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**“Our strike is essential”: Organizing the Transnational
Feminist Strike during the Covid-19
Pandemic in Italy, 2020–2021**

Between 2015 and 2017, a ‘feminism of the 99%’¹ organized a march against the Trump administration in the United States, while Polish women were fighting against the tightening of restrictive abortion laws. Feminists from Southern Europe and South America marched against domestic violence and economic precarity under the banner of ‘not one less’/‘ni una menos’ (Watkins 2018: 5-6; Arruzza et al. 2019: 6). On the 8th of March 2017, these movements came together launching the first global feminist strike.

According to Watkins (2018), there has been significant progress in women’s equality since the 1970s. However, this progress occurred in parallel, or rather in ‘collusion’, with increases in socio-economic inequalities and the establishment of a global neoliberal order by international institutions (ibid.: 7). As Watkins suggests, the way in which the global order has changed since the 1970s shows that gender alone is not a useful category to bring about transformations at a societal level and improve the living conditions of women around the globe. By rendering the concept of patriarchy universal and committing to a neoliberal agenda, global feminism has not been able to effectively foster change towards gender equality. With the 2017 global feminist strike, the resurgence of an oppositional, anti-neoliberal feminist movement suggests the existence of an alternative to this form of hegemonic global feminism.

Both academics and new feminist movements have shown through theory and practice that given the current state of ‘cannibal capitalism’, feminism needs to be anti-capitalist and any anti-capitalist coalition needs to include feminist demands (Fraser 2022: XVI-XVII; see also Arruzza et al. 2019: 14-15). The feminist strike is an example of how these two necessities are brought together. Nevertheless, feminist movements have shown great variety in terms of focus and outcomes, for example the #MeToo movement in the US has focused on harassment at work or in education, while “new movements in Latin America have focused on domestic violence and those in southern Europe on economic, sexual and migrant precarity” (Watkins 2018: 9). Following Gago (2019), I argue that the feminist strike as a theory-practice can be used as an analytical lens to look at how new feminist movements in specific locations have theorized and then put into practice a protest against gendered economic inequalities. In particular, the feminist strike sheds light on the relation between productive and reproductive labor in bio-capitalism; the feminization of labor and the global division of labor; the subject of new feminist movements; the international dimension of new feminist movements.

¹ When referring to the ‘feminism of the 99%,’ Watkins draws on the Manifesto of the same title by Arruzza et al. (2019). The manifesto is inspired by recent developments in the wave of transnational, anti-systemic feminist organizing and is in direct opposition to neoliberal corporate feminism. It advocates for anti-capitalist forms of feminism, proposing an alternative framework that fosters alliances between feminist movements and other social movements (labor, environmental, anti-racist, migrant rights movements). The goal of the manifesto is promoting change that benefits the majority of people, rather than serving the interests of elites.

Through the feminist strike it is possible to map new forms of exploitation of bodies and territories (Gago 2019: 231), which shows how feminist approaches to the critique of capitalism are relevant to develop protests against exploitative working conditions. The feminist strike expresses a feminist point of view about labor, answering the questions: “What is labor? Who are the workers?”. It recognizes labor that has always been devalued, showing in which way non-recognized and non-paid work contributes to the general precarization² processes, also highlighting how it disproportionately affects certain categories of people. Finally, it re-appropriates the traditional tool of the class struggle, which involves an internationalist framing and international solidarity, to create alliances between the feminist middle-class movement and the migrant workers’ struggle for better living and working conditions.

This paper discusses the theory-practice of the feminist strike from the localized perspective of Italy during the global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–2021. Through months of fieldwork, both online and offline, and textual analysis of documents published by several movements, ethnographic data was gathered and analyzed through Grounded Theory and Situational Analysis (cf. Glaser & Strauss 1967; Länsisalmi et al. 2014; Clarke 2012).

Firstly, I will provide an overview of *Non Una di Meno* (lit. ‘not one [woman] less’) as a movement. Then I will briefly discuss methodology. After this I will present the central tenet of this paper, which is that the strike can be used as an analytical lens to understand how new feminist movements connect theory and practice through the critique of global socio-economic inequalities. Finally, I will make two concrete examples of how the feminist strike has been articulated in Italy between 2020 and 2021. Specifically, I will look at documents from *Non Una di Meno* network (NUDM) that criticize government’s post-pandemic policies, reinforce NUDM’s demands and suggest feminist economic alternatives. Finally, I will look at how the strike at the YOOX factory³ was framed through a grammar that mirrors that of the feminist strike through documents published by the *Women’s Assembly of the Migrant Coordination*, showing the possibility of inter-class alliances based on feminist demands.

Non Una di Meno

The Italian *Non Una di Meno* network was established in 2016 by a series of already existing realities organized against violence against women and for reproductive rights (Trillò 2019: 1). During a nationwide gathering held in October 2016, feminist activists launched the creation of the NUDM movement through mobilizing people for its first big protest action on the ‘International Day of the Elimination of Violence Against Women’ (November 26, 2016) in Rome (Trillò 2018: 88). At the beginning of 2017, the Argentinian feminist movement launched the idea for a women’s strike on the 8th of March 2017 (Ni Una Menos 2017a). In Italy, feminists

² Precarization represents a global shift of the traditional working class (proletariat) being increasingly replaced by the precariat. According to Standing (2014), the precariat is characterized by unstable employment, lacking secure occupational identities, and performing unpaid ‘work-for-labor’ tasks, often being overqualified for their roles. Economically, they depend on volatile wages without access to non-wage benefits like pensions or medical coverage, resulting in chronic financial insecurity and growing inequality. They also face declining state support, with limited access to rights-based benefits, dependent on discretionary aid tied to moralistic judgments.

³ YOOX is an Italian online fashion retailer and part of *YOOX Net-a-Porter Group S.p.A* and *Net-a-porter Group*.

met in a nationwide gathering in Bologna on February 4th/5th, 2017 and decided to join the international strike initiative (Chironi 2019: 19).

Afterwards, several more nationwide gatherings took place, leading to other moments of collective protest, mostly on internationally coordinated dates such as on the 8th of March and on the 25th of November, as well as to the *Verona Città Transfemminista*, a three-day counter-congress organized by NUDM against the 13th ‘World Congress of Families’.⁴ Besides street protests, NUDM has an extensive social media presence through which it coordinates the framing of the real life protests (Trillò 2018). On the NUDM official blog, all texts published by the movement are available. The most important document, concretizing the set of demands of the movement, is the “Feminist Plan to Combat Male Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence” that was made public on the 25th of November 2017 (Non Una di Meno 2017a). After this foundational text, other documents were published that I will refer to in the analysis.

Data collection and analysis

In terms of data collection, I have tried to recount a truthful narrative of the experience of the feminist strike in Italy from the standpoint of both an insider and outsider, student and activist. In 2021, I have lived between Leipzig (Germany) and Vienna (Austria), and I have gone back to Italy for three to four weeks, between July and October, to do field research. The mode of my field-research data collection has been mostly participant observation (both offline and online), together with the collection of an extensive email corpus and a corpus of documents produced by the movement, both published and unpublished. Inspired by feminist approaches to Grounded Theory (cf. Glaser & Strauss 1967; Lämsä et al. 2014; Clarke 2012), I applied triangulation as a method that involves combining interviews, participant observation and textual analysis. The product of these three data sources has been the compilation of textual and visual diaries that I have then analyzed. During the preliminary analysis (roughly from January to June 2021), I have started gathering data while at the same time mapping all the possible themes that were connected to the topic of the feminist strike and the NUDM movement (RD 19.05.2021: 58-59). This kind of Situational Analysis, as proposed by Clarke (2012: 18), serves to describe in a cartographic way a particular situation, taking into account every actor and discourse even when contradictory, that appears within a specific ecology.

After the nationwide gathering in Bologna in October 2021, I closed the data gathering stage and finally decided on the aspect I was going to focus on in the writing process. The main drivers for this decision were not only the strong connections between the feminist strike and the topics of work and economic violence that emerged from the provisional analysis of my data, but also the composition of the Bologna assembly, which included groups and voices that were particularly vocal on this topic.

⁴ The *Verona Città Transfemminista* action also included a transnational assembly on March 31, 2019, which saw participation of feminist activists from throughout Europe and the Argentinian Marta Dillón (the Facebook event of the assembly is still available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/1863649617188588/279199649692517/> [accessed on 21.01.2025]).

The feminist strike as an analytical lens

The hermeneutic power of the feminist strike lies in the fact that it is “connecting the analytic dimension to the organization of insubordination” (Gago 2021: online). There are three main dimensions of the feminist strike as a theory and practice that are relevant to characterize it in relation to other social movements and the traditional feminist movement: the analysis of current labor relations under bio-capitalism, the enlargement of the concept of class and the transnational dimension.

Reproductive work as the essential site of capitalist appropriation

Silvia Federici defines ‘wage patriarchy’ as a system in which women’s labor and bodies are controlled through the distinction between wage and non-wage labor. Through the intersection between patriarchy, racism and class exploitation, capitalism can function and reproduce itself through the appropriation of reproductive work, which is still either unpaid (free housework, care for children and the elderly, performed within the patriarchal family) or underpaid (labor performed by racialized categories of workers and especially migrant workers) (cf. Vincze 2021: 15). This reproductive dynamic of capitalism occurs at a global scale, whereas the growth of the service sector in developed countries “expanded the supply of low-wage jobs and the demand for working-class immigrants to fill them” (Sassen 1988 quoted in Vincze 2021: 16).

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed “the deep interconnectedness and mutual dependency” between countries that rely on a global division of labor, but also between production and social reproduction (ibid.: 7).⁵ The care crisis brought about by the pandemic has led to the emergence of the category of ‘essential workers’, such as nurses, teachers, care workers, cleaners, logistic workers, grocery store workers, seasonal workers, all jobs that are mostly performed by women, LGBT*QIA+ people and migrants. After two years of pandemic in a phase of post-pandemic reconstruction it seems clear that despite care labor and care workers being essential to the system, their lives are still disposable as can be seen by the neoliberal agenda of national recovery plans (E.A.S.T. 2022).

According to Morini and Fumagalli, the current stage of bio-capitalism has seen the collapse of the Fordist theory of time value, unlike in industrial capitalism where value could be measured in terms of time and output (Morini & Fumagalli 2010: 248). The so-called bio-labor is characterized by the overcoming of a series of dichotomies that characterized Fordist work: separation between work time and lifetime, between workplace and life-place, between production and reproduction and, within the latter, between circulation and consumption. Bio-labor is defined as a conjunct of relational, linguistic, cognitive, symbolic, corporeal, and affective labor (Morini & Fumagalli 2010: 241).

⁵ Social reproduction can be defined as the whole set of activities that maintain life on a daily and intergenerational basis. It includes subsistence means like clean water, air, and food (Arruzza & Cirillo 2017: 120). This way of defining social reproduction allows to include different types of household/domestic systems, as well as community or collectivity-based social reproduction. Moreover, a socialist feminist approach to social reproduction recognizes the way capitalism functions “at the intersection of gendered dominance (patriarchy), racialized oppression (racism), and class exploitation (capitalism)” (Vincze 2021: 15). In this sense all reproductive work, both unpaid and underpaid, constitutes essential productive forces of capital accumulation and capitalist system’s very reproduction.

The relevance of bio-labor questions the categories of manual/intellectual labor, as well as those of labor/non-labor, productive and unproductive labor, or paid and unpaid labor. Therefore, the authors suggest that in current bio-capitalism a labor theory of value is actually a life theory of value (Morini & Fumagalli 2010: 249). This process is defined as ‘feminization of labor’. The latter concept means not only an increase of feminine presence in the job market, but also that the precarious work that has been historically assigned to women is now performed by men as well. The characteristics of traditional ‘female jobs’, both in the reproductive and the productive spheres, i.e. care work, both in and outside the home, and work that involves affective labor, are the standards of labor in current late capitalism. The feminization of labor is also linked to the globalization of the labor market and the feminization of immigration which is a consequence of the increase in demand for care and domestic labor, which is linked to both the nature of bio-labor and the progressive dissolution of the welfare state (Morini & Fumagalli 2010: 242).

Looking at work from the perspective of the social reproduction chain, such as the interdependence between people within the community, and the relationship with other species and the environment, it appears clear that social reproduction has an essential role in the capitalist productive system (Morini 2021: online). As life and time have become the raw material of capitalism, the strike in the sense of *paro* (lit. *strike* or *stoppage*) which prevents the production and reproduction of value, becomes the privileged means of expressing resistance to such a system (ibid.). In other words, striking the system itself becomes essential. For precisely this reason, migrant feminized subjects are obviously at the forefront of the struggle for work and life.

Expanding feminist subjectivities and the concept of class

The feminist strike and the implied understanding of bio-labor expands the right to strike to all subjects that were historically excluded from it because of not being part of wage-work or because they are not considered productive subjects (Gago 2021: online).⁶ This also means that the feminist strike is not only a strike for women, but for “women, LGBT*QIA+ people, people with disabilities and people without a residence permit” (FD Nazionale Bologna: 18, 20). As Arruzza points out “[t]he problem of the replacement of class struggle with identity-based struggles should [...] be reformulated as a political problem arising from the hegemony of the liberal articulation of feminist discourse” (Arruzza 2017: 195).

Recognizing the historical formation of sexual, gender, and racial identities explains how they contribute to and intersect with the formation of socio-economical classes. In fact, she goes on, “[i]f we think of the class as a political agent, gender, race, and sexuality should be recognized as intrinsic components of the way people concretize their sense of self and their relation to the world” (ibid.), therefore becoming part of the way political subjectification takes place, as well as what practices to engage in (ibid.). The connection between identities’ historical formation and capitalism has the advantage of proposing a theory of intersectionality that is strongly built on materialism and on an anti-capitalist analysis. As Arruzza and Cirillo put it, a Marxist feminist theory of universality is necessarily inclusive (Arruzza & Cirillo 2017: 123).

⁶ Since 2016 the strike, at least in Argentina, kept changing name showing the evolution of the politics behind it: *Paro nacional de mujeres* became *Paro internacional de mujeres, lesbianas, trans y travestis*, *Paro internacional feminista plurinacional* and finally *Huelga general feminista* (Gago 2019: 17).

The feminist strike as a common practice of the ‘new feminist movements’

Even though feminist organizing around the world never ceased to exist, between 2015 and 2016 we saw a resurgence of a mass feminist movement that took to the streets and used the tool of the strike. In 2016, Polish activists adopted the strategy and message of the 1975 Iceland women’s strike and organized a massive women’s strike to stop a bill in parliament that would have banned abortion. Argentinian activists did the same in October 2016 to protest male violence against women. Most authors (cf. Montella 2017; Gago 2019) traced in the 2015 mass demonstrations against femicide in Argentina and the 2016 strike in Poland against the right-wing government, as well as 2016 Women’s march in the US against Trump’s election (Davis et al. 2017: online), the premises for the 8th of March 2017 call for a global feminist strike.

According to Verónica Gago, between 2015 and 2016 the feminist protests in different parts of the world were not coordinated but gradually contributed to weave connections and *de facto* exchange (Gago 2021: online). It was only after March 8th, 2017, that the actual transnational coordination began with the call for an international feminist strike. The internationalist dimension seems to be central because of the very nature of new social movements and the transnationalization of protest (Hafez & Grüne 2022: 135), as well as the inheritance of anti-globalization organizing. Additionally, the international dimension is intertwined with the very significance of the strike: The re-centering of work as a feminist issue cannot be separated from the critique of the global division of labor, the denouncement of neoliberalism and of the global restructuring of the economy (Gago 2021: online). It also denounces the neo-colonial and racist oppression emphasizing how the price of care work not considered central by the state is paid by (female or feminized) migrants (Montella 2017: 153).

Economic violence as patriarchal violence

In November 2017, after one year that saw the flourishing of tens of permanent assemblies in 70 cities, five nationwide gatherings and after the global women’s strike on the 8th of March 2017, NUDM published “We Have a Plan: Feminist Plan to Combat Male Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence” (Non Una di Meno 2017a). It is based on the idea that male violence against women is systemic, it is implicit in the social construction of *maschile* and *femminile*⁷, and that is why it is defined as gender violence. As Gago puts it, the reconceptualization of sexist violence is a key to the feminist movement because it expands its meaning beyond physical and sexualized violence. Similar as in the case of *Ni Una Menos* Argentina, *Non Una di Meno* Italia began as the organization of women and feminized subjects against sexualized violence, domestic violence and femicide. In the first year since its inception, the analysis of systemic violence refined and expanded to touch nine different thematic areas, economic violence being just one of them.⁸

Feminist alternatives to the post-pandemic neoliberal state

At the October 2021 national assembly, the discussion about work started by focusing on the labor crisis brought to light by the Covid-19 pandemic. In Italy, even before the pandemic, 48

⁷ Masculinity and femininity.

⁸ Other areas that NUDM identifies as sites of gender-based violence include education, healthcare, media, migration policies, and environmental policies.

percent of women were unemployed.⁹ In 2020, 70 percent of the people who lost their job were women (Non Una di Meno Bologna 2021). One of the reasons for women losing their jobs is related to the fact that during the lockdown the responsibility of care work fell back on women and the family (FD Nazionale Bologna: 16,26; Non Una di Meno Bologna 2021).¹⁰ At the same time, the care work that was already dealt with outside of the family such as elderly care in resting homes – i.e., reproductive and care work that has been considered essential during the pandemic (FD Nazionale Bologna: 16; Non Una di Meno Bologna 2021) – became a site of high risk and exposure to the virus. Work in sanitation and healthcare, performed almost completely by women and especially women migrants, had to get done under terrible working conditions: low wages, work contracts that offer very little protection and intense working rhythms (ibid.), which showed even more the precarity of the workers in the care sector, as well as the precarity of life within the system (FD Nazionale Bologna: 27).

The post-pandemic *National Plan for Recovery and Resilience* (PNRR) was harshly criticized by NUDM. Written between the Conte II and Draghi governments, despite the lobbying of women MPs, women's shelters, and institutional feminist networks, in its final draft it did not discuss gender issues as a structural problem (Non Una di Meno Bologna 2021) but rather in neoliberal terms. Despite the recognition of the low participation of women in the labor market, no structural changes have been proposed but rather an emergency policy. In the PNRR presented to the EU, the funds allocated to women are minimal and most of them pass through companies and only a small part through social benefits (Non Una di Meno Bologna 2021). Companies obtain finance and tax exemptions through women's employment and through 'empowerment development' i.e., through benefits given to companies that are managed by women, while other companies can access credit by respecting gender balance requirements – requirements that are not specified in the plan itself (Non Una di Meno Roma 2021; Non Una di Meno Bologna 2021). For subordinate workers, apart from an insufficient investment in nursery care¹¹ and the practice of *smartworking*¹² (Non Una di Meno Bologna 2021), no measures have been proposed that go towards a redistribution of care work (Non Una di Meno Roma 2021).

By focusing on supporting middle-class women's access to the labor market (as in productive wage work), "the [EU Gender Equality] strategy divides women who should dedicate more time to productive labor from those who should perform care work for unlivable wages. It is taken for granted that other women, mainly migrants, will take care of the reproductive burden for poverty wages. The latter do that often under the threat of the residence permit, the abuses

⁹ "L'occupazione femminile è al 49,7%, -18,3 punti % di quella maschile; l'inattività femminile al 44%, +20 punti % di quella maschile (ISTAT, 2019); il differenziale salariale di genere complessivo al 43,7% (Commissione Europea, 2018). 2 milioni e 472mila sono le donne in povertà assoluta e 4 milioni e 669 mila quelle in povertà relativa (ISTAT, 2018)" (Non Una di Meno Roma 2019).

¹⁰ Nevertheless, this is a more general trend. According to Pirovano (n.d.), in 2016, 30,000 women left their jobs. Among them, one in five resigned because their children were not admitted to nursery school, nearly one in four cited work and childcare incompatibility, and 5% attributed their decision to the high cost of newborn care.

¹¹ Currently, in Italy, an average 25 percent of children have access to kindergartens (Non Una di Meno Bologna), even though it varies significantly across the country with the South and the islands at the bottom.

¹² The Treccani vocabulary defines *smartworking* as "flexibility provided by law within an employment relationship, aimed at increasing productivity and facilitating the worker's personal needs" [translation]. The concept of *smartworking* can be looked as another form of feminization of work, as the life-time of the workers through the prolonged hours that the digital form has allowed, is made available to the capital (FD Nazionale Bologna: 30).

of the bosses, the constant threat of losing wages and housing, while leaving their own families” (E.A.S.T. 2022). In 2020, the crisis of care work prompted several European governments to grant amnesties to invite migrant workers to obtain documents and stay in the care sector, as it was the case in Italy, or through other forms of institutionalized exploitation.¹³ In Italy, of almost two million domestic workers, at least 311,000 do not have a residence permit, and more than half of them are working without any permit (Associazione DOMINA 2021: 10). Of the 177,000 legalization applications submitted, only 43,000 were completed by 2021 (Assemblea Donne del Coordinamento Migranti 2021, November 22). Due to the strict requirements in the form of proof of a valid rental agreement, the high costs of intermediaries who assist in filling out complicated forms, both migrant single mothers and mothers in families were excluded from any PNRR benefits (ibid.).

Through the tool of the strike, NUDM reiterated a commitment towards its main demands: ‘self-determination income’¹⁴ (Morini 2020), European minimum wage, and universal and public welfare.¹⁵ In contrast to measures that reinforce dependence on the family, reproduce nationalistic limitations to the freedom of movement (and therefore racialized hierarchies), and focus on wage labor (cf. Ciccarelli 2021), NUDM advocates for a revolution in the welfare system. This revolution is libertarian in its aims. Moving away from existing welfare measures, it fosters a re-centering of individual and collective self-determination, a revaluation of the interdependence of individuals within society and a re-collectivization of reproductive labor.

The ‘care state’ imagined by contemporary feminist movements needs to rethink the welfare policies developed in the aftermath of the Second World War and make them universal by re-centering and prioritizing care over profit (The Care Collective 2021: 74). Public welfare should promote autonomy and strategic independence rather than dependence, which means creating the conditions for active participation in democracy tailored on the specific needs of each individual (ibid.: 75). Consistent with feminist abolitionism, the care state would prioritize social justice over punitive justice by building supporting communities instead of privatized systems of incarceration (ibid.: 76). Putting promiscuous¹⁶ and communal care at the center (ibid.), the ‘care state’ involves basic income measures, such as the self-determination income proposed by NUDM, in order to reduce the hours of wage labor and open up time, resources and capacities to care both within the household and within the community (ibid.).

¹³ See for example the case of live-in care workers in Austria, cf. Igas 2021: 35-42.

¹⁴ ‘Self-determination income’ is defined by *Non Una di Meno* as a universal and unconditional basic income that is not tied to employment, citizenship, or residency status. Morini (2020: 75) describes it as a tool envisioned to ensure economic independence and support for women escaping violence, whether domestic or workplace related. Beyond addressing gender violence, it aims to provide autonomy and freedom from exploitation, labor precarity, and existential insecurity for all individuals. Additionally, self-determination is viewed not only as an outcome of this income but also as a process achieved through the act of claiming it. Thus, the feminist movement positions basic income as central to reimagining societal structures, prioritizing care, social networks, inclusive urban spaces, and environmental sustainability.

¹⁵ For this work, I have decided not to focus on other demands of the movement, including a European residence permit, the reduction of work time, the decriminalization of sex work and a reform of the parental leave system.

¹⁶ The Care Collective defines ‘promiscuous care’ as care within a community beyond family ties and market logics—an “indiscriminate” form of care. The concept is inspired by queer care practices during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and so-called “chosen families.” It emphasizes care beyond normative frameworks, aiming to expand relationships and intimacy to create care networks, even among strangers.

The strike of the YOOX workers

During 2020-2021, some long-term strikes erupted, specifically the strike of the YOOX workers in Bologna, Italy and the GKN strike in Florence, Italy. As a delegation of the YOOX workers participated in the national NUDM assembly in Bologna, they discussed the way NUDM activists had practically supported them during the days of the strike, by waking up at 5 a.m., joining the pickets in front of the factory and bringing food (FD Nazionale Bologna: 32). The strikers also mentioned the way in which, through the experience of the strike, they managed to overcome the fear of retaliation from the employers and to show them that they have the power to fight and change their conditions (ibid.).

At the beginning of 2020, YOOX changed the contract company from the *YOOX Warehouses* to *Lis Group*. Consequently, the employees with a permanent contract were informed that, despite what was written in their contract, the time of their shifts were changed – the morning shift starting as early as 5:30 a.m., and the afternoon shift finishing as late as 11:30 p.m.. The workers were forced to choose between having to work the new shifts or leaving the company. With a majority of female employees including many mothers of young children and single mothers, it became clear that the new shifts were unsustainable since school-age children do not leave the house earlier than 7 a.m. and do not get out of school much earlier than 11:30 p.m. Because the Italian welfare system offers very little, if any, support to caretakers, and public childcare is poorly distributed across the country and overall expensive,¹⁷ most of the care is provided by women within the family or private babysitters. For single mothers, migrant workers, and workers who do not hold Italian citizenship or a long-term residence permit, which means restricted access to public welfare, or who do not have extensive family ties available to get their unpaid care work done, or who do not earn enough to be able to afford a private babysitter (Coordinamento Migranti Bologna 2020, December 8), the shifts offered at YOOX are obviously impossible.

Among the workers affected by these changes was a small group of about fifteen people that, after being repeatedly ignored when expressing their needs in terms of working conditions, decided to protest these changes. Their main demand was to be employed on a central shift or to have their working hours temporarily reduced in order to be able to take care of their children (Assemblea Donne del Coordinamento Migranti 2020, December 1). Some of them had already participated in a season of protests in 2014-2015 during which the YOOX workers had to demand basic rights such as respect for the minimum hourly rate set by the national collective bargaining agreement for the sector (1,200 Euros per month against the 800 that they were

¹⁷ More than half of the childcare facilities (for the 0-3 age range) in Italy are private, while less than 39% belong to the public sector (as of 2016). Nevertheless, as it can be deduced by the levels of enrolment, there is significant variation across the country in terms of availability of facilities and accessibility with enrolment rate being between 24.3% and 43.5% in the North and between 6.8% and 25% in the South and the islands (Bulgarelli: 2). Regarding average coverage, the rate is at 7.6% in the south, 26.5% in the center and 23% in the north (Pirovano: 3). In general, childcare facilities in Italy are considered quite expensive. The rate of enrolment and price level falls on the age range 3-6, which are run by national government rather than regional government (Bulgarelli: 6). In 2012, 22.4% of women who worked during pregnancy lost their job within two years of giving birth, with younger, less educated women in South of Italy being even more likely to lose their job (Bulgarelli: 5). In 2016, of 30,000 women that have left their workplace, one in four has declared that it was because of incompatibility between work and child-care (Pirovano: 3).

being paid), parental leave paid at 30 percent, and breastfeeding hours for new mothers. According to the striking workers who were aware of their rights under permanent contracts, the YOOX company tried to get rid of them in order to hire younger and more inexperienced workers who are more easily exploitable. In addition to YOOX's motive was also the fact they were not available for overtime (up to 16 hours per day) due to their parenthood (Coordinamento Migranti Bologna 2020, December 8).

The Yoox women's strike is not just about Yoox women workers. In our assembly before this strike, dozens of women shared similar experiences. It was clear to all of us that the bosses take advantage of the fact that we are women, mothers, migrants to exploit us more, to reduce our wages, to divide us. This is why our Yoox comrades who organized the strike wanted it to start on November 25, the day against male violence towards women. (Assemblea Donne del Coordinamento Migranti 2020, December 7 [translation CT])

On the 25th of November 2020, a group of fifteen YOOX workers, the *Assemblea delle Donne del Coordinamento Migranti*, together with *Non Una di Meno* started striking in front of the YOOX branch establishment at the Bologna Interporto. In the call for a transnational strike on the 25th of November, they write:

We do this because the fight against male violence is also fought in places of exploitation and cannot be separated from the racist violence that we face everywhere. At Yoox, as in many other companies that employ female workers, we workers, mostly migrants, are forced to work hard in shifts, which serve to blackmail us as mothers who cannot afford a babysitter, even though we need work to earn a living and also just to be able to stay in Italy. It is blackmail and violence, and we do not intend to give in. (Assemblea Donne del Coordinamento Migranti 2020, November 25 [translation CT])

After two weeks of strikes and picket lines at Bologna Interporto, on the 12th of December 2020 the *Assemblea delle Donne* took the streets of Bologna together with the YOOX workers and the SI Cobas¹⁸ (Assemblea Donne del Coordinamento Migranti 2020, December 14). On March 8, 2021, the day of the global feminist strike, the company YOOX signed an agreement with *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL), *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori* (CISL) and *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (UIL). Under this agreement, concessions for central shift adjustments were granted exclusively to mothers of children under one year old, while workers with children between one and three years old were allowed to change their full-time contract to a part-time one. With only a part-time salary, YOOX workers would have to depend on their husbands, partners, and family members. In fact, to have access to a residence permit, a minimum income is required, which many women, especially single mothers, could not achieve with part-time work (Assemblea Donne del Coordinamento Migranti 2021, March 10). The workers rejected the agreement reached between the confederated unions and YOOX, choosing to continue their struggle.

¹⁸ The Inter-categorical Union *Cobas* is a 'sindacato di base' (grassroot union). Differently from 'sindacati confederali' ("confederated trade unions", i.e. all the unions that are associated with the three main trade union organizations), which in Italy are CISL (Christian Democratic), UIL (social-democratic), and CGIL (formerly associated with the Communist Party), who already in the 1980s were accused of colluding and compromising with *il padronato* (the ruling class), the *sindacati di base* born in the 1980s and 1990s tried to reorganize and re-unionize starting from the local level. Self-management, basic democratic decision-making, have been at the basis of *sindacati di base*. SI Cobas, as an heir of this tradition, has taken up the struggle of logistic workers. The big retail enterprises make use, for transport and portage operations, of subcontracting enterprises organized in 'co-operatives'. The workers employed by these cooperatives, considered as 'members', do not benefit from the most basic rights recognized for other workers by labor legislation and national labor contracts (L'Internazionale 2016).

Finally, on the 31st of December 2021 the Labor Court of Bologna recognized that the shifts imposed by Lis Group are unmanageable, admitting that starting a shift at 5:30 a.m. or leaving work at 11:30 p.m. makes it impossible to take care of one's children, and ruled that the central shift must be restored for all workers with children under twelve. Commenting on the ruling, the *Assemblea delle Donne* stated that:

For us in the Women's Assembly of the Migrant Coordination, for our comrades who work at Yoox and who have fought with courage to achieve this result, it is clear that the common sense of this society is that it uses racism and sexism to exploit us more and then send us home when we are no longer needed. But we didn't accept this. We didn't let ourselves be humiliated or beaten down. And with our struggle, with a strike that was immediately feminist and as such was embraced by Non Una di Meno, we were able to make our voices heard publicly. (Assemblea Donne del Coordinamento Migranti 2022, January 8 [translation CT])

On November 26, 2021, in a public (online) talk between the *GKN Women's Coordination*, the *Women's Assembly of the Migrant Coordination* and two spokeswomen of the YOOX workers on strike, they discussed both the specifics of their struggle and the general issues that affect them (Coordinamento Migranti Bologna 2021, November 26). According to Liuba, one of the YOOX workers' spokeswomen, when the contract company for the YOOX warehouses changed to the Lis Group, the shifts were changed, and women workers were forced to choose between impossible working conditions or having to give up a permanent work contract. This strategy affected women and young mothers disproportionately. In fact, only very few of the male YOOX workers participated or supported the women's strike. Among them was Mohammad Nazam who also asked for a central shift due to health reasons, but his request was denied. He was crushed by a truck on 25th of January 2022 on his way to start a shift at 5:30 a.m., while biking to the Bologna Interporto (Coordinamento Migranti Bologna 2022, January 25).¹⁹

As Marie, a comrade from the *Women's Assembly of the Migrant Coordination* points out, essential workers, such as women employed in cleaning companies, were the first ones to be at risk during the pandemic. They had to fight for minimum security protocols, such as masks, gloves, and disinfection (ibid.). In 2020, as many as 444,000 people lost their jobs in Italy, of which 312,000 were women. In December 2020 alone, of the 101,000 people who lost their jobs 99,000 were women (Non Una di Meno Milano 2021, February 2; Istat 2020).²⁰ The reason why many women lost their job and only half of the women in Italy are employed, is related to various structural reasons such as the weight of the *doppio-lavoro* (the double shift of wage and care work), worsened especially during the lockdown. In addition, working conditions for women worsened as traditionally feminized low-wage sectors of care work (e.g. catering industry, tourism), which employ the majority of women, were completely shut down due to the pandemic. This shows that not just migrant men and women are blackmailed based on the residence permit, but that different categories of people, such as working-class women and

¹⁹ Nazam's death only adds up to a long list of workplace fatalities, especially at the Bologna Interporto, among which for example the death of Yaya Yafa who was crushed while loading and unloading trucks in unsafe working conditions on the 22nd of October 2021 (Coordinamento Migranti 2021, November 2; Zuppiroli 2021, October 22).

²⁰ "In Italy women's employment is at 50%; one out of two women is expelled from the labor market for various structural reasons, such as the higher cost for the employer in case of maternity, the gender pay gap [...], the weight of the 'double burden', care work that is neither recognized nor waged related to the care of children, the elderly, the home." (Non Una di Meno Milano 2021).

caretakers, are affected by having to choose between unfair working conditions and unemployment.

The support of political collectives for workers' struggles, such as in the case of the *Women's Assembly of the Migrant Coordination* and *Non Una di Meno*, who have actively and materially supported the YOOX strike since its beginning in October 2020, is important. This shows the continuity between the *sciopero vertenziale* (lit. 'trade union strike'), that focuses on the conciliation of working hours and lifetime, and the feminist political strike.

The feminist strike differs from the production strike in that, on the one hand, it is not directly related to industrial relations, and on the other hand, it possesses a distinct political dimension (Arruzza et al. 2019: 8-9). It is also different because it takes into consideration social reproduction and not just production. But what the YOOX women's strike shows, is that a production strike can also take on feminist demands. By putting life at the center, and the connection between lifetime and work time, the YOOX workers' strike shows the overlap between feminist strike and labor strike in contemporary capitalism.

"Striking changes your life" (FD Nazionale Bologna: 32 [translation CT]). The feminist strike puts at its center the essential needs of workers and migrant women through highlighting that as women and as migrants, we are all workers. By focusing on the reality of current bio-capitalism, it points to the non-existent separation between work time and lifetime and translates this lacking separation into a site of resistance to capitalist exploitation. But while being a fundamental element of the agitation and mobilization of the last six years, NUDM activists recognize that the strike is just one way of carrying on the struggle. The global feminist strike is therefore also a political strike because it is a site that has the potential to create solidarity among different positions and different struggles at the local level. While focusing on precarity and economic violence as part of gender violence, it makes clear to what extent the feminist struggle has the capacity to complicate the class struggle.

The example of NUDM joining forces with a concrete labor strike suggests that NUDM political stance of intersecting labor-related and migrant struggles bear fruits at a local level through active anti-racist and feminist solidarity. It also shows that the feminist strike and its demands have also influenced the practice of striking outside of the place of the feminist movement and of the 8th of March. Finally, the cooperation between NUDM and the *Women's Assembly of the Bologna Migrant Coordination* in support of the YOOX workers opens horizons of transnational organization that go beyond the feminist movement, showing how feminist activists are also involved in migrant and anti-racist networks.

Conclusions

In this paper I have argued that the feminist strike is a useful category to understand new feminist movements. The use of the strike by feminist movements worldwide should not be underestimated. Instead, this tool, now part of many movements' repertoires of action, in order to protest gendered economic inequalities, but not limited to it, exhibits a high degree of political elaboration.

In fact, it is through a feminist Marxist analysis of the concepts of work and value, that NUDM is able to reformulate the definition of work, including forms of unpaid or underpaid work, that

are traditionally not included in its definition. By putting life and social reproduction at the center of economic analysis, the hierarchy between production and reproduction is turned upside down, suggesting that social reproduction is a site of capitalist accumulation which is essential to the capitalist system. Finally, NUDM's analysis exceeds classical Marxist and white feminist analysis by taking into consideration a decolonial feminist perspective which suggests that the colonial/patriarchal matrix of power is at the basis of the current gendered and racialized global division of labor. Because of the expansion of the definition of work, several subjects that have not been considered 'workers' or that have been marginalized by the workers' and trade union movements, being women and feminized subjectivities, domestic workers, precarious and/or migrant workers, are now included in the class struggle and in the feminist struggle.

Secondly, from the analytical to the practical sphere, NUDM proposes the feminist strike as a site of resistance and opposition to a neoliberal and racist society (FD Nazionale: 32). I have highlighted how the NUDM movement began as a protest against patriarchal violence and changed the meaning of this term. Initially defined narrowly as sexism and sexual violence, the term currently also includes economic violence. In this way, it operated a politicization that rejects a narrative of victimhood for people that are affected by violence, people whose work, although deemed 'essential', is constantly undervalued, underpaid, or unpaid, and people whose unpaid work is naturalized and made invisible. This political analysis shows how gendered and racialist hierarchies affect certain categories disproportionately, but it is the same analysis that also allows to create solidarity through a political strike. In this way, abstract terms as the feminization of labor take on a very concrete meaning by referring to processes of exploitation of labor, and especially of bio-labor, that affect all genders. By understanding current capitalism in terms of bio-capitalism, there is no distinction between work time and lifetime, as capitalism appropriates the lifetime of the workers, NUDM reinterprets the struggle for decent work and decent life through the feminist strike. As a strike for life, in the sense of a strike that affects all areas of life and especially sites where life is reproduced, the feminist strike has the political potential to build transnational solidarity by proposing a shared grammar.

Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn so far need to be understood in relation to their limitations. The reconceptualization of gender violence as economic violence as well as the other demands expressed by NUDM are an important precondition for the resurgence of both discursive and practical alliances between the feminist middle-class movement and the workers and migrant movements. Of course, questions remain about the degree of cooperation and the long-term results of such an alliance. Given these limitations, I also want to suggest that the Italian NUDM movement is just one example within a broader feminist movement. A feminist anti-capitalist analysis is not unique to the Italian NUDM movement; rather, it is a shared perspective that characterizes certain strands of contemporary anti-capitalist internationalism. However, further comparative analysis is needed to corroborate the extent to which it is possible to talk of a global movement. While anti-capitalist feminist theorizations are becoming more common in academia (Arruzza et al. 2019; Gago 2019, 2020, 2021; Gago et al. 2020; Fraser 2022), practical experiences of striking in the long run might reveal more differences than are currently foreseeable, particularly in terms of priorities, alliances, and practices. Further research should also explain in which way the common grammar of the 'strike for life' is constructed and what kind of concrete connections link those movements to each other apart from discursive similarities.

In conclusion, this paper aims at echoing one of the slogans of the 2021 global feminist strike, “*Essenziale è il nostro sciopero*” (“Our strike is essential”). Not only women, lesbians, trans*, intersex and non-binary people, refugees, migrants, and racialized people are the ones mostly involved in essential sectors of the economy, which in countries like Italy, during and after the pandemics, has been the care and logistics sectors. The exploitation of their life and work, that is unpaid, underpaid, invisibilized and/or precarized, allows the reproduction of the current capitalist system. The exploitative working and living conditions of women, migrants and ‘free subjectivities’²¹ have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemics of 2020. Nevertheless, as the feminist strike in 2021 has shown, feminist subjects are striking back, developing discursive and practical strategies of resistance and *impoteramento*²², making visible the essential nature of our participation in society and the collective power of the strike.

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²¹ The phrase ‘free subjectivities’ loosely refers to all people who question the cis-hetero-binary norms.

²² Empowerment but rather *empoderamento*; see Borghi 2020: 13.

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- FD Nazionale online (06-07.02.2021)
- FD Campeggia (05-10.07.2021)
- FD Encuentro Intergaláctico (25.07-1.08.2021)
- FD Nazionale Bologna (9-10.10.2021)

Research Diary

- RD (09.03.2021-05.03.2022)

Coding

- C1: First coding (July-November 2021)
- C2: Second coding (December 2021)
- C3: Third coding (January 2022)