

Gendered labour, immigration, and deindustrialization in Montreal's garment industry

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ABSTRACT

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For nearly a century, the garment industry was a driving force of Montreal's economy, and a major employer in the city's manufacturing industries. However, the Canadian government pursued a progressive trade liberalization policy in the 1970s, and the effects of increased import competition led to successive waves of closures in the domestic textile and clothing industries. Due to the historically entrenched gender norms that structured the Canadian garment industry, immigrant women workers were often the first to be laid off, bearing the brunt of restructuring. These closures occurred against the backdrop of a profound crisis in the industry's institutions, increased labour intensification, and rapidly deteriorating working conditions. Tensions culminated in the 1983 garment strike, when rank and file workers organized against job losses and widespread de-unionization. Organizers drew on the language and politics of the women's movement in Quebec to highlight the historic marginalization of women in garment manufacturing, and to articulate their resistance to deindustrialization. However, this study also aims to de-center wage labour within our understandings of life under capitalism, showing that women's experiences of deindustrialization were also shaped by their unpaid reproductive labour within the home. The impacts of paid and unpaid labour combined often left workers with poor health outcomes, revealing the longer-term, "slow violence" of capitalism. Through oral history interviews with former garment workers, rank and file organizers, union officials and employers, I show that deindustrialization in Montreal's garment industry was a highly gendered process, and that its effects were felt at the intersection of existing marginalities.

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INTRODUCTION

Toward a feminist deindustrialization studies: The historical legacies of gendered industrial labour

Il y avait une grande campagne de publicité à un moment donné fait par le syndicat. C'était marqué 'Achetez canadien'. On avait une étiquette qu'on montrait à la télévision et c'était signé 'Union internationale des ouvriers de vêtements pour dames' et cette étiquette-là... À un moment donné à la fin, ils ouvraient des boîtes et prenaient les vêtements de Chine, ils mettaient les étiquettes 'fait au Canada', les étiquettes payées par les syndiquées et ils sortaient ces vêtements. C'était là que ça brassait de la merde. Ça se pouvait pas là.¹

The International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) label campaign directly reflected the union's growing concern over rising apparel imports to the United States and Canada.² For Fatima Rocchia, a sewing machine operator and shop steward in one of Montreal's largest garment factories, Sample Dress, sewing on union labels to imported clothing was a tipping point. However, the ever-increasing imports that began to flood the Canadian clothing market occurred against the backdrop of a domestic clothing industry that had also been deteriorating from the inside. Rocchia felt a deep sense of responsibility for the women in her shop, and knew they had to take action:

J'étais la représentante syndicale de 600 femmes. On parlait à peu près 20 langues. On était toutes des femmes immigrantes là-dedans... Et petit à petit ils préparaient les fermetures des usines une après l'autre. Et c'était tout ça que nous on revendiquait. Il y avait des manufactures qui fermaient avec la complicité du syndicat, et c'est ça qu'on avait dénoncé. C'est pour ça qu'on avait fait le *Dossier Noir* et qu'on a sorti toutes sortes de choses... Ils ne travaillaient pas pour les intérêts [des travailleuses] souvent... Quand on les faisait venir dans les manufactures [le syndicat], ils parlaient avec le boss, ils se serraient la main et ils ne venaient pas me voir.³

¹ "There was a big advertising campaign by the union. It said 'Buy Canadian'. We had a label that was shown on television and it was signed 'International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union' and that label... At some point at the end, they would open boxes and take the clothes from China, they would put the labels 'made in Canada', the labels paid for by the union members and they would send those clothes out. That's when the shit hit the fan." Fatima Rocchia, interviewed by Leona Siaw. Saint-Joseph-du-Lac, November 5, 2017.

² Pamela Ulrich, "'Look for the Label': The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Label Campaign, 1959-1975," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 1995): 49–56.

³ "I was the union representative for 600 women. We spoke about 20 languages. We were all immigrant women in there... And little by little they were preparing to close the factories one after the other. And it was all this that we were fighting against. There were factories that were closing with the union's complicity, and that's what we denounced. That's why we made the *Dossier noir* and why we came out with all kinds of things... They didn't work for the interests [of the workers] often... When we brought them [the union officials] into the factories, they spoke with the boss, they shook hands and they didn't come to see me." Fatima Rocchia, November 5, 2017.

As the shop steward at the time, Fatima was frequently left out of conversations between the union and her employer. Occurrences such as these, shaped by the gendered structure of the ILGWU executive, were deeply frustrating for concerned workers like Fatima, and fueled their determination to shake up the status quo in the industry. In response, Fatima and a handful of other workers formed the Comité d'action des travailleurs du vêtement, and published the *Dossier noir sur l'UIOVD*, a public excoriation of the failures of their union to represent the rank and file amid the factory closures happening all around them. The *Dossier noir* provided a lucid analysis of their situation: unionized work in the industry was under threat, the union executive seemed to have a closer relationship to employers than to the rank and file, and immigrant women working in the lowest-paid positions were bearing the weight of the steady stream of closures. What the *Dossier noir* also reveals is that deindustrialization placed working conditions in a renewed phase of decline. Most sewing machine operators were paid piece rates, which authors of the *Dossier noir* described as “an inhumane system” that was “an inescapable vicious circle.”⁴ The pressures of working by the piece, where workers’ wages depend on how quickly they can work, often had devastating long-term health impacts. For MD, a garment worker who started her career in the industry a mere days after arriving in Montreal from Italy, working by the piece was deeply stressful:

Mais moi j’ai tombé malade. J’ai tombé avec— mon cœur. J’ai arrêté à 42 ans. J’ai plus travaillé. Parce que à travailler piecework il y a beaucoup de... Avec la famille... Beaucoup de stress. Le stress m’a touché dans mon cœur. Oui, mais c’est pas juste le travail, c’est la maison, les enfants, aller coucher tard, debout à bonne heure le matin, pour préparer les lunchs, pour préparer les lunchs à la famille. Oh toute, j’ai cherché à faire toute de bonne qualité— de maman, de femme, de toute! Mais, après, j’ai tombé malade, pour faire tout ça.⁵

MD’s story complicates the boundaries of the workplace under deindustrialization. On the one hand, her experience of deindustrialization was not just shaped by the imminent threat of job loss, or even the progressively worsening working conditions that deindustrialization also precipitated. The gendered labour that she performed as a mother and a wife compounded these experiences and forced her into early retirement due to the long-term disability caused by her paid and unpaid work. Taken together, MD and Fatima’s stories reveal a complicated history of the impacts of deindustrialization on immigrant women workers in a traditionally gendered industry. However,

⁴ Comité d'action des travailleurs du vêtement, *Dossier noir sur l'UIOVD*, November 4, 1981. Personal Papers of Fatima Rocchia.

⁵ “But I got sick. I fell ill with my heart. I stopped at 42. I didn't work anymore. Because to work piecework there is a lot of... With the family... A lot of stress. The stress touched my heart. Yeah, but it's not just work, it's the house, the kids, going to bed late, up early in the morning, to pack lunches, to pack lunches for the family. Oh everything, I tried to do everything right - as a mom, as a woman, as everything! But then I got sick, to do all that.” MD, interviewed by Lauren Laframboise. Montreal, October 29, 2019.

the conditions that led up to the 1970s and 1980s when the first waves of closures hit the city's formerly prosperous clothing industry were nearly a century in the making.

Industrialization and the gendered structure of labour relations

The garment industry in Canada emerged in the 19th century as the organization of apparel production shifted from made to measure, individually tailored clothing to the larger-scale manufacturing of clothes that were ready to wear off the rack. Industrialization in the 19th century drastically reorganized the division of labour involved in clothing production, and laid the groundwork for the modern apparel manufacturing industry.⁶ From its very beginnings, the garment industry primarily employed women, who represented between 70 and 80 percent of all needleworkers.⁷ Between 1881 and 1951, the garment industry was the largest employer of women in Quebec, followed by the cotton textile industry.⁸ The gendered labour regime in the 19th century garment industry was often referred to as “sweating”, or “sweated labour”, a term coined in Britain in the 1840s to describe an organization of labour that saw women and children sewing clothes in their homes or working in small subcontractor's shops. Sweating became synonymous with poor working conditions, very low wages, irregular work, and frequent layoffs.⁹ The sweating system was widespread, and it was estimated that in 1898 nearly three quarters of all clothes made in Montreal were made in workers' homes or in subcontract shops.¹⁰ This reorganization of the systems of clothing production also led to the proliferation of a complex network of contractors and subcontractors aggressively competing against one another.¹¹ The resulting competitiveness put constant downward pressure on the prices of garments, and because of the labour-intensity of clothing manufacture, there was also a congruent downward pressure on wages.¹²

⁶ For a detailed study of this transition toward larger-scale manufacture in Montreal, see Mary Anne Poutanen, *For the Benefit of the Master: The Montreal Needle Trades During the Transition, 1820-1842*, MA thesis, McGill University, 1985. In her study, Poutanen argues that this reorganization of the division of labour led to worsening working conditions in the industry: contracts to journeymen shortened, employers began paying piece rates, and seasonal layoffs occurred with increasing frequency. These shifts largely foreshadow what regulators, civil society, and organized labour would see as the biggest problems in the garment industry throughout the 20th century.

⁷ Robert McIntosh, “Sweated Labour: Female Needleworkers in Industrializing Canada,” *Labour / Le Travail* 32 (1993): 105.

⁸ Gail Cuthbert Brandt, *Through the Mill: Girls and Women in the Quebec Cotton Textile Industry, 1881-1951*, (Montreal: Baraka Books, 2018), 15.

⁹ McIntosh, 111.

¹⁰ Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddart, “Ouvrières et travailleuses montréalaises, 1900-1940,” in Cross, Lavigne, and Pinard, *Travailleuses et Féministes : Les Femmes Dans La Société Québécoise*, (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1983), 102.

¹¹ McIntosh, 112. According to McIntosh, the barriers to entry to the garment industry were quite low compared to other manufacturing sectors. Contractors needed access to two things: contracts and a ready supply of needleworkers.

¹² *Ibid*, 113.

The women who sweated in the extremely poor working conditions of their homes and of Montreal's late 19th century garment shops were the subject of growing concerns about women's work. According to Judith Coffin, "the poorly paid seamstress became the very image of poverty, women's vulnerability, [and] the wrongs of market society."¹³ As a result of these concerns, the sweating system attracted the attention of bourgeois reformers, who sought a "harmonious conciliation" between wage work and domestic labour.¹⁴ Sweated labour within the home was relatively inoffensive to patriarchal norms, since this largely invisible regime of women's work did not meaningfully trouble the image of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers.¹⁵ As Robert McIntosh argues, "these women did not desert home duties and children by taking on wage labour outside the home, nor did they steal men's jobs."¹⁶ In the meantime, the new industrial order of apparel production frustrated the male skilled tailors as they saw their working conditions declining in step with the rise of sweating. Tailors organized and formed one of the earliest unions in Quebec, The Journeymen Tailors' Union, who gained most of their strength and numbers around the end of the 19th century.¹⁷ The tailor's union was borne of a male artisan pride in work, which on the one hand emerged as a central part of the political struggle against the deskilling of tailoring, and on the other was shaped by a working-class construction of the respectable male breadwinner.¹⁸ The tailor's union, through its attempt to strictly maintain tailoring as a skilled trade, would foreshadow the gendered division of labour that considered men's trades in apparel manufacturing as skilled, and women's jobs as unskilled.

By the 1890s, many of the garment factories, especially in the men's clothing industry, employed a mixed model where a portion of the sewing work was done in factories, but an even larger portion was sent out to homeworkers.¹⁹ In the first decade of the 20th century,

¹³ Judith G. Coffin, *The Politics of Women's Work: The Paris Garment Trades, 1750-1915*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁴ These reform movements would give rise to a number of developments in the world of women's work: inquiries, legislation, nominating factory inspectors, the creation of professional associations, and job training programs. A leading reformer in the world of women's work was former Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, who submitted a report on the plight of sweated labour to the federal government in 1898. See Lavigne and Stoddart, "Ouvrières et travailleuses," 109-110.

¹⁵ Ibid, 99.

¹⁶ McIntosh, 107. See also Wally Secombe, "Patriarchy Stabilized: the construction of the male breadwinner wage norm in nineteenth-century Britain," *Social History*, H, No. 1 (January 1986): 53-76

¹⁷ See Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec : des origines à nos jours*, (Montréal : Boréal, 1989), 15-17. This early period of unionization, Jacques Rouillard argues, represented the birth of the labour movement in Quebec. As was the case for many of these early unions in Quebec, membership was made up of skilled tradesmen, and played the primary role of maintaining wages, providing sickness and death benefits, and importantly, of strictly controlling apprenticeships to maintain a level of skilled workers that did not exceed demand. Unionized workers at this point in time represented the "aristocracy" of the working-class, and would go on to take up leadership in the labour movement until the 1930s. See also Harold A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada, Their Development and Functioning*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1948), 209.

¹⁸ Mercedes Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace: Women and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890- 1940*, (Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

¹⁹ Cross cites an example of a typical garment firm who employed 130 women inside of the factory, and

manufacturers began to favour production inside their factories as opposed to sending work out,²⁰ which also coincided with shifting understandings of women's wage labour. On the one hand, the increasing incidence of women working outside of the home in garment factories was relatively acceptable, since the tasks expected of women in these jobs were seen as "pure extensions" of their work within the home.²¹ On the other hand, as women began working for wages outside of the home in increasingly visible ways, they competed with men on the open labour market, and were met with hostility from male wage earners.²² Adding to these developments was a resurgence in the influence of the Catholic church in Quebec in the decades after WWI, which sought to reinforce traditional gender roles, attempting to keep women within the home.²³ Despite widespread concerns about women's work, countless working-class women in Montreal had little choice but to work for wages to support their families.²⁴ Much of the female workforce that was employed as sewing machine operators were French Canadian women. Between the 1920s and 1940s, they made up between 80 and 90% of the female workforce in the industry and were largely concentrated in the lower skilled positions.²⁵

In the early 20th century the industry also relied heavily on the labour of immigrant workers from Eastern Europe and Italy. A large proportion of the male workers in the industry were Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to Montreal from Eastern Europe in the wake of widespread anti-Semitic violence.²⁶ Jewish workers largely occupied the higher-skilled jobs as well as a large proportion of the management and ownership of garment factories.²⁷ Importantly, Jewish workers played a highly significant role in the unionization of the Canadian garment industry.²⁸ Largely

1400 women working from home. Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in 19th Century Montreal," *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 12, no. 1 (1973): 211.

²⁰ Jacques Rouillard, "Les Travailleurs juifs de la confection à Montréal (1910-80)," *Labour / Le Travail* 8-9 (1982-1981): 255. Moving away from regimes of homeworking had little to do with the appalling working conditions of homeworkers and small contract shops, but rather because the quality of garments was better when they were made in-house. It is important to note, however, that the sweating system was never truly abolished, and would continue to be utilized by manufacturers in the busy seasons to meet seasonal increases in demand.

²¹ Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 2.

²² See Lavigne and Stoddart, "Ouvrières et travailleuses," 99; McIntosh, 108; and Seccombe, 66.

²³ Lavigne and Stoddart, "Ouvrières et travailleuses," 110.

²⁴ See Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) for a study of the late 19th century, and Denyse Baillargeon, *Ménagères au temps de la Crise*, (Montreal: Éditions Remue-Méninges, 1991) for more on the Depression era.

²⁵ Lavigne and Stoddart, "Ouvrières et travailleuses," 110.

²⁶ Out of all Jewish workers who were employed in manufacturing, 75% worked in apparel manufacturing, which represented between 20 and 30% of the entire workforce in the industry. Rouillard, "Les Travailleurs Juifs," 254.

²⁷ Garment factory floors were one of the few spaces of encounter between Jewish and French-Canadian workers in the early 20th century. This space of encounter was a complicated one, where politics of ethnicity, gender, and class collided daily. See Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*.

²⁸ Jewish workers were at the forefront of the labour movement in the North American garment industry, especially by organizing in the international unions like the ILGWU and ACWA. Workers of Ashkenazi Jewish descent thus went on to make up the majority of the union leadership and union organizing

unorganized throughout the 19th century, several unions vied for control at the turn of the century, creating a turbulent landscape for contract negotiations. Between 1901 and 1905, the textile and garment industries were affected by the second highest number of strike days and lockouts in all of Quebec.²⁹ Labour conflicts occurred with continued frequency through the 1930s, especially in the dressmaking sector, and between 1934 and 1940, barely a month went by without a strike in one of the city's many dress factories.³⁰ In the end, it was two international unions, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), that came to organize the highest number of workers. This was not an easy process: although the ACWA (which organizes the men's clothing sector) and the ILGWU (responsible for organizing the women's clothing sector) were active in the late 19th century, they were only able to organize about a quarter of workers by the 1920s, and by 1937, about half of the workers in the industry were unionized.³¹

These chaotic labour relations can be partially attributed to the highly competitive nature of the garment industry with its complex networks of contractors and subcontractors, which made collective bargaining particularly challenging.³² In reaction to the tough terrain faced by unions and their continued difficulties to negotiate with employers, they actively sought third-party mediation and government intervention to stabilize the industry.³³ In 1934, the provincial government introduced the Collective Labour Agreements Extension Act (also commonly known as the Arcand Act, or the *Loi sur les décrets de conventions collectives*). The Arcand Act effectively allowed the government to extend a collective agreement by decree to the entirety of

apparatus. Again, there is much more to be said on the Jewish immigration, and the transnational connections between Montreal, Toronto, and New York that I am unable to cover here. See Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). On the politics of gender, ethnicity, and class as it relates to encounters between Jewish workers and French-Canadian workers, see Mercedes Steedman, "Canada's New Deal in the Needle Trades: Legislating Wages and Hours of Work in the 1930s," *Relations Industrielles* 53, no. 3 (1998). For oral histories of Jewish workers, see Seemah Cathline Berson ed., *I Have a Story to Tell You*, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2010). See also Daniel Hiebert, "Jewish Immigrants and the Garment Industry of Toronto, 1901-1931: A Study of Ethnic and Class Relations," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83, no. 2 (June 1993): 243-71; Florian Alatorre, "Les grèves de la Shmata, 1934-1937 : étude des contradictions de genres, d'ethnicités et de classes dans le mouvement ouvrier juif à Montréal." UQAM, 2018; and Rouillard, "Les Travailleurs Juifs."

²⁹ Lavigne and Stoddart, "Ouvrières et travailleuses," 110.

³⁰ This period is a storied one for the ILGWU and ACWA in Canada and in the US. For the history of the ACWA, see Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme*, 191-192; Johanne Duranceau, *L'évolution du syndicalisme dans la confection masculine montréalaise. Analyse d'un cas: « L'Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America », 1915-1936*, M.A. (histoire), UQAM, 1985, 228. For more on the ILGWU, see Evelyn Dumas, *Dans Le Sommeil de Nos Os. Quelques Grèves Au Québec de 1934 à 1944*, (Montréal: Leméac, 1971); Rouillard, "Les Travailleurs Juifs," 253.

³¹ Steedman, "Canada's New Deal," 2.

³² Ibid.

³³ The ILGWU's activities in the United States also reflected this spirit of cooperation with employers. See Ulrich, "Look for the Label," 49.

an industry, meaning that non-unionized workers also benefitted from the standards laid out in the collective agreement. Unions, whose tactics had up until that point been directly confrontational, began to favour more co-operative, industry-wide negotiations.³⁴ The existence of a decree set up a Joint Board, a secondary administrative body with representatives from employers, unions, and government that managed collective bargaining, dues, strike calls, and the administration of benefit funds.³⁵ The Arcand Act was highly popular: in just the first year of the legislation's existence, government officials had already negotiated 40 decrees. The law proved to be especially attractive among employers and unions in industries with a high degree of labour intensity, and where competition between firms was aggressive, such as the construction, printing, shoemaking, and clothing industries.³⁶

Although this intervention in the collective bargaining process was widely welcomed by union executives and employers alike, Mercedes Steedman has pointed out that the legislation had lasting structural consequences for gender relations in the garment industry in the province and across Canada.³⁷ Firstly, the decrees effectively codified in law what jobs were considered to be skilled and unskilled, and formalized wage differentials between men and women, where women on average made between 10 and 20% less than men working in the same positions.³⁸ These formal wage differentials were enshrined in the collective labour agreements, too.³⁹ In addition, from the earliest years of unionization, the union executive was dominated by male workers who came from the highest-paid segments of the workforce. The division between women workers, who were largely paid by the piece, and male workers, who worked on an hourly basis, was not only a gendered one, but it was also a classed difference. Even though much of the early union organizing had been carried out by women like Rose Pesotta and Lea Roback, their work was largely discredited within the union.⁴⁰ On this early moment in organizing women in the garment industry, prominent textile union organizer Madeleine Parent remarked that "as soon as the first contract was signed, women who thereafter fought to make the union responsive to members were witch-hunted out of the union."⁴¹ From the perspectives of the women who organized in the garment industry, the union was quickly losing any sense of militancy. This lack of confrontational strategy was not only reinforced through legislative mechanisms as Steedman points out, but also reflected the ILGWU's strategy at the time. Under the leadership of David Dubinsky, the ILGWU's president from 1933 to 1966, the union largely operated on the premise that "an efficient, healthy, and growing industry" was important for the

³⁴ Steedman, "Canada's New Deal," 10.

³⁵ Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada*, 210-211.

³⁶ Jacques Rouillard, "Genèse et mutation de la loi sur les décrets de convention collective au Québec (1934-2010)," *Labour / Le travail* 68 (Fall 2011): 16.

³⁷ Steedman, "Canada's New Deal," 2.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 7-8.

⁴⁰ Carla Lipsig-Mummé, "Organizing Women in the Clothing Trades: Homework and the 1983 Garment Strike in Canada," *Studies in Political Economy* 22 (1987): 57.

⁴¹ Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos, *Problems of Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Force*, (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1979), 15.

union's operation.⁴² By the 1960s, Dubinsky's strategy would be heavily criticized for creating an environment where the union was far too close to employers, and much too far away from its rank and file.⁴³ This approach, combined with the inclusion of state officials in the negotiation process, moved trade union activism even further from the shop floor, where women actually worked and had "at least a minimal political voice."⁴⁴ Here, Steedman elaborates on the lasting consequences of this early history of the garment industry, and how it effectively solidified women's marginal relationship to their unions:

"Women garment workers' dislocation from the collective bargaining process began in the early years of unionization, and it signified a specific relationship that women had to the public sphere of waged work. While this relationship may have altered over the decades, women's political disenfranchisement continued. The workplace culture continued to be masculine, which meant that women's work was measured against the work of their male co-workers, and that women would always come up short, considered less skilled, less committed to the workforce, and less militant as trade unionists."⁴⁵

Tellingly, in an analysis of the union executive officeholders between 1910 and 1987, at no point had a woman ever occupied the positions of president, secretary-treasurer, or executive secretary in the ILGWU.⁴⁶ This distance from the shop floor continued to shape union politics for the decades to come. Not only did this collective bargaining system and legislative landscape leave rank and file workers out of the negotiation process, but it also impacted the pathways deindustrialization took in the apparel manufacturing industry.

The intersections of trade liberalization, second wave feminism, and immigration

Between the postwar era and the early 1980s, profound economic and social shifts affected the realities of manufacturing work in Canada. After the periods of intense labour disputes and the legislation of the Arcand Act, by all accounts, labour relations were relatively stable in the garment industry in the immediate postwar era. It appeared that textile and garment manufacturers generally enjoyed the overall economic buoyancy of the decades following the Second World War: domestic demand for textiles quadrupled between 1949 and 1967, and the value of clothing output increased by 33 percent between 1949 and 1969.⁴⁷ However, despite these favourable conditions, the Canadian government began to pursue an increasingly liberal trade agenda, and the domestic apparel manufacturing industry saw increased competition from

⁴² Ulrich, "'Look for the Label'", 49–50.

⁴³ Ibid, 50.

⁴⁴ Steedman, "Canada's New Deal," 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 535.

⁴⁶ Lipsig-Mummé, "Organizing Women," 52.

⁴⁷ Rianne Mahon, *The Politics of Industrial Restructuring: Canadian Textiles*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 46-51.

imported goods as early as the 1950s.⁴⁸ But it wasn't until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the global textile industry underwent a profound shift, and its effects were especially felt in the global clothing market. In the first half of the 1970s, exports of textiles from low-wage sources increased by 133%, whereas exports of clothing from those same low-wage sources increased by a staggering 311%.⁴⁹ In response, in 1971, the Canadian government legislated its first trade policy on textiles. In her study on restructuring in the Canadian textile industry, Rianne Mahon argues that the Canadian state pursued trade liberalization and prioritized the future of its staples exports over protecting its domestic manufacturers. In particular, the textile and clothing industries were deemed to be marginal to the national economy, and the result of the textile policy negotiations reflected this reality.⁵⁰ In an effort to intervene directly in the process of deindustrialization, the 1971 Textile Policy legislated a progressive trade liberalization strategy that gave domestic producers "breathing room" to adjust to the impending realities of global free trade.⁵¹ In practice, this breathing period was effectively an ultimatum: either modernize and improve efficiencies, or close up shop.

As part of their restructuring program, the Canadian state offered relatively substantial financial support to textile producers and clothing manufacturers to invest in new equipment to keep up with import competition. In this sense, trade liberalization was combined with a direct incentive for massive investment in automation and technological change. As a result, the Canadian textile policy took a double-edged sword to apparel manufacturing employment: if a manufacturer didn't close, their investments in labour-saving technologies ultimately also led to lay-offs. In the first half of the 20th century, employment in the garment industry accounted for one in every four manufacturing jobs in Montreal.⁵² Although Canadian cities like Toronto and Winnipeg were also home to a sizeable garment industry, by the late 1970s, approximately 70% of employment in the garment industry in Canada was concentrated in Montreal.⁵³ In 1976, approximately 94,500 montrealers worked in labour intensive sectors, and this number plummeted to 54,600 in 1996.⁵⁴ This decline in employment was primarily attributed to the decline of textiles and apparel industries in Montreal, which represented 27,000 job losses in that

⁴⁸ Ibid, 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 97.

⁵⁰ Even within the negotiations for the Canadian textile policies of the 1970s, the textile and clothing industries were primarily represented by the textile industry's highly consolidated capital. Although clothing manufacturers' associations were included within the trade negotiation apparatus, they wielded very little influence, primarily due to the highly fractured nature of the garment industry. And, perhaps most importantly, organized labour had little to no say within these trade negotiation processes, neither on the textile side nor on the clothing side. As a result, there was no working-class representation at the decision-making levels of the Canadian government. See Mahon, 32-38.

⁵¹ Ibid, 95.

⁵² G.P.F. Steed, "Locational Factors and Dynamics of Montreal's Large Garment Complex," *Tijdschrift voor Econ. en Soc. Geografie* 67(3), (1976): 151-168.

⁵³ Arnopoulos, *Problems of Immigrant Women*, 7.

⁵⁴ Tara Vinodrai, "A Tale of Three Cities: The Dynamics of Manufacturing in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, 1976-1997," Micro-Economic Analysis Division, Statistics Canada, November 2001. 12.

period.⁵⁵ Between 1953 and 1980, the total number of manufacturing jobs the Canadian women and children's clothing industry declined by 29%.⁵⁶ This steady decline turned into an outright free-fall in the years immediately before the strike, when between 1981 and 1982, 18,000 jobs were lost,⁵⁷ and an estimated 150 shops closed.⁵⁸ Compared to other Canadian cities, Montreal was particularly hard-hit by deindustrialization, primarily due to the high concentration of "labour-intensive" industries like clothing, textiles, and electrical manufacturing.

At the same time as trade liberalization slashed employment in Montreal's highly feminized labour-intensive industries, the women's movement in Canada and Quebec also shaped developments in manufacturing. In Quebec, the provincial government formed the Conseil du statut de la femme in 1973, leftist feminist magazines like *La Vie en rose* sprung up, and the industrial unions and their federations began forming their own women's committees. Whereas first-wave feminism in Canada was explicitly oriented toward the interests of upper-class white Christian women, second wave feminism attempted to cast a much wider net to represent the interests of all women by advocating for a set of demands around the shared condition of womanhood.⁵⁹ In union circles, feminism at this time largely focused on eliminating gendered wage gaps enshrined in collective agreements, advocating for paid maternity leave, and increased access to abortion rights.⁶⁰ The histories of the garment industry and the feminist movement intersected frequently at this time, with women's organizations and publications frequently attempting to draw attention to the poor working conditions in the industry and to the failures of the garment unions to protect their workers.⁶¹ Most importantly, as I will show in Chapter 1, women organizing against deindustrialization drew heavily on these feminist politics to advocate against closures and to improve their jobs.

Yet, the feminism of the 1970s and 1980s had some serious limitations for the industry's largely immigrant workforce. As Nora Loretto argues in *Take Back the Fight*, second wave feminism tried to represent all women but ultimately couldn't: women who experienced interlocking oppressions along the lines of race, class, and immigration status were never front and centre; and it was largely white women in the middle and upper classes who benefitted.⁶² Importantly, the uneven gains of the women's movement shaped the changing occupational structure in Canada. While the proportion of women in the labour force increased dramatically,

⁵⁵ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁶ See "Women and Children's Clothing Industries", Annual Census of Manufactures, (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1995), CS34-252-1995, xv.

⁵⁷ Lily Tasso, "Pour sauver leurs emplois: Les travailleurs du vêtement manifestent contre les importations et le travail à domicile" *La Presse*, Montréal: October 9, 1982.

⁵⁸ Lipsig-Mummé, "Organizing Women," 47.

⁵⁹ Nora Loretto, *Take Back the Fight: Organizing Feminism for the Digital Age*, (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2020), 27-28.

⁶⁰ Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*, (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2005), 52.

⁶¹ In Quebec, the Ligue des femmes du Québec published a report titled "De fil en Aiguille," October 1980. Personal papers of Fatima Rocchia.

⁶² Loretto, 27-28.

the types of jobs that women could access was highly variable based on factors such as ethnicity, citizenship status, race, and class. At the same time as Canadian-born women were able to move into higher-paid white-collar work, immigrant women largely took up work in the lower-paid manufacturing sectors.⁶³ This labour market structure was also produced and reinforced by developments in Canadian immigration policy. Canada's various immigration programs have always been designed to direct certain kinds of demographic growth and to meet labour market needs.⁶⁴ However, with the introduction of the points-based immigration system in 1967, women immigrating to Canada most commonly arrived as their husbands' "dependents" and did not have access to language or job training, which further affected the types of jobs immigrant women could access.⁶⁵ In a report to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos explained that immigrant women were highly over-represented in the lowest paid sectors of the Canadian economy, occupying what she describes as "the bottom rung of the 'vertical mosaic'."⁶⁶ Most highly represented in the clothing industry, and who will form the major focus of this study, were women from Southern Europe.⁶⁷ The manufacturing sector was one of the largest employers of European immigrant women in Canada, and in 1961 almost 57 per cent of the more than 32,000 Italian women workers in Canada were in manufacturing, most of them in the clothing industry.⁶⁸ As I've shown in the previous section, from a structural perspective, the garment industry and the institutions that were intended to protect workers were slowly eroding. By 1986, 94% of sewing machine operators were born outside of Canada.⁶⁹ As the garment industry was beginning to deindustrialize, it was largely these immigrant women who were the first to be laid off from their industrial jobs.

Toward a feminist deindustrialization studies

⁶³ Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 92-93.

⁶⁴ Canadian immigration policy, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, was animated by racial exclusion on the one hand, and violent processes of settler colonialism on the other. See Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Roxana Ng, "Racism, Sexism, and Immigrant Women," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, edited by Sandra D. Burt, Lorraine Code, and Lindsay Dorney, 2nd Edition., (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 281.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 288.

⁶⁶ Arnopoulos, *Problems of Immigrant Women*, 3.

⁶⁷ All the production workers whose stories appear in the following pages were born in Southern Europe (specifically Southern Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and moved to Montreal in their teens or early twenties. Their differences from non-immigrant Montrealers were largely constructed along the lines of language and ethnicity. I therefore don't deal directly with the concept of race here, although immigrants from Southern Europe have a complex and historically contingent relationship to whiteness that I unfortunately can't explore in much detail here.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 93.

⁶⁹ Roxana Ng, "Restructuring Gender, Race, and Class Relations: The Case of Garment Workers and Labour Adjustment," in *Restructuring Caring Labour: Discourse, State Practice, and Everyday Life*, edited by Sheila Neysmith, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2000), 228.

The developments of the women's movement, global trade liberalization and shifts in the Canadian immigration system through the postwar years to the 1980s formed a distinct backdrop for the gradual deindustrialization of the apparel manufacturing industry in Montreal. In many ways, this history proposes a rather different image of the stereotypical industrial worker. By and large, the field of deindustrialization studies has tended to focus on factory, mill, and mine closures in the traditional heartlands of heavy industry. As a result, the field's dominant gendered analyses have primarily interrogated the impact of industrial closures on working-class masculinities.⁷⁰ Although this work provides important insights on some of the fallouts of deindustrialization in regions hard-hit by closures, centering the male breadwinner largely reproduces what Alice Kessler-Harris has described as "the central paradigm of labour history, namely that the male-centered workplace is the locus from which the identity, behaviour, social relations and consciousness of working people ultimately emanates."⁷¹ Kessler-Harris thus calls on historians to problematize the masculine in our understanding of class.

Along these lines, there are a number of studies on deindustrialization that move toward destabilizing the male breadwinner in our conception of the industrial worker. Jefferson Cowie's *Capital Moves* is one of the more complete studies on the dynamics of deindustrialization for women working in gendered manufacturing sectors. He highlights some of the most pervasive characteristics of women's industrial work, namely, gendered wage discrimination, conceptions of women being "naturally suited" to perform certain tasks, and a resulting division of labour that constructs women's work in industrial manufacturing as less skilled than men's work.⁷² Crucially, Cowie argues that "women, whether at the shrinking center or growing periphery of industrial production, have borne the brunt of the process of restructuring both past and present."⁷³ Jackie Clarke's work on Moulinex, the French domestic appliance manufacturer, has shown that women's industrial work has largely been overshadowed by the grand narratives of

⁷⁰ See Valerie Walkerdine and Luis Jimenez, *Gender, Work and Community After De-Industrialisation: A Psychosocial Approach to Affect*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012); and Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

⁷¹ Alice Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as 'Other': Redefining the Parameters of Labor History," *Labor History* 34, no. 2-3 (June 1, 1993): 195. It is important to note, however, that even within studies of these traditionally masculine industries, important scholarship has examined the work of women, families, and queer people in supporting movements against closures, perhaps most notably in recent work on UK coal mining. See Diarmaid Kelliher, "Solidarity and Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners 1984-5," *History Workshop Journal* 77, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 240-62; Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, "National Women Against Pit Closures: Gender, Trade Unionism and Community Activism in the Miners' Strike, 1984-5," *Contemporary British History* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 78-100.

⁷² Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*, (New York: New Press, 2001), 17-18.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 5.

deindustrialization that have centred heavy industry, effectively rendering women's industrial work invisible, marginalized, and disqualified in political discourse on industrial closure.⁷⁴

There is also a small but insightful body of research on deindustrialization in the historically feminized clothing and textile industries. Case studies of the former textile towns of Scotland are particularly well-represented in the field.⁷⁵ Andy Clark's work on the Lee Jeans factory occupation in Greenock probes the complexities of women's resistance to deindustrialization, and the difficult relationships that working-class women often had with their unions. The themes explored by Clark's and others' work are deeply resonant with the ones I explore in Chapter 1 of this study, suggesting that the insights gained in these individual case studies point to broader structuring dynamics of gendered deindustrialization in the clothing industry. Other work on the textile and garment industries focuses on the global politics of deindustrialization, and how industrial decline signalled an overall erosion in working conditions as well as a broader shift in the global division of labour. In her book on deindustrialization in the Yugoslav textile sector, Chiara Bonfiglioli crucially points out that in the context of the global "race to the bottom" that accompanied free trade in textiles and clothing, industrial decline went hand-in-hand with labour intensification and worsening labour conditions in existing factories.⁷⁶ As a result, the effect of global economic changes including trade liberalization and globalization simultaneously facilitated offshore relocation and hindered the ability of North American garment workers to demand fair pay and good working conditions.⁷⁷ The stories of deindustrialization in domestic apparel manufacturing are thus also tied to industrialization outside the traditional "heartlands" of industry in advanced capitalist economies, signalling a broader trend toward labour segmentation between the Global North and the Global South.

It is thus also crucial to understand deindustrialization within the broader history of capitalism. Xavier Daumalin and Philippe Mioche have emphasized that taking a *longue durée* approach to the waves of closures in the 1970s and 80s means putting them in the context of a historically volatile capitalist system.⁷⁸ Globalization and deindustrialization can often appear, as Judith Collins puts it, "faceless and inevitable, a vast, abstract process that few of us understand

⁷⁴ Jackie Clarke, "Closing Moulinex: Thoughts on the Visibility and Invisibility of Industrial Labour in Contemporary France," *Modern & Contemporary France* 19, no. 4 (November 1, 2011): 446.

⁷⁵ See Margaret Robertson and Andy Clark, "'We Were the Ones Really Doing Something About It': Gender and Mobilisation against Factory Closure," *Work, Employment and Society* 33, no. 2 (April 2019): 336–44; Andy Clark, "'And the next Thing, the Chairs Barricaded the Door': The Lee Jeans Factory Occupation, Trade Unionism and Gender in Scotland in the 1980s," *Scottish Labour History* 48 (2013): 116–35. William Burns, "'We Just Thought We Were Superhuman': An Oral History of Noise and Piecework in Paisley's Thread Mills," *Labour History*, no. 119 (November 2020): 173–96; and Rory Stride, "Women, Work and Deindustrialisation: The case of James Templeton & Company, Glasgow, c.1960-1981," *Scottish Labour History*, vol. 54, (2019): 154-180.

⁷⁶ Chiara Bonfiglioli, *Women and Industry in the Balkans: The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Textile Sector*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 6.

⁷⁷ See Jane L. Collins, *Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁷⁸ Xavier Daumalin and Philippe Mioche, "La désindustrialisation au regard de l'histoire. Introduction." *Rives méditerranéennes*, no. 46 (October 15, 2013): 7.

and none of us control.”⁷⁹ However, recent literature has powerfully argued that the effects of deindustrialization are anything but that.⁸⁰ As Steven High argues, factory closures and relocations are not just part of the inevitable march of capitalism, they are “willful acts of violence perpetrated against working people.”⁸¹ Recent scholarship on deindustrialization has also mobilized Rob Nixon’s concept of “slow violence”, a type of “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, and attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”⁸² The slow violence of deindustrialization is often normalized as part of the status quo, but has lasting impacts on individuals, families, and communities as a whole.⁸³ Widespread closures of industrial workplaces have not only meant job losses for working-class people, but they have also meant the loss of unionized, well-paid jobs that supported families and communities.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the violences of capitalism are experienced at the multitude of intersecting identities that make up what Harsha Walia terms the “co-constituents of class formation.”⁸⁵ In a published reflection on her time as the chairperson of a labour adjustment committee on the garment sector in Toronto, Roxana Ng describes the effects of deindustrialization on the largely immigrant workforce, noting that “people’s experiences of work restructuring and globalization are *always* differentiated on the basis of gender, race, ability, and so forth.”⁸⁶ This, she argues, “*is* the process of class formation in late capitalism.”⁸⁷ Organizers working directly with immigrant women workers, like Roxana Ng, had a clear-eyed sense of the effects of globalization on the new paradigms of global class formation, arguing that immigrant women workers “are both essential to and disposable in a capitalist system.”⁸⁸

It is also important to note that waged work is not the only form of labour that capitalism subsumes. Importantly, Michael Denning insists that “we decentre wage labour in our conception

⁷⁹ Collins, xi.

⁸⁰ See Alice Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

⁸¹ Steven High, “Beyond Aesthetics: Visibility and Invisibility in the Aftermath of Deindustrialization,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 84 (2013): 141.

⁸² Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor*, (Cambridge: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 2.

⁸³ See Robert Storey, “‘By the Numbers’: Workers’ Compensation and the (further) Conventionalization of Workplace Violence,” in Jeremy Milloy and Joan Sangster (eds.), *The Violence of Work: New Essays in Canadian and US Labour History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 160-183; Steven High, “The ‘Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power’: Recognizing the Structural Violence of Deindustrialization as Loss,” *Urban History Review* 48, 2 (Spring 2021): 97-116.

⁸⁴ Christine Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 7.

⁸⁵ Harsha Walia, *Border & Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*, (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2021), 10.

⁸⁶ Roxana Ng, “Restructuring Gender, Race, and Class Relations: The Case of Garment Workers and Labour Adjustment,” in *Restructuring Caring Labour: Discourse, State Practice, and Everyday Life*, edited by Sheila Neysmith, (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2000), 227.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 235.

of life under capitalism.”⁸⁹ As social reproduction feminists like Susan Ferguson have argued for decades, we need to direct our attention to the interaction between unpaid and paid labour, and understand them as “different-but-equally-essential parts of the same overall (capitalist) system”:

“That is, capitalism develops only by trapping and distilling the generalized capacity of humans to labour. But it does so not simply — or even primarily — by feeding off the productive potential of waged labourers. It does so equally by reorganizing and devaluing all peoples’ life-making activities, most of which have been the tasks assigned to women.”⁹⁰

This interaction between the worlds of paid and unpaid work forms one of the central themes of this study. As will become evident, women who worked in the deindustrializing garment industry also understood their experiences within the context of their roles as wives, mothers and women too, who also had a whole other world of work to attend to in the home and in their communities. Women who were left disabled by decades of work at sewing machines also attributed their long-term disabilities to the difficulties of balancing the intensification of their industrial work with the unpaid labour they were expected to perform within their households. And, even within the workplace, women’s organizing against deindustrialization took their unpaid work into account, explicitly placing gendered concerns such as child care at the core of their demands.⁹¹ As Roxana Ng has shown, women’s decision-making about their paid employment is organized around their family and household responsibilities, meaning that “restructuring affects *all* dimensions of women’s lives, not just their paid work.”⁹² Taking this more expansive view of the meaning of work, we can move toward understanding the more specific and concrete ways that deindustrialization affects women. As I have shown, gender not only shapes women’s experiences of waged industrial work, but also the interaction between deindustrialization, the gendered structures of that industrial work, and their unwaged work within the home.

In sum, this thesis aims not only to write women’s experiences into the history of industrial closures, but above all, to argue that looking through a feminist lens can tell us something *fundamentally different* about deindustrialization. First, many types of industrial labour are gendered: work at a sewing machine has been constructed as a natural extension of women’s work within the home, and the division of labour within the production process constructs men’s jobs as skilled, and women’s jobs as unskilled. Sewing machine operators, positions almost exclusively occupied by women, were the first to be subcontracted out of a downsizing shop. By historicizing the gendered structure of industrial production, we get a sense of the unique pathways that deindustrialization took. Secondly, I want to bring the theoretical tools of social reproduction and intersectionality feminism into direct conversation with the

⁸⁹ Michael Denning, “Wageless Life,” in *Global Histories of Work*, (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 274.

⁹⁰ Susan Ferguson, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction*, (London: Pluto Press, 2020), 2-3.

⁹¹ See chapter 1. These demands were clearly articulated in one of the central primary sources I use to study women’s organizing in the garment industry, the *Dossier noir sur l’UIOVD*.

⁹² Ng, “Restructuring Gender, Race, and Class Relations,” 227.

insights of deindustrialization studies to understand how the slow violence of deindustrialization intersected with and amplified women's experiences of class, gender, ethnicity, and immigration status. This means taking regimes of paid and unpaid labour together and probing the interactions between them. It also means problematizing notions of "skilled" and "unskilled" work, and recognizing that women's industrial work is historically constructed as secondary to men's labour. There is nothing inherently unskilled about working at a sewing machine, rather, this work is actively devalued the lines of race, class, and gender. Lastly, processes of deindustrialization also coincided with broader developments in women's and gender history, including the women's movement of the 1970s and 80s. The momentum behind these movements shaped women's resistance to plant closures, but it also determined the bounds of who did what kind of work. Taken together, these insights paint a more complicated and complete picture of industrial work beyond the paradigmatic male worker.

On sources, methods, and place

In the field of deindustrialization studies and in labour history more broadly, oral history has proven to be an important methodological touchstone in the broader political project of centering the experiences of working people. Feminist traditions of oral history also emphasize that interviewing is not simply about collecting the stories of others, it is also about allowing those stories to shape the research agenda.⁹³ In this sense, the oral history interviews I conducted and drew upon for this study have largely directed the themes of this thesis, most strongly when it came to themes around the burdens of unpaid work within the home. However, the experience of interviewing working-class, and specifically immigrant women, came with its own set of challenges. One such challenge was recruitment itself — I found that my open calls for participation went consistently unanswered, and I relied heavily on direct outreach and my existing networks to recruit participants who were always reluctant to do an interview. In some cases, I was able to interview only because of several months of grandchildren (mostly friends or acquaintances of mine) convincing their *grandmamans* and *nonas* to accept the invitation for an interview. For this, I am indebted not only to the women who hosted me in their homes and agreed to speak with me, but also to the work that their grandkids put into making a meeting happen in the first place.

Another challenge with interviewing working-class women of varying backgrounds is that they were often reluctant to discuss the details of the closures of their workplaces. Accordingly, some interviewees wished to be anonymous, and chose pseudonyms for their interviews. Whether this represented an unwillingness to gossip or a fear of retribution despite more than 30 years of retirement, it is telling of the gendered order of industrial sewing. The tension between the challenges and the possibilities I faced as an interviewer and researcher were constantly palpable.

⁹³ Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 1 (March 1994): 6.

On the one hand, I was extremely keen to not only interview and learn from their experiences, but also to populate the archive with working-class women's experiences of deindustrialization. Importantly, though, Sangster cautions that:

“we need to avoid the tendency, still evident in historical works, of treating oral history only as a panacea designed to fill in the blanks in women's or traditional history, providing ‘more’ history, compensating where we have no other sources, or ‘better’ history, a ‘purer’ version of the past coming, unadulterated, from the very people who experienced it. The latter approach erroneously presents oral histories as essentially unmediated, ignoring the process by which the researcher and the informant create the source together.”⁹⁴

Since the interview is always co-created, we must also acknowledge that the interview space is highly imperfect, especially in my case of interviewing across generation, language, ethnicity, and class.⁹⁵ For me, learning to read these stories and attempting to do justice to complex lives meant listening across difference.⁹⁶ There were several moments in interviews where my own differences were put into relief — for example, misunderstandings through language barriers, or even my own sometimes narrow conception of what does and doesn't count as labour history — and I've tried to make these moments visible in this thesis. Additional challenges also come about in the interpretation of life stories. I am acutely aware that in the case of a few of the discussants featured in the chapters that follow, my feminist interpretations of their experiences would very directly contradict their own understandings of their lives.⁹⁷ I conducted the oral history interviews in French and in English. Interviews in French appear in-text in their original French, and English translations are available in the footnotes.⁹⁸

Of course, this thesis also relies on archival research. For a variety of reasons, the archival landscape of Montreal's garment industry is highly fragmented across institutions, time frames, and geography. Newspaper articles were key to crafting the historical narrative of the 1983

⁹⁴ Ibid, 7.

⁹⁵ As Katrina Srigley, Stacey Zembrzycki and Franca Iacovetta have pointed out, more recent feminist oral history scholarship has reminded us that there are dangers in “assuming the commonalities of gender over the differences forged by class, race, age, Indigeneity versus settler status, ability/disability, and other social categories”. These factors also shape the power dynamics of an interview, as well as the production of knowledge more generally. Katrina Srigley, Stacey Zembrzycki, and Franca Iacovetta, eds.

“Introduction,” in *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 8.

⁹⁶ As Steven High writes, listening across difference is “a unique learning landscape” that “represents a not-so-subtle shift from leaning *about* to learning *with*.” Steven High, “Listening Across Difference: Oral History as Learning Landscape,” *LEARNIng Landscapes* 11, no. 2 (July 4, 2018): 39-40.

⁹⁷ See Sangster, “Telling Our Stories,” 11. See also Katherine Borland, “‘That’s not what I said’: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 63—75.

⁹⁸ Although this ensures that the interviews are accessible for anglophone readers, I am also acutely aware of the politics that this thesis is written in English, and many of the discussants will not be able to read its contents.

ILGWU strike outlined in Chapter 1. I also conducted research in a number of Montreal archives, including the Centre d'histoire et archives du travail (CHAT), who hold part of the archives of the ILGWU, and who also importantly put me in touch with former ILGWU executives for interviews. Much of the primary research is rooted in French-language sources, which included mainstream newspapers, as well as left-wing publications. The union literature was often also published in multiple languages, including English, French, and Italian. The archive of textile labour organizer Madeleine Parent at the McGill University Archives & Special Collections was also highly influential for me, and it was where I first saw a copy of the *Dossier Noir sur l'UIOVD*, one of the more crucial primary texts to this study. In Madeleine Parent's archive, the lineages of women's organizing in Montreal were apparent, and contained countless references to labour and social struggles outside of her own work. I also found these lineages of activism in oral history interviews with the labour organizers featured in this story, who drew on the support of older generations of organizers to develop their strategies of resistance.

This thesis also builds on the work of earlier scholars and activists who were deeply attentive to the issues facing women working in the garment industry during its deindustrialization, like Roxana Ng, Laura Johnson, and Carla Lipsig-Mummé.⁹⁹ Although the language of deindustrialization hadn't yet entered into mainstream public and scholarly discourse, as socially engaged scholars working in the 1980s and 1990s, their analyses were grounded in the contemporary experiences of deindustrialization, and many of the themes I cover here follow directly from their pathbreaking work.¹⁰⁰ Collaboration also proved to be essential to this project. As graduate students, we rarely get the chance to actively collaborate with other students on our projects. In fact, we're often discouraged from sharing sources and research with others and keep our archival materials closely guarded. However, in this project I found a true collaborator in Leona Siaw, who was working on a graphic novel on the 1983 strike and the garment industry at the time.¹⁰¹ Through her work, Leona met Fatima Rocchia, a rank and file organizer in the ILGWU who co-founded the CATV. Leona interviewed Fatima and obtained a

⁹⁹ See Ng, "Racism, Sexism, and Immigrant Women"; Ng, "Restructuring Gender, Race, and Class Relations"; Roxana Ng, "Work Restructuring and Recolonizing Third World Women: An Example from the Garment Industry in Toronto," *Canadian Woman Studies* 18, no. 1 (1998): 21–25; Roxana Ng, "Homeworking: Dream Realized, or Freedom Constrained? The Globalized Reality of Immigrant Garment Workers," *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1999), 110–114; Laura Johnson, *The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada*, (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982); Carla Lipsig-Mummé, "Canadian and American Unions Respond to Economic Crisis," *Journal of Industrial Relations* 31, no. 2 (June 1, 1989): 229–56; Lipsig-Mummé, "Organizing Women"; Carla Lipsig-Mummé, "The Renaissance of Homeworking in Developed Economies," *Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations* 38, no. 3 (1983): 545–67.

¹⁰⁰ Katrina Srigley, Stacey Zembrzycki, and Franca Iacovetta very poignantly argue for the political importance of acknowledging and valuing earlier scholarship. They point out that the requirement for academic programs to produce original work "has engendered training methods that can encourage a culture of discounting or forgetting elders... One result is frequent dismissal of, or disregard for, the work of earlier scholars." Srigley, Zembrzycki, and Iacovetta, "Introduction," 7.

¹⁰¹ See Leona Siaw, *Seam Stress: Garment Work and Gendered Labour Struggle in 1980s Montreal*, Masters thesis, Concordia University, 2020.

grocery bag full of documents from Fatima's CATV organizing days. In the spirit of reciprocity, I shared some of my interviews with Leona and translated some of the archive into English. Leona's interview with Fatima and the access to her personal archive proved to be essential for my own research on the compelling story of the CATV and the 1983 garment strike, and features prominently in Chapter 1.

With this study, I am particularly interested in what Doreen Massey terms the "global production of the local".¹⁰² Although I discuss workplaces located in a handful of different Montreal neighbourhoods, the bulk of the story takes place in the Chabanel industrial area. Built in the early 1960s, this large industrial complex is composed of massive manufacturing buildings that together occupy more than 10 million square feet on a plot of land just north of Montreal's Metropolitan highway in Ahuntsic-Cartierville.¹⁰³ Its mammoth size is representative of just how important the garment industry was to Montreal's economy, and how the postwar boom and shifts in transportation networks increased demand for manufacturing space outside the city's historic industrial areas.¹⁰⁴ Although manufacturers who moved into the Chabanel area enjoyed a short period of economic buoyancy, the Canadian government began to legislate progressive trade liberalization in the 1970s, and the effects of increasing imports began to take their toll. The forces behind deindustrialization may have operated at a global scale, but they were deeply felt and bitterly resisted at a local level. Chapter 1 hones in on the early 1980s as a tipping point for the garment industry in Montreal, when the recession precipitated a flurry of closures. These closures occurred against the backdrop of a profound crisis in the industry's institutions, and rank and file workers organized against job loss and for improvements to their working conditions. Tensions culminated in a strike in 1983, where strikers made very few gains. Through oral history interviews with rank and file organizers, union officials, and employers, I show that deindustrialization was entangled with the gendered structure of labour relations in the garment industry in Quebec, and that organizers against deindustrialization drew on the women's movement to articulate their grievances. Chapter 2 takes a longer view, following the life stories of two immigrant Italian garment workers, and traces the impacts of labour intensification on their long-term health throughout the industry's gradual decline. Through a deep listening of their life stories, I consider the interaction between their paid work as sewing machine operators and their unpaid work within their households.

¹⁰² Doreen Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," *History Workshop Journal* 39, (1995): 190.

¹⁰³ Given the geographical bounds of this study, it is also important to consider how life and work in Canada is structured by the entangled histories of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and racial ordering. Recent work in Canadian labour history has begun to move toward a more integrative understanding of working-class labour histories and the structuring logics of settler colonialism. See Fred Burrill, "The Settler Order Framework: Rethinking Canadian Working-Class History," *Labour / Le Travail* 83 (Spring 2019): 176-177. David Camfield, "Settler Colonialism and Labour Studies in Canada: A Preliminary Exploration," *Labour / Le Travail* 83 (Spring 2019): 166.

¹⁰⁴ For a complete picture of industrial geography in Montreal, see Robert D. Lewis, *Manufacturing Montreal: The Making of an Industrial Landscape, 1850 to 1930*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

I conclude by reflecting on the continuities and discontinuities of decline in the gendered garment industry. The chasm of trade liberalization left countless workers unemployed, factories empty, and an entire section of the Canadian economy in a marginal position. Closures in the garment industry and other manufacturing sectors represented a fundamental rupture in working-class life, where workers saw a critical decline in the power of their unions and in their overall working conditions. Further compounding the dislocations of deindustrialization, the new workplaces of the “knowledge economy” moved into the former factories where workers had built lives and careers. However, these “postindustrial” transitions are never smooth, even, or complete. The problems afflicting the Canadian garment industry largely foreshadowed the postindustrial employment structure, which continues to be highly unequal, with immigrant women over-represented in the lowest-paid segments of the Canadian workforce.

CHAPTER 1

“La grève de la fierté”: Women’s resistance to deindustrialization in Montreal’s garment industry

On August 15, 1983, 9,500 workers from the Montreal locals of the American-based International Ladies Garment Workers Union went on strike for the first time in 43 years. They hit the streets of the industrial area of Chabanel, home to Quebec’s apparel manufacturing industry, in protest to a proposed collective agreement where workers would see wage rollbacks and a reduction in paid holidays.¹⁰⁵ The overwhelming majority of the strikers were women, largely immigrant and elderly sewing machine operators. Women on the picket lines felt that it was not only their livelihoods that were being threatened, but also their pride and their worth as workers who, for many of them, had spent most of their working lives in the industry. The strike became known as “la grève de la fierté”, and it garnered support from major feminist organizations such as the Conseil du statut de la femme, which officially stated its “unconditional support” for the strikers.¹⁰⁶ Eight days after it began, union leadership ended the strike. The only major victory was in securing a wage freeze rather than the dramatic 20% wage rollback that the manufacturers association was proposing.

The conditions that led to the strike, and the efforts behind its organizing were several years in the making and represented a boiling over of tensions as the pace of factory closures increased in the early 80s. Once having accounted for 1 in 4 manufacturing jobs in Quebec,¹⁰⁷ between 1981 and 1982, 18,000 jobs were lost,¹⁰⁸ and an estimated 150 shops closed.¹⁰⁹ However, trade-induced deindustrialization was entangled with the gendered structure of labour relations in the garment industry in Quebec. At the same time, the eroded and ineffective institutions were unable to exert any real pressure on government or industry. Organized labour, too, was facing its own crisis of confidence from both the public and from its membership, as it largely failed to adapt to the growing threat of deindustrialization. As a result, the story of the 1983 garment workers strike in Montreal shows that resisting deindustrialization and the steep decline in working conditions was largely left to the rank and file. Women organized their own resistance movements within the existing structures of organized labour, and were consistently undermined by union officials and employers alike. Even though the 1983 strike was largely unsuccessful in securing any major improvements in working conditions or increases in wages, crucially, workers put forward a series of demands to improve their health and safety conditions.

¹⁰⁵ Lipsig-Mummé, “Organizing Women,” 42.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 41.

¹⁰⁷ G.P.F. Steed, “Locational Factors and Dynamics of Montreal’s Large Garment Complex, *Tijdschrift vooe Econ. en Soc. Geografie* 32 (1976) 151-168.

¹⁰⁸ Lily Tasso, “Pour sauver leurs emplois: Les travailleurs du vêtement manifestent contre les importations et le travail à domicile,” *La Presse*, Montreal: October 9, 1982.

¹⁰⁹ Lipsig-Mummé, “Organizing Women,” 47.

This chapter relies heavily on oral history testimonies from four individuals from radically different locations in the overall history of the garment industry. We first hear from Randy and Glen Rotchin, two brothers whose father and grandfather owned garment manufacturing companies that closed in the 1980s. Their interviews give us insight into the decisions that employers made in the face of trade liberalization. At the other end of the spectrum, I also draw on an interview with Fatima Rocchia, who was an organizer and founding member of the Comité d'action des travailleurs du vêtement. She grew up in Portugal, and worked in the garment industry in the 1970s and 1980s when she was in her twenties. She was the shop steward for the sewing machine operators at Sample Dress, incidentally the company that Glen and Randy's grandfather owned, and, after being "let go" from that job, she was embroiled in a bitter legal battle with Sample Dress and the Union, which left her effectively blacklisted from work in the industry. Lastly, we hear from Jesus Falcon, who worked in the garment industry as a cutter, and eventually moved on to take the Vice-Presidency of the ILGWU in 1980. Jesus immigrated to Montreal in his teens from Spain, and carried with him a strong set of leftist politics that shaped his perspective on union organizing. Taken together, these interviews provide insights on the decline of the garment industry in Montreal from a wide variety of perspectives and positions.

From a historiographical perspective, this chapter also builds on the work of Carla Lipsig-Mummé, who wrote an article about the 1983 strike just a few years after in 1987 for the journal *Studies in Political Economy*.¹¹⁰ Lipsig-Mummé argues that the strike was primarily in response to the union's inability to curtail the resurgence of homeworking in the industry. At the time that she wrote the article, the industry's decline was very much still unfolding, and there was still hope that articulating an effective feminist response could slow the hemorrhaging of unionized jobs, and even bring unionization levels back up to their postwar levels. This chapter revisits the same event almost 40 years later, and reassesses some of Lipsig-Mummé's initial observations by placing them in the context of widespread industrial restructuring and deindustrialization across North America.

Progressive trade liberalization and "business decisions"

By the mid 1970s, the garment industry was in a highly precarious state. Trade liberalization meant that the economic forecast for domestic apparel manufacturing was not looking good. Reductions in tariffs effectively opened up the already highly competitive garment industry to even more competition, which exacerbated many of the existing structural problems in the industry. Carla Jane Dress and later A&R Dress are two companies whose closures are highly illustrative of the ways that global economic forces and domestic factors collided. Carla Jane Dress, like the majority of garment manufacturers and subcontractors, were private label manufacturers who made clothes for brands that were proprietary to retailers. Randy Rotchin, the

¹¹⁰ See Lipsig-Mummé, "Organizing Women," 41-71.

son of the owner of Carla Jane who managed the production operations at the plant, explains what this meant for Carla Jane Dress:

Essentially, each of their [Carla Jane's] clients, let's say it was a national retailer like Sears, would have its own label and they would produce garments that would all go under the Sears label. So it gave the retailer much more control over their own brand, that way they weren't selling some other brand. And the feeling was that by dealing with large companies in this manner it would become much more efficient, they could concentrate all their efforts from a sales and marketing point of view on a much smaller target.¹¹¹

Manufacturers were at the whim of the buying offices of these department stores and retailers like Sears, Reitman's, Eaton's, and Zellers. Glen further explains how private labeling encouraged intense competition between manufacturers:

The retailers owned the name, so they realize that they really held the leverage over their client. They said 'I don't need you to manufacture it, I can have him manufacture it. I could have anybody. And I can make you all compete against each other. Who's gonna manufacture this garment for less money.' And so the industry was all fighting against each other. That's kind of what happened.¹¹²

The highly competitive landscape of apparel manufacturing is one of the defining features of the industry.¹¹³ Randy described the manufacturers' main concern as keeping costs as low as possible: "The garment industry is funny in a way, if you don't have a brand or label, you really don't control your selling price. In a way it's a race to the bottom as far as price is concerned, so you're always watching your costs."¹¹⁴ One way that manufacturers controlled price was in their fabric inputs. Randy explained that Carla Jane and other manufacturers relied heavily on the domestic textile industry to keep their costs low. However, as the domestic textile industry also deindustrialized, it became increasingly expensive and time consuming to access their primary inputs:

There was a time where you could buy all of your fabric from domestic textile mills, and that was already disappearing. At that point, you needed to import fabric. The advantage of being able to purchase fabric domestically as you need it and cut it and ship it, was disappearing. The time from order to shipment was getting longer and longer. So when the textile industry disappeared, it became much more difficult to justify having a domestic operation. It was expensive, but there was also the problem of time. In the case of Carla Jane and A&R, it was always a cut-to-order business. In other words, they never speculated on anything, they wouldn't buy fabric, they wouldn't build a line and invest in inventory. They would invest in samples, and they would show these samples to buyers,

¹¹¹ Randy Rotchin, November 2, 2018.

¹¹² Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

¹¹³ See for example Steed, "Locational Factors," 151.

¹¹⁴ Randy Rotchin, November 2, 2018.

and if a buyer committed to a certain style, a certain number of units, that's when they would go and buy the fabric and actually produce the garment. So everything was cut to order. And that became more difficult, without having a domestic textile industry.¹¹⁵

According to Rianne Mahon, the textile industry was the first sector of the Canadian economy to be threatened by trade-induced deindustrialization.¹¹⁶ Citing the federal government's decisions to allow more duty-free imports from low-wage countries, executives at Dominion Textile closed 15 of its 31 plants between 1982 and 1988.¹¹⁷ They also felt that the textile unions in Canada wielded too much power over manufacturing, and these closures specifically aimed to undercut the Canadian plants where unions were strongest.¹¹⁸ The relatively high rate of unionization coupled with the decree on the apparel industry in Montreal, were also deemed to be problematic for garment manufacturers. Glen recounts the words of his grandfather, which reflected the views of many manufacturers: "My grandfather would say all the time it was the unions that killed the industry. It was certainly the unions that killed the large manufacturers."¹¹⁹ As Steven High has argued, this "anti-union animus" was one of the driving forces of plant relocations and deindustrialization in the North American Rust Belt.¹²⁰ Unionized shops like Carla Jane Dress made decisions that gradually de-unionized the labour force and moved production to smaller non-union shops through contracting and subcontracting. Randy explains what this looked like for Carla Jane and how they circumvented the ILGWU:

During all this time, the factory was a union factory. When I came into the company in the 1980s they had 200 employees at that point, most of which were women who were sewing, and finishing garments. They also started to use external contractors to make up gaps in production. Rather than hire more employees and take on more of that cost they started to contract out. So they opened a second company, the original company was called Carla Jane Dress, and the second company that they opened was A&R Dress. A&R worked primarily with contractors, and Carla Jane, they produced garments in-house.¹²¹

Randy explained that they opened a new company, A&R Dress, which was not unionized, to deal with the contractors. For some time, Carla Jane and A&R operated simultaneously, with A&R taking care of the production that was contracted out to homeworkers when the in-house production employees at Carla Jane were fully employed. Over time, however, the owners of Carla Jane decided to close their factory. Randy explains how this was done:

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Mahon, 3.

¹¹⁷ Barbara Austin, "Managing Marketing in a Commodities Manufacturing Firm: Dominion Textile," *Business and Economic History* 18 (1989): 174.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

¹²⁰ Steven High, *Industrial Sunset*, 98.

¹²¹ Randy Rotchin, November 2, 2018.

There were two separate companies, and one was a non-union shop, that was A&R dress, and they worked with contractors, and one was a union shop, Carla Jane. With the approval of the union, we were able to close Carla Jane, and essentially open a new company, resetting the clock on all the union employees. So it eliminated a lot of seniority, it got us out from under the collective bargaining agreement so we could negotiate a contract with our employees themselves. So that, that was essentially the beginning of the end. It was probably 5 years later that the new company was just closed entirely where there was a decision made to just close the shop down because anything that was produced in the shop was no longer competitive from a price point of view.¹²²

When Carla Jane closed, this new company (a numbered company) was not owned by the original owners (Randy's father and his two brothers), but rather by the former Carla Jane foreman. Randy explained that "it was an official closure of the company but with an understanding that these employees would be hired by the new entity." Comprised of the former employees of Carla Jane, some of which had worked with the company for decades, the employees at the numbered company decided to re-unionize with the ILGWU. This new company paid rent to A&R, and essentially served as a contractor to them. Some other companies simply decided to open their own non-union sub-contracted shops. Such was the case with Joseph Ribkoff Inc., a company that Glen mentioned as having "survived" the decline of North American garment manufacturing. They were not only subcontracting out sewing to a company that they themselves created, but they were employing several non-union subcontractors so that they could continue to increase production without hiring more unionized operators or purchasing more machines.¹²³

Subcontracting allowed manufacturers to offload costs directly to the workers through practices of sending sewing work to people who worked from their homes. Homeworkers had to buy their own sewing machines and were responsible for their upkeep.¹²⁴ Glen explains how this was a relatively common practice in the industry:

There was another phenomenon called homeworking, which is rather than have people coming into the factory to do your sewing, they would do it at home, and they would have people coming around the city with bags of clothes in pieces that they would bring to women and they would get paid for the piece that they sewed. And they were located all over the city. Most manufacturers did both, they had their own plants inside, and they had pieceworkers outside. Women, Italian women, greek women, chinese people in their basements, doing piecework.¹²⁵

¹²² Randy Rotchin, November 2, 2018.

¹²³ Application des conventions collectives, June 22, 1982, P1-210-1982-1, Fonds du Conseil Conjoint Québécois de l'Union Internationale des ouvriers du vêtement pour dames (P1), Centre d'histoire et d'archives du travail (CHAT), Montréal, QC.

¹²⁴ Ng, "Homeworking: Dream Realized, or Freedom Constrained?" 114.

¹²⁵ Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

Homeworkers have been an integral, yet hidden labour force of the garment industry in Montreal and across North America ever since its early industrial beginnings.¹²⁶ The sweated labour of the 19th century's garment industry relied heavily on women who sewed in their homes, but homeworking briefly decreased in the early to mid-20th century. As Laura Johnson and other feminist scholars argued, its resurgence in the second half of the 20th century represented a rolling back of working conditions to the early industrial era of clothing manufacturing.¹²⁷ Homeworking was unregulated and under-the-table, and as a result, workers experienced some of the worst working conditions in the industry and were paid dismal wages. Roxanne Ng's study on homeworkers in Toronto published in 1999 reported that homeworkers would make about 2\$ for sewing a skirt, while it would retail for more than 200\$ in stores.¹²⁸ Homeworking is a particularly gendered regime of work – women need to work long hours to make very little money, and as they work from their homes, homeworking is often seen as compatible with housework and childcare.¹²⁹ However, as Randy indicates, manufacturers were often very removed from homeworkers' working conditions through sub-contracting:

There was a driver out there who was delivering bundles of garment pieces and then picking up finished garments... It was much easier to deal with contractors who could take thousands of garments, and presumably they had homeworkers themselves, but at least we could deal with just one company at a time. So we transitioned from having individual homeworkers to working with contractors. And there would usually be 10 or 12 different companies.¹³⁰

The increasing complex web of subcontractors also signaled shifts in the spatial division of labour in the garment industry, as manufacturing activities were gradually removed from the factory floors and redirected into the homes of workers. According to Carla Lipsig-Mummé, "homeworking is part of a far-reaching transformation in the organization of work and the international division of labour" linked to the increasing fragmentation of employment and "to the growing competition between labour-intensive enterprises" in the Global North and South.¹³¹

While homeworking represented a shift in the geographies of production on a local level, domestic producers began to look abroad to reduce costs and maintain their bottom line. In our interview, Glen also described importing as the only mechanism for the "survival" of the industry: "the garment companies themselves either became importers... importing was the only

¹²⁶ See Johnson, *The Seam Allowance*.

¹²⁷ The body of literature homeworking, which largely came out in the 1980s, registered the symbolic nature of this transfer outside of factories in workers homes. See Laura Johnson, *The Seam Allowance*; Ng, "Homeworking"; Lipsig-Mummé, "The Renaissance of Homeworking in Developed Economies"; and Lipsig-Mummé, "Organizing Women."

¹²⁸ Ng, "Homeworking", 111. These rates are consistent with those found in previous studies from 10 years before, indicating that wages did not rise substantially (if at all) with inflation. See Johnson, *The Seam Allowance*.

¹²⁹ See Laura Johnson, *The Seam Allowance*.

¹³⁰ Randy Rotchin, November 2, 2018.

¹³¹ Lipsig-Mummé, "The Renaissance of Homeworking," 545.

way you could survive, at that point.” Glen also notes that the turn toward importing in the 1980s and 1990s changed the patterns of space use in the buildings in the Chabanel district:

Because again, manufacturing becomes importing, and with importing all you need is hanging space, you don’t have people working in that space, it’s garment storage space, that’s all it is. My dad’s company, like I say, went from maybe a hundred people, to, before it closed, I think it had 7 employees. And it had 15 thousand square feet. Just 7 employees. He had I think 2 or three people working in the office, you know 2 or 3 buyers for fabrics and trimmings and stuff like that, and that was it. And then you have two or three people working in shipping, and that’s the whole company.¹³²

As Glen shows, technological change and globalization had their effects on the amount of people who were employed in the industry, gesturing at the major contraction that Carla Jane Dress (later A&R) saw with its transition to imports. A study of manufacturing dynamics in three Canadian cities confirms this trend: the number of production workers in Montreal’s labour-intensive sector (dominated by clothing) declined by 40% between 1976 and 1996, whereas the number of non-production workers remained stable throughout the same period.¹³³

Importing, however, was understood by workers and the ILGWU as threatening to the industry and their employment. In the 1975 collective agreement between the Manufacturers Guild and the Montreal Joint Board Dressmakers Union of the ILGWU, article 70 directly addresses imports: “In order to protect the general welfare of the industry and to safeguard the jobs of its workers, it is hereby agreed that the parties hereto oppose as unacceptable the spirit of this Agreement the importation of garments, at the expense of workers employed in the industry under jurisdiction of this contract.”¹³⁴ It goes on to state that the Guild and the Union would set up a joint committee “to utilize all agencies and legislation to restrain imports of garments into Canada.”¹³⁵

At the same time as manufacturers were beginning to import their garments, so were their customers. For Carla Jane Dress, globalization exacerbated many of the issues with the structure of the garment industry, and made manufacturers heavily dependent on their customers. When the pressures of globalization were combined with private labeling, both Randy and Glen explained that retailers (their customers) went directly abroad, setting up buying offices in the new centres of garment production where they could access cheap labour — therefore bypassing domestic manufacturing altogether. In my interview with Glen, he repeatedly quoted his father’s somewhat grim tagline: “my dad’s famous line is ‘When your customer becomes your competitor, you are dead.’”¹³⁶ At one point during our interview, Randy very succinctly summed up what he felt were

¹³² Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

¹³³ Calculated from data in Vinodrai, “A Tale of Three Cities,” 12.

¹³⁴ “Memorandum of Agreement, August 21st, 1976 - July 31st, 1978,” P1-210-1975-2, Fonds du Conseil Conjoint Québécois de l’Union Internationale des ouvriers du vêtement pour dames (P1), Centre d’histoire et d’archives du travail (CHAT), Montréal, QC).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

his main challenges as a manufacturer: “It was kind of like a perfect storm in a way, where trade policy, domestic manufacturing costs, customers that were becoming more and more demanding and at the same time sourcing their garments themselves overseas, it became more and more challenging to do business as a private label manufacturer.”

Of course, as garment companies like Carla Jane and A&R began closing *en masse* throughout the 1980s, on the other end of the actions taken by manufacturers were thousands of laid off workers. In a study of the impacts of plant closures on older workers in Montreal’s garment industry, Julie Ann McMullin and Victor Marshall sum up what capital’s business decisions meant for those who were on the other end of them:

“Regardless of the particular business strategy, rightsizing, down-sizing, and restructuring are the buzz words used to signify the elimination of jobs and the termination of workers in a company’s quest to become more competitive and profitable within the context of contemporary capitalism. These words have translated into loss of employment for thousands of people in Canada and the United States.”¹³⁷

Not only did so-called business decisions mean lay-offs, but it also meant that those who remained employed in the industry laboured under increasingly poor conditions, with declining union protections.

Declining working conditions and labour intensification

At the same time, working conditions continued to decline in the industry, and the institutions meant to maintain livable standards for workers were effectively crumbling. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a number of scathing reports laid bare the ever-multiplying problems in the garment industry, increasing public scrutiny on the long-standing issues in the world of apparel manufacturing.¹³⁸ In her interview, Fatima Rocchia sums up her experience as a sewing machine operator viscerally: “Moi je venais d’une dictature au Portugal; à l’époque on avait la dictature Salazar... Et c’était pire qu’au Portugal, les conditions de travail, sur la rue

¹³⁷ Julie Ann McMullin and Victor W. Marshall, “Ageism, Age Relations, and Garment Industry Work in Montreal,” *The Gerontologist* 41, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 111. Bluestone and Harrison also make this critique in *The Deindustrialization of America*, arguing that “Deindustrialization does not just happen... Conscious decisions have to be made by corporate managers to move from one location to another... or to shut down a facility altogether.” Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 15.

¹³⁸ See “Les ouvrières du vêtement”, Dossiers “Vie Ouvrière” no. 116 Juin 1977 — Vol. XXVII; Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos, *Problems of Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Force*, (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1979); Ligue des femmes du Québec, “De fil en Aiguille,” October 1980. Personal papers of Fatima Rocchia; Laura Johnson, *The Seam Allowance*.

Chabanel.”¹³⁹ She goes on to explain how employers’ constant search for profit often left workers in perilous health and safety situations:

Eux, c’est le cash. Tu sais, c’est juste le cash qui compte, il y a rien [d’autre]. J’ai vu des femmes tomber par terre. Il faisait chaud, on arrivait avec une chaudière d’eau froide pour l’envoyer dans la face. C’étaient des conditions comme ça, le travail. Là j’en revenais pas, j’ai dit: “Appelle l’ambulance, quelque chose, appelle son mari” tout ça. Ils ont dit: “non, non, non. Elle va mieux, là, elle va finir la journée.” Ils l’ont pris, elle s’est relevée, ils l’ont mis à la machine à coudre, et elle continuait à travailler. C’étaient des conditions écœurantes. À un moment donné j’avais fait venir le ministère du travail faire un test sur la qualité de l’air et sur la chaleur parce que c’était fou. Il y avait toutes les presses pour presser les vêtements, et ça c’était tout à vapeur chaude. Il y avait les fenêtres ouvertes mais dans toute la manufacture ils chauffaient tout le temps pour fournir la vapeur chaude. En plus de faire 44 degrés dehors, on avait la température en dedans.¹⁴⁰

The legacies of poor working conditions in the garment industry have been well-studied over the course of history, and in Chapter 2 I address them in greater detail, especially as they relate to long-term health impacts. However, the poor working conditions and structural problems were experienced with particular intensity as plant closures ramped up. In her national report on the plight of immigrant workers in the industry, Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos showed that the high unemployment rates in the garment industry made many women workers reluctant to complain.¹⁴¹ Mireille Larocque takes up similar themes in a 1977 exposé of the garment industry published in the *Dossiers Vie Ouvrière*, this time as it relates to piecework. Working by the piece was an industry standard for sewing machine operators, one of the many legacies of earlier legislation that set the “unskilled” operators’ wage rates by the piece and the skilled jobs by the hour. The decree on the garment industry still set a floor for wages, though, so it was expected that sewing machine operators worked quickly, and produced enough garments to ensure their piece rate was in line with the minimum wage rate. However, it was not always possible for some workers to make the minimums. Here, Mireille explains:

¹³⁹ “I came from a dictatorship in Portugal; at the time we had the Salazar dictatorship, the coup d’état took place afterwards... And it was worse than in Portugal, the working conditions, on Chabanel.” Fatima Rocchia, November 5, 2017.

¹⁴⁰ “They’re all about the cash. You know, it’s all about the cash, there’s nothing else. I’ve seen women fall on the floor. It was hot, you’d come in with a bucket of cold water to throw in your face. It was conditions like that, the work. I couldn’t believe it, I said: ‘Call the ambulance, something, call her husband’ and so on. They said, ‘No, no, no. She’s better now. She’s better now, she’s going to finish the day.’ They picked her up, she got up, they put her on the sewing machine, and she kept working. Those were sickening conditions. At one point I had the Department of Labor come in and do an air quality and heat test because it was crazy. There were all the presses to press the clothes, and it was all hot steam. They had the windows open, but all through the factory they were heating all the time to provide the hot steam. In addition to being 44 degrees outside, we had the temperature inside.” Fatima Rocchia, November 5, 2017.

¹⁴¹ McLeod Arnopoulos, *Problems of Immigrant Women*, 13.

“Il y a un salaire minimum, mais celles qui ne peuvent pas arriver à le faire, elles doivent signer une carte d’incompétence et travailler seulement à la pièce... Si une fille ne fait pas le salaire minimum, on l’amène dans un bureau, et là on lui dit: “Écoute, ça fait un an que tu ne fais pas ton salaire; le boss est obligé de te payer le salaire minimum et tu ne le fais pas. C’est parce que tu es trop vieille, tu sais: qu’est-ce que tu veux! Tu as été malade, peut-être, t’es finie. Mais comme tu as un bon boss, il a décidé de te garder quand même. Alors la fille est contente d’apprendre qu’elle a un bon boss, mais elle est moins contente d’apprendre qu’elle est finie, et elle se dit: “Si je vais ailleurs, je n’irai pas plus vite et je ne ferai pas le salaire minimum.” Alors elle accepte de signer une carte d’incompétence.”¹⁴²

As Mireille shows here, there were several reasons that workers may not have been able to make the minimum wages, which were often felt at the intersections of factors such as age or disability. In addition to being constantly under the pressure of employers to produce at a certain rate, in an industry with increasingly high unemployment rates, workers had little choice but remain in workplaces like these. Piece rates also force operators to work as fast as possible, but the faster they work, the lower the prices are set for the pieces because they take less and less time to make. Katie Quan, worker and organizer in the 1982 garment workers’ strike in New York’s Chinatown, describes the difficulties of piecework vividly: “I call the piece rate system the system of being both the slave and the slave driver. You’re the slave because you’re the one doing the work. But you’re the slave driver too, because you force yourself to work faster and faster, believing that the more pieces you sew, the more money you earn.”¹⁴³

In addition to this downward pressure, piece rates also created workplaces that were often rife with conflict. Jesus Falcon elaborates:

Parce que il faut comprendre que, à part les tailleurs, qui travaillent à l’heure, tout les autres travaillent à la pièce. Travailler à la pièce, dans une industrie saisonnière, ou vous changez deux trois fois par jour les modèles, et après ça ils les font dans d’autre sections, il y’a pas un dieu qui est capable d’établir un prix fixe qu’on peut négocier. Donc, c’est à chaque jour, c’est une négociation. Donc, une chance d’avoir la chicane. Y’a des travaux plus vite que d’autres. Mettre un col c’est pas la même chose que faire la couture sur le côté, une couture droite, là. Donc y’en a des travaux qui prennent plus de temps que d’autres, mais y’en a aussi des gens qui sont pas assez vite, ou qui bougent pas assez. Donc, il faut envoyer des gens les aider. Qui c’est que vous prenez pour faire ça? Bon,

¹⁴² “There is a minimum wage, but those who can’t make it, they have to sign an incompetence card and work only on a piecework basis... If a girl doesn’t make the minimum wage, we take her to an office, and there we tell her: ‘Listen, you haven’t made your salary for a year; the boss is obliged to pay you the minimum wage and you don’t make it. It’s because you’re too old, you know: what do you want! You’ve been sick, maybe, you’re finished. But since you have a good boss, he decided to keep you anyway.’ So the girl is happy to learn that she has a good boss, but she is less happy to learn that she is finished, and she thinks: ‘If I go somewhere else, I won’t go any faster and I won’t make minimum wage.’ So she agrees to sign an incompetence card.” Mireille Larocque, “Les ouvrières du vêtement,” *Dossiers « Vie Ouvrière »* no. 116 vol. XXVII, (Juin 1977): 329.

¹⁴³ Katie Quan, “Memories of the 1982 ILGWU Strike in New York Chinatown,” *Amerasia Journal* 35, no. 1 (2009): 79.

ben, le meilleur travailleur. Mais le meilleur travailleur, il est pas content, parce que... Mettons qu'il fait des colliers. Et il y'a trente paires de trucs, et qu'il va vite. Mettons que vous l'envoyez faire une manche, un poignet. Ben c'est pas la même chose. Comme il connaît pas le truc, il va moins vite. Et en attendant qu'il s'habitue, mais il est là juste pour donner un coup de main. Donc il peut être là 3-4h, une journée. Donc pendant ce temps là il gagne pas la même argent que quand il fait sa job. Ça fait la chicane. Donc... Y'a une espèce de frustration générée, et ils veulent que le syndicat... Une des choses, c'est qu'ils voulaient que le syndicat règle ça.¹⁴⁴

Not only did piecework make it difficult to set fair and consistent prices, it also clearly undermined solidarities between workers, and actively discouraged them from helping each other. A report by the Ligue des Femmes du Québec further argued that piecework systems heightened tensions between immigrant and non-immigrant workers.¹⁴⁵ The Ligue des femmes interviewed 139 women for this report, identifying a key set of issues highlighted by respondents: the piecework system, sexual harrassment, abusive and controlling management, the search for profits above all else, and the “double emploi” of work outside the home and inside the home.¹⁴⁶ Importantly, the report signaled the growing practice of employers threatening closures to force workers to fear for their jobs, and to keep them producing at the highest possible levels.¹⁴⁷ In another report Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos further argued that the astoundingly high yearly turnover rate, 35%, is in itself a testament to the poor working conditions, and the degree to which workers will only tolerate their situations for as long as they have to. The study largely echoes many of the issues identified by the Ligue des femmes and *Vie ouvrière* reports, and recommends provincial legislation be bolstered and better enforced to materially improve conditions in the industry. But what her report crucially also identifies is that there was a growing

¹⁴⁴ “Because you have to understand that, apart from the tailors, who work by the hour, all the others work by the piece. Working on a piecework basis, in a seasonal industry, where you change the models two or three times a day, and then they do it in other sections, there’s no god that is able to establish a fixed price that can be negotiated. So, it’s a negotiation every day. So, a chance to have a dispute. Some jobs are done faster than others. Putting on a collar is not the same as doing the seam on the side, a straight seam, there. So some jobs take longer than others, but there are also people who are not fast enough, or who don’t move fast enough. So you have to send people to help them. Who do you get to do that? Well, the best worker. But the best worker is not happy, because... Let’s say they make the collars. And there are thirty pairs of things, and they go fast. Let’s say you send them to do a sleeve, a cuff. Well, it’s not the same thing. Since they aren’t used to it, they don’t go as fast. And while waiting for them to get used to it, they’re just there to give a hand. So they can be there for 3-4 hours, one day. So during that time they don’t earn the same money as when they’re doing their job. It’s like bickering. So... There’s a kind of frustration generated, and they want the union... One of the things is that they wanted the union to settle this.” Jesus Falcon, interviewed by Lauren Laframboise. St-Eustache, November 27, 2019.

¹⁴⁵ Ligue des femmes du Québec, “De fil en aiguille.”

¹⁴⁶ The Ligue des Femmes also put forward a series of recommendations for the union to enforce. They recommended that unions provide clear and accessible information about workers’ rights and about union processes; that they organize to abolish piece work, advocate for wage increases, and improve health and safety conditions; and educate the public about the plight of workers in the garment industry. Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Pierre Vennat, “La Ligue des femmes à la défense des midinettes,” *La Presse*, Montréal: October 1, 1980.

problem with the institutions that were meant to regulate the industry. A combination of weak inspection systems, absent mechanisms for fining employers, and the limited number of months that employees can be reimbursed for back pay, meant that it was becoming easier and easier for employers to circumvent the minimum wage legislation.¹⁴⁸

Rank and file resistance to deindustrialization

Although labouring in the garment industry was becoming increasingly difficult, workers were keen to not only save their jobs, but to improve the conditions under which they worked. In fact, in every interview I conducted, garment workers would almost invariably address this common misconception that work in apparel manufacturing was a “bad job”. Jesus Falcon had previously worked at Canadair, an aircraft manufacturer located in the Saint-Laurent borough of Montreal, where he was an electrician. Here, he explains that after Canadair cut a large portion of their workforce, he worked in the garment industry, and was able to command a higher salary than as an electrician:

Ben parce que Canadair il y’a eu, j’sais pas là, il y’a eu une grosse réduction de travail. On était 14,000 et pis ils sont restés 5000 par ancienneté. Donc j’ai perdu mon emploi par ancienneté. J’étais électricien dans l’aviation. Et j’ai retourné dans les vêtements. Pis là j’ai gagné plus qu’à Canadair... À Canadair je gagnais 1.62\$ à peu près, pis dans les vêtements, quand j’ai retourné, ils me donnaient 1.75. Pis un an après j’étais rendu à 2.25... C’est juste pour vous dire que la réputation du vêtement qui payait mal, ça dépend quel secteur.¹⁴⁹

In our interview, Falcon very much aimed to counter the “reputation” of the garment industry. At the same time, he recognized that wages were not the same for everyone. Falcon worked as a cutter and occupied one of the highest paid positions in the garment manufacturing process, which was a position reserved for men and one of the few positions that was paid hourly. However, even the women that I spoke with who worked as sewing machine operators and who mostly worked on piece rates argued that they could command relatively high wages. Fatima Rocchia, an organizer with the Comité d’action des travailleurs du vêtement and sewing machine operator, recalled that her wages were on par with her husband’s:

On pouvait pas dire qu’on était si mal payées que ça, parce qu’en 1980 quand je sortais pour l’accouchement de ma fille, j’avais plus de dix dollars de l’heure. On avait une

¹⁴⁸ McLeod Arnopoulos, 14.

¹⁴⁹ “Well, because Canadair had, I don’t know, there was a big reduction in work. There were 14,000 of us and then there were 5,000 by seniority. So I lost my job by seniority. I was an electrician in the aviation industry. And I went back to the garment industry. At Canadair I was making about \$1.62, and in clothing, when I went back, they gave me \$1.75. And a year later I was up to 2.25... It’s just to tell you that the reputation of the garment industry that was paying poorly, it depends on what sector.” Jesus Falcon, November 27, 2019.

parité, presque. Il y avait beaucoup de femmes, de jeunes femmes aussi, de mon âge - à l'époque j'avais 25 ans, j'ai accouché de ma fille à 25 ans - et les conjoints étaient beaucoup dans la construction. On avait un équivalent de salaire d'un plombier à l'époque. Les gars qui travaillaient dans la construction, dans la plomberie, on avait la même parité de salaire. On était bien payées, celles qui étaient syndiquées, celles qui étaient dans les comités... on appelait ça des comités paritaires. Il y avait un comité paritaire pour le vêtement. C'était tout de même pas pire. C'était pas la mer à boire, mais quand je compare aujourd'hui, avec le salaire minimum, quand je repensait à tout ça, c'était quand même des bons salaires, et là ils ne voulaient pas nous le payer.¹⁵⁰

As Rocchia explains, her salary should have been a good one, but by the early 1980s, the collective agreement and its wage standards were frequently violated by manufacturers. These violations of the collective agreement were largely tolerated by the Joint Committee, which just a few years earlier, had been placed into government receivership as a result of its inability to enforce even the minimum labour standards in the industry.¹⁵¹

Indeed, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the ILGWU was in a veritable crisis. Not only was it facing increasingly difficult economic conditions with the onset of progressive trade liberalization, but it also faced a crisis of confidence from its membership and the public writ large. In February 1976, the FTQ launched an investigation into both the ILGWU (at the time, 16,000 members) and the ACWA (9,000 members) in response to complaints from their membership, which included allegations of collusion with employers.¹⁵² In November of 1980, the provincial organized crime watchdog, the Commission de police du Québec relatif aux enquêtes sur le crime organisé (CECO), was assigned to dedicate all of its resources to an investigation into garment manufacturers, contractors, employers' associations, unions, and the Joint Committee.¹⁵³ Although the CECO inquiry didn't conclude until 1984, as early as 1981 it unearthed a major scandal, finding that the ILGWU erased a debt of 273,688\$ to the union's welfare funds from a garment manufacturer, Raymond Boisvert. This transaction was allegedly made to keep the shop unionized with the ILGWU, and became known as the Affaire Boisvert.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ "You couldn't say we were paid that badly, because in 1980 when I went out for my daughter's delivery, I was getting over ten dollars an hour. We had parity, almost. There were a lot of women, young women too, my age – at the time I was 25, I gave birth to my daughter at 25 – and the spouses often worked in construction. We had the equivalent of a plumber's salary at the time. The guys who worked in construction, in plumbing, we had the same pay. We were well paid, those who were unionized, those who were on committees... we called them joint committees. There was a joint committee for clothing. It wasn't any worse. It wasn't bad, but when I compare it today with the minimum wage, when I think back on it, it was still good wages, and then they didn't want to pay us." Fatima Rocchia, November 5, 2017.

¹⁵¹ Pierre Vennat, "Pour mauvaise administration et mandat non rempli, Industrie de la robe: le comité paritaire mis sous tutelle," *La Presse*, Montreal: February 10, 1977.

¹⁵² Pierre Vennat, "Des ouvriers du vêtement pour dames croient qu'il y a collusion entre leur syndicat et leurs employeurs," *La Presse*, Montreal: August 8, 1975.

¹⁵³ "Décret du gouvernement du Québec numéro 3684-80, concernant un nouveau mandat de la Commission de police du Québec relatif aux enquêtes sur le crime organisé," November 26, 1980.

¹⁵⁴ Pierre Vennat, "Un syndicat international efface certaines dettes de Raymond Boisvert pour rester dans ses entreprises," *La Presse*, Montreal: April 29, 1981.

In the wake of the multiple scandals involving the institutions that were meant to protect them, rank and file workers began to organize their own movements against deindustrialization.

In June 1981, about 6,000 members of the ILGWU refused to enter about 50 of the city's garment manufacturers, in protest of companies systematically circumventing the industry-wide collective agreement by sending work to non-union shops and homeworkers.¹⁵⁵ The walkout paralyzed about 60% of the city's clothing manufacturers, and union members toured media outlets on the Friday afternoon, before going to the Labour Minister Pierre Marois and the General Secretary of the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ), Fernand Daoust. Protest signs read: "Contre les divisions", "Non au travail à domicile!", "Le chômage profite aux boss", "While we can let's fight now". Workers demanded an assembly, and refused to go back to work unless the problems associated with subcontracting to non-union shops were resolved.¹⁵⁶ However, the workers who had staged the walkout were swiftly ordered back to work by ILGWU leadership, who also denied their request for a union assembly, after the employers signed agreements to reduce or put an end to "undeclared work" in the industry.¹⁵⁷ This commitment from ownership proved to be empty, as manufacturers continued to circumvent the collective agreement, and rank and file workers would become increasingly doubtful of union leadership's ability to enforce even the basic labour standards outlined in the collective agreement.

The rank and file movement against plant closures and layoffs also intersected with the women's movement in Quebec, taking on the plight of women workers specifically. The Comité d'action des travailleurs du vêtement was on the forefront of rank and file organizing against plant closures. The Comité d'action was formed in 1980 by a multi-racial and multi-ethnic coalition of immigrant sewing machine operators who were dissatisfied with the inaction of their union in the face of mass closures and job loss. The Comité d'action crystallized against the backdrop of the long-time gendered division of labour that organized apparel manufacturing for decades, and several members of the Comité d'action were also involved in the ILGWU's newly-formed and highly militant women's committee. On November 4, 1981 the Comité d'action published the *Dossier Noir sur l'UIOVD (The Black Book on the ILGWU)*, a scathing report against the union's corruption, its leadership, and the plight of workers in an industry operating under the constant threat of deindustrialization. According to contemporary newspapers, the *Dossier noir* had the effect of a bomb in the industry. It laid bare their main grievances against their union and the structural issues in the industry. It was prepared in advance of the 1981 Convention of the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, in a total of two weeks by a group of 20 unionized ILGWU workers. The *Dossier noir* was distributed to garment workers, labour organizers and other community activists.¹⁵⁸ It made use of original reporting, union and

¹⁵⁵ "ILGWU return expected," *The Globe and Mail*, June 27, 1981.

¹⁵⁶ Yves Rochon, "Des ouvriers du vêtement pour dames mécontents de leur syndicat", *Le Journal de Montréal*, Montreal: June 27, 1981.

¹⁵⁷ Lisa Binsse, "Vêtement: le débrayage fini, les syndiqués se demandent pourquoi?" *La Presse*, Montreal: June 27, 1981.

¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, I first came across the *Dossier noir* in Madeleine Parent's archive, a renowned labour organizer in the textile industry. McGill University Archives and Special Collections, 2009-0074.01.98.2.

government-generated statistics, and most centrally, workers' testimonies to illustrate the biggest problems that workers identified. Mireille Trottier, president of the Comité d'action, explained that workers were accusing the ILGWU not only of not attempting to solve any of the problems with the industry, but also of collaborating with employers. They also denounced the union's lack of militancy, chauvinism toward women, and discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and race.¹⁵⁹

Gendered concerns about health and safety conditions were at its core. The very first section of the *Dossier noir* denounced the way that the collective agreement characterized pregnancy as an "illness", and, in many women's experiences, pregnancy would lead to job loss. One worker provides a testimony in the *Dossier noir*: "I still needed to produce even if my energies diminished, even if I was exhausted. I couldn't feel my legs and my back. I talked to the other women and they told me that a lot of women miscarried in the garment industry because of the difficult working conditions." Another concern of the *Dossier noir* was for their aging workers. Restrictive conditions to accessing pensions meant that few were able to receive their pensions, and were thus unable to retire. They noted that on top of that, the conditions to access the pensions were also difficult to attain for women in particular — because of the need to have worked for several consecutive years, which were often interrupted by leaves of absence to perform the gendered and unpaid labour of childcare and other types of caregiving. The *Dossier noir* shares the testimony of Nadia, who had immigrated to Canada 18 years before and who was nearing retirement at age 63. She was laid off after her plant closed and couldn't find work because she was aging and slowing down. Because the union required 20 years of work, and 10 consecutive years before retirement, Nadia was not allowed access to a pension. The pressures put on by deindustrialization thus restricted older workers' access to pensions, which was even more difficult for immigrant women. According to the testimony in the *Dossier noir*, Nadia had no other choice but to take on work at home at piece work rates.

The *Dossier noir* was a direct appeal for the FTQ to intervene, and it included a resolution to be presented at the FTQ Congress in late November of 1981, requesting that the ILGWU be placed into receivership by the FTQ. In interviews with local media, organizers with the Comité d'action argued that it was the responsibility of the trade union federation to which they were

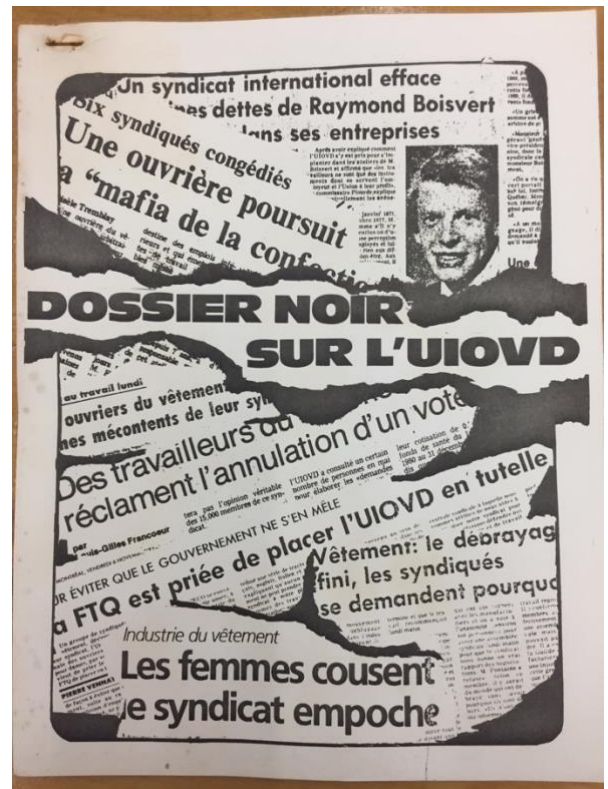


Figure 1: The *Dossier noir sur l'UIOVD*, as found in Madeleine Parent's archival collection at the McGill University Archives and Special Collections, 2009-0074.01.98.2.

¹⁵⁹ Luc Rufiange, "Vêtement pour dames: Demande de tutelle," Newspaper clipping from the personal papers of Fatima Rocchia, date and publication unknown.

affiliated to ensure that their union is able to defend their living and working conditions.¹⁶⁰ From the very beginning of the Congress, the FTQ was forced to publicly debate the plight of the garment unions and the problems faced by the industry, which eclipsed many of the other issues on the agenda for the day.¹⁶¹ After two hours of bitter public debate, the resolution ultimately failed and the FTQ refused to put the union into receivership.¹⁶² Instead, the FTQ committed to yet another investigation into the ILGWU, citing that this option was far less “odious” than a receivership.¹⁶³ Although they were disappointed, the Comité d’action wasn’t surprised by the result. They considered the two-hour public debate a victory, since it forced the FTQ and its membership to consider the plight of the garment industry in a sustained way.¹⁶⁴

In the wake of the Cliche Commission on Quebec’s construction unions, which placed those unions under government receivership, members of the Comité d’action were keen to avoid government involvement, and wanted the issues within the ILGWU to be addressed within the labour movement itself.¹⁶⁵ In fact, one of the central concerns of the Comité d’action was the overall health of the labour movement, and they were sensitive to the overall anti-union sentiment at the time:¹⁶⁶

“Nous ne voulons pas d’un autre salissage du mouvement syndical comme il y en a eu contre les travailleurs de la construction. Nous voulons rester syndiqués. Nous voulons demeurer avec la FTQ, mais il faut que la FTQ agisse face à l’UIOVD, et nous avons besoin du soutien de la FTQ et de tous les syndicats qui y sont affiliés pour parvenir à faire le grand ménage dans l’UIOVD.”¹⁶⁷

The relationship between deindustrialization and the state of the labour movement is also elucidated in the response from the other garment workers union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, who also presented a resolution at the FTQ Congress that year. Their resolution condemned the CECO investigation into organized crime in the industry, and urged the government to end the inquiry by the end of December that year. They argued that the inquiry was based on unfounded rumours, and that the interventions in offices and union members’ homes are unreasonable and unjustified. Importantly, though, they were concerned about the

¹⁶⁰ Pierre Vennat, “Pour éviter que le gouvernement ne s’en mêle: La FTQ est priée de placer l’UIOVD en tutelle,” *La Presse*, Montreal: November 6, 1981.

¹⁶¹ Pierre Vennat, “Dès l’ouverture de son congrès: La FTQ se voit contrainte d’amorcer un débat public sur ses syndicats du vêtement,” *La Presse*, Montreal: November 16, 1981.

¹⁶² Lisa Binsse, “La Fédération des travailleurs du Québec en congrès: L’UIOVD s’en tire avec une enquête,” *La Presse*, Montreal: November 20, 1981.

¹⁶³ “Laberge prône le redressement d’un syndicat,” *Le Soleil*, June 19, 1982.

¹⁶⁴ Binsse, “La Fédération.”

¹⁶⁵ Vennat, “Pour éviter que le gouvernement ne s’en mêle.”

¹⁶⁶ Lisa Binsse, “La Fédération des travailleurs du Québec en congrès: L’UIOVD s’en tire avec une enquête,” *La Presse*, Montreal: November 20, 1981.

¹⁶⁷ “We don’t want another smear campaign against the labour movement like there was against the construction workers. We want to stay unionized. We want to stay with the QFL [Quebec Federation of Labour], but we need the QFL to take action against the ILGWU, and we need the support of the QFL and all the unions affiliated with it to clean up the ILGWU.” Pierre Vennat, “Dès l’ouverture de son congrès.”

timing of the inquiry and the heightened threat of deindustrialization in the early 1980s. They argued that the garment industry “suffered and continues to suffer economic losses,” and “because of this inquiry, the industry’s reputation will continue to decline in the public’s eye, which will cause further layoffs of garment workers.”¹⁶⁸

In March 1982, the ILGWU underwent a major restructuring, around the same time that the FTQ began the investigation that they promised in the Congress of the year before. The new union leadership, headed by former cutter Gilles Gauthier, was viewed with skepticism by the more militant elements of the ILGWU, including the Comité d’action and the women’s committee. They largely saw these developments as “more of the same”, accusing the new leadership of quashing militancy among its rank and file. Just 3 weeks into their mandate, the new leadership of the union sought to disband the Comité d’action-associated women’s committee, and appoint its own women’s committee.¹⁶⁹ The Comité d’action’s spokesperson saw the new leadership’s attempt to de-stabilize the women’s committee as a direct threat against the more militant rank and file members.

The new ILGWU executive would soon face a massive challenge. On August 3, 1983, the three-year ILGWU contract expired. The employers proposed a 15% wage rollback, an increase in the work week to 40 hours from 35 and a reduction in their benefits. Employers complained that they could not afford the current wage scale, because of competition from foreign imports and non-unionized domestic manufacturers, who on average paid 1\$ less an hour.¹⁷⁰ Ten days later, union leadership called a general meeting to discuss the employers’ association’s contract offer. According to one publication, the 5,500 members in attendance at that meeting “roared their displeasure” with the employers’ proposal.¹⁷¹ In an overwhelming show of hands vote, the members in attendance voted 99 per cent in favor of strike.¹⁷² On August 15, 1983, 9,500 workers from the Montreal locals of the ILGWU went on strike for the first time in 43 years. According to a number of accounts, the ILGWU was not particularly keen on the idea of striking at that time. Fatima Rocchia remembers that the groundswell of frustration from the membership was continuous with their organizing work:

C’était par le Comité d’action que la grève a été organisée parce que là on se battait contre le syndicat et tout. On avait pas l’appui du syndicat. On avait pas l’appui du tout. À un moment donné ils ont essayé, ils se sont greffés, ils sont arrivés avec les affiches et ils nous ont dit: “bon ben, on va vous fournir les affiches et toutes ces choses là.” C’était vraiment les militantes, les gens qui étaient des militantes.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Lisa Binsse, “Vêtement: des membres ont peur d’être baïllonnés”, *La Presse*, Montreal: March 32, 1982.

¹⁷⁰ Joyce Napier, “Midinettes’ cut ties with a passive past,” *The Globe and Mail*, August 17, 1983.

¹⁷¹ “Strikes, Settlements ILGW,” *The Globe and Mail*, August 13, 1983.

¹⁷² Napier, “Midinettes’ cut ties with a passive past.”

¹⁷³ “It was through the Action Committee that the strike was organized because we were fighting against the union and everything. We didn’t have the support of the union. We didn’t have the support at all. At one point they tried, they joined in, they arrived with the posters and they told us: ‘well, we’ll provide you

For Fatima, it was the rank and file members of the union who were the real catalysts for the strike, and the union leadership followed. Gilles Gauthier, the union's new Quebec president, said in an interview: "We've accepted low wages for the last 35 years to help the industry. Now we want the industry to help us. This strike must go on in the name of pride and decency. It is no longer a matter of money."¹⁷⁴ The wage rollback proposed by the employers was unacceptable to rank and file workers and union leadership alike. On the picket lines, workers were demanding a 1\$ an hour wage increase. Employers framed the union's demands for pay increases as unrealistic in the context of competition from cheaper imports and non-union subcontractors, and argued that a 1\$ an hour pay increase would trigger massive layoffs.¹⁷⁵

On August 20, 1983, the ILGWU executive recommended that the membership accept a new contract proposal that would freeze workers' wages until March of the next year, where there would then be a 50-cent increase for the lowest-paid workers and a 25-cent increase for workers in higher wage groups.¹⁷⁶ Importantly, the issues around working conditions and benefits remained unsettled.¹⁷⁷ The union executive knew this was a bad deal: "I'm not trying to sell them a good contract, but it's the best we could get," Gilles Gauthier, president of the Quebec local, said.¹⁷⁸ At the first meeting since the beginning of the strike, workers loudly rejected the contract proposal. The meeting was meant to be a vote on whether or not to end the strike, but the rowdy show of hands vote was inconclusive, and the executive needed to call another meeting for a vote by secret ballot. Three days later, the union held the official vote to accept or reject the contract proposal. A little over 6,000 of the 9,000 ILGWU members voted at nine polling stations across Quebec.¹⁷⁹ The vote was 3,085 to 3,024 in favor of accepting the contract offer, only a 61 vote margin. There were double the number of spoiled ballots than the number of votes that determined the outcome.¹⁸⁰

The day after the secret ballot vote, workers were forced to return to work. A group of 200 workers were deeply unhappy with the new contract, and they blamed their union for having failed to make gains on their health and safety concerns. One anonymous worker sums it up particularly well:

with the posters and all that stuff.' It was really the activists, the people who were activists." Fatima Rocchia, November 5, 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Members of the retailers' associations say 30 firms are in danger because of the strike, and that they "cannot survive the union's demands." Napier, "Midinettes" cut ties with a passive past." Joyce Napier, "Garment workers to vote again on pact they rejected Saturday," *The Globe and Mail*, August 22, 1983.

¹⁷⁶ There would also be identical increases on September 1st, 1984 and March 1, 1985. "200 protest ballot result as garment strike ends," *The Globe and Mail*, August 25, 1983.

¹⁷⁷ "Garment union leaders urge pact acceptance," *The Globe and Mail*, August 20, 1983.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Joyce Napier, "Garment workers in Quebec narrowly accept latest offer," *The Globe and Mail*, August 24, 1984.

¹⁸⁰ "200 protest ballot result"

“Our eyes are opened this time. Our own union is taking us for a ride. They’re telling us to go back to work now. Then what did we strike for? It’s been the same crappy thing for 43 years with this union. When we go back, management will open the doors and tell us, ‘Come in, you animals.’ I’ve been a presser for eight years. Two weeks ago it was 110 degrees in our shop, and we have no air conditioning. I know what lousy working conditions are.”¹⁸¹

The frustration that this worker expresses toward the outcome of the strike is highly representative of the profound ambivalence that the strike generated. It was clear that the industry was in the middle of a freefall, and striking seemed like the last option to make any gains for their working conditions.

Epilogue: The meanings of success and failure

In the immediate aftermath of the strike, members of the Comité d’action were systematically purged from the union and from their jobs.¹⁸² After the strike, Fatima was laid off from her job. Not only that, but she was effectively blacklisted and prevented from working elsewhere:

Je savais, j’ai continué à faire des démarches, et mon nom était affiché partout. C’était impossible de me trouver du travail en couture. Impossible. Rocchia c’est le nom de mon conjoint, et à l’époque j’ai réessayé de prendre mon nom de fille. Écoute, même ma photo était affichée partout, partout. On était toutes affichées. Il y avait un monsieur qui m’avait dit qu’il avait vu ma photo. Lui il m’avait expliqué qu’il est allé travailler dans un autre endroit; ils ont les bureaux de réception quand tu arrives dans une manufacture. Ils avaient plein de photos. Elles étaient toutes là. Il y en avait partout. Les gens qui venaient chercher du travail, là ils comparaient la photo. Ils ne te laissaient même pas remplir la demande.¹⁸³

Although very little scholarship has examined women’s resistance to deindustrialization, Andy Clark’s work on the 1981 Lee Jeans factory occupation in Greenock, Scotland, is a useful point of comparison. There are some striking similarities between the experience of women strikers in Montreal and in Scotland, suggesting that the structuring nature of gender relations in the industry run deep and transcend national boundaries. In the Lee Jeans occupation, Clark found

¹⁸¹ Napier, “Garment workers in Quebec.”

¹⁸² Lipsig-Mummé, “Organizing Women,” 51.

¹⁸³ “I knew, I kept applying for jobs, and my name was posted everywhere. It was impossible to get sewing work. It was impossible. Rocchia is my partner’s name, and at that time I tried to take my maiden name again. Look, even my picture was posted everywhere, everywhere. We were all posted. There was a gentleman who told me that he had seen my picture. He explained to me that he went to work in another place; they have reception desks when you come to a factory. They had a lot of pictures. They were all there. They were everywhere. People who came to look for work, there they would compare the picture. They wouldn’t even let you fill out the application.” Fatima Rocchia, November 5, 2017.

that the union continually dismissed independent action from the women within their ranks, adding yet another barrier to the success of their collective struggle.¹⁸⁴

On the outcome of the 1983 strike, Carla Lipsig-Mummé writes that despite its “ostensible failure”, the strike “was a landmark and perhaps a watershed,” revealing “the extent of de-unionization and deindustrialization in the garment industry,” and exposing “the paralysis of the principal union faced by this widespread destruction of women’s jobs.”¹⁸⁵ In my conversation with Jesus Falcon, who was a member of the ILGWU executive during the 1983 strike, we discussed some of the difficult questions that came up for union leadership at this time. In his view, the ILGWU was in an impossible position. The tailspin of plant closures deeply affected their ability to organize at this time, and they profoundly felt the impacts of the decline in their membership:

Aussi, le membership, en descendant, on était pas capable de garder autant de monde. Y'a fallu couper... Donc, oubliez pas qu'un syndicat... Quand on a rentré on avait 30 agents d'affaires, on avait 6-7 employés de bureau, tous les employés de bureau, il faut leur faire une paye à chaque semaine, on est une compagnie par nous-même, là. Le syndicat y'avait pas mal dépensé l'argent, quand on a pris la place là, y'avait plus de dettes qu'il y avait de l'argent. Une des reproches qu'on faisait au syndicat, que moi je faisais au syndicat, c'est que y'avait une politique que quand ils partiraient il y aurait plus d'argent. On leur disait il fallait qu'ils augmentent la cotisation syndicale de 10 cents par mois ... Parce qu'ils nous ont présentés les états financiers, la caisse y'descendait continuellement, donc... c'est ça...¹⁸⁶

The membership of the ILGWU was declining largely in step with the increasing pace of plant closures from the late 1970s and into the 1980s. In 1976, ILGWU membership stood at about 17,500 workers. By 1981, this figure dropped to 13,000, and by 1985, it plummeted to 7,500 members.¹⁸⁷ Declining membership meant a decline in the union’s coffers, and a decline in the union’s ability to be able to organize new shops:

Arrivait le libre-échange, la modernisation, les robots pis ainsi de suite, et le manque de... les gens qui vieillissaient, tout ça c'est arrivé comme au même temps. On était pas capable d'organiser. On a beau essayé, autant d'argent qu'on pouvait, même plus, dans le département d'organisation, y'ont jamais rien organisé. Ils ont jamais vraiment organisé

¹⁸⁴ Clark, “And the next thing,” 128.

¹⁸⁵ Lipsig-Mummé, “Organizing Women,” 42.

¹⁸⁶ “Also, the membership, as the industry declined, we weren’t able to keep as many people. So, don’t forget that a union... When we came in, we had 30 business agents, we had 6-7 office workers, all the office workers, they have to be paid every week, we are a company by ourselves. The union had spent a lot of money, and when we took over, there were more debts than funds. One of the criticisms that was made of the union, that I made of the union, was that there was a policy that when they left there would be more money. We told them they had to increase the union dues by 10 cents a month ... Because they presented us with the financial statements, the fund was continually going down, so ... that’s it ...” Jesus Falcon, November 27, 2019.

¹⁸⁷ Lipsig-Mummé, “Organizing Women,” 47.

quoi que ce soit. Pis bien souvent, c'est des anciens syndiqués qu'on rencontrait dans les places non-syndiquées. Mais il y avait un esprit que c'est la faute du syndicat, cet esprit de frustration, envers le syndicat, qu'il leur donnait pas une bonne job, qu'il faisait pas ci, qu'il faisait pas ça.¹⁸⁸

It was clear in our exchange that Jesus really struggled with the frustration that was directed at the union. There was also an overall undertone of resignation: in the face of deindustrialization, Jesus explained that the ILGWU executive would just take care of the membership that it still had, by providing the best pension, health insurance, and other services.¹⁸⁹ In several of my conversations with men who worked in positions of authority, like Jesus, Randy, and Glen, the idea of a confluence of external forces came up repeatedly. For Jesus, the situation was attributed to a number of problems all happening at the same time, a “perfect storm” of sorts that led to the industry’s demise. This theme was taken up in my interview with Randy Rotchin, one of the manufacturers we heard from earlier. What is crucial to keep in mind, though, is that caught in the middle of this “perfect storm” are thousands of working people. From Fatima Rocchia’s perspective, it felt more like the union was giving up on their members: “l’industrie de l’époque, elle était déjà en déclin grave. C’est pour ça qu’ils se sont fiché de nous, les conditions qu’on avait. Ils se sont fiché des travailleurs.”¹⁹⁰

Perhaps the strike was, in fact, a “watershed moment” for feminist labour organizing at the time. However, I think the impacts and outcomes of this strike were far more ambiguous. On the one hand, the Comité d’Action created a movement within the rank and file of the ILGWU that elaborated not only a feminist critique of the male-dominated union leadership at the time, but also against their employers and the government institutions that were meant to regulate the industry. Workers in the Comité d’action not only fought to save their own jobs, but they also wanted to improve them, and campaigned on a series of feminist demands to improve their health and safety conditions. The outcome of this resistance, not only that workers largely failed to secure any major gains in their wages or working conditions but that also a number of the Comité d’Action’s activists were blacklisted, shows just to what extent the garment industry was structured patriarchally. The gendered distance between union leadership and the rank and file largely created the conditions for the Comité d’Action to fight for their jobs on two fronts: against their employers as well as their own union.

¹⁸⁸ “Free trade, modernization, robots and so on, and the lack of... people getting older, all that happened at the same time, and... We weren’t able to organize... No matter how hard we tried, as much money as we could, even more, in the organization department, they never organized anything... They never really organized anything... And very often, it was former union members that we met in the non-unionized places. But there was a spirit that it’s the union’s fault, this spirit of frustration, towards the union, that it didn’t do a good job, that it didn’t do this, that it didn’t do that.” Jesus Falcon, November 27, 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Jesus Falcon, November 27, 2019.

¹⁹⁰ “The industry at the time, it was already in serious decline. That’s why they didn’t care about us, the conditions we had. They didn’t care about the workers.” Fatima Rocchia, November 5, 2017.

CHAPTER 2

“Oui, mais c’est pas juste le travail”: Immigration, social reproduction, and the embodied effects of deindustrialization

Participation in organized resistance like the 1983 strike was just one of the ways that workers experienced deindustrialization. Thousands of other women in the garment industry lived through the labour intensification and the overall decline in their working conditions and were left with the lasting bodily effects of that work. Often, as Arthur McIvor has argued, “the more marginalized voices of the injured, ill, and disabled have been drowned out in the broader narrative of working-class struggles, protests, campaigns, and strikes to defend jobs.”¹⁹¹ In the following sections, I focus on two oral history interviews with MD and Cornelia Caruso, two women who immigrated to Montreal from Italy in the 1960s, and who worked in the garment industry from the mid 1960s to the 1990s. Their experiences of industrial labour, immigration, and raising families in Montreal tell us a great deal about the lived experiences and costs of deindustrialization in gendered industrial work.

The focus on these two oral history interviews provides an in-depth understanding of the specific ways that economic restructuring affected women’s work and family lives. Furthermore, MD and Cornelia’s individual experiences provide insight into the lived experience of postwar Italian immigration, and how this intersected with their industrial work. Following their life stories also provides a longer view: whereas the last chapter focused in on just a few years in the early 1980s, MD and Cornelia’s stories span the 1960s until the 1990s. In this way, the arc of their careers provides insights into the postwar boom years, and later, the successive waves of closures that profoundly changed its organization. Oral history, as Arthur McIvor contends, is also a particularly useful way to enrich our understanding of the embodied effects of work and deindustrialization.¹⁹² MD and Cornelia’s lives of labour include both waged industrial work and unremunerated gendered labour within the home, showing us that the increased pressures of deindustrialization in the garment industry compounded existing gendered inequalities. Taking both waged and unwaged labour together, I show that the intensification and deterioration of working conditions precipitated by deindustrialization in the garment industry had a disproportionate effect on immigrant women. MD and Cornelia’s testimonies offer important insights into how the pressures of global capitalism and deindustrialization are transferred to individuals and their families via their workplaces.

¹⁹¹ Arthur McIvor, “Deindustrialization Embodied: Work, Health, and Disability in the United Kingdom since the Mid-Twentieth Century” in Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perhard, eds. *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, (Vancouver ; Toronto: UBC Press, 2017), 26.

¹⁹² Arthur McIvor, “Working-class studies, oral history, and industrial illness,” in Michele Fazio, Christie Launius, and Tim Strangleman, *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies*, (Routledge, 2020), 191.

Arriving in Montreal

MD and Cornelia both immigrated to Canada from in the mid-1960s from the adjoining southern Italian agricultural regions of Abruzzo and Molise. Their experiences fit into a broader and much longer history of the Italian diaspora across the world that gave rise to sizeable Italian communities in North American industrial cities like Montreal. The breadth and scope of these migrations were massive: between 1876 and 1976, more than 26 million Italians left their hometowns, both temporarily and permanently, to find work in other locales.¹⁹³ In Canada, it was the country's two largest cities, Montreal and Toronto, that were the top destinations for newly arrived Italian immigrants. Montreal's Italian community has roots in the city since the late 19th century and received several subsequent waves of immigration extending throughout the entirety of the 20th century. At the turn of the century, the predominant pattern was the seasonal migration of mostly single men, working in construction, mining, and various major infrastructure projects. However, by the second decade of the 20th century, patterns of immigration began to favour more permanent settlement as opposed to the more temporary sojourning of the previous decades.¹⁹⁴ Italian settlement in Montreal would give rise to vibrant Italian community life in several neighbourhoods across the city.¹⁹⁵

It was in the postwar era that Canada saw the largest volume of Italian immigration, with an estimated 514,000 Italians arriving to Canada between 1950 and 1970.¹⁹⁶ At the same time, during the postwar economic boom years, many sectors of the Canadian economy experienced severe labour shortages as investment in large infrastructure projects increased demand for workers. As a result, large Canadian employers like railway companies lobbied the government to loosen immigration restrictions. In 1950, the federal government responded by creating so-called "bulk order" immigration schemes to bring in thousands of Italian immigrants, particularly young men between the ages of 19 and 39. Under this model, Italian men entered Canada under

¹⁹³ Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*, (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), xviii.

¹⁹⁴ Bruno Ramirez, "Montreal's Italians and the Socioeconomy of Settlement: Some Historical Hypotheses," *Urban History Review/Revue d'Histoire Urbaine*, Vol. 10, no. 1 (June 1, 1981): 40. For more about Italian immigration to Montreal in the early 20th century, specifically as it relates to urban employment for men, see Bruno Ramirez, "Brief Encounters: Italian Immigrant Workers and the CPR 1900-30," *Labour / Le Travail* 17 (1986): 9-28. For the "commerce of migration" that occurred via *padroni* networks, another important part of the story of Italian immigration to Montreal, see Robert Harney, "The Commerce of Migration," *Canadian ethnic studies*, Vol. 9 (1977): 42-53; and Robert Harney, "Montreal's King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism," *Labour/Le Travail*, Vol. 4 (1979): 57-84.

¹⁹⁵ In the early 20th century, Italians primarily settled on the northern outskirts of Montreal in the Clark-Beaubien area of the Mile End. Ramirez, "Montreal's Italians and Socioeconomy of Settlement," 46. Italian settlement in Montreal would continue to extend northward as the city grew, and by the postwar era, neighbourhoods like Villeray, and later St. Leonard, would become the city's main Italian areas.

¹⁹⁶ Sonia Cancian, *Families, Lovers, and Their Letters: Italian Postwar Migration to Canada*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 24, citing Franc Sturino, "Italians," *Encyclopedia of Canada's People*, ed. Paul Robert Magosci (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 789.

contract to fill a particular labour demand. Once the contract was completed, workers could choose to stay in Canada permanently and go through the process of acquiring citizenship.¹⁹⁷

Working-class people from Southern Italy sought to escape the *miseria* of the postwar South, and Italians hailing from the Southern agricultural regions like Abruzzo and Molise accounted for almost 60% of the total Italian immigration to Canada between 1951 and 1961.¹⁹⁸ MD explains that her postwar childhood in Italy wasn't easy, and that economic difficulties in her home region left a lot of people in her community with little choice but to emigrate:

Ben, pas facile, parce que c'était après la guerre, avec la misère... C'est pour ça que nous sommes immigrés. C'est en '50 et '60, c'est l'été de l'immigration. Dans ce temps, tout le monde qui avait l'opportunité de partir, de sortir de l'Italie pour améliorer les conditions de vie, n'importe quel. Même avec un mariage, beaucoup de monde, de gens, ça c'est la première fois connaître un garçon qui reste ici [au Canada], envoyer la photographie en Italie, faire connaître. C'est toute une histoire...¹⁹⁹

In addition to the widespread economic hardship in postwar southern Italy, MD's story reveals that marriage was one of the ways that men and women planned emigration as individuals and as members of families and community networks.²⁰⁰ Networks of correspondence were crucial to facilitating Italian migration to Canada in the postwar era. As MD describes, families sent photos between Canada and Italy to potential matches, a kind of transnational network of long-distance dating. Sonia Cancian's book *Families, Lovers, and Their Letters* examines exactly these types of connections between Canada and Italy in the postwar era, and the centrality of correspondence for bridging distances between loved ones. But it was also one of the primary drivers of Italian immigration to Canada, with correspondence creating relationships where families would eventually be able to reunite in Canada through channels of chain migration. MD's eventual husband, like many other Italian men hired as contract workers at the time, had moved to Canada to work for the Canadian National Railway (CN) as a track maintenance worker. Accompanied by their families, many women like MD joined husbands who had secured work in Canada, which was facilitated by the Government of Canada's family sponsorship program, a family-based migration policy introduced in 1947.²⁰¹

Like MD, Cornelia Caruso also grew up in the South of Italy in the region of Molise, an area similarly hard hit by economic depression in the postwar era. After her husband worked as a

¹⁹⁷ Franca Iacovetta, "Ordering in Bulk: Canada's Postwar Immigration Policy and the Recruitment of Contract Workers from Italy," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (1991): 53-59.

¹⁹⁸ Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, xxii.

¹⁹⁹ "Well, not easy, because it was after the war, with the *miseria*... That's why we immigrated. It was in the '50s and '60s, it was the summer of immigration. At that time, everyone who had the opportunity to leave, to leave Italy to improve the conditions of life, no matter what. Even with a wedding, a lot of people, this [the wedding] is the first time they meet a man who stays here [in Canada], to send the photograph in Italy, to get to know each other. It's a whole story." MD, October 29, 2019.

²⁰⁰ Emigration was a highly intentional process, with a high degree of planning, consideration, and strategy. See Ramirez, "Montreal's Italians," 39.

²⁰¹ Cancian, 24.

janitor in various small towns and cities around the region of Molise, they eventually decided to emigrate to Canada, also through the family sponsorship program. In 1964, Cornelia and her husband arrived in Montreal, joining her partner's family who had immigrated a few years prior. Cornelia and her family had originally planned to stay in Canada for only a few years, and then head back to Italy. When they arrived in Montreal, Cornelia and her husband already had one child. Cornelia initially stayed home while her husband worked a white-collar job at Reitman's, a clothing retailer and manufacturer. Eventually, her husband found a job in his field, at a school board in Montreal, and the family would end up staying in Canada.

The process through which MD, Cornelia, and their families arrived in Canada shows how gender, migration, and labour are inextricably linked. As Donna Garbaccia and Franca Iacovetta argue, the migration of women and children primarily depended on men's ability to find non-seasonal stable work abroad, and frequently resulted in the temporary fragmentation of families.²⁰² Italian immigrant families usually made their lives in urban economies that could also provide opportunities for semi- and lower- skilled women workers, who frequently began working immediately upon their arrival in Canadian cities. However, the structure of the Canadian postwar immigration system, especially the family sponsorship program, played a major role in the gendered structure of Italian migration. While the Canadian government actively encouraged the immigration of Italian men to fill labour market needs, it did not express the same enthusiasm for women, who entered under the family classification scheme, and were officially classified as "dependents" and thus the responsibility of their husbands.²⁰³ In addition to solidifying ideas of women's dependence on a male breadwinner, the structure of Canadian immigration policy did not allow immigrant women to access formal language or job retraining programs, which funneled them into the most poorly-paid segments of the workforce.²⁰⁴ Although Italian community and family-based narratives of migration often emphasized women's "natural" roles within the home,²⁰⁵ families' material situations often meant that women had little choice but to enter the paid workforce. In MD's case, she had incurred debts from her travels to Canada, adding a considerable burden to the family's tight budget: "Même avec le voyage j'ai une dette... Beaucoup de monde, le premier argent qu'ils gagnent il faut payer le voyage."²⁰⁶ MD describes how, with no experience at all in clothing manufacturing, she had to find a job right away to make ends meet:

En Italie j'ai pas travaillé dans la couture, mais j'ai rentré tout de suite dans la couture. La première étape. Nous, après deux jours, le jour après que nous sommes arrivés ici, il fallait chercher le travail, à 50 cennes, 75 cennes, pour l'heure... Moi je me rappelle, j'ai commencé à 75 cennes, et je prenais 27 piasses par semaine, net. Moi et mon mari,

²⁰² Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, "Women, Work, and Protest in the Italian Diaspora: International Research Agenda," *Labour / Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998): 166.

²⁰³ Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, 78-79.

²⁰⁴ Ng, "Racism, Sexism, and Immigrant Women," 283-285.

²⁰⁵ Cancian, 98.

²⁰⁶ "Even with the trip I had a debt... Many people, the first money they earn, they have to pay the trip." MD, October 29, 2019.

payaient 25 piasses de *board* [loyer], j'ai resté avec 2 piasses, pour le ticket de l'autobus.²⁰⁷

It was clear in the interview that MD took great pride in her resourcefulness, and in her ability to become a skilled seamstress with no formal training. She recalls: "Personne m'a aidé, personne m'a montré. Mais c'est une passion pour moi, mais, juste à regarder. C'est moi qui avait beaucoup de passion pour apprendre."²⁰⁸

Working in the garment industry

Both MD and Cornelia started their careers in the 1960s as sewing machine operators in the men's clothing industry, which was structured differently than the women's clothing industry discussed in the previous chapter. Firstly, men's clothing styles changed less frequently than women's, and as a result, these manufacturers worked with more consistent products. Shirt & suit factories were "scientifically advanced", produced at higher volumes, and frequently employed hundreds of workers.²⁰⁹ Secondly, the menswear industry was unionized with a different international union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), that was not plagued by the same degree of gendered discrimination and internal strife that was endemic in the ILGWU.²¹⁰ When Cornelia began her career in the garment industry in 1965, she started working at Hyde Park Clothes, which was unionized with the ACWA. The factory occupied multiple floors of the Caron Building, one of the few former garment buildings still standing in Montreal's Place des Arts area. However, Cornelia began working there after decades of a bitter fight for the recognition of the Amalgamated by the notoriously anti-union management. In 1930, the ACWA took notice that Hyde Park was hiring young immigrant workers and paying them 5-10\$ for a 68-

²⁰⁷ "In Italy I didn't work in sewing, but I got into it right away. The first step. We, after two days, the day after we arrived here, we had to look for work, at 50 cents, 75 cents an hour... I remember, I started at 75 cents, and I took 27 bucks a week, net. Me and my husband paid 25 bucks board, I stayed with 2 bucks, for the bus ticket." MD, October 29, 2019.

²⁰⁸ "Nobody helped me, nobody showed me. But it's a passion for me, but, just looking at it, I was the one who had a lot of passion to learn." MD, October 29, 2019.

²⁰⁹ To keep up with frequent changes in style, women's clothing factories relied more heavily on small producers and contractors (although there were some large dress factories, like Sample Dress from the previous chapter). The larger menswear factories still operated within the complex landscape of contracting and sub-contracting, though. The seasonality of the industry required a high degree of flexibility from producers, and large garment factories would often sub-contract parts of their production requirements to smaller shops. Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 114—115.

²¹⁰ Of course, patriarchal structures did exist in the ACWA, but from its earliest days, it regularly employed women as organizers, and consistently had an active women's committee. See Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 89. For more on the ACWA in Montreal, see Johanne Duranceau, *L'évolution du syndicalisme dans la confection masculine montréalaise. Analyse d'un cas: « L'Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America », 1915-1936*, M.A. (histoire), UQAM, 1985. For more on the ACWA in North America, see Karen Pastorello, *A Power among Them: Bessie Abramowitz Hillman and the Making of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America*, (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

hour work week, and attempted to organize the workers at that point, which was ultimately unsuccessful.²¹¹ The ACWA appears to have not given up, however, because in 1937, Hyde Park's management has organizers from the ACWA arrested.²¹² After Hyde Park had installed a company union, the decades long fight to unionize Hyde Park came to a head in the spring of 1958, and after successive lockouts, strikes, and calls for boycotts from March through June, the ACWA was finally recognized as the representatives of Hyde Park's employees.²¹³ However, even after its unionization, the working conditions at Hyde Park remained poor. Here, Cornelia describes her difficult, "prison-like" working conditions when she first started at Hyde Park in the mid 60s:

Le travail, ben je faisais des vêtements pour les hommes. Mais c'était une compagnie très... très dure, très— On travaillait beaucoup, des Italiennes et des Grecques, mais je le trouvais une compagnie, c'est vraiment—j'ai trouvé cette manufacture comme une prison [elle rit]. Parce que le midi, quand on faisait deux tours pour manger, des fois je me souviens, quand ça fermait des portes en fer... Pour faire un tour pour manger dans la salle à dîner. Je me... je pensais des films en noir et blanc, de l'année 45, 44. Oui, je le trouvais très dur.²¹⁴

When Cornelia first started at Hyde Park, she was paid hourly. However, throughout her two years working there in the mid-1960s, her company transitioned from paying their employees hourly to paying them by the piece. Although piecework was a common system of remuneration ever since the earliest days of industrial garment manufacture, shifting to piecework payment regimes was a common change in the organization of work to cut costs in the face of economic restructuring. According to Rianne Mahon, between 1949 and 1969, the clothing industry was undergoing a period of adjustment: employment rose by a modest 6%, whereas the value of output in the industry had increased by 33%. Mahon argues that much of this had to do with changes in managerial style and input, which included a widespread shift toward piecework payment regimes.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 138.

²¹² "Arrestation de chefs d'unions," *La Tribune*, Montreal: March 17, 1937.

²¹³ "Nouvelle atteinte au droit de l'association," *The Labor World = Le monde ouvrier*, Montreal: April 1958. "1500 manifestants bravent une averse d'avril devant les ateliers de Hyde Park," *The Labor World = Le monde ouvrier*, Montreal: May 1958. "Hyde Park Accused of 'Domination' in Court," *The Labor World = Le monde ouvrier*, Montreal: June 1958. "L'UIOVD demande le boycott des vêtements de Hyde Park," *The Labor World = Le monde ouvrier*, Montreal: June 1958.

²¹⁴ "But it was a very... very tough company. We worked a lot, Italian and Greek women, but I found it a company – I found that factory like a prison [she laughs]. Because at lunchtime, when we would go for two shifts to eat lunch, sometimes I remember, when they closed the big iron doors... It made me think of old black and white movies, from '45, '44, yeah, I thought it was very tough." Cornelia Caruso, interviewed by Lauren Laframboise, Laval, February 8, 2020.

²¹⁵ It is important to note that although technological change had a major impact on the textile industry's restructuring in the same period, the clothing industry was less directly affected by labour-saving technologies in the 1949 to 1969 period. She cites the fact that there was only a 5% rise in capital investments in the garment industry at the time, indicating that the rise in the value of manufacturing

This switch was also highly emblematic of the intensification of work in the garment industry that was taking place in the mid-late 1960s. Cornelia and MD had complicated relationships to working by the piece. Here, Cornelia explains what the piecework system looked like for her on a daily basis:

Oui oui chaque semaine on faisait le— parce que je travaillais à la job, on faisait le compte pour l'étiquette que je faisais, il y avait deux prix, parce que moi je faisais, le stitch ici dans les jackets des hommes. Si je faisais 1, c'était un prix, si je faisais 2 c'était un autre prix, c'était plus cher.²¹⁶

By doing different sewing stitches on different garments, workers would collect tickets. The more pieces workers sewed, the more tickets they collected, and the more money they made. Despite the fact that piecework has been largely condemned by labour organizers and other industry activists, it was possible to make quite a large amount of money if one was particularly fast, experienced, and had a lot of seniority in their shop. For MD, piecework was both a path to making more money and a deeply stressful way to work, which would end up having devastating health consequences later in her life. Here, she describes what it felt like for her to improve and work faster and faster:

Après, on a commencé ça, à travailler piecework, gagner quelques dollars de plus, améliorer la situation... on a commencé le salaire a monté à 50 piasses par semaine. 50, 60, 70, 80, ah mon dieu c'est la fin du monde, c'est une grande paye, 70 piasses? Ah, c'est la fin du monde.²¹⁷

MD's sarcasm here is telling: on the one hand, she recognizes that 70 dollars a week doesn't seem like a lot today. But, as she puts it, it was “the end of the world” for her at the time, it was such a large amount of money. For MD, piecework was a pathway to increasing her paycheck and improving her situation.

For Cornelia, the transition to piecework, or as she puts it, “*le travail à la job*”, brought about exploitation from her employer. In this evocative story, Cornelia describes the way that her employer used the transition to piecework to withhold pay from their employees:

Quand je commençais à travailler à la job, moi je faisais beaucoup d'argent, mais la

output was not the result of significant upgrades in machinery. According to Mahon, any increases in the value of output were the result of changes to capital's supervision tactics and arrangement of space on the one hand, and an increase orientation to ‘style’ and adaptation to new fabrics on the other. Mahon, 51.

²¹⁶ “Yes, yes every week we did the— because I was working by the piece, we counted the labels for all the stitches we were doing, there were two prices, because I was doing, the stitch here in the men's jackets. If I made one, it was a price, if I made 2 it was another price, it was more expensive.” Cornelia Caruso, February 8, 2020.

²¹⁷ “Then we started working piecework, making a few more dollars, improving the situation... we started the salary went up to 50 bucks a week. 50, 60, 70, 80, ah my god it's the end of the world, that's a great pay, 70 bucks? Ah, it's the end of the world.” MD, October 29, 2019.

compagnie, des fois, mon mari il faisait, l'addition pour l'argent que je prenais la semaine. Et je voyais que chaque semaine ça manquait beaucoup d'argent, des fois dix dollars, des fois cinq... Une semaine, cette semaine je prenais une grosse paie parce que j'ai travaillé aussi le samedi, c'était le seul samedi que j'ai travaillé, je prenais 240, 200 quelque chose, et il me manquait 30 dollars...²¹⁸

Cornelia told me this story as she showed me the day-planners that she used to keep track of her piece rate wages. She meticulously calculated all of the pieces that she sewed in the day, and how much each day's worth of sewing added up to at the end of the week. Each day had a total, and then written across several days the number for the entire week was circled.



Figures 2 & 3: Cornelia Caruso's day-planners from ca. 1967. Photos courtesy of Katrina Caruso.

Cornelia explains what she did after she realized that she was missing a substantial portion of her wages:

Alors j'ai demandé à la fille qui travaillait au bureau, parce qu'il me manquait beaucoup

²¹⁸ "When I started to work piecework... I made a lot of money, but the company, I sometimes, my husband did the calculations for the money I made during the week. And I saw that every week it was missing a lot of money... ten dollars sometimes, five, sometimes. One week, this week I took a big pay because I also worked on Saturday, it was the only Saturday I worked, I took 240, 200 something, and I was 30 dollars short..." Cornelia Caruso, February 8, 2020.

d'argent dans ma paie. Elle m'a expliqué, mais elle parlait en anglais, et moi je parlais pas beaucoup en anglais, je comprenais— alors j'ai appelé une autre fille qui parlait en anglais et je l'ai expliqué en italien, je voulais savoir, parce que, il me manquait beaucoup d'argent dans la paie de la semaine, et là la madame elle a répondu que, avant je travaillais à l'heure, et la compagnie me donnait de l'argent que moi je faisais pas, alors quand j'ai commencé à travaillé à la job, la compagnie elle reprenait l'argent qu'elle m'a donné de plus quand je travaillais à l'heure.²¹⁹

Of course, the employer had no grounds to take back Cornelia's pay in the transition to piecework. In addition to her employer withholding her pay, Cornelia's story also shows just how complicated it was to work in such a multilingual workplace, signaling the fact that employers could easily take advantage of immigrant workers by fabricating complicated situations such as this. Workers clearly relied on each other, though, putting their respective language skills together, to advocate for themselves.²²⁰ These workplace solidarities between immigrant women were crucial for workers to resist potential exploitations from their employers. After getting that explanation from management at Hyde Park, Cornelia knew that something wasn't right, and decided to go straight over to the union:

Alors c'est ça— je suis allée un jour à l'Union, j'ai dit— “Non non non, je vais aller à l'Union, pour savoir si la compagnie a le droit de reprendre l'argent.” Ben j'ai descendu l'escalier, l'ascenseur, et je suis allée dans la rue, parce que c'est pas loin d'où je travaillais, il y avait l'Union. Quand je suis arrivée là, moi je parlais pas français, pas l'anglais. Je comprenais quelques choses en français, mais pas beaucoup, mais l'anglais je parlais pas. J'ai rentré à l'Union, j'ai dit “qu'est ce que j'ai venu faire ici?” Moi j'étais pas capable de parler. Mais j'ai rencontré un monsieur, il m'a demandé en anglais “est-ce que je peux t'aider?” Lui, il m'a vu, que j'étais vraiment en difficulté, il a dit “Est-ce que vous parlez... Quelle langue?” Moi j'ai dit “Je parle seulement italien.” Il a dit “Moi aussi je parle en italien!” [elle rit] Alors j'étais vraiment contente, et j'ai expliqué, il m'a demandé dans quelle compagnie je travaillais, j'ai dit “Je travaille chez Hyde Park.” Et il a dit “Ah!” parce qu'il le connaissait bien [elle rit] ça c'était... Alors j'ai expliqué l'argent que la compagnie me reprenait, il est revenu avec moi... il m'a fait faire un nouveau cheque, pour reprendre toute l'argent que la compagnie elle m'avait pris avant.

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²¹⁹ “So I asked the girl who was working at the office, because there was a lot of money missing from my pay. She explained to me, but she spoke English, and I didn't speak much English, I understood - so I called another girl who spoke English and I explained in Italian, I wanted to know, because, I was missing a lot of money in the weekly pay, and there the lady answered that, before I worked by the hour, and the company gave me money that I didn't make, so when I started to work by the piece, the company took back the money that they gave me when I worked by the hour.” Cornelia Caruso, February 8, 2020.

²²⁰ Stéphanie Premji, Karen Messing, and Katherine Lippel, “Broken English, Broken Bones? Mechanisms Linking Language Proficiency and Occupational Health in a Montreal Garment Factory,” *International Journal of Health Services* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 14.

²²¹ “So that's what— I went to the Union one day, I said— “No no no, I'm going to go to the Union, to find out if the company has the right to take the money back.” So I went down the stairs, the elevator, and I went to the street, because it's not far from where I was working, there was the Union. When I got there, I

While she was still learning French, language barriers were clearly a persistent theme in Cornelia's first years in the garment industry in Montreal. Since they represented such a multilingual workforce, unions in the garment industry had to also reflect their diverse membership. Like other workers, union delegates also played a large role in mediating language barriers for their members.²²²

Experiences of plant closures and de-unionization

Cornelia worked at Hyde Park for 5 years, and eventually moved to another factory in 1970. Hyde Park closed just 6 years later in 1976, and its closure is emblematic of the decline of the large menswear factories that employed hundreds of production workers. When Hyde Park shut down, it left 582 workers unemployed, and it was the largest single lay-off that year in Montreal.²²³ Although management was dismissive of the impact of its closure, Hyde Park was one of the most well-known clothing manufacturers in Canada, and its demise did not go unnoticed.²²⁴ A 1977 issue of the *Dossier vie ouvrière* placed Hyde Park's closure within the broader and concerning context of the wave of closures across Quebec from 1976 to 1977.²²⁵ Hyde Park's decline was interpreted as a bad sign for Quebec's garment industry: if such a large, dominant firm found themselves in a position where they had to close, one newspaper article asked, was the industry destined for a slow death?²²⁶ For the garment industry, Hyde Park's closure signaled the beginning of the end for the large, unionized garment factories throughout the 1970s and 1980s like it and Premier Brand. It also marked a change in the geography of Montreal's garment industry. As factories closed in Montreal's historic downtown garment centres, many of the newer, smaller, and non-union factories moved northward, closer to the neighbourhoods where the industry's largely immigrant workforce lived.²²⁷

In 1985, Premier Brand, where MD had worked since 1965, went bankrupt and also closed its doors. She recalls Premier Brand's closure as an emotional time, since she had developed

didn't speak French, I didn't speak English. I could understand some French, but not much, but I couldn't speak English. I came back to the Union, I said "what did I come here for?" I was not able to speak. But I met a man, he asked me in English "Can I help you?" He saw that I was really in trouble and he said, "Do you speak... what language?" I said "I only speak Italian." He said "I speak Italian too!" [she laughs] So I was really happy, and I explained, he asked me what company I worked for, I said "I work at Hyde Park." And he said "Ah!" because he knew the company well [she laughs] that was... So I explained the money that the company was taking from me, he came back with me... he made them write me a new check, to take back all the money that the company had taken from me before." Cornelia Caruso, February 8, 2020.

²²² Premji, Messing, and Lippel. "Broken English, Broken Bones," 14.

²²³ "Quand ferment les usines..." *Dossiers "Vie ouvrière"* Août-Sept. 1977 — Vol. XXVII, No 117. 392.

²²⁴ "Hyde Park Clothes ferme ses portes," *La presse*, Montreal: July 1, 1976.

²²⁵ Ibid, 389.

²²⁶ "Le principal concurrent de Rubin ferme ses portes à la fin d'août," *La tribune de Drummondville*, Drummondville: July 15, 1976.

²²⁷ See Steed.

years-long friendships with her co-workers. When I asked her whether she liked her work, MD answered: “Beaucoup. J’ai pleuré quand ça a fermé. Oui... c’est une famille.”²²⁸ Despite having poured 20 years of her working life in this workplace, MD had to find another job at another garment manufacturer very shortly after her initial workplace’s closure. Although MD managed to find another job relatively quickly, she had to take a steep pay cut, which totaled out to about 3\$ an hour less than the wage she had previously earned. She explains how it seemed like she was restarting her career from scratch:

Ben oui, j’avais de la difficulté, parce que ils recommençaient et le salaire était plus bas, ben oui... Recommencer, mais, chaque manufacture te donne de moins. Même si tu apportes ton slip, et tu dis moi j’ai pris— ça c’est ma paie, ils disent, “mais si vous voulez rester, *that’s it*”. Moi j’ai recommencé à trois dollars de moins.²²⁹

MD’s story indicates that it was difficult to find quality work that reflected her level of experience: de-unionization meant that workers couldn’t maintain their seniority. Cornelia had similar difficulties in finding quality work. After she left her job at Hyde Park before it closed in 1970, Cornelia found another job at a smaller, non-unionized swimwear manufacturer called Canada Beachwear, where she worked from 1970 to 1977 when it also closed. In 1977, she began working at another swimwear company called Christina. At Christina, work was highly seasonal as much of the demand for swimsuits was in the spring and summer. Production staff worked from September until May and went on unemployment insurance during the summer months until the employer called them back in for the fall. Here, Cornelia describes the problems she had prior to being laid off from Christina, where she worked until 1992:

Parce que j’avais... j’avais un peu de problèmes chez Christina, c’est comme je disais, on travaillait juste l’hiver, et l’été j’attendais que la compagnie me rappelait pour rentrer travailler. Mais une année, ils m’ont appelé pour rentrer, mais j’avais un rendez-vous avec un spécialiste pour... Ben il y avait quelque chose qui devait être regardé par un spécialiste. Alors j’avais un rendez-vous, je pouvais pas rentrer dans la compagnie, alors j’ai dit à la compagnie que je pouvais seulement rentrer plus tard, parce que c’est toujours— j’avais quelque chose à faire de plus important. Mais la compagnie elle m’a jamais appelé après.²³⁰

²²⁸ MD, October 29, 2019.

²²⁹ “Well yes, the difficulty, because they were starting over and the pay was lower, well yes... Starting over, but, each employer gives you less. Even if you bring your pay stub, and you say this is my pay, they say, “but if you want to stay, that’s it.” I started over at three dollars less.” MD, October 29, 2019.

²³⁰ “Because I had... I had a little bit of trouble at Christina, it’s like I said, we just worked in the winter, and in the summer I would wait for the company to call me back to work. But one year, they called me to come back, but I had an appointment with a specialist for... Well there was something that needed to be looked at by a specialist. So I had an appointment, I couldn’t go back to the company, so I told the company that I could only go back later, because it’s always— I had something more important to do. But the company never called me back.” Cornelia Caruso, February 8, 2020.

Despite the fact that she was never called back in, Cornelia didn't give up on her job easily. She called back to see what was happening, and learned that the company had entirely restructured their production process:

Quand j'avais rappelé, ils m'ont dit que la compagnie elle avait changé le système de travailler. Parce qu'ils sont venus avec des Chinoises, parce qu'avant on travaillait trois femmes ensembles et on faisait toute une— c'était tout différent de quand que je suis partie. Ils ont complètement changé le travail avec le système qui est venu des Chinoises à montrer comment en Chine on travaillait. C'est plus vite.²³¹

This reorganization of her workplace meant that Cornelia was never re-hired by her employer, effectively ending her career. Although Cornelia didn't have much information on the internal decision-making behind her former workplace's restructuring, it is telling of trends in the garment industry in Canada in the 1990s. First, it signals a demographic shift, where Asian workers were becoming increasingly represented among the ranks of immigrant workers in the garment industry.²³² But it also reflects the fact that the clothing industry relied heavily on increasing productivity through changes in the organization of production processes in their attempts to keep up with global competition.²³³ Tellingly, these changes in supervision were themselves part of the process of globalization and trade liberalization that was gradually closing hundreds of domestic firms.

When Cornelia asked to get her job back, the company offered her the minimum wage and the night shift if she wanted to stay at the company. This came nowhere close to her previous position at the company: the spring just before, Cornelia had been a sample maker, the person who makes the model that all the other workers base their garments on — a position usually occupied by the most experienced seamstress in a shop. So, Cornelia decided to take her employer to court:

Parce que j'ai travaillé plus de 10 ans, après quand ils m'ont appelé pour rentrer, ils m'ont coupé le salaire, moi je prenais 15\$ à l'heure, à cette époque, alors ils m'ont coupé le salaire, et ils voulaient que moi je travaille de 5 heures le soir jusqu'à minuit, alors j'acceptais pas ça. Alors j'ai pris un avocat, j'ai apporté la compagnie— en court. Mais le juge, il a pas— pris considération de ça. Il a dit que la compagnie il faisait des rénovations pour le travail... Oui,

²³¹ “When I called back, they told me that the company had changed the way they worked. Because they came with Chinese women, because before we worked three women together and we made a whole—it was very different from when I left. They completely changed the work, with the system that came from the Chinese women who showed how in China they worked. It was faster.” MD, October 29, 2019.

²³² See for example Ng, “Work Restructuring.” Although Ng’s study is focused on the garment industry in Toronto, similar trends were observable in Montreal.

²³³ Mahon, 51.

alors c'est la compagnie qui a gagné.²³⁴

The law was clearly not in Cornelia's favor, and workers had little recourse to maintain the wage rates that they had built up over time. After she and her coworkers lost their court battle, Cornelia went to her union and asked for another job at a level of compensation that reflected her experience. But in the mid 1980s, work was hard to come by in the garment industry:

Je retrouvais pas le même travail, il fallait réadapter à un autre travail, mais c'est pas le même salaire que je gagnais— je recommençais toujours au salaire minimum... Moi je voulais pas un salaire de 7 dollars à l'heure quand je gagnais 15 dollars. Après chez Christina, le deuxième, troisième année, la dernière année que je travaillais, je faisais seulement des échantillons. Alors je gagnais plus d'argent aussi.²³⁵

These pay cuts in the face of workplace closures were ubiquitous across the garment industry and were often a product of age discrimination against older workers with seniority who commanded higher wages. In a study on Montreal's garment industry conducted in the 1990s, Julie Ann McMullin and Victor Marshall illustrated that often, ageist ideology and behaviour helped to legitimize employers' decisions to lay off their most experienced workers. The authors of this study show that under mass plant closures, older workers who earned higher wage rates face significant discrimination when they looked for another job:

“Thus the seemingly age-neutral strategy of closing a business has different structural consequences for the workers affected by it depending on their age. Younger workers do not have to fight ageism in their search for work, the oldest workers have the option of retiring, and those in the middle must confront age discrimination in hiring practices.”²³⁶

It was workers in this in-between zone, too young to retire, but who faced hiring discrimination due to their age, that were most often left behind.

When Cornelia tried to find a new job, she had little success. However, through this process, Cornelia and her 10 other coworkers (also aging garment workers) were able to access a federal government program that bridged garment workers to retirement. The Programme d'adaptation des travailleurs âgés (PATA) was a bridging program that offered workers aged

²³⁴ “Because I worked there for more than 10 years, then when they called me to come back, they cut my salary, I was getting 15\$ an hour, at that time, so they cut my salary, and they wanted me to work from 5 o'clock at night until midnight, so I didn't accept that. So I got a lawyer, I took the company to court. But the judge, he didn't take that into consideration. He said the company was doing renovations for the job... Yes, so the company won.” Cornelia Caruso, February 8, 2020.

²³⁵ “I didn't find the same job, I had to readjust to another job, but it wasn't the same salary that I was making – I always started over at minimum wage, I didn't want to be paid 7 dollars an hour when I was making 15 dollars. Then at Christina, the second, third year, the last year that I worked, I was only doing samples. So I was making more money too.” Cornelia Caruso, February 8, 2020.

²³⁶ Julie Ann McMullin and Victor W. Marshall, “Ageism, Age Relations, and Garment Industry Work in Montreal.” *The Gerontologist* 41, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 120.

between 55 and 64 financial support. This program wasn't available to everyone, though, and is emblematic of the patchwork approach that Canadian legislators took for supporting laid off workers in deindustrializing communities. With the introduction of the 1970 Canadian textile policy, the first labour market adjustment program was introduced. The Adjustment Assistance Benefits (AAB) program, which was active from 1971 to 1982, provided pre-retirement benefits to displaced workers aged 55 and over who worked in the textile, clothing, footwear, and tanning industries.²³⁷ However, the AAB program was extremely limited in its ability to support aging workers facing deindustrialization. Between 1971 and 1980, only 900 benefits claims were approved.²³⁸ This is mostly due to the fact that eligibility requirements were extremely narrow. In order to qualify, the lay-off had to be certified by the program by meeting a minimum size requirement of workforce reduction. Further, the cause of the layoff had to be directly related to a reduction in tariffs or other measures set out by the federal government's textile policy, which was hard to prove. Workers within these certified layoffs also had to qualify: they needed to be 54 years old, to have worked in the industry for at least 1,000 hours in each of the previous fifteen years, have exhausted UI benefits, and be unable to find work.²³⁹ These adjustment programs morphed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and they attempted to cover the most workers possible. However, Roxana Ng notes that labour adjustment programs are not meant to take care of workers for the long term, but are rather meant to facilitate the redeployment of a flexible labour pool.²⁴⁰ For workers like MD, who had to leave the workforce early due to health problems, this bridging program was not an option.

The embodied effects of economic restructuring

After being laid off from her workplace of 20 years in 1985, MD took a new job at 3\$ less an hour at a new manufacturer. However, her work at this next factory would prove to be short-lived, as she was soon faced with health problems that kept her from working longer. Here, MD explains:

J'ai travaillé à une autre manufacture après pour un an. Mais moi j'ai tombé malade. J'ai tombé avec— mon coeur. J'ai arrêté à 42 ans. J'ai plus travaillé. Parce que à travailler piecework il y a beaucoup de... Avec la famille... Beaucoup de stress. Le stress m'a touché dans mon coeur.²⁴¹

²³⁷ Marsha Chandler, Robert Howse, and Michael Trebilcock, *Trade and Transitions: A Comparative Analysis of Adjustment Policies*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 133.

²³⁸ Ibid. 134.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ng, "Restructuring Gender, Race, and Class Relations," 240.

²⁴¹ "I worked at another factory afterwards for a year. But I got sick. I fell ill with my heart. I stopped at the age of 42. I didn't work anymore. Because working piecework there is a lot of... With the family... A lot of stress. The stress hit me in my heart." MD, October 29, 2019.

MD links her health problems to both the adversity of hard industrial labour and the stresses of everyday life as a mother. At this point in the interview, I asked a follow-up question emphasizing how stressful piecework in particular must have been. But MD insisted that it was the stress of *both* work and family that impacted her so much:

LL: Oui, parce que c'est stressant parce qu'il faut continuellement— il faut travailler très rapidement.

MD: Oui, mais c'est pas juste le travail, c'est la maison, les enfants, aller coucher tard, debout à bonne heure le matin, pour préparer les lunches... Je sortais à 6h30. Puis en rentrant, 5 ou 10 minutes pour se changer, parce qu'on se changeait pour travailler, pour avoir un peu de relax, mais tout arrivait tout de suite, à 7h56, 55, 56, 57, alors c'est toute boom boom boom.²⁴²

MD's explanation here is crucial. She points out that her experience of industrial labour was not only shaped by the difficult conditions of that work, but that it was also compounded by the gendered unwaged work that was required of her to support her family. For MD, too, working and caring for family would have been particularly difficult to manage, because her husband was frequently away for long periods of time for his job as a track maintenance worker at National Rail. During the interview, I continuously insisted on her fatigue and health problems being related to her waged work. Here is another telling exchange:

MD: C'était dur hein, c'était très dur. Parce que des fois dans la journée toutes ensembles j'ai eu un grand mal de tête, et j'étais pas capable de revenir à la maison. Ça m'a arrivé une fois, deux fois par année, ah oui. Durant le travail, arrive que je me sens mal, il faut arrêter, il arrivait que j'avais de la misère à prendre l'autobus ou le métro pour retourner à la maison.

LL: Mais j'imagine qu'il y a aussi beaucoup de bruit avec les machines...

MD: Mais c'est la fatigue.

LL: C'est la fatigue.

MD: C'est la fatigue, c'est la fatigue accumulée. Parce que j'étais très fatiguée. Je travaillais beaucoup. Dans la manufacture, dans la maison...²⁴³

²⁴² “LL: Yeah, because it's stressful because you have to continually— you have to work very quickly.

MD: Yeah, but it's not just work, it's the house, the kids, going to bed late, getting up early in the morning, to make lunches... I would go out at, to be good, 6:30. To find everything, plus 5 or 10 minutes to change, because we were changing for work, to have a little bit of relaxation, but everything was happening right away, at 7:56, 55, 56, 57, so it's all boom boom boom.” MD, October 29, 2019.

²⁴³ “MD: It was hard, it was very hard. Because sometimes during the day all together I had a big headache, and I wasn't able to come home. It happened to me once, twice a year, oh yes. During the work, sometimes I felt bad, I had to stop, it happened that I had difficulty to take the bus or the metro to go back home.

Despite the clarity and insistence with which MD communicates her experience, as I revisit the interview transcript, the questions I asked in the interview replicate much of the same understanding of occupational health that fails to recognize women's unpaid work within the home.

MD's emphasis on the accumulated fatigue of work in manufacturing, combined with her duties as a working-class mother, were a heavy load to bear. As she indicates above, this had devastating impacts on her health, where she had to retire far earlier than she would have liked, in her late forties. What we can understand from this excerpt is also that this fatigue had an impact on both her physical health and her mental health. As a pieceworker in the garment industry, MD was not alone in having occupational health problems as a result of the repetitive, fatiguing, and stressful nature of her work. Researchers Chantal Brisson, Alain Vinet, and Michel Vézina have published extensively on the health impacts of long-term work in the garment industry. The study, conducted between 1976 and 1985, surveyed garment workers who left employment about their health problems.²⁴⁴ In 1985, the year that MD's factory closed, the research team interviewed 800 sewing-machine operators between the ages of 45 and 70 years. The study found that former garment workers were five times more likely to develop severe disability at a younger age compared with workers formerly employed in other occupations.²⁴⁵ Among workers who left employment, the authors found that the prevalence of severe disability increased in step with the number of years that workers had spent working under piecework payment regimes. They argue that the time pressure involved with piecework rates constitutes an important stressor on mental and physical health, which in the long term, leads to adverse health effects. Highly relevant to MD's difficulties with fatigue and mental health that she reveals in her testimony above, the study also found that garment workers still currently employed had higher levels of symptoms of anxiety and depression than workers in other sectors.²⁴⁶

Interestingly, the study intentionally didn't take into account the experiences of immigrant women, instead only taking as its sample population women who were born in Canada. Immigrant workers would certainly have faced similar long-term health problems as those who were included in the study, if not worse health complications due to the added stressors of language barriers, for example. One study on a Montreal garment factory explores the particular

LL: But I imagine that there is also a lot of noise with the machines...

MD : But it's the fatigue.

LL: It's fatigue.

MD: It's fatigue, it's accumulated fatigue. Because I was very tired. I was working a lot. In the factory, in the house..." MD, October 29, 2019.

²⁴⁴ Chantal Brisson, Alain Vinet, and Michel Vézina, "Disability among Female Garment Workers. A Comparison with a National Sample," *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 15, no. 5 (1989): 323.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 325.

²⁴⁶ Chantal Brisson, Michel Vézina, and Alain Vinet, "Health Problems of Women Employed in Jobs Involving Psychological and Ergonomic Stressors: The Case of Garment Workers in Quebec," *Women & Health* 18, no. 3 (June 17, 1992): 55.

difficulties associated with language barriers for immigrant workers. The authors argue that proficiency in official languages had a direct influence on occupational health by affecting workers' ability to communicate and understand information, as well as their ability to support relationships that can affect work-related health.²⁴⁷

Another limitation of these studies that looms large in the context of MD's interview is the fact that they only focus on the workplace and paid work, and do not interrogate the relationship between negative occupational health outcomes and the stresses of unpaid labour outside the workplace. Given MD's insistence on the "fatigue accumulée" between her sewing work and the everyday unremunerated work of being a mother, her experience is perhaps also telling of the gendered structure of Italian immigration. According to Sonia Cancian, although a large proportion of Italian women were employed outside of the home, they were often identified (by themselves and others) primarily according to their family roles.²⁴⁸ MD didn't have the choice but to work for wages to contribute to her household's income, yet she was also expected to perform the same gendered labour within the home that a stay-at-home mother could provide.

Nonetheless, MD took great pride in what she was able to accomplish during her career, as a worker, but also as a mother and family member. She emphasizes that she wanted to do her best at everything, but that it came at a cost: "moi je faisais toujours du bon travail. C'est... ma manière.... J'ai cherché à faire toute de bonne qualité— de maman, de femme, de toute! Mais, après, j'ai tombé malade, pour faire tout ça."²⁴⁹ MD's health difficulties are part of a broader story of occupational health problems associated with the garment industry and the embodied effects of deindustrialization. As a result of these devastating health complications, MD didn't have access to any of the bridging programs, due to her need to leave the industry when she was only in her forties. However, as MD explains so clearly in her interview, it was not just her work in the garment industry that impacted her health, it was her paid work combined with all of the other labour she had to perform within the home. Often, jobs mainly occupied by women are not deemed to be at high risk for severe workplace accidents or industrial disease, compared to more masculine industries such as mining.²⁵⁰ However, the combination of repetitive work and time pressure have severe impacts on workers' health in the long term.²⁵¹ As Clare Bambra argues, "paid work, or lack of it, is the most important determinant of population health and health inequalities in advanced market democracies."²⁵² However, in addition to paid work, it is also

²⁴⁷ Premji, Messing, and Lippel, "Broken English, Broken Bones?" 1.

²⁴⁸ Cancian, 77. I am weary of putting too much determinative weight on "cultural differences" here. Iacovetta urges historians of immigration to avoid falling into the pitfalls of an Old World past and New World/modern future in immigration histories. Nonetheless, these highly gendered roles are a common thread through the literature on gender and Italian immigration to Canada, and point to the complex patterns of continuities and change that migration produces. See Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People*, xxiv-xxv.

²⁴⁹ "I always did good quality work. It was my way.... I tried to do everything with quality— being a mother, a wife, everything! But, afterwards, I got sick, to do all that." MD, October 29, 2019.

²⁵⁰ Brisson, Vézina, and Vinet, "Health Problems of Women," 50.

²⁵¹ See Ibid, and Brisson, Vinet, and Vezina, "Disability among Female Garment Workers."

²⁵² Clare Bambra, *Work, Worklessness, and the Political Economy of Health*, (Oxford: Oxford University

important to consider women's experiences of unpaid labour under deindustrialization. Insights from social reproduction feminism show that unpaid domestic work has an "interactive relation to the realm of waged labour."²⁵³ In this sense, if deindustrialization impacts paid work, then it also impacts domestic work.

MD and Cornelia's stories show the substantial barriers that immigrant women faced in Montreal: learning two new languages, adjusting to life as working mothers, and financing their journeys to Canada, to name a few examples. At the same time as they adjusted to life in a new country, they both began work in the garment industry shortly after arriving in Montreal: their testimonies describe the exploitation that employees were often subjected to in the face of deindustrialization, but they also describe the solidarities that workers built with fellow immigrant workers, pooling together language resources to get to the bottom of employers' wrongdoing. Through the widespread switch to piecework payment regimes and changes in workplace organization designed to extract as much value from employees, amid the global restructuring of the textile industry deindustrialization brought on the intensification of work in garment factories across Montreal.²⁵⁴

Although MD and Cornelia worked in the same industry at the same time, and both came from neighbouring regions in Italy, their stories depart in important ways. One had access to government support to bridge her to retirement, the other had to stop working early due to occupational health problems. These differences provide crucial information about the multiple ways that workers experienced the pressure points of deindustrialization in the garment industry. But what I have also sought to introduce in this chapter is the importance of thinking through waged labour and unpaid labour in the home as mutually constituting the lives of working people, and productivity and capitalism itself. By thinking through waged and unwaged labour together, we gain a unique perspective on gendered experiences of deindustrialization that go beyond the workplace, allowing us to consider not only the embodied impacts of deindustrialization, but also the broader impacts of job loss on families and communities as a whole.

Press, 2012), ix.

²⁵³ Ferguson, *Women and Work*, 59.

²⁵⁴ See Bonfiglioli, *Women and Industry in the Balkans*, 6.

CONCLUSION

From the garment industry to the fashion industry? Interrogating the “postindustrial” transition

The clothing industry was not only central to the Montreal’s base of manufacturing employment, but it was also where struggles over the future of industrial employment played out. Workers brought their concerns about the decline of their industry and working conditions out into the streets of Chabanel, Montreal’s garment district, during the 1983 garment strike. Despite that sustained resistance, many of their jobs would continue to disappear, and by the 1990s, most manufacturing firms transitioned to importing or closed shop altogether. For a number of years, the area saw declining occupancy rates and stalled investments. Although manufacturing and other industrial activities continued in the area, there was a palpable sense of decline. Glen Rotchin, who started working as a property manager at one of the Chabanel buildings in the 1990s, and Randy Rotchin, a former manager at his family’s garment operation, understood the government’s increasingly liberal trade agenda as a turn away from manufacturing and toward the so-called “knowledge economy.” Glen explains:

The government of Canada basically said, ‘we’re really not going to support these industries anymore, we’re going to support high tech, other more advanced — these are old-school industries, well we’re more interested in high-tech, brainy industries.’ And what they did was they kind of abandoned the companies here.²⁵⁵

Interestingly, garment manufacturers did not immediately close shop, and began to align themselves with the new knowledge economy. First, manufacturers invested in new technologies, especially in new computerized machines for patternmaking, marking, and grading. Although automation greatly impacted certain parts of the garment manufacturing process, technological developments for the labour-intensive work of operating sewing machines were comparatively modest.²⁵⁶ Modernization further impacted the gendered structure of labour relations in the garment industry, as machines replaced the higher-paid cutting and marking jobs, while maintaining a base of poorly-paid sewing machine operators.²⁵⁷ Not only did these technological changes impact the garment production process domestically, but they also facilitated the transition to offshore production in Asia and the Global South.²⁵⁸ Randy explained that once

²⁵⁵ Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

²⁵⁶ Mahon, 51.

²⁵⁷ There is a much more nuanced and complex story of technological change and automation in the global clothing industry that I am unfortunately not able to explore here. However, one relatively consistent theme is that technological change largely continued to entrench gendered wage gaps between men’s jobs (considered to be “skilled”) and women’s jobs (considered to be “unskilled”). See Carole Truman and Joan Keating, “Technology, Markets and the Design of Women’s Jobs—the Case of the Clothing Industry,” *New Technology, Work and Employment* 3, no. 1 (1988): 21–29.

²⁵⁸ See Stephan H. Lindner, “Technology and Textiles Globalization,” *History and Technology* 18, no. 1

Carla Jane Dress laid-off their production workers, their domestic operation began to focus on designing and creating patterns:

We would bring the innovation to our customers, and they would say “Ah, that’s something that we want,” and they would provide a budget, and we would then produce a sample domestically, send it to Sears or to Reitman’s, or to whoever, they would look at it, maybe make some changes as far as the fit was concerned, and once that was approved, then we would make a finished pattern and in many cases actually make the marker because it could be sent over electronically. The efficiency of the marker essentially determines how much waste there would be because you’re buying fabric and a certain amount of that fabric gets thrown away once they cut all the useable pieces out.²⁵⁹

Automation, deindustrialization and globalization were essentially part of the same process that saw the restructuring of the international division of labour within the clothing industry. But what my interview with Randy makes clear is that Carla Jane Dress made the transition into design and thus became part of the new postindustrial economy of knowledge and culture. Increasing their orientation toward “style” offered an additional pathway to meet ever-increasing import competition.²⁶⁰ By “bringing the innovation to their customers” Randy’s company effectively embedded itself in the new creative industries. This shift also reflected broader changes in the old industrial cities of North America and Western Europe. One response to deindustrialization in London’s garment industry was a re-orientation of public policy discourse toward urban creativity and design-intensity in manufacturing operations.²⁶¹

At the same time, massive lay-offs precipitated by the offshoring of jobs also meant that garment companies no longer needed the large spaces that Chabanel’s buildings provided, leading to a decline in occupancy rates. In the early to mid-2000s, property developers and municipal government in Montreal began to take a renewed interest in the area, forming the Regroupement pour le développement et la promotion du quartier Chabanel, a marriage between municipal government and real estate developers Groupe Dayan.²⁶² In 2001, the City of Montreal announced a 2 million dollar revitalization project in the garment district that rebranded the area as the “Cité de la Mode.”²⁶³ In an interview with the *Globe and Mail*, the president of the Regroupement, Georges Dayan explained: “The area was in decline. We decided we had to go

(January 1, 2002): 1–22.

²⁵⁹ Randy Rotchin, November 2, 2018.

²⁶⁰ Mahon, 51.

²⁶¹ Yara Evans and Adrian Smith, “Surviving at the margins? Deindustrialisation, the creative industries, and upgrading in London’s garment sector,” *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 38, (2006): 2266.

²⁶² Interestingly, Groupe Dayan is made up of former owners of garment manufacturing companies, signalling that there is a remarkable degree of continuity between old forms of industrial capital and the new, highly financialized real estate developers.

²⁶³ Cité de la Mode roughly translates to “Fashion City”. Paris also has its own Cité de la Mode, a building in the place of the former storehouses on the Austerlitz quai, which houses a fashion design school and contemporary art museum.

beyond clothes manufacturing.”²⁶⁴ The article went on to explain that Groupe Dayan had gone on a “buying spree” in 2005 with a massive investment partner: the Canada Public Sector Pension Fund, purchasing 5 buildings in the area. Glen Rotchin describes this transition:

You know when we first started, the reason why Georges and the investment fund bought was because there was a lot of empty space in this area, so people who built the buildings, and who profited from the industry when it was in its heyday and these buildings were full full full of manufacturers, they were not willing to reinvest in these buildings. And so there became a lot of vacancy, and, so these buildings were inexpensive. There’s tons of space, they were uninvested, they were neglected properties. I mean look at this office, we’ve invested in these buildings, to attract a new industry.²⁶⁵

These investments proved to be successful at attracting new industries. Now, companies such as Aviva Insurance and Laurentian Bank – hallmarks of the FIRE (Finance, Insurance, Real Estate) industries at the vanguard of the Global North’s so-called postindustrial economies – have offices at Chabanel. Stéphanie Cardinal, urban planner and architect for the Regroupement, explained that “it’s kind of like the meat-packing district in New York City that became a trendy place. We have the same vision for Chabanel.”²⁶⁶ Over the past 20 years, Chabanel has seen many of its buildings renovated and rebranded to attract other types of industries in the wake of the decline of manufacturing. Chabanel is still a hub for the garment industry, but only a small proportion of fashion or clothing-related firms manufacture on site. High fashion brands such as Marie St. Pierre have their offices there, and the former factory floors that haven’t been converted to offices are occupied by massive distribution centres for upscale online fashion outlets like S-Sense.²⁶⁷

Scholarship on Montreal notes a “cultural turn” in urban regional development policy, where municipal governments and private interests began to place the creative industries and a tourism-based “competitive advantage” at the centre of its urban development strategies.²⁶⁸ Mary Sprague and Norma Rantisi argue that “a prevailing strategy employed by postindustrial cities to attract capital has been the marketing of former inner-city manufacturing districts as spaces to locate new industries, such as the creative industries currently lauded by urban governments as drivers of the citywide economy.”²⁶⁹ The city of Montreal, in conjunction with private real estate interests, have leveraged various forms of “hard” and “soft” interventions to “revitalize

²⁶⁴ Bertrand Marotte, “Montreal’s rag trade gets Cinderella makeover,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 30, 2010.

²⁶⁵ Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

²⁶⁶ Marotte, “Montreal’s rag trade.”

²⁶⁷ Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

²⁶⁸ See Sarah Moser, Gabriel Fauveaud, and Adam Cutts, “Montréal: Towards a Postindustrial Reinvention,” *Cities* 86 (March 1, 2019): 128.

²⁶⁹ Mary Sprague and Norma M. Rantisi, “Productive Gentrification in the Mile-Ex Neighbourhood of Montreal, Canada: Exploring the Role of the State in Remaking Urban Industrial Clusters,” *Urban Research & Practice*, (March 9, 2018): 1–21.

dilapidated districts” in service of a knowledge-based economy.²⁷⁰ In *Capital City*, Samuel Stein argues that the increasingly close relationship between municipal governments and private real estate interests marks a sweeping trend across deindustrializing cities, where urban real estate has become central to capital’s growth strategy.²⁷¹ But there is a particular type of commodification that occurs with industrial spaces in the urban real estate market. Highly emblematic of the postindustrial commodification of industrial space is the conversion of one of the smaller manufacturing buildings into residential condominiums, with the building now named “La Fabrique 125”.²⁷² A look at the project’s website encapsulates the postindustrial ethos of the residential conversion:

La Fabrique 125 is in keeping with the will of the community to make fashion, design and creativity tools for the development of the area. In addition to presenting numerous architectural qualities, La Fabrique 125 includes six studio-apartments for artists on the ground floor, making the building a place for creation that is in symbiosis with the vocation of this sector of Montréal.²⁷³

The ability to sell these places for their “postindustrial” chic relies on the commodification of their industrial past.²⁷⁴ At the center of these policies to attract creative and knowledge economy workers are practices of place marketing and promotion. In his study *Selling Places*, Steven Ward notes the erasures that often accompany these marketing campaigns. Because “the place is packaged and sold as a commodity,” Ward writes, “its multiple social and cultural meanings are selectively appropriated and repackaged to create a more attractive place image in which any problems are played down.”²⁷⁵ In this way, the La Fabrique 125 marketing materials position the condo conversion project as the product of “the will of the community”, effectively manufacturing public consensus in favour of the project. The property management company Glen works for, Groupe Dayan, was the one that spearheaded the process:

We took the tenants out of that building, put them in other buildings, and we turned that whole building into a residential building. They’re condos — there’s a hundred and ninety condos, and they’re all sold (...) This area’s zoned industrial. We got an exception for that building to be able to develop it, but it’s generally industrial. and we did a

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Samuel Stein, *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State*, (London: Verso Books, 2019), 4.

²⁷² For an interesting discussion of the marketing of residential space in “postindustrial” cities, see Seamus O’Hanlon, “Selling ‘Lifestyle’: Postindustrial Urbanism and the Marketing of Inner-City Apartments in Melbourne, Australia 1990-2005”, in *The Deindustrialized World: Confronting Ruination in Postindustrial Places*, eds. Steven High, Lachlan MacKinnon, and Andrew Perchard, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 232-256.

²⁷³ “La Fabrique 125: An industrial building repurposed into lofts in the Chabanel sector,” *Accès Condos*, Accessed December 17, 2019. <https://accescondos.org/en/project/la-fabrique-125/>

²⁷⁴ See Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁷⁵ Stephen Ward, *Selling Places: The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities 1850-2000*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

partnership in that building with SHDM, the Société d'habitation de Montréal, they actually bought the project. We built it, and they bought it, and then they sold all the apartments to people (...) And in that building we had to redo the heating systems, the electrical systems, the plumbing systems, everything. It was a major job, a major major investment, but the building's successful. I would have never thought 20 years ago that we could have a residential building on Chabanel. That was unimaginable. Like who's going to live on Chabanel. But it turns out that people like it.²⁷⁶

This postindustrial allure fits into a larger set of public policy decisions and marketing pushes that seek to capitalize on the aesthetics of deindustrialization and commodify spaces at their highest possible value on the real estate market. In the case of La Fabrique 125, the para-municipal SHDM purchased the building, and sold the individual condo units under its AccèsCondos program.²⁷⁷

Importantly, Lucy Taksa has argued that the aestheticization of deindustrialization is predicated on a conception of the past that is “unconnected to present labour concerns and struggles.”²⁷⁸ Although deindustrialization is punctuated by discontinuities, these “postindustrial” transitions are never smooth, even, or complete. Of course, deindustrialization is part of the ongoing history of capitalism that generates complex and ongoing patterns of disinvestment and reinvestment.²⁷⁹ The incompleteness of deindustrialization is highly visible in the buildings of Chabanel: some have been subject to significant reinvestment, whereas others fall into a state of disrepair. But this unevenness is not just visible on the façades of industrial buildings; these spaces are also not fully “postindustrial” — despite what private developers might have us believe — because the garment industry still employs hundreds of people in manufacturing activities in these very spaces. Jackie Clarke has crucially theorized around the politics of deindustrialization in France, arguing that “it is not because there are no factories left that

²⁷⁶ Glen Rotchin, October 23, 2018.

²⁷⁷ See Tracy Neumann, *Remaking the Rust Belt: The Postindustrial Transformation of North America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Seamus O'Hanlon, “Selling ‘Lifestyle’”. There is also a parallel process at play here (which warrants its own in-depth study) where industrial decline also coincided with widespread disinvestment in social housing. As Glen indicates, the para-municipal Société d'habitation de Montréal bought the conversion of La Fabrique 125, which they folded into their AccèsCondos program. Critics of the program have argued that it increases and consolidates the power of professionalized real estate developers, favors household indebtedness at the same time as excluding the most precarious populations from the housing market, and that housing policies encouraging property ownership are antithetical to the most pressing needs for housing. For more on these critiques of AccèsCondos, see Louis Gaudreau, Guillaume Hébert, Minh Nguyen, “Les périls de l'accès à la propriété,” *Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomique (IRIS)*, October 16, 2013; and Moser, Fauveaud, and Cutts, “Montréal,” 132—133. For a broader study of divestment from social housing in Canada, see Greg Suttor, *Still Renovating: A History of Canadian Social Housing Policy*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2016).

²⁷⁸ Lucy Taksa, “Labor History and Public History in Australia: Allies or Uneasy Bedfellows?” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 76, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 84.

²⁷⁹ Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 15.

industrial labour is less visible,” but rather, “the discourse that consigns factories (and those who work in them) to the past is itself one of the most common mechanisms by which a *France ouvrière* that does exist is conjured away before our very eyes.”²⁸⁰ In this way, much of the public and policy discourse around the “postindustrial” positions deindustrialization as a process that is already complete, in spite of the continued presence of industrial work and workers. This process is further complicated in cities like Montreal, where the dominant postindustrial narrative produces both a sense of inevitability and progress toward the economies of the future.²⁸¹

Deindustrialization has also impacted the quality of industrial employment, leading to the “degradation and informalization” of the blue-collar work that remains.²⁸² As I have shown in the previous chapters, the working conditions in the jobs that remained in the garment industry were in steep decline. Regimes of sub-contracting and homeworking not only led to plummeting rates of unionization, but they also re-worked the spatial organization of labour in the garment industry to those of its early industrialization.²⁸³ Throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the provincial Liberal government’s pursuit of neoliberal policy also precipitated the gradual erosion of the legislative protections on working conditions in the garment industry and other labour-intensive sectors.²⁸⁴ In 1999, the old government decrees that extended collective agreements to non-unionized garment workers were abolished, which effectively froze salaries and significantly rolled back benefits.²⁸⁵ Those Montrealers that remained employed in the garment industry were largely racialized immigrant women with few other employment options.²⁸⁶

In this thesis, I’ve shown that understanding women’s experiences of economic restructuring through an explicitly feminist framework complicates our understanding of deindustrialization. The historically entrenched gender norms that structured the Canadian garment industry shaped the pathways of the industry’s decline. Women’s jobs were often the first to be subcontracted out, and sewing machine operators were thus the first to be laid off. Employers sought to protect their ability to make profits in an increasingly competitive market through a slew of cost-cutting measures that had a disproportionate effect on their female employees. For example, many manufacturers transitioned away from paying sewing machine operators on an hourly basis in favour of piecework and rates of homeworking increased. This led to an intensification of the work that remained in the industry, and often devastating long-term health impacts related to the stressful and repetitive nature of piecework structures. Furthermore,

²⁸⁰ Clarke, “Closing Moulinex,” 447.

²⁸¹ See Steven High, “The ‘Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power’: Recognizing the Structural Violence of Deindustrialization as Loss,” *Urban History Review* 48, no. 2 (April 1, 2021): 97–116.

²⁸² Curran, “Gentrification and the Nature of Work,” 1243–44.

²⁸³ See Johnson, *The Seam Allowance*.

²⁸⁴ Jacques Rouillard, “Genèse et Mutation de La Loi Sur Les Décrets de Convention Collective Au Québec (1934-2010),” *Labour / Le Travail* 68 (Fall 2011): 27.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

²⁸⁶ Roxana Ng goes so far as to designate these garment workers as a “captive labour pool.” See Roxana Ng and T. Das Gupta, “Nation Builders? The Captive Labour Force of Non-English Speaking Immigrant Women,” *Canadian Women’s Studies* 3, no. 1: 83–89.

the increasingly complex networks of subcontracting also contributed to the gradual deunionization of the industry, which further eroded working conditions and wages. However, the highly unequal gender relations in the industry also structured the institutions that were meant to protect working conditions in the industry. The largely white and male union executive was distant from the realities of the impacts of the industry's decline on its rank and file, and they failed to meaningfully advocate for the women who made up the majority of its membership. Taken together, the experiences described in this thesis show that deindustrialization itself was a deeply gendered process.

The chapter structure develops two main arguments around the gendered nature of deindustrialization. In the first chapter, I argue that in the face of job losses and the decline of working conditions that disproportionately affected immigrant women, rank and file workers launched a feminist response to their declining working conditions and the rapid pace of job losses and deunionization in the industry. The period of decline of Montreal's garment industry coincided with a widespread wave of feminist organizing across Quebec and Canada. Women organizing against closures drew on the language and politics of the women's movement in Quebec to highlight the historic marginalization of women in garment manufacturing. In this way, resistance to deindustrialization put gendered concerns at its core, and reflected a feminist politics against the loss of industrial work. The second chapter looks at the experiences of women who were not in a position to join the movements to resist industrial decline. MD and Cornelia, two Italian immigrant women, experienced the industry's decline first-hand, and worked throughout the period of intensification that accompanied deindustrialization. Their experiences reveal the specific challenges that immigrant women faced when confronted with employers' cost-cutting measures. Their experiences also reveal the longer-term, "slow violence" of capitalism, which left them with poor health outcomes. This was not just the result of difficult, repetitive work in garment factories, but also due to the gendered labour they performed in their homes. Women's unpaid labour, including parenting, childrearing, and caregiving also often prevented garment workers from gaining the consecutive work years to access union pensions and structural adjustment benefits. Taken together, these two chapters show that the impacts of economic restructuring are always felt at the intersection of existing marginalities.

In many ways, deindustrialization in the traditionally feminized garment industry sits somewhat uncomfortably within scholarly and public narratives of industrial decline. Unlike in traditionally masculine industries like steel, mining, and auto manufacturing, the garment industry was never deemed a central part of the Canadian economy. It made up a large portion of the industrial employment in Montreal, yet it consistently employed the most marginal segments of the working-class. Its historic feminization also added to its marginality – women's wages are frequently constructed as supplemental to a household's income – and women's manufacturing jobs were disposable in the eyes of government and employers. And, although many of the jobs were unionized and their working conditions protected by provincial legislation, these structures largely failed to maintain liveable standards for garment workers. The decline of Montreal's garment industry and the parallel decline in working conditions largely foreshadowed the contemporary realities of the highly segmented Canadian occupational structure, where racialized

and immigrant workers are often employed in the lowest-paid and least-valued sectors of the economy. Even though a sewing machine operator may not be the first thing that comes to mind when we think of a displaced industrial worker, the dynamics of deindustrialization in the garment industry are highly illustrative of who bears the brunt of the violences of capitalism.

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