year, one of the EUI research centres, the European Forum, was studying the question of work time from a gendered perspective. The invisible reproductive work done by women was at the heart of this issue.

This research project on the history of the International Feminist Collective for Wages for Housework, presented to the EUI authorities, enabled me to study the European portion of the network. Northern Italy being a sort of cradle of the Wages for Housework strategy, the EUI was an ideal starting point from which to expand my research into Italy, Germany, and Switzerland (and into England, as I had hoped from the start). The intellectual, academic, and material support offered by the EUI and the research activities of its European Forum (workshops, seminars, conferences) were to serve as important assets to the project.

While in Italy, I was able to meet Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Leopoldina Fortunati, and Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa, of the Italian Wages for Housework groups, and Gisela Bock of the German group. In Geneva, I met Viviane Luisier, Alda De Giorgi, and Suzanne Lerch of the Collectif L’Insoumise, the Wages for Housework group there. I had an opportunity to consult their personal archives, to which all gave me free access, as well as the archives of documentation centres in Italy, particularly in Milan and Bologna. In Paris, I met Marie-Christine Gaffory, an “orphan” Wages for Housework activist (as there was no group in France²⁷). Despite several attempts, I was not able to meet Selma James.²⁸

When I returned to North America, I met Silvia Federici, of the New York Wages for Housework group and the main initiator of other American groups, in Brooklyn. At the time, I couldn’t find Judy Ramirez, a pivotal figure of the Toronto group. I was, however, able to consult the Canadian Women’s

Movement Archives, conserved at the University of Ottawa, where an activist from the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee (Francie Wyland, who has my undying gratitude) had deposited the group's archives. These archives have been very valuable to me, because they contain a good number of documents from other groups in the international network.

However, due to the unprecedented nature of this research, the dispersed and multilingual nature of the pertinent documentation, and the distance problems inherent to an international investigation, the two years covered by the post-doctoral grant did not enable me to complete my study. As a lecturer and independent researcher, I was able to return to work on the subject only occasionally, which explains the long delay that occurred between the beginning of this history project and its completion. In the end, a teaching fellowship from the Université du Québec à Montréal in 2012 and 2013 enabled me to devote myself full time to finalizing my research and writing this book.

That said, other factors were also at play. In particular, Federici was pushing me to complete and publish my research. Throughout the years, we had maintained occasional email contact, promising to see each other again to complete an interview on her intellectual journey, which could not be finalized at the time. A conference in Montreal in March 2012, to which she had been invited, provided us with an opportunity to meet. She convinced me that it was urgent for me to make widely accessible as possible all the material I had in my possession before I ... let's say ... went to heaven.

In the end, I realized that this research was, in a way and from many angles, my encounter with my own intellectual and activist history – a sort of full circle from youth to wisdom. It also expressed, above all, my desire to provide today's young people with historical feminist intellectual tools that address the question of gendered division of labour and social reproduction and its new forms at the time of neo-liberal capitalist globalization. And finally, deep within me is an ardent desire to rescue from oblivion, through this book, the rich intellectual heritage of the Wages for Housework perspective, to be certain that it will now take its proper place in the history of thought and of the feminist movement. This book is an attempt to take a step in this direction, which others may continue.

WHY 1972 TO 1977?

The Wages for Housework network of groups has been through various phases. The first was a period of establishment and organization between 1972 and 1977, under the name International Feminist Collective. Then there was a period of reorganization, which began around 1977 or 1978, during which certain groups withdrew, new ones arrived, and some older groups continued their activities. The name International Feminist Collective, however, was no

longer used after this time, even though certain components of the collective remained active under other names.²⁹

Thus, the IFC's lifespan in itself defined the study period. This was the phase during which the network's foundations were established and debates took place on its components, on the definition of the network's bases, on the organization of the Wages for Housework campaign, and on the theoretical perspective underpinning the campaign. It was also when international conferences were held. For each national collective, it was an intense period of production and publication of journals, brochures, and tracts of all types accompanying a variety of demonstrations. In a word, it was a period of generalized effervescence, which left behind a large amount of documentation.

It was also the period before major dissent arose and certain groups withdrew from the initial network. It appeared to me almost impossible to deal with these events in a way that is significant for feminist history. Even after twenty-five years, activists had trouble talking about it, and they did not want to discuss it in a casual way.³⁰ Leaving it to others to reconstruct this part of the network's history seemed to be the wisest decision under the circumstances.

The period of the IFC, from 1972 to 1977, is also the one that the activists interviewed had the most pleasure remembering. For many, it was an exceptional time in their life. Some even spoke, retrospectively, in terms of "paradise lost." It was the period of great feminist mobilizations during which, as Federici observed, "We felt that we were part of a great historic transformation." This "first phase of the new feminism," as historian Gisela Bock (the figurehead of the Berlin Wages for Housework group) called it in an interview, corresponds, in the memories of activist founders of various national collectives whom I interviewed, a time when women, together, felt that they were in a position of power. "We lived as a community, we mobilized easily, we were flying high, and we thought we had the power to change life, right away," said one of the activists from the Collectif L'Insoumise in Geneva. This observation was corroborated by another activist from the group, who told me about "the immense power of the women at that time who, united, were able to make power retreat." "We felt dangerous," she continued. "We felt that together, united around a cause, we had power." Yes, she remembered, "we certainly had some power in Geneva."

The end of this period also coincides, historically, with the end of an era in second-wave feminism. The next period, which, at least in Europe, began in 1978 or 1979 – depending on the country – saw no more great feminist mobilizations. These years sounded the knell for this historical phase, the demise of which was punctuated, especially in a number of European countries, by repressive laws (mainly in Italy, but also in West Germany and even Switzerland).

Most activist groups then went through a period of crisis, during which various components of the feminist movement were forced to redefine themselves,

reorient themselves, or, in some cases, stop being active. For example, speaking of the evolution of the feminist movement in Geneva during these years, an Insoumise member said, “We left more and more space for the creation of services. Little by little, we lost the Women’s Liberation Movement dimension and, little by little, no one availed herself of [it] anymore.”³¹ The period of the International Feminist Collective, from 1972 to 1977, overlaps with this first phase of the new feminism.

MORE PRECISELY ...

To complete this research, I drew on various sources: publications by national collectives (books, journals, brochures, press releases, tracts, and press clippings); IFC publications; personal archives – those of activists I met, my own, and those of my friends, notably Nicole Lacelle; the Canadian Women’s Movement Archives conserved at the University of Ottawa; various documentation centres in Italy; and information provided by some of the figureheads of the national Wages for Housework collectives whom I encountered and talked to along the way.³²

Because this is almost virgin territory, we must see this work on the IFC and the vision that it promoted as a historical sketch, with the interpretation biases inherent to the genre. This is especially true because I took the closest look at what interested me the most in the movement and what seemed to me relevant to retain with regard to feminist concerns today, notably the movement’s theoretical production and some of its struggles.

Thus, in this book I modestly reconstruct fragments of this network’s history. I dwell upon the popularization of the current of thought that it induced and how it was embodied in certain struggles. The first chapter is therefore devoted to placing in context the publication, in the early 1970s, of the book-manifesto *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. What was the theoretical and activist environment into which this Wages for Housework perspective was inserted? What did it bring that was new to feminist theorization and activism at the beginning of what was later called second-wave feminism?

In the second chapter I look at the popularization of works that were the basis for Wages for Housework thought, written between 1972 and 1977 – the period of the IFC. The third chapter gives a general portrait of the IFC as a network of groups and as an international forum: how it was formed and how it functioned.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I look at how the Wages for Housework perspective was embodied in action, in some of the mobilizations organized or supported by groups in the network. I will perform this analysis through the various documents issued for these mobilizations. In Chapter 6, I present examples of struggles undertaken by and political perspectives of two groups on the

periphery of the network: Lohn für Hausarbeit in Berlin and the Collectif L'Insoumise in Geneva.

In the conclusion, I attempt to sketch out the background for the evolution of social reproduction in the domestic and private sphere. The afterword, devoted to two interviews with figureheads of the Wages for Housework perspective, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici, will address this same question in the broader context of neo-liberal globalization and give an overview of their intellectual trajectory since 1977.

Finally, I believe that it is possible to read the chapters of this book independently of each other. To read about the intellectual atmosphere of the early second-wave feminism, see Chapter 1; for Wages for Housework theory and current of thought, see Chapter 2; for fragments of history of an embryonic feminist “internationale,” see Chapter 3; and for examples of mobilizations and struggles of Wages for Housework groups in six countries (Italy, England, the United States, Canada, West Germany, and Switzerland), see Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Readers who are more interested in the evolution of the perspective of Wages for Housework and reproductive work to the present should see the final part (Conclusion and Afterword). Reading all the chapters in order is, of course, not forbidden!