

## MARIAROSA DALLA COSTA'S STATEMENT ON "WOMEN AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY" AND HER COLLABORATION WITH SELMA JAMES

Dalla Costa's writing of "Women and the Subversion of the Community" must be located in a specific political context. The encounter between her and Selma James was made possible by an Italian comrade who in fact was present also in various moments of the production of this article. After the meeting with Selma in London, a period of political exchanges and communication followed whose outcome was Mariarosa's decision to promote in Italy as well the debate on the condition of women, starting from the question of "domestic work." In Italy too, this period was the beginning of the feminist movement. Mariarosa had for years been involved in the political activity of Potere Operaio, an organization issuing from the Operaist movement, later dissolved into what has become "Autonomia." She had a solid knowledge of Marxism and organizational experience and the political categories she was using in her theoretical work were those classic of Operaism: the strategic character of wage struggle, refusal of work, the social factory. This were categories Selma used as well, as she too was in contact with Italian Operaism, and it is not surprising these categories are to be found in the articles in questions.

The classic method for promoting a mobilization around a political issue was to draft an analysis of it and submit it to a circle of militants to then arrive at some "conclusions and proposals." Thus, in order to stimulate the formation of a feminist group in Padova where she lived, Mariarosa drafted a document and presented it to some women who had an experience of political work. Undoubtedly, there were elements of Selma's political perspective in this document and this was highlighted also by the fact that Mariarosa invited Selma to participate in one of the meetings in which the document was discussed. But the main point of the document was to establish a connection between the feminist struggle and the other struggles that were taking place in Italy: students' struggles, struggles over transports, cafeterias, and cost of living. Mariarosa's intention was to connect Selma to the developing feminist movement in Italy, fully recognizing her merits both on the level of analysis and political practice. From that first meeting, Mariarosa worked full-time to make the new movement grow and for a while the relationship with Selma was in no way problematic.

At a certain point it was decided to join Mariarosa's article with the one written by Selma in 1953, and to publish them together in English. During the time period of the revising of the article and the English translation, Selma was staying at Mariarosa's place, and they often discussed various points of it, also with the comrade who had facilitated their encounter. Selma made some changes and modification in the articles that Mariarosa did not necessarily agree with, but accepted. In one case in particular Mariarosa decided she would not accept Selma's suggestion, although she compromised for the English edition so that there is now a difference between the Italian and the English. At page 35 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Italian edition you read: "free from a social unit based on ideological ties", whereas in the English version, (page 23 of the third English version), you read "biological ties." Also the comrade mentioned, who often joined the discussion of the article, inserted important points and footnotes. But never was it proposed that we both sign the article or even that the three of us sign it. In fact, Selma wrote an introduction that underlined the significance of the fact that the article came from Italy.

At a certain time after the publication, Selma told Mariarosa that people believed that she and her have different positions with respect to the demand of wages for housework. So Mariarosa publicly stated that this article was a fruit of their collaboration. After another while, Selma asked Mariarosa to sign with her "Women and the Subversion of the Community" (WSC).

Mariarosa refused because in her view this would have invalidated the introduction and the scheme for the book. Anyway, starting from the third English edition of the book, Selma has put her signature on the essay, independently of the question of the signature of WSC. Mariarosa has interrupted her political collaboration with Selma due to important differences regarding how to organize to obtain the political objectives of the Wages For Housework campaign, independently, therefore, of any question concerning the signature of WSC.