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Capitalism and the Organization of Displacement: Selma James's Internationalism of the Unwaged

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Abstract

As political theorists explore work beyond traditional workplaces, how should we understand the vast class of insecure, informal, and unsalaried workers whose existence defies traditional categories of employment? In asking this question, I revisit the political theory of the Marxist feminist and cofounder of the International Wages for Housework movement, Selma James, to explore her "internationalism of the unwaged" and her writings on wagelessness. An example of political theory in service of struggle, James's internationalism was widely circulated in anticolonial, Black radical, and autonomous Marxist circles in the 1970s. In this article, I argue that it was grounded in three intertwined and mutually reinforcing arguments: an account of how capitalist life is spatially divided into distinct workplaces; an anticapitalist theory of identity that explains social difference as maintained by the international division of labor and labor market hierarchies; and a diagnosis of work organization viewed from the perspective of the wageless worker. I trace how James developed these arguments about the spatial division of labor, hierarchies of identity, and internationalist political struggle and how her view of the common exploitation and division of workers formed the basis of a class-struggle identity politics. Her political theory was an

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important contribution to women's international thought and transnational feminist critiques of global forms of domination and exploitation. It also offers a critique of capitalism's organization of the displacement of work and workers and an account of wagelessness as a work situation, both of which illuminate capitalist organization of work and wageless life today.

Keywords
feminism, class, identity, internationalism, capitalism, social movements

"You don't need a job to be a proletarian." This insight of Michael Denning's (2010) captures a fact Marx knew well: proletarian existence has never been synonymous with earning a steady wage. Rising informality across the global South; the neoliberal erosion of secure work in the deindustrialized North; and the globalization of the platform, gig, and care economies have produced a class of precarious and underemployed workers with an uneasy relationship to the wage. They occupy the terrain of what Denning calls "wageless life," putting pressure on twentieth-century concepts like "employment," "unemployment," and the "informal sector" (Benanav 2014; Crouch 2019; Denning 2010; Standing 2011). As political theorists explore work beyond traditional workplaces (Muldoon and Raekstad 2023; Turner and Van Milders 2021; Weeks 2011), how should we understand these irregular, unsalaried, and often marginalized workers? How does their situation compare to that of the waged workers who are the subject of most recent political theories of work (Anderson 2017; Gourevitch 2013)? And how does their exclusion from salaried work, or even wage labor, relate to their subordinated position in social relations of domination, like racial or gender hierarchies?

One set of answers to these questions is found in the Marxist tradition, according to which the "wageless" of capitalist society have always been among the "surplus populations"—those with access neither to the means of production nor waged work. In their function as an unemployed reserve army of labor, they are a structurally pivotal part of political economy—a "mechanism of domination that strengthens the power of capital" (Mau 2023, 306). Yet the condition of wagelessness itself—whether necessary to capital accumulation (Araghi 2009) or "remaindered life" superfluous to its requirements (Li 2010; Shaw and Waterstone 2019; Tadiar 2022)—is usually characterized as a product of dispossession, expropriation, or abandonment, and therefore distinct from the dull compulsions of economic relations.

For the cofounder of the Wages for Housework movement (WfH), the Marxist feminist Selma James, wagelessness was also a work situation.

Thanks to her important contributions to WfH, James is rightly cast as a pioneer of feminist theories of social reproduction—the labor of reproducing labor-power, the labor force, and the social conditions of life and capital accumulation (Bhattacharya 2017; Ferguson 2019; Fraser 2016). But the housework debates, as Alessandra Mezzadri (2020) suggests, were not only contributions to social reproduction theory, narrowly conceived as the work of the household. They also addressed the politics of informal labor markets, deindustrialized workplaces, and wagelessness—a situation that existed inside and outside the household, which was irreducible to "unemployment." Indeed, I will argue here that the Marxist feminist tradition in general, and James's thought in particular, provides a distinctive source for understanding wagelessness, viewing it not as marginal but essential to economic life under capitalism.

This paper revisits James's political theory by beginning from her account of the "unwaged"—a category that included but exceeded the unwaged woman worker of the household.[1] For James, the unwaged named a revolutionary transnational subject, providing the basis for an internationalism that began not from the industrial worker; anticolonial worldmaking; or a feminist figure like the "global woman," "Third World woman," or "Woman of Color" (Blain 2019; Enzer and Beins 2018; Fisher 2012; Getachew 2019) but from the organization and exploitation of the unwaged layers of the global working class. Yet, as I will show, the concept of wagelessness also unlocked a broader understanding of the spatial organization of work and class in capitalism—one that included an account of intraclass division and the class character of racism and sexism, as well as a vision of anticapitalist resistance.

The relative neglect of James's writings has been facilitated by a complex history of misattribution that surrounds her most-cited work, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (Dalla Costa and James 1973). In the first British edition, this text—which provided the basis for the WfH perspective—included James's introduction, the English translation of Mariarosa Dalla Costa's "Donne e Sovversione Sociale" (1971), and an earlier essay of James's "A Woman's Place."[2] In the third edition, James listed herself as

1. James—not always a reliable narrator—claims to have "invented" several concepts of struggle, including the "unwaged" (James 2012, 151). This claim has little historical basis but provides a clue to autobiographical significance. In her 2012 collection, James replaces her usage, in earlier editions, of "wagelessness"—a key category for autonomist Marxism—with "unwaged," perhaps to bolster this claim to originality—for example, cf James (2012, 45) with James and Dalla Costa (1975, 3). I use the terms interchangeably, as James initially did.
2. "A Woman's Place" was originally printed as a coauthored pamphlet (Brant and Santori 1953); James's penname was Brant.

coauthor of "Women and the Subversion of Community," later characterizing herself as its sole author.[3] This—alongside controversies about James's divisive leadership and tactics—has, ironically, overshadowed James's own contributions. For in the 1970s, she was better known in anticolonial, Black radical, and autonomist Marxist circles for the essay "Sex, Race, and Working-Class Power" (1974). When this was reprinted as a book, Black Marxist Darcus Howe described it as the document that most informed "the theoretical perspective" of his journal *Race Today* (James 1975a, iv). Hall et al. (1978, 370) agreed. Black Marxist women Barbara Beese and Mala Dhondy (James 1975a, 5–8) saw in it justifications for Black women's autonomous organizing. Guyanese radical Andaiye described James as a major influence on Walter Rodney and her own understanding of capitalist divisions and identity (Andaiye 2020, 145, 238; Rodney 1990). Several autonomist Marxist groups used James's ideas in this essay as the basis for their own (Cleveland Modern Times Group 1976; Struggle Against Work Collective [SAWC] 1976). As Dave Feickert (James 1975a, 22) observed, James's "internationalism of the unwaged" provided an alternative to Maoist Third Worldism and Trotskyist "sectarian antinationalist" critiques of national liberation movements, pointing to immigrant workers as "the only international that presently exists."

In this paper, I show that this internationalism is grounded in three intertwined arguments: an account of how capitalist life is spatially divided into distinct workplaces; an anticapitalist theory of "identity" that explains how social difference is reproduced and maintained by the international division of labor and labor market hierarchies; and a diagnosis of work organization viewed from the perspective of the wageless worker. James saw capitalist labor markets and the division of labor as organizing workers by dislocating their work from centers to peripheries and from peripheries to centers—from factory

3. James has claimed authorship of several WfH and Johnsonite publications, including those by C. L. R. James. Of course, joint authorship in social movements—and marriages—is a vexed topic. Her claims to sole authorship are sometimes hard to substantiate, especially when publications were first printed pseudonymously or name two authors. In the dispute between James and Dalla Costa over "Women and the Subversion of Community," the latter's claim to sole authorship is credible. James's erasure of Dalla Costa was gradual. In the introduction to the first and second British editions that collected the essay (already translated in *Radical America* as Dalla Costa's), James praised it as Dalla Costa's sole work; Dalla Costa acknowledged James's influence on her thinking (Dalla Costa and James 1973). In the third edition, a publisher's note and foreword referred to it as jointly authored (Dalla Costa and James 1975, 4). In James's (2012) collection, it was portrayed as single-authored by James. For Dalla Costa's response that James has wrongfully removed her name from the essay "eleven times," see Dalla Costa (2012).

to kitchen or slum, from global South to North—and relocating them into new work sites. She identified these processes of division as forging hierarchies of difference (of waged and wageless, male and female, white and racialized workers). For James, it was this that produced wagelessness—a situation of exploitation characterized not by the superfluity of populations but by the devaluation of a range of laboring practices functional to capital accumulation through the hierarchical organization of workers (above all, through the denial of a wage). Like many movement intellectuals, James's statements of the political theory that underpinned her organizing are scattered across an activist corpus. I argue here that her vision can be reconstructed to reveal a significant contribution to a distinctive twentieth-century spatial critique of capitalist work organization—one that theorized capitalism as a system that produces what I call *organized displacement*, whereby the wageless, though spatially displaced from centers of accumulation, remain organized by capital.

My aims in revisiting James's thought are both historical and political. First, I argue that James should be appreciated not just for her theories of capital and social reproduction but for this worker internationalism of the unwaged. While James herself remains politically active, her internationalism marks a historic contribution to feminist efforts to forge new subjects of struggle and to women's international thought, particularly to the theorizing of transnational resistance to global relations of domination by a generation of feminists whose work is now being revisited (Balfour 2023; Burden-Stelly and Dean 2022; Hutchings and Owen 2021; Turner 2021; Valdez 2019; Weeks 1998; Zerilli 2005). James's internationalism was part of what I characterize as her *class-struggle identity politics*—a strategy of working-class antagonism to capital that sought to justify autonomous political organizing by identity-based and sectoral groups. In this respect, James's writings are an example of what Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2017) and Asad Haider (2018) characterize as identity politics as a revolutionary practice—an identity politics before its "elite capture" (Táíwò 2022). Moreover, James's spatial critique of capitalism anticipates arguments made by later feminists: the extensions by sociospatial theorists of geographies of social reproduction beyond the household and the explorations by transnational feminists of spaces of domination and places of resistance (Bhandar and Ziadah 2020; Gilmore 2020; Katz 2001; McKittrick 2006; Mohanty 2003; Moore 2015).

My second aim is to ask what insights of James's we might "creatively reappropriate"—to borrow Kathi Weeks's (2011) phrase—to make sense of wageless life. I contend that James's writings offer an underdeveloped but fruitful account of the labor of wagelessness and of the importance of work hierarchies and dislocations to social difference. I draw out two arguments by thinking with James. First, that even though the wageless appear as "surplus," they remain workers and subjects of capitalist organization. I flag the

importance of James's suggestion that the "constitutive outside" of waged production is not only explainable by distinct logics of accumulation (i.e., dispossession, expropriation) but is also a mechanism for reproducing classical relations of exploitation. This offers a view of proletarian life as made up of waged and unwaged situations of exploitation, united yet differentiated by market dependence and the organizational power of the division of labor. Second, I suggest that characterizing capitalism as producing a situation of organized displacement calls attention to distinctive features: capital's organization of reproductive work outside centers of accumulation, such that it appears among what Fraser and Jaeggi (2018) describe as capitalism's "background" conditions; its use of surplus populations as reserve armies of labor, reproductive workers, and sources of extraction (Vierkant and Adler-Bolton 2022); and its pursuit of spatial fixes (Harvey 1975) to reorganize populations and workplaces.[4] It is this organization of work and workers that generates the displacements that constitute wagelessness.

My argument proceeds as follows. In the first section of this paper, I show the origins of James's spatial thought in her 1950s analysis of workplace domination in home and factory. This became a building block of her internationalism, as she extended her focus to encompass the plantation, street, and community; to recast the home as a site of exploitation; and to explore wagelessness as revelatory of capitalist totality. In the second section, I explore the counterpart to this spatial depiction of work organization in James's idea of the "global hierarchy of labour powers," which she developed through an idiosyncratic reading of Marx to account for the reproduction of racial and gendered domination through work. James sketched how the division of labor produces multiple forms of exploitation—thus attempting to provide an alternative to multiple-systems theories of oppression (e.g. Hartmann 1979) and class abstractionism (c.f. McCarthy and Desan 2023) and anticipating efforts of social reproduction theorists to build a unitary theory of capitalism and gender oppression (Arruzza 2016) and to explain social difference by analyses of divisions of labor and labor market dependency (Cicerchia 2022; Young 1981). The third section locates James's thought alongside contemporaneous theories of surplus populations and explains the view of wagelessness as a situation of organized displacement. The final section explores her class-struggle identity politics and feminist internationalism. James saw modern categories of identity—from the local to the global—as produced by the division of the working class and advocated autonomous organizing as an internationalist strategy for defeating capital. Struggles around subjectivities were part of the struggle against the division of labor—differences of scale, not kind.

4. Thanks to William Conroy and Robert Nichols for help delineating these claims.

While James's framework can help make sense of wagelessness, it also homogenized the processes that organize capitalist life and provided a limited account of how to overcome the obstacles to collective action that her diagnoses illuminated. I suggest we read these flaws as part and parcel of the creativity of James's theory, which was creative in a sense often associated with Marx (Carver 1987): it was intended to provide insights into the relation of social structures to subjectivities that people could deploy as they cultivate their hostility to capitalism. James was an extraordinary stylist, propagandist, and activist. Her work provides a case study in a form of political theory that views itself not just as invested in struggle but as a tool for it—with the advantages and costs that entails.

The Capitalist Division of Space and Work

Born Selma Deitch in 1930 to a white working-class Jewish family of organizers—a truck-driver father and housewife and factory-worker mother—James grew up in Depression-era Brooklyn at the intersection of the Black and Jewish ghettoes. It is perhaps unsurprising that she was interested in the peripheral spaces into which workers were organized and that she saw domination and difference as beginning in the labor processes of factory and family. At the age of fifteen—already a factory worker and soon to be a mother—she joined the Johnson-Forest Tendency (JFT). She would later be involved in the West Indian independence movement, the Black British Movement, the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, the International WfH movement, and the groups associated with the Power of Women Collective—including Black Women for Wages for Housework, English Collective of Prostitutes, and Women Count Network.

At its core, James's theory offers an account of a working class united by exploitation but divided by capitalist organization of work. Its foundations drew from JFT's "anti-institutionalist" Marxism (Roberts 2020, 224). JFT opposed bureaucracies (including parties and unions of the organized left) and advocated the self-emancipation of the working class through workers' inquiry and self-activity. They assumed the unity and universality of class interests but saw the class as divided by sector and conditions (Glaberman 1947). When they addressed which struggles took priority, they initially argued that only worker struggles in production could undermine capitalist planning, yet insisted the struggles of lower layers—"rank-and-file workers, Negroes, women, and youth"—had "independent validity." James cut her teeth organizing as a worker-teacher in JFT's "Third Layer School" alongside James Boggs and editing the women's page for the newspaper *Correspondence* (Ward 2016).

James's commitment to feminist struggle found theoretical expression with her account of home and factory, which straddled the labor and social reproduction feminisms of the 1940s. In columns and pamphlets that explored women's "two jobs", including the widely circulated and reprinted *A Woman's Place* (Brant and Santori 1953, 29; James 2012, 29), James characterized home and factory relations in terms of a community divided by capitalist bureaucracy into spaces of differentiated labor and domination. She was, from the outset, interested in social division and its source in the organization of work. "The division that is made between home and factory creates a division between the father and his children" and "between the mother and father." Women's search for freedom and "control" of work conditions was, in part, a struggle to reunite home and factory (Brant and Santori 1953, 8; James 1951). A chapter written or co-authored by James with her husband C. L. R. James in his *American Civilization* argued that while the "bureaucratic domination" of the factory ruins its "purpose," the "personal domination" of the family does the same (James 1970, 8). These divided spaces were intertwined: distinctive forms of domination were articulated together in not only analogous but mutually reinforcing systems. The factory could not be isolated from the family or its needs (which were subordinated to production). Men's jobs exerted power over women's time, so the domination of women was never merely personal but connected to workplace domination by the boss and through capitalist time discipline (9, 14). Given the Johnsonite assumption that institutions tend to bureaucratize, impersonal domination was also an effect of the bureaucratization of life: society was being "strangled" by the factory and family, both "monstrous bureaucratic growths" (18).

James already made two arguments that would define her feminism. The first was that women's liberation required the transcendence of the spaces of women's work. James began with a separate spheres model of social life: in the "two most important spheres of social life, production relations and family relations," workers and women were in analogous struggles for "freedom and equality." Their aims were to reorganize the labor process of factory and family into cooperative forms, overcoming division and throwing off the bureaucratic plan of state and workplace (James 1970, 8, 12). As C. L. R. James put it, in an argument that Henry and Buhle (1992, 212) note was shaped by Selma, a "truly satisfactory relationship in personal lives must begin with a total reorganization of labor relations in every department of life" (James 1960, 120).[5] Although James changed her mind about the priority of the relationship of factory to home, she continued to see the sexual division of labor—the heart of the patriarchal relations of domination she

5. On C. L. R. James's feminism, see Chetty (2019).

thought predated capitalism (James 2012 [1975], 103)—as intertwined with relations of personal and impersonal domination in the factory.

The second claim that endured in James's feminism was that women were engaged in a refusal of these divisions: they grasped their subordinate position and had no need for parties and unions (themselves "monstrous bureaucratic growths") to bring them to consciousness. When women sought divorce, refused to be "machines for raising children," and struggled against the double shift (or, for Black women workers, the triple burden), they were "breaking up the home" (James 2012, 25; James 1951).[6] Individual withdrawals from the spaces into which women were organized were acts of worker resistance. This claim that women were engaged in acts of refusal and did not need their consciousness raised (in either the feminist or Lukáscian sense) anticipated WfH's account of women's "absenteeism," which drew from Italian workerist theories of work refusal as everyday class struggle (James 1976 [1972], 16).

This portrayal of the division, interdependence, and subversion of home and factory became the model for other spaces James considered when her involvement in Black internationalist, Marxist, and feminist movements pushed her beyond a separate spheres model to account for the multiplicity of spaces organized by capital. James left the United States for Trinidad in 1958 to join the independence campaign alongside C. L. R. James, where they cofounded *The Nation* newspaper as a recruiting tool for Eric Williams's People's National Movement party (Henry and Buhle 1992). After leaving Trinidad, disillusioned with the institutionalism of the West Indian federation movement, she became involved in Black British politics, working for the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination and the Black Regional Action Movement (Sewell 1993; Waters 2018, 83–93). She was part of many of the era's defining networks: the 1966 study group that Rodney recalls as formative to Black Marxism (Rodney 1990, 28–29); the Mangrove Defence Committee following the arrest of the Mangrove Nine (Waters 2018, 78–84); the revamped *Race Today Collective*; and, intermittently, the Offord Road *Capital* study group, which introduced Italian workerism to the United Kingdom (Cleaver 2014). Through the network that linked Italian, British, and U.S. workerist Marxism (Bracke 2013, 46; Pizzolato 2013, 178), she connected to Movimento di Lotta Femminile and Lotta Feminista, who were rethinking women's class position through the figure of the housewife.

The WfH campaign began in 1972, with the formation of the International Feminist Collective (Toupin 2018). James founded the UK-based Power of Women Collective, taking inspiration from the US National Welfare Rights Organization (Wandor 1990), the struggles of "unsupported mothers" in Britain,

6. The origins and authors of this text are unclear.

and Italian workerism. In subsequent writings, she adopted the operaismo theory of the wage as a form of power, which challenged the orthodox view that receipt of a wage defined the working class and framed struggles both for better wages and for separating wages from productivity as means of bolstering working-class power. With other autonomist feminists, James articulated an account of the value of unwaged work and a political strategy—wages for housework—according to which the wage demand was not only a mechanism for recognition and making visible women's naturalized work but for refusing the division of waged and unwaged workers and strengthening the working class.[7] In the 1970s, she now characterized the housewife's situation not only as one of "dependence," "loneliness," and work (1970) but as wagelessness and labor (that is, wagelessness was a *laboring* situation, where women's labor-power was incorporated into capitalism as the commodity labor). She also adopted a different scale, decentering the factory by appeal to workerist accounts of the social factory (Wright 2017) and arguing that the labor relations of plantation, street, and school likewise had to be refused (James 1974a, 14).

One of WfH's underappreciated contributions was its analysis of the spatial differentiation of work and of how capital organized spaces, using the wage to divide workers hierarchically. The implications of this analysis for WfH are well-known (Best 2021; Bracke 2013; Weeks 2011). WfH argued that the "patriarchy of the wage" and the wagelessness of reproductive labor disguised its character as commodity production, making subjects appear outside the wage relation when they are in fact incorporated within it as "facets of capitalist production and its division of labour" (James 1975a, 12). Wagelessness, in its capitalist form, was often gendered: although in some wageless spaces in the global south, precapitalist relations of patriarchy persisted (James 2012, 103–104), wagelessness and the "resulting dependence on men is the form patriarchy takes under capitalism" (James 1976 [1972], 11). This condition was not tied to the space of the household but exceeded it.

If we take the spatial dimensions of these arguments seriously, as I suggest we should, we can see that WfH's demand for payment was not only a rejection of wagelessness but of the locations into which workers were organized. Some of these spaces were waged workplaces (the hospital, the office), others unwaged (the household but also the community).[8] Though proximity to

7. This strategy of combining refusal with recognition/valorization tracks a broader tension in autonomist Marxism between its negativist and affirmationist tendencies.

8. For James, the wage is what constructs the reproductive laboring space of the household as a particular historical form of appearance. But James did not explain why certain labor processes were indexed to wagelessness. For the importance of embodiment in doing so, see Battistoni (2024).

an industrialized labor process was one determinant of which spaces were waged, James no longer privileged production, nor did she explain "women's place" in terms of interconnected spaces of domination or the impact of factory relations on the family but by women's functionality to capital accumulation and the fact that they labored within spaces that were, despite appearances, organized by capital. For James, formal waged workplaces involved "rationalized exploitation" (107). But unlike narrower accounts of exploitation that tied it to waged workplaces, she insisted the "unemployed"—in quotes to signal the term was a state-capitalist category of division—were still "commanded by the wage relation" and exploited.[9] Despite the "geographical separation of home and factory" and the divide enforced by the wage, there was a "totality of exploitation" (James 1976 [1972], 28).

James's arguments for this totality rested on three claims. First, capitalist organization divides workers in space—dividing them into workplaces (both formal and informal) and hierarchizing them on the basis of capitalist categories of pay and skill (James 2012, 103–107)—but in claiming their labor-power, it in fact claims their time, which transcends this spatial organization. Second, production and reproduction were intertwined processes that operated across nested scales[10]: the work performed in household and factory was part of "one circuit of production, organized by capital . . . to appear as two circuits of struggle" (James 2012, 80). Third, capitalist exploitation could not be reduced to exploitation involved in wage labor; the wage hides the fact of exploitation beyond industrial production, obfuscating that exploitation occurs by virtue of capital's command over labor in class-divided societies and therefore inheres to unwaged work too.

This diagnosis did not only implicate women. Wagelessness was widely shared: children, youth, the "unemployed," immigrants, and peasants were all displaced by the wage—"factory versus plantation versus home versus school" (James 1974a, 14). Thus, the task for feminists was to resist capitalist organization through "the subversion not only of the factory and office but of the community" (International Feminist Collective, 2017 [1972]). By rhetorically invoking spaces of work, like the plantation and village, whose workers were involved in interconnected emancipatory struggles against their shared wageless, exploited condition, James thus pointed to the locations out of which her internationalism would be built.

9. For different accounts of the scope of exploitation see Carver (1987); Wood (1995); Roberts (2017).
10. I owe the use of this phrase here to Robert Nichols.

Hierarchy and the Maintenance of Social Difference

James constructed that internationalism by tackling a series of questions with global implications: how to make sense of the relation of class to race, gender, sexuality, or nationality and the logic of capital to those of social ascription. The key text here is "Sex, Race, and Working-Class Power" (James 1974a, reprinted in James 1975a), a response, published in *Race Today*, to a review of Dalla Costa and James by Ambalavaner Sivanandan, who argued pseudonymously they had redefined class in a way the Black movement—which wrongly accepted divisions between class and "caste"—had failed to do (Brown 1973). James retorted that caste and class were not so easily separable: capital simply made different parts of the working class appear to have different interests (James 1975a, 9). Capital requires division and difference, and also explains it. The core of this position was not unique (cf. Ignatin 1976), but I argue here that James defended it with distinctive claims, developing a global account of identity formation that described how social difference is produced and reproduced through the division of labor. She explained social location and intra-class domination by appeal to an unusual concept: the "capitalist hierarchy of labour-powers."

If, as the young James believed, the working class was unifiable and capable of world revolution, then what needs to be explained are the social divisions that create obstacles to transformation. James did not explicitly appeal to distinctive systems of domination (patriarchy, white supremacy) or processes of accumulation (dispossession, expropriation) to explain the origins of these divisions (although she made clear she saw patriarchy as predating capitalism, even as it was its key tool). Instead, she focused on the maintenance of differentiation by the division of labor and its hierarchy of labor-powers. It was through this hierarchy that caste was organized (James 1975a, 13). James invoked Marx's account of manufacture in *Capital* volume 1:

> Manufacture . . . develops a hierarchy of labour power, to which there corresponds a scale of wages. If, on the one hand, the individual labourers are appropriated and annexed for life by a limited function; on the other hand, the various operations of the hierarchy are parceled out among the labourers according to both their natural and their acquired capabilities. (Marx 1976, 354)

Here, Marx explained the origins of the division between skilled and unskilled workers out of new divisions of labor and the fragmentation of work in the era of manufacturing. James put these ideas to different use to explain how modern social difference was produced by the organization of work—and why that basis was hidden. "The labour that capital wants done is divided and

each category parceled out internationally as the life work, the destiny, the identity of specific sets of workers." The division of labor created a "scale of wages," which it applied by naturalizing and fixing existing differences between workers. Racism, sexism, nationalism, and generational chauvinism were features of organization that weakened class power: each was an "indispensable" element of the division of labor, which was ultimately an international division of laborers and their capacities. James thus argued that power relations between sexes, races, and so on were "particularized forms of class relations." "Our identity, our social roles, the way we are seen, appears to be disconnected from our capitalist functions." In fact, "identity – caste – is the very substance of class" (James 1975a, 13).

James's view of class relations built from the Johnsonite understanding of proletarian life as defined not by relation to the bourgeoisie but by the common condition of those who share the imperative to labor. Location in the international division of labor, not relations to production, defined class and intraclass position. She characterized the spaces of domination in which workers labored as created by this hierarchy and mediated by various instruments of division—the wage, racism, labor unions—which fractured the unity of the class. The international division of labor-power also created the reserve army of labor, turning waged and wageless against each other, encouraging racism and sexism. Conflict over identity was thus a form of intraclass conflict. James illustrated the nature of this intraclass domination with colonial and neo-republican metaphors: power relations between sexes and races were "the particularized forms of indirect rule, one section of the class colonising another and through this capital imposing its will on us all" (James 1975a, 14).

This account of intraclass domination was widely circulated on the international left. Margaret Prescod recalls discussing the essay with Andaiye, Audre Lorde, and others as Black Women for Wages for Housework was forming and assuming that James was Black on account of her "clarity about race and autonomy" (James 2021, xi). Autonomist Marxists in the United Sates, United Kingdom, and Canada praised James's analysis of power relations within the class (e.g., SAWC 1976). But her claims about work and identity—that social differentiation was produced through work organization and the "parceling out" of labor (James 1975a, 14)—were also contested, in part because of her insistence on the differentiating rather than collectivizing power of capitalist labor markets and labor processes. Her attempt to explain how workers—not despite but because of their division by labor markets—had a common class experience of exploitation was criticized by those who followed Harry Braverman's explanation of how the machine industry created the deskilled

mass of the proletariat (uniting the "male Ford worker or steel worker" with the "woman in the typing pool or the hospital ward" [Taylor 1975–76, 20]). They saw James as failing to defend her application of Marx's description of preindustrial manufacture to later stages of development, thus assuming differentiation where others saw the creation of the mass worker, and positing as given the social division of labor, which many feminists identified as the object to be explained (Hall et. al. 1978, 362–63; Taylor 1975–76).

James's account of identity formation had a second basis in another argument—that the hierarchy of labor-powers allocated distinctive types of labor to particular groups, thus reinforcing social roles. This was argued by WfH theorists who sought to tear the "veil away from this international capitalist division of labor," exposing women's class position, which was hidden by their caste position (James 1975a, 11). On the one hand, caste position was explained by women's wagelessness: WfH based itself on this "hitherto invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labour powers." On the other, women's identity was explained in terms of their function in the social division of labor—that is, their reproductive labor (which all women performed, waged or not). This explained why women could struggle both as a class and as part of the working class and why their collective destiny was to occupy a subordinated social location. Even if, contingently, an individual occupied a higher position in the hierarchy, she nonetheless "remains defined as a sexual object of men. . . . Because as long as most women are housewives, part of whose function in reproducing labour power is to be the sexual object of men, no woman can escape that identity" (James 1975a, 14, 17). The same hierarchy that divides workers, relegates women to the home, and displaces them from centers of industry by denying them a wage also divides them according to their functions and the concrete labors they perform, allocating these labors according to "natural and acquired capabilities" and further naturalizing women's subordination. Reproductive labor was thus, on this view, gendered and racially ascribed. Capital was not indifferent to the identity of the people it exploits (cf. Best 2021; Gonzalez and Neton 2014; Mau 2023; Wood 1995).

These two arguments, about the hierarchical division of labor and the concrete labors allocated to particular groups, together allowed James to explain why workers—whether unwaged, service, or factory workers—are divided yet share a common antagonism to the division of labor. It located a shared basis for social divisions, including divisions of nationality. Here, James globalized the workerist challenge to divisions of labor, extending it from the shop floor to the world: struggles of self-, group, or national determination merely operated at distinctive scales. But the second argument, about the allocation of social functions to workers in the hierarchy, was less generalizable. In the case of women, conceived as a class of reproductive workers, it was

plausible that identity be shaped by association with a specific type of concrete labor and a specific space of the home. But this was less persuasive in the case of other identities in the "hierarchy of castes," from "white skilled men to Black unwaged and unskilled schoolgirls" (James 1974b, 29). What, for instance, was the form of labor performed by the "Black unwaged"? Did all wageless workers perform reproductive labor? Was their work reproductive not because it reproduced labor-power or the labor force, but because it reproduced, more broadly, capitalist social relations, of authority and class? James did not develop this argument. It was difficult to explain the location of racialized workers, displaced from the wage, by reference to specific labor processes. Yet given James's emphasis on spatial organization, implicit—but never spelled out—was the suggestion that the Black unwaged subject's location in the space of the urban ghetto shaped their subjectivity and that processes of expropriation created that space.

What is unique about these arguments? Unlike critiques that described forms of violence distinct from the compulsions of exploitation (Dawson 2016; Fraser 2016; Nichols 2020), James focused on how workers were differentially exploited in a range of spaces organized by the division of labor. Her argument was functionalist and somewhat circular (cf. Ferguson 2019, 104). Identity was both the cause and effect of allocations of labor in capitalism. Preexisting relations of domination gave social meaning to workers' "capacities" and explained capitalism's internal composition and patterns (i.e. why unwaged labor is organized in a specific gendered way), but identities were also reproduced and produced by the spatial differentiation and hierarchization of labor. James's account of the hierarchy of labor-powers wavered between suggesting this hierarchy was a function of tendencies internal to classical capitalist relations of exploitation and acknowledging that relations of domination that are not only effects of capitalism but of patriarchy, imperialism, and so on must be admitted into accounts of social difference. What I want to underscore is that her most compelling claim was not, however, a causal one. It was that hierarchy was constantly reorganized through capitalist labor markets, such that identities were *maintained* through relations of exploitation. For James, race and gender—and the other forms of differential embodiment she saw as relevant to the division of labor, including age, sexuality, and disability—were material phenomena. She called them forms of identity, but we might equally describe them as forms of social organization that are reproduced through labor processes.

Additionally, unlike much social reproduction theory, James did not defend a "two-level approach" to the critique of capitalism (O'Kane 2021a). She did not see capital as generating separate spheres of waged and unwaged labor, production and reproduction, one representing a potentially creative "life-making"

sphere beyond the grip of capital (Bhattacharya 2017; Fraser 2014). Although subsequent social reproduction theorists have understood James's account as too closely tied to domestic labor (Ferguson 2019, 101–105), in fact she took an expansive view of social reproduction as not only the household work of reproducing labor-power or the labors grouped as "women's work" but of societal reproduction, including the intertwined reproduction and production processes that maintain capitalist society. More controversially, James saw reproduction and production as not only intertwined: as the Power of Women Collective (1975, 81) wrote, these were "one process, done on an assembly line that moves from the waged workplace to the home and back again." James also insisted there was no "outside" the wage nexus. No labor was exterior to value or unproductive. The weaker version of these claims—that I return to later—suggested that the constitutive outside of waged production was not only explainable through distinct logics of accumulation but as part of relations of exploitation. The stronger version, which James defended, was characterized by what Susan Ferguson (2019, 125) has called an "all-or-nothing logic." It implied an account of capitalism as an expressive totality[11] and the view that every activity that reproduces labor-power produces value and that all of life was exposed to processes of capitalization: "There is nothing in capitalism which is not capitalistic, that is, not part of the class struggle" (James 1973, 5).

James's purpose in reaching for this capacious account of exploitation and of capitalism as expressive totality was political: to reveal a unity of class interests despite intraclass divisions and hierarchies. This was the basis of what I am calling her class-struggle identity politics, according to which autonomous struggles around identity were forms of class struggle. For James, housewives and schoolchildren were engaged in class struggles against capitalist organization of life (contrast to Fraser's [2014] "boundary struggles"). For regardless of the distinct concrete labors these groups performed, they inhabited spaces structured by capital: "schools are institutions organized by capital to achieve its purpose through and against the child" (James 1975a, 10). The WfH "strategy of refusal" was therefore not only about work refusal but involved a struggle to subvert the spaces of work and to refuse the tools of their division, from the wage to racism and heteronormativity (Wages Due Lesbians 1975; Brown 1976), as well as institutions that augmented capitalist organization—unions, parties, universities—and "collaborated" with capital and the state (James 1976 [1972], 9). The wage and the international division of labor made these struggles global in scope: writing in the Latin American edition of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community*, James described "the wage relation internationally" as commanding reproductive and productive labor through both its presence and

11. On expressive totalities see O'Kane (2021b).

its "lack" (and so also globalizing the patriarchal domination of the wage) (James 1975b, 25–28). Thus, on this view, struggles over the social wage were class struggles, and the wage demand was a tactic not just for the wageless (housewives, students, Black women, lesbians) but for nurses, sex workers, immigrants, and the formerly colonized too.

Organized Displacement and the Wageless Class

So far, I have argued that James provided an account of the spatial division involved in capitalist work organization, which not only produced wagelessness but maintained social difference through the hierarchical division of labor-powers. In this section, I reconstruct and situate James's account of wagelessness as part of a tradition of anticapitalist critique before turning to show how the unwaged became a vehicle for her internationalism and class-struggle identity politics.

In the two decades following Frantz Fanon's 1961 recasting of the "wretched of the earth" as agent of transformation and his "stretching" of Marxist concepts to accommodate imperial capitalism, theorists of empire reconceptualized class, breaking with stadial orderings of "advanced" and "backwards" classes (Makalani 2017). Other Marxists framed processes of deindustrialization, automation, and migration as organizing the displacement of populations outside the industrial labor force. This was a theme of the many efforts in the 1960s to update Marx's account of the proletariat— Stokely Carmichael's "lumpenproletariat"; José Nun's "marginal mass"; James Boggs's "expendables," "outsiders," and "displaced persons"—and, in subsequent years, to imagine shared interests and solidarities between subsistence workers in imperial peripheries and migrants, married women, and the Black unemployed in the core.

I want to suggest that a number of these theories, and James's in particular, can be understood as critiques of capitalism as a system that produces and depends on the organized displacement of workers. I adapt this idea from the account of "organized abandonment" developed by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007), herself part of the extended WfH network, which describes a strategy of racial capitalist state formation that turned on the state-sponsored neglect and exploitation of vulnerable communities. The idea of capitalism as a system that organizes displacement is a complementary account of how capital accumulation—enabled by but distinct from state violence—creates surplus populations on which it depends by organizing the movement of workers; displacing them from centers of accumulation; and, in so doing, falsely recategorizing them as nonworkers. Displacement here is not something that happens only as part of the transition to capitalism or to those workers forcibly removed from their land and subsistence by extra-economic violence but also refers to a

phenomenon within labor markets that enables and constitutes exploitation. This vision was often tethered to understandings of full employment, which cast the unwaged as displaced from centers of Fordist industry into abject conditions of "super-exploitation" or superfluity, as automation left workers with nowhere to go (Boggs 1963). But it is also pertinent both to subsequent eras of deindustrialization, when workers were displaced from different industries, defaults forced producers from land, and the rise of the care economy produced global labor migrations and reorganized social reproduction, as well as to our own, as climate chaos and platform capitalism produce new forms of displacement and underemployment (Benanav 2020; Gilmore 2007).

For James, the dynamic of displacement that produced wagelessness by dislocating workers into the home, community, or street was not reducible to the expulsion of workers from the wage relation, for it included a reincorporation into the circuit of capital. While several theorists have explored "accumulation by displacement" and "dispossession by displacement," emphasizing the dispossession that accompanies neoliberal globalization (Araghi 2009; Harvey 2003), James implied the organization of displacement by capitalist labor markets was part of proletarianization rather than a process of *de*proletarianization—that is, informalization. To make these claims, James "stretched" a different set of Marxist concepts—not those of primitive accumulation and dominance used to explain extra-economic and constitutive forms of violence in capitalism's peripheries (cf Federici and Fortunati 1984; Guha 1997; Nichols 2015) but of the hierarchy of labor-power, exploitation, and reserve army of labor.

To illustrate, consider two interpretations of Marx's reserve army of labor thesis (RAL), distinguished by William Roberts (2017, 181 n.141). According to the first, the RAL was drawn temporarily into capitalist production and formed an irregular workforce; they were an inevitable and integral feature of industrial and postindustrial labor processes. This interpretation, defended in the 1970s by Harry Braverman (1974) and others, cast the labor force as continuously formed from the relative surplus populations as capital searches for profitable investment. Marxist feminist theorists of the labor process, in debates sparked by the work of Veronica Beechey and others, stretched this account to explain women's subordination in terms of the functionality to capital not only of domestic labor but of women's position in the reserves—their labor market position as "disposable" and reliable, yet temporary and transitory, labor (Beechey 1977; Bland et al. 1978; Bruegel 1979; Simeral 1978, cf. Gardiner 1977).

The second interpretation saw the reserve as workers who are not yet (or may never be) part of production. This was a starting point for imagining a global class of superfluous workers outside the wage relation. James Boggs (1963)

pointed to how automation created a "disposable" people excluded from the labor force, identifying in Black youth what Mike Davis (2006) would identify as a broader effect of capitalism (cf. Benanav and Clegg 2010; Johnson 2011). Another set of Marxist feminists, analogizing the domestic mode of production with subsistence modes as involving workers yet to be drawn into capital accumulation, gave meaning to metaphors of women as colonized by framing the housewife's subordination to capital as—like that of global south subsistence workers—one type of marginal subsumption, produced by ongoing primitive accumulation and appropriation (Bennholdt-Thomsen 1981; Mies et al. 1988). The reserves were located at the capitalist frontier and subject to extra-economic violence. Nikhil Pal Singh (2016, 38) has observed that in accounts of capitalist development that deem slavery and capitalism nonsequential, a "temporal cleavage gives way to simultaneity"; the same was true of these accounts, which understood what it meant for a reserve army to "not yet" be drawn into production in spatial rather than stadial terms.

James's account combines elements of both interpretations. Like other WfH theorists (Federici and Cox 1975, 4–10), she sometimes used the category of wageless interchangeably with that of reserve army to describe workers dislocated from centers of accumulation yet essential to reproduction and production. Structurally, James argued, the "standing army of unemployed" reinforce "capital's international division of labor." The unwaged were displaced into peripheries—the Third World and the "kitchen in the metropolis" (James 2012, 99)—but were the "indispensable workforce" (45). "Port of Spain, Calcutta, Algiers, the Mexican towns south of the U.S. border," James wrote, "are the labour-power for shit work in Paris, London, Frankfurt, and the farms of California and Florida" (99). At times, the wageless referred to women in particular; as Catharine MacKinnon (1989, 66) observed, WfH saw women as reserves in a dual sense: they absorb fluctuations by increasing their unwaged productivity but remain ready for low-wage work. In keeping with the WfH insistence on the value-producing nature of reproductive work, James did not characterize the wageless only in terms of their potential or temporary contributions to waged productive labor but stressed that their reproductive unwaged contributions were themselves productive: they thus performed triple labor for capital, as reserves keeping wages low and as reproductive/productive workers. As we have seen, the twist that James insisted on was that the unwaged reserves were also exploited—and exploited as proletarians. Proletarianization was thus never equated with direct wage dependency. Despite their displacement from the wage, the unwaged were commanded by labor markets and occupied spaces organized by accumulation strategies. Their designation as surplus was political; hence "unwaged work is the basis of our powerlessness" (James 2012, 45).

The situation of the wageless was both instructive and particular. It was instructive because it revealed the totality of capitalist exploitation by illuminating how the command of capital exceeded the wage-labor relation. The position of the unwaged as exploited, subordinated, and unpaid disclosed the real situation of the proletariat in general: the claim for payment—their demands for a return of wealth owed for their unpaid labor—revealed the unpaid labor of the proletariat (in the form of surplus value). This insight was intended to augment worker's hostility to capital and encourage antagonism to the division of labor. Just as the demand for WfH had disclosed the situation of all workers through the figure of the housewife (Forrester 2022), the figure of the unwaged was also intended to disclose capitalist realities in service of broader struggle (one of those realities was that any worker might find themselves temporarily among the wageless). But wagelessness was also a particular kind of labor situation. In their capacity as a reserve army, the unwaged posed a threat to struggles against the wage and to work less ("unemployment" stifled worker power and stabilized capitalism) (James 2012, 108). If the unwaged demanded a wage, this diffused that threat. They, therefore, had a special place in social transformation on account of their potential to disrupt capital's organization (as well as their potential to disrupt capitalist forms of patriarchy and the capitalist welfare state). They were also in a relation of antagonism to the division of labor by virtue of their subordination by its hierarchy. Their relative disincorporation meant their struggle against capital could be fought on less mediated terrain.

Did this mean that James saw all unwaged workers as antagonistic to capital? Hall et al (1978, 370–71) criticized James for insufficiently disaggregating the concepts of the reserve army and the wageless, because to define the unemployed as wageless work-refusers was an alternative, not a complementary, characterization to the RAL: the refusal to work entailed the refusal to be a part of that army, itself an instrument of capital. Hall was himself committed to a structural method that saw social formations not as expressive totalities but articulated unities and to a different view of proletarian experience, which allowed him critical distance on James's arguments; he was right that James had no account of how the reserve army might become work refusers. She was not interested in whether the refusal of marginality takes "avant-garde or atavistic" forms (Davis 2006, 202). Just as the young James had seen divorce as feminist refusal, she did not discriminate between exclusion from the wage and refusals of work, nor did she think that consciousness had to be raised or workers recruited to make the difference. Adapting a version of the workerist distinction between technical and political class composition, she implied the reserve "army" designated a structural account of workers who despite being displaced from centers of accumulation were

organized into the economic category of labor, whereas the wageless acquired their political status by resisting that incorporation. For James (2012), that refusal was activated through the wage demand: "to the degree that we demand and win a wage we can refuse to be the army of wageless threatening from outside the factory every struggle of women (and men) inside to work less and get paid more." Yet because James came from an anti-vanguardist tendency, the unwaged did not have an exceptional claim on the capacity to refuse work. They are better thought of not as a vanguard but as a special constituency in James's class-struggle identity politics and her internationalism from below.

Class-Struggle Identity Politics and the International of the Unwaged

This class-struggle identity politics was a species of identity politics as a revolutionary practice—a category that Taylor (2017) uses to describe the antiracist, anti-heteronormative, anti-imperialist socialist feminism of the Combahee River Collective. James's politics should be understood in similar terms, though it derives from distinctive Marxist and feminist traditions, one that did not emphasize coalition politics but autonomous struggle (cf. Taylor 2022). For James (2012, 157), because different groups were connected by their common antagonism to capital's division of labor yet differentially located within the "hierarchy of struggle," group self-activity was necessary to "break down the power relations among us, on which is based the hierarchical rule of international capital" (James 1975a, 17), and to build intraclass respect and unity. Class struggle had to begin with each sector of the class winning power and developing autonomy by refusing their place within capitalist organization and by making their own "specific attack on capital and its State" (James 2012, 157). Through acts of refusal, autonomous sectors of the class would, on James's view, develop and show their power and prove to other sectors their use as partners in struggle, thus enabling class unity. That was the meaning of the Power of Women Collective's slogan: "power to the sisters and therefore to the class."

In what respects was this an internationalism? An internationalist struggle would be built by groups "raising power" at each layer of the international hierarchy (James 2012, 108). James put this claim spatially, extending the hierarchy metaphor to include all workers—from subsistence workers in global south communities to sex workers in London: "Wherever we are, our moves are adapted—or subversive—to the specific levels of the hierarchy in which we are enmeshed, the niche our sector is squeezed into, even on a

street, even in a tenants' association, even in King's Cross between those of us who are prostitutes, those of us who are clients, and those of us who are neither" (157). One example of raising power James praised was Julius Nyerere's *ujamaa* village project. As Adom Getachew (2019, 154) has described, Nyerere argued that global hierarchies did not stop at the level of international dependencies produced by empire but extended to rural life, existing between laborers. For James (2014), ujamaa showed the wageless of Tanzania's African Socialist peasant movements exiting, transcending, and subverting these hierarchies (cf. Lal 2015).

Internationalism had long been important to James's anti-imperialist and feminist activism. It was implicit in her invocation of the nested scales organized by capital and her account of hierarchy and explicit in WfH's depictions of women's struggles as global struggles against "development" and for the "reappropriation of social wealth that capital accumulated" (Federici and Cox 1975, 4), as well as in the extensions of the WfH demand to incorporate anticolonial demands for reparations for slavery and "back pay" for Third World women (James 2012, 108, 158). But the 1980s saw a distinct wave of internationalist activism, particularly with the Women Count Network and their focus on the quantification of women's work as itself a "weapon against the work" (James 1985, 12). In her organizing with Black and immigrant women around deportation and other issues, James (1985, 10) now defended immigration as a method of women workers for "reappropriating their own wealth, stolen from them at home and accumulated in the metropolis" and demanded the quantification of women's "history of exploitation" in producing colonial wealth and for the work of immigration itself. Here, James's internationalism operated as what Weeks (1998) calls a "standpoint ontology"—a theory that sought to reveal and construct subjectivities by grounding them in laboring practices. By revealing the wageless labors of immigrants, the Women Count Network sought to produce a transnational feminist subject—the unwaged, caring "network of reappropriators" (James 1985, 11), displaced by colonial capital—who demanded what they were owed for what capital had taken from them (capital, James (2012, 149) wrote, "takes who we could be and limits us to who we are"). Immigrants were key to the international of the unwaged: as the Black Women for Wages for Housework activist Margaret Prescod wrote, "immigration is the network along which the international travels" (James 1985, 85).

At this time, James also recommitted to the claim that internationalist politics were identity politics at a different scale. In a 1983 lecture, "Marx and Feminism", given in the context of the neoliberal intensification of global labor hierarchies, she revisited her creative misreading of Marx to extend the

hierarchy of labor-powers concept to explore a hierarchy of "workload" (James 2012, 155). Social difference, she now suggested, corresponded not just to wages and capacities but to quantity of work. This emphasis on quantity extended certain WfH arguments about labor—the aspects of their theories that, as MacKinnon suggested, shared more with Smith and Ricardo than Marx (for MacKinnon: their invocation of a labor theory of value, their account of women's labor as reflected in profits, and their account of labor productivity and value as a "fixed condition" determined "independent of the market" and accumulation [MacKinnon 1989, 71–76]). Though this literalist reading misses what Alyssa Battistoni (2024, 187) calls WfH's critique of the wage as a "false reflection of value," the Women Count Network's efforts to quantify hidden workload confirmed MacKinnon's diagnosis in other respects. For James, identities now tracked quantity of labor, with those at the bottom rung of the division of labor performing more work. Identity divisions were not just markers of the place in a hierarchy of power, which structured and allocated forms of labor to particular groups, but of burdensome workload that kept the lower layers in hidden workspaces of abject exploitation (James 2012, 161–73.

This fusing of identity and workload justified the tactic of working through international organizations like the UN, which James had long cast as neocolonial. As anti-institutionalism dissipated and many Third World women used international organizations, particularly their social scientific practices of data collection, to name and remedy women's subordination (Mitra 2023), James campaigned for the 1985 ratification by the UN General Assembly of the demand to quantify the "unrenumerated contribution of women to agriculture, food production, reproduction and household activities" (Fleming 1986; Toupin 2018, 258). This shift from a struggle for payment to quantification reflected a decline in left power. But because of her class-struggle identity politics that characterized self-determining groups as engaged in transnational antagonism to capital's division of labor, James was able to argue coherently—if not always convincingly—that counting women's unwaged work was an anticapitalist internationalism. Engagement with international organizations could be defended from charges of reformism and reframed as the wageless class raising its power by disclosing its workload.

Strikingly, James defended this tactic by writing pseudonymously using "the name Fahnbulleh to disguise my non-African origins" (Fahnbulleh 1987; James 2012, 190).[12] She retrospectively explained this as a collaborative choice

12. Thanks to Kathi Weeks and the editors for encouraging me to develop this argument and to Durba Mitra and Brandon Terry for discussion of the next three paragraphs

of hers and the editor of *Third World Book Review* Kofi Hadjor. According to James, Hadjor suggested that "his colleagues would not consider what a Western woman had to say" on what they agreed was the important matter of defending the UN Decade for Women as an opportunity for grassroots women in the global south to access resources. This ventriloquizing of a "Third World Woman" is a controversial tactic for a white American woman, one that would likely be criticized today. In her reflections on her use of the pseudonym, James implied it was justifiable strategically. She may also have believed it to be politically coherent. In the context of the cultural politics of the Nairobi conference, we might read James's maneuver to assume the social location of the Third World woman as expressing her vision of a unified working class divided by capitalist organization, within which the subject position of the subjugated wageless class—whether in the peripheral plantations or the kitchens of the core—was available as a first-person position. Rhetorically, James had long invoked such a position of collective subordination: she wrote of "the wageless," "the enslaved," "the prostitute," and "the housewife" by occupying the plural "we." This collectivizing move that saw the positionality of the Third World woman as available to many was both a feature of the grammar of several twentieth-century freedom struggles, and apiece with the particular contemporaneous cross-racial British politics of "political blackness", in which people of color of Asian and African descent were seen to occupy the anti-imperialist social location of Blackness (Narayan 2019; Shilliam 2015).

Viewed in this context, James's use of pseudonymous propaganda, which represents a subversion of the politics of deference that Olúfémi Táíwò (2022) associates with elite identity politics, certainly indicates how far her politics of identification is from contemporary indictments of cultural appropriation and feminist debates about positionality. A sympathetic reading of this pseudonymity might see it as reflecting James's commitments to a form of political theory in the service of universal class struggle, one which—since her days as an anonymous columnist for *Correspondence*—prioritized message over messenger (a priority that, however, sits tellingly alongside James's own personal anxieties of authorship). Identity politics, for her, was grounded in action: what mattered was the waging of class struggle, not the identities of those who waged it.[13] All groups needed to autonomously raise their power to "claim their possibilities" (James 1985, 37), but no agent or group had a special claim or vocation for struggle—not even the wageless. As James had written in response to worries about the middle-class character of the women's movement, "guilt doesn't build a political movement; it inhibits and exhausts it" (James 1976 [1972], 18).

13. James also deployed anonymity as a tactic—for example, the ECP occupation when protestors wore masks to protect sex workers' identities (Walkowitz 2019, 250).

At the same time, this ventriloquizing also illuminates that James—accustomed, since the era of anticommunist repression, to engaging in propaganda and political education campaigns pseudonymously—knew well that positionality, and the claim to authenticity and authority this conveyed, was a key part of recruitment. This moment reveals another side of James, familiar to her critics: her ruthless style of leadership, which manifested in her willingness to proliferate both front groups and authorial identities to achieve her goals and bolster her organizations.[14] This was a form of praxis that she never defended in theory. Indeed, while James's internationalism located a transnational subject and her tacit endorsement of an account of capitalism as an expressive totality recast identity struggles as class struggles, she never explained how that subject might be constituted or how those struggles might, in practice, be waged in a way that antagonized capital. James's autonomism meant both that she viewed all organizations with suspicion and that she assumed the unity of the class. She thus disregarded questions about the mechanics of struggle, solidarity, and coalition as merely tactical. Moreover, James did not explain how groups would come to recognize the convergence of their interests; nor did she explain why, if agency is sufficient for self-emancipation, the class is not yet free.[15] Instead, the coherence of her class-struggle identity politics depended on a vision of a class capable of self-emancipation through separate yet ultimately common struggles of refusal—a vision that did not always recognize the force of the obstacles of division and organization that James herself diagnosed.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to illuminate James's internationalism of the unwaged and her diagnosis of the work of wageless life and to suggest that her enlivening of Marxist feminism's spatial imagination marks an important contribution to both twentieth-century international thought and the critique of capitalism. James's account of wagelessness as a laboring situation sought to disclose the interdependence of waged and unwaged workers everywhere. She argued for the distinctiveness of the situation of the wageless but also emphasized the interconnections between the forms of exploitation and domination faced by all workers—both those who work for a wage and those who struggle to be identified as workers at all. For James, so long as the division of labor within the class is imposed by capital, workers in a variety of labor

14. James frequently wrote pseudonymously—see, for example, her own anonmyous criticisms of her critics in Michel and Southwick (1973); for confirmation that Southwick was James's pseudonym, see Delmar (2020).
15. For this objection to C. L. R. James's work, see Roberts (2020)

processes are exploited, both despite and because of their division by hierarchies of work organization and labor markets. This view of work organization was articulated to an account of identity formation, according to which identity is forged by the work we do unequally and reproduced through the capitalist organization of space, the allocation of labor, and the division of workers. Thus, hierarchical divisions of labor track other relations of domination and social difference but also themselves produce and occlude the ultimate unity of working-class interests. On this view, class identity may be shaped by race, gender, and nationality but remains class identity. These claims set the coordinates for James's class-struggle identity politics, which cast autonomous struggles over subjectivity as class struggles and refusals of capitalist organization, and for her internationalism, which framed the global unwaged not as a vanguard but as a necessary constituency in the struggle against international capital.

Capitalism was, on this view, an engine of division and dislocation: it organized the displacement of work and workers. By "stretching" concepts of hierarchy and underscoring the importance of organization, James extended Marx to show how the development of capitalist relations and forces of production proceeded through the spatial reorganization of populations and the hierarchization, across multiple scales, of the forms of labor characteristic of different spaces of capital accumulation. For James, capital separated and hierarchized waged from unwaged workers, divided specialized waged workers from each other, and segregated entire sectors and spheres of life (industry and agriculture, town and country, workplace and household). It produced geographical divisions on a global scale. Yet it was crucial to James's argument that displacement from the wage never meant that the wageless weren't workers; an international of the unwaged was still a worker internationalism.

These arguments left much under-interrogated—about processes of accumulation, the making and unmaking of social divisions of labor, the dynamics of spatiality, and wageless labor itself.[16] James rhetorically collapsed distinct forms of division, characterizing the separation of family and household, formal and informal workplaces, and so on as distinct scales of the same process (the division of labor) rather than as distinctive processes. Her emphasis on a unity preceding differentiation led both to important insights, like her insistence that modern labor markets had a differentiating as much as a collectivizing power, and to less persuasive claims, like her portrayal of all struggles around social difference as necessarily class struggles. James was

16. For classic and recent examples of interrogations of these themes see Massey (1994); Ferguson (2004); La Berge (2018); Vrousalis (2017).

clear-eyed about how capital's differentiating power constrained collective action by producing divisions between workers. But she wrote little about the mechanics of resistance to that power and building solidarity between worker identities (even as she dedicated her life to doing so in practice).

I began this paper by asking how to think about the terrain of wageless life, and I want to conclude by suggesting that even if James's critique of capitalism does not provide a guide for steering action, her understanding of the organization of work can nonetheless offer a lens for seeing that terrain with fresh eyes. With much contemporary critical theory focusing on dispossession and deproletarianization, James's capacious account of exploitation serves as a reminder that underemployment and informal work are features of capitalist labor markets functioning as usual, without recourse to extra-economic forms of force and violence. Social relations of domination like racial and gender hierarchies are important conditions for labor relations, but they are also made and remade at work.

Moreover, we might also creatively reappropriate James's insights about wagelessness, reproductive work, and spatial divisions of labor to generate an account of how capitalism organizes displacement, one that I see as illuminating three features of capitalist organization of work. These include that capital requires reproductive work to secure accumulation, and that this work historically has been dislocated from centers of production (to the household) and so appears as a "background condition" even though it is performed throughout capitalist society; that capital requires, reorganizes, and displaces unwaged surplus populations (who function as reserve armies, reproductive workers, and sources of accumulation); and that it pursues spatial fixes that facilitate its reproduction, which, in turn, provokes further geographical processes (like migrations) that reorganize labor processes and produce informal workers and surplus populations (who have a variety of relations to the wage). This account of capitalism offers an understanding of wagelessness as produced by the organization of displacement across different scales. Taken alongside James's insistence that wagelessness is a work situation, it also suggests that though many insecure workers are condemned to situations of superfluity, they nonetheless remain organized by capital, as market dependent or subject to the imperative to labor.

Consider, by way of conclusion, the example of microwork—the work of data-tagging performed by low-wage workers across the global south, from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya to the Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon, for companies like Amazon Mechanical Turk and Clickworker (Jones 2021). These workers, who exist in uneasy relationships to the wage, are not organized into offices or factories but displaced into peripheral zones, needing little more than a computer or smart phone to do piecework. The lens of

organized displacement provides a way of characterizing this displacement as central to the logic of capitalist division and invites us to see how spaces that appear to be relegated to noninclusion in capitalist development (cf. Bhattacharyya 2018, 169) are also spaces of labor or market dependence into which the social division of labor congeals, reproducing relations of gendered and racial domination. It discloses these surplus workers as part of an exploited class who share a common antagonism with workers everywhere. Whether or not they will build an international of the unwaged, they are part of a struggle against a global division of labor that is imposed by capital—a division of labor that is not their own.

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