The Rise and Decline of Patriarchal Systems
Nancy Folbre
(Verso, 2021)

Chapter 1
Intersectional Political Economy

Social divisions can and often do morph into forms of structural inequality that are both unfair and inefficient. One might worry that attention to divisions deeply rooted in the distant past would dampen hopes for an equitable and sustainable economic future. Not so. Such a future can only be nurtured by a critical analysis of long-standing patriarchal institutions that intersect, overlap, and interact with hierarchical institutions based on other dimensions of collective identity.

Abuses of collective power are more easily redressed when we understand their evolution. Their various forms are often linked in ways that render them vulnerable to similar forms of contestation. Both the decline and the persistence of gender inequalities tell us something about the trajectory of other forms of collective conflict. Complex histories of exploitation warn in concert of the costly consequences of gain-seeking that devalues the current and future wellbeing of other people.

Feminism and Marxism have been described as partners in an unhappy marriage that some believe should lead to reconciliation, others to divorce.[1] We should think less about this conjugal pair and more about their contributions to a larger meme pool. I once embraced a feminist political economy based on a concept of Patriarchy analogous to the Marxian concept of Capitalism, two big Nouns that allowed for many qualifying adjectives: ageist, racist, nationalist, homophobic, and so on. In the 1980's debate raged over which noun was the bigger and more important, and whether they could be combined into

something called patriarchal capitalism or capitalist patriarchy. Whatever their relationship, these two entities tell only part of a larger story of intersecting, overlapping forms of exploitation.

The intersectional political economy presented here retains many important insights from Marxian theory but offers a more complex account of collective conflict that draws on insights from feminist theory, institutional economics, game theory, and bargaining models. I argue that adjectives such as patriarchal, capitalist, racist, and nationalist describe sets of social institutions that mutually influence one another, sometimes undermining but often reinforcing hierarchical relations by crippling unified opposition to them. I call attention to forms of exploitation that long predated the emergence of wage employment and were internalized, modified, and, in some ways, weakened by the expansion of capitalist institutions. I offer examples of the impact of patriarchal institutions on the coevolution of many forms of socially constructed inequality.

This analysis of collective identity and conflict builds on three propositions that emerged from feminist theory and seemed, initially, to pertain only to inequalities based on gender. One: Women share some common interests. Two: Many of these common interests grow out of our historical specialization in reproductive activities, defined broadly as the production and maintenance of human capabilities and sometimes simply referred to as "care." Three: Care activities help reconcile tensions between individual and group welfare—and, more broadly, between self-interest and altruism—in ways that are particularly costly to women.

Each of these propositions has proved remarkably generative, extending in relevance far beyond their original domains. That women have some common interests as

women implies that men have some common interests as men, some which are often aligned. Any effort to mobilize individuals around common interests almost inevitably highlights the interests that they do not have in common. If collective interests can be based on gender, they can also be based on age, sexuality, race/ ethnicity, citizenship, class, and other aspects of socially assigned group membership.

Control over the means of reproduction has economic consequences just as profound as control over the means of production. The means of reproduction, however, are not just women's minds and bodies; processes of daily and generational reproduction cannot be reduced to interactions based on gender, sexuality and age. Access to the resources required to develop and maintain human capabilities is unevenly distributed in many different ways, profoundly affected by the distribution of wealth, and mediated by access to state-financed social spending. Income is not the only currency of group advantage, especially in a global economy where paths to health care, education, social protection, and productive employment are circumscribed by many dimensions of socially assigned group membership.

Women should have as much space as men to pursue their own self-interest, but that does not mean that the total space for self-interest should expand at the expense of care for others. In order for women to gain more rights, men must shoulder more obligations. Women's historical specialization in the care of dependents has heightened awareness of the permeable boundaries of the self--the difficulties of clearly defining "self-interest" in an interdependent world. The costs, benefits, and risks of altruistic commitments should be fairly shared.

The feminist compass points toward an intersectional political economy that highlights dynamics of cooperation and conflict, applying an interdisciplinary vocabulary influenced, but not dictated by the Marxian theory of historical materialism. Like this theory, it interprets the broad sweep of institutional change in the past in ways that inform political strategies for the future. The following chapters add detail to the general perspective summarized below.

Cooperation and Conflict

The economic analysis of patriarchal institutions falls largely outside the purview of both neoclassical economics (with its focus on markets) and traditional Marxian economy (with its focus on capitalism). A great deal of empirical research explores inequalities based on gender, but attributes these to personal choices, outdated cultural norms, or capitalist imperatives to maximize profits.[2] The possibility that men might design, enforce, and defend social institutions that give them economic advantages over women goes largely unexplored.

Here's why: Patriarchal institutions cannot be established by means of individual choices within markets, and they presuppose collective interests that are not motivated by the extraction of surplus value in wage employment. Conventional definitions of "the economy" and "economic systems" discourage economists from consideration of the institutional bases of many dimensions of social inequality, including but not limited to gender. Attention to patriarchal institutions requires a new way of thinking about economic systems—and vice versa.

Economic systems are characterized by complex forms of cooperation and conflict among both individuals and groups, mediated by a variety of social institutions. System

dynamics can seldom be reduced to one axis of collective conflict, such as gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship, or class; systems can be simultaneously patriarchal, racist, nationalist, and capitalist, and none of these individual adjectives fully captures their internal logic, though some are more salient than others at different points. Hierarchical institutions rely heavily on the stabilizing effect of the multiple social divisions they create. However, they can be undermined by the shifting weights of differing identities and interests, battered by the forces of technological change, social invention, and political alliance.

The rise and decline of patriarchal institutions illustrate such shifts, with implications for the evolution of the larger systems of which they are a part. Gender inequalities coexist and coevolve with other inequalities. Overlaps, intersections, and interactions among distinct structures of collective power help explain the emergence of patriarchal institutions, their alteration in the course of economic development, and their influence on welfare states. Many forms of exploitation that pre-dated capitalist institutions have weakened over time, but some have taken new shapes.

Capitalist institutions create powerful incentives to maximize short-run profits by exploiting unpriced public goods crucial to the sustainability of the social and natural environment. The unpaid and paid care of others is one these public goods—a source of immense social benefits that are not fully captured by those who generate them. Women's continuing specialization in the care of dependents—whether at home or in the labor market--both limits their collective bargaining power and gives them a particular stake in the development of more cooperative and sustainable economic systems.

Rise and decline do not imply decline and fall, but a change in the slope of a long-run line. The ragged ups and downs of political and cultural contestation remain confusing and painful. An international backlash against gender equality is evident.[3] The hypermasculinity of world leaders like Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin derogates women even as it invokes the glory of the white nation-state as a path to prosperity.[4] Yet this very backlash reveals deep-seated anxieties created by fundamental shifts in the organization of reproductive work, along with the powerful valence of overlapping privileges based on gender, race/ethnicity, citizenship, and class.

Consolidated forms of power build on their antecedents, creating complex inequalities that both hinder efforts to build political coalitions of the disempowered and create potential for sudden realignments. In January 2017, Oxfam released a report estimating that the eight richest people in the world—all white men, six from the U.S.-- own as much net wealth as the bottom half of the global population.[5] Their personal characteristics and countries of origin hardly seem incidental.

Because patriarchal institutions are increasingly vulnerable to contestation, feminists have become the harbingers of structural change. The poster that sparked the Occupy Movement in the U.S. in 2011 featured an elegant ballet dancer balanced atop the bronze bull of Wall Street. In 2017, a smaller sculpture known as Fearless Girl faced that bull in the street for a few months, creating a furor because, as the mayor of New York City observed, she represented everyone willing to stand up to the rich and powerful.[6] The success of this metaphorical challenge rests on the development of theoretical tools that can help forge broad progressive coalitions based on principles of fair play.

Systems and Structures

A patriarchal system is one that includes structures of patriarchal power, overlapping and intersecting other structures of collective power in historically specific ways. All these structures have common features: laws, ideologies, and asset distributions that create collective advantages or disadvantages. Our language reveals subliminal awareness of structural constraints: unlevel playing fields, broken ladders, poverty traps, glass ceilings, maternal walls, sticky floors.

Many of the institutional structures that shape relations between men and women also influence the reproduction and care of human beings. A patriarch is not merely a man; he is a man who wields power by virtue of his age and sexual orientation, as well as his gender. Patriarchal laws, rules, rights, and public policies leave clear traces, and the historical record shows that they have begun to recede. Patriarchal ideologies shaping cultural norms are more resistant to change, because they are imprinted at an early age and reinforced by cultural and economic influence. Patriarchal control over financial and other assets is another durable source of gendered power.

Economic assets cannot be narrowly defined as means of capitalist production; they include all sources of future income: not just property easily denominated in dollars, but also human capital or labor power (the value of productive capabilities), natural capital (the value of environmental resources and ecological services) social capital (the value of networks of reciprocity, obligation, and mutual aid), and knowledge capital (the value of what we know, from human history to modern technology). These forms of capital, though difficult to literally own, are subject to collective control. They yield indispensable economic benefits yet can also be conducive to costly forms of exploitation.

Emphasis on the synergies between political, cultural, and economic institutions focuses attention on collective identity and action. It is often possible to ascertain the distributional effects of institutional arrangements by parsing their effects on the relative bargaining power of groups, asking "what dimension of socially assigned group membership do these institutions reward?" Some institutions facilitate the accumulation of advantages based on gender, age, or sexuality. Others facilitate the accumulation of advantages based on class, race/ ethnicity, citizenship or other dimensions of group identity such as religion.

Analogues are signaled by the very words we use. The suffix "archy" derives from the Greek words for rule and ruler. "Hierarchy," a word invented long ago to describe the ranks of angels, gradually acquired a secular meaning: a structure of inequality that is at least somewhat independent of those who occupy it.[7] Terms such as patriarchy, monarchy, and oligarchy reflect this semantic intent. It hardly seems incidental that most monarchies and oligarchies put fathers in charge. Economists did not invent the word "capital"—it derives from Middle English: "standing at the head or beginning," via the Latin "capitalis" from "caput" or head. Capitalism is a hierarchical structure that gives owners of inherited or accumulated wealth institutional power over wage earners. Traditional Marxian theory treats it as a hegemonic mode of production that dominates—perhaps even generates--other manifestations of collective power, but when capitalism emerges, it coexists, co-evolves, and interacts with other hierarchical structures. None of the causal arrows move in straight, one-way lines; they are convoluted and recursive.

All hierarchical structures are economically consequential, creating the potential for exploitation and affecting both the production and distribution of surplus. Patriarchal

institutional structures allocate power by gender, age, and sexual orientation, organizing reproduction in ways that historically contributed to a distinctive form of accumulation—population growth. Likewise, the racist and nationalist institutional structures that predated capitalist ways of organizing work coordinated forms of collective action—including organized warfare—that made some groups wealthy at the expense of others. These forms of surplus creation and appropriation were not superceded by capitalist development but incorporated into it.

This historical narrative is far more tangled than the classical Marxian succession of modes of production such as feudalism-to-capitalism, revealing an ecology of power characterized by multiple and simultaneous forms of exploitation. It brings women and families into a larger picture in ways that go well beyond an analysis of gender inequality. The complexity of economic systems comprised of a large number of interlocking hierarchical structures almost certainly helps explain both their relative stability and their occasional susceptibility to change. To simply call a totality like this "capitalism" is misleading.

Democracy, in the broadest sense of rules guaranteeing both personal rights and equal participation in collective decision making, represents an institutional structure designed to minimize exploitative outcomes. Not that democracy necessarily escapes hierarchy: Even groups that forego leaders and make decisions by consensus typically enforce rules of membership and behavior, drawing boundaries that define their purview. Democracy seldom functions effectively when it remains incomplete. Still, democratic ideals provide a crucial benchmark for the critical analysis of hierarchical institutions that create arbitrary and unfair forms of inequality.

Conventional neoclassical economics locates individuals in competitive markets; classical Marxian theory focuses on class struggle within stylized modes of production. Some critics of both theories point to social institutions but stop short of a comprehensive analysis of multidimensional forms of collective conflict. Political science is generally more attentive to distributional maneuver, sociology and anthropology to normative power. These diverse approaches themselves occasionally intersect and overlap. They can all inform the conceptual project of defining institutional structures of collective power in terms of their economic consequences for collective affiliations.

Actors and Actions

Feminists aim to understand "the patriarchal" for an obvious reason. If you want to tear down a structure, it helps to understand how it was built and what is it connected to. Collective power tends to reproduce itself or morph into resilient hybrid forms but is not invulnerable. Political realignments that weaken one institutional structure can destabilize the larger edifice. Institutional structures that promote success in one environment can prove ineffective in another, undermined by ideological inconsistencies or disrupted by technological change. Short-run gains can be abruptly reversed. The tendencies toward systemic crisis central to the classical Marxian critique of capitalism can take a more general form, applying to complex systems unable to adapt to changing circumstances such as severe threats of social and environmental disruption.

Social structures and systems do not fall from the sky. They are created and sustained by a dialectic of cooperation and competition, complicated by unforeseen events and unexpected consequences. Individuals often pursue their own self-interest in market exchange, as conventional neoclassical economics posits. Classes often struggle over the

control of surplus, as Marxian political economy posits. These actors and actions, however, tell only part of a more complicated story in which unfair inequalities in bargaining power lead to coexisting forms of exploitation.

This story becomes more compelling when the definition of economic activities is expanded beyond production for market exchange to encompass the more gendered activities of appropriation (such as theft and war), reproduction (the production and maintenance of human capabilities), and the larger process of social reproduction (the creation and maintenance of group identities that enable the pursuit of collective interests) which both depends on and enables success in production and reproduction. All these activities require forms of coordination enforced by structures of collective power. This coordination comes at a high cost, because it creates opportunities for those in positions of power to claim an unfair share of the gains from cooperation. Effective democracy is the only safeguard, and it is undermined by economic inequality.

Economic inequality cannot be defined simply in terms of market income; it must be defined more broadly in terms of differential access to financial, human, natural, and social capital. While many of us can choose whether or not to join specific interest groups, our ability to choose socially assigned groups based on characteristics such as gender, age, sexuality, race/ethnicity, class, and national citizenship is limited by distinct labels stamped upon us at birth. These labels are not necessarily culpable, but they are often deployed in ways that create economic vulnerability for some and unfair advantage for others. We can choose which groups to align ourselves, but our agency is limited, our choices hampered by incomplete information regarding other peoples' virtually simultaneous decisions.

Some of us enjoy multiple forms of group-based advantage or suffer multiple forms of disadvantage; many of us find ourselves in mixed or contradictory positions, advantaged in some respects, disadvantaged in others. As Roxane Gay puts it, "To have privilege in one or more areas does not mean you are wholly privileged…The acknowledgement of my privilege is not a denial of the ways I have been and am marginalized, the ways I have suffered."[8] The very complexity of privilege makes it difficult to forge agreement on principles of economic justice, much less coordinate efforts to apply them. Fear of the future often makes us cling to the past. The difficulty of predicting the consequences of possible coalitions gives theoretical narratives and cultural ideologies enormous influence over our decisions.

Neoclassical economic theory emphasizes free-rider problems, instances in which the pursuit of individual self-interest undermines commitments to cooperation. Yet it often underestimates the ways in which such coordination problems are overcome. Classical Marxian theory highlights class solidarity, but often leaves equally important forms of solidarity in the dark. Neither theory provides a complete account of the dialectic of cooperation and conflict that shapes social divisions. Both individuals and groups maneuver for a larger share of the gains they can garner from cooperation and exchange. Institutional structures designed to discourage free-riding often exacerbate an equally serious problem: top-riding or cream-skimming by those in positions of power. Strong groups often find ways to exploit weak groups and to institutionalize their gains in ways that perpetuate their advantage.

We are all players in metaphorical games in which the rules and rewards are often taken as a given. The winners, in particular, are likely to resist change. Yet all players have a

stake in improving the size and sustainability of the total payoff, and with it, the value of their winnings. Two important tools of political economy, bargaining models and game theory, help explain why equitable forms of cooperation can leave everyone better off in the long run. There are good reasons why most of the literal games we enjoy stipulate rules of fair play and put umpires into place.

Some feminist theorists are suspicious of formal methods of economic reasoning. Audre Lorde's famous warning comes to mind: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."[9] Some tools, however, cut both ways. The martial art of aikido teaches defenders to reverse the energy of attack. In medieval warfare, few successes were more impressive than those hoisting attackers on their own petards.

Enlarging the Economic

Intersectional political economy redefines "the economic" in ways that encompass both reproduction and social reproduction- the creation of human capabilities and the social institutions that bind people into groups with at least some common identities and interests. The first five chapters of this book conceptualize a strategic landscape in which structures of collective power create interlocking hierarchies, defining the scope for individual and collective decisions and generating coalitions that rely heavily on normative ideologies to coordinate their efforts. Interlocking structures of collective power set the stage for a multilayered process of collective bargaining among groups seeking to strengthen portfolios of privilege and those hoping to escape structural disadvantage.

This theoretical reconstruction brings patriarchal bargains to the front and center of human history, while also acknowledging their deep embeddedness in complex hierarchical systems. Because patriarchal institutions have undergone gradual, but

fundamental transformation in a variety of historical and cultural contexts, they reveal some recipes for change. The proof of the pudding lies in the development of a more comprehensive explanation of intersectional dynamics.

This is a very big pudding, not one that can be fully cooked in a single pot. The last five chapters offer, instead, a taste of alterations to several central narratives of political economy: the origins of exploitation, the expansion of capitalist institutions, the development of welfare states, the persistence of gender inequality, and hopes for building progressive coalitions.

These chapters integrate analysis of demographic and economic dynamics mediated by structures of collective power that constrain individual and collective decisions. Causality works both ways: personal and social choices exert a cumulative effect on structures of collective power. These reciprocal processes fit loosely under the rubric of social reproduction but cannot be reduced to the social reproduction of capitalism as a unitary system, or explained simply as the result of cultural inertia and technological change. They reflect more complex rhythms of collective cooperation and conflict.

History, Herstory, Us-story

Capitalist development has encouraged a reallocation of human effort away from population growth toward increases in per capita income and consumption, with many positive consequences for women. These improvements, however, have been achieved in part through the exploitation of groups with relatively little bargaining power. The global North has benefited partly at the expense of the global South, and growth in Gross Domestic Product has been purchased at the expense of future generations who lack any means to contest the degradation of natural assets, the destabilization of global climate,

and the risk of social and political dysfunction. Even those singing along cannot know how this opera will end.

Origins

Inequalities are often fractal, with small patterns replicated on a larger scale. Any understanding of unfair inequality writ large must be based on an understanding unfair inequality writ small, in families. If the gender division of power between men and women were entirely prescribed by biological differences, it would be difficult to explain why it has been enforced—often violently--by so many social institutions. This institutional history begins long before history itself (his story, not hers or ours) was invented, challenging the Marxian assumption that societies without private property in livestock or land were largely egalitarian. Still, a more basic principle of Marxian historical materialism remains apt. Exploitative institutions can help groups seize or generate a surplus that works to their collective advantage, even though the benefits are unequally distributed within the group. Once established, such institutions remain resistant to change even when they become costly for everyone.

Patriarchal institutions initially proved complementary to the development of class- and race-based institutions of private property and status, helping ensure their social reproduction. The enslavement of women taken as prizes in war was a precursor to the later enslavement of entire families to be bought and sold like livestock. Tribes, lineages, and dynasties were conceived as families writ large, and distinctions among them provided a template for future ideologies of race. The authority of fathers became a metaphor and a model for the authority of kings. Hierarchical institutions delivered significant benefits

often conditioned on military success, including the accumulation of agricultural surplus and—equally if not more important--the accumulation of population.

Capitalist Development

Capitalist institutions ranging from debt finance to wage employment emerged slowly and unevenly within a patriarchal, racist, nationalist and often feudal matrix, rewarding innovation, but also encouraging new forms of exploitation. They built upon—and may well have been dependent on, pre-existing inequalities and group allegiances. One institutional form that played an important role was slave-based plantation agriculture, a profit-oriented form of coerced labor that emerged where differences in class power overlapped with differences in racial/ethnic power. Many forms of colonization took a similar turn.

Early capitalist development often proved most dynamic in countries where workers had sufficient bargaining power to pressure employers to seek profits through innovation rather than mere coercion. Indeed, where powerful groups could simply exact tribute or seize valuable natural assets, they seldom risked their wealth on forms of investment that could increase living standards. They could, instead, invest in the co-optation of local elites, a strategy perfected by the British East India Company in India.

The genesis of wage employment took variable forms. Whether workers entered factories as a last resort or eagerly sought wage employment depended in large part on their gender and their age, as well as local economic conditions. In some instances, the initial expansion of factory production had contradictory effects—making the younger generation less dependent on their parents for land and livelihood even as it locked them into a new kind of dependence on the labor market. In general, wage employment took a

distinctly gendered form, with women restricted to the least remunerative jobs. Capitalists stood firmly with other men, often including their own employees, in defense of male advantage.

On the other hand, capitalist development transformed the paths to economic success. In areas where household-based production declined and family size began to shrink, it became increasingly costly for men to keep women in the home. Access to market income, as well as fertility decline, improved family living standards and increased women's ability to renegotiate patriarchal rules and norms. The institutional gains of the early feminist movement often had ideological spillover effects, weakening some patriarchal laws and norms even in areas where relatively little economic change was apparent. Imperial powers such as England often congratulated themselves on enforcing rules against child marriage or mistreatment of widows in their colonies.

Women's potential empowerment was everywhere mediated by many other dimensions of their collective identity, especially their race/ethnicity, class, and citizenship. Capitalist development and increased geographic mobility weakened family commitments. While wage employment offered economic opportunities outside the home, it did not offer any compensation for the direct care or support of family members. Some young people preferred to strike out on their own.

Here again, the consequences were contradictory. On the one hand, the increasing cost of children encouraged efforts to limit family size, reducing the enormous demands of childbearing and rearing. On the other hand, women were still left with primary responsibility for the care of dependents, including the growing ranks of the elderly. With increases in divorce and non-marriage in Europe, the U.S., and much of Latin America,

fathers became less likely to take economic responsibility for their children, and the risk that motherhood itself would lead to poverty increased. The ethos of capitalist individualism—along with reduced incentives for family and community cooperation—left many dependents vulnerable to neglect.

Welfare States

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the weakening of family ties in affluent capitalist countries increased the economic pressure for state provision of care services such as education, health care, pensions, and a social safety net. State provision also offered greater efficiency through specialization, economies of scale, and pooling of risk. Working class organizations often played a key role in bargaining for increases in the "social wage," but employers also had an economic stake in the development of a healthy, well-educated and well-cared for labor force, and the military counted on able-bodied soldiers.

Many welfare state policies subsidized traditional breadwinner/homemaker families, channeling pensions and other social benefits through men's hands. In racially and ethnically divided countries, such as the U.S., whites acted in concert to restrict benefits to others, claiming both the profits and the wages of whiteness. Class inequalities often influenced the structure of both taxes and benefits. In Nordic countries, relatively low levels of racial and class inequality facilitated the emergence of organized women's groups that successfully fought for more generous and universal social benefits.

As the twenty-first century approached, globalization intensified the disconnect between reproduction and production. Large employers became less willing to support social spending and better able to minimize taxes and wages through offshoring and outsourcing. Both capital mobility and increased automation made employers less

dependent on any one national labor force. At the same time, the proliferation of new military technologies such as unmanned drones and cyberwarfare made nations less dependent on human soldiery. Neoliberal policies came to the fore: The international expansion of welfare state policies, once considered virtually inevitable, slowed considerably and, in some countries, reversed.

Changes in the realm of reproduction also put workers and taxpayers on the defensive. On the one hand, new medical technologies enhanced women's control over reproductive outcomes. On the other hand, the relative costs of raising and educating children increased—especially for mothers. Growing tensions within the welfare state echo tensions within families. Who should take care of whom? Public policies explicitly designed to support childrearing, including family allowances, childcare provision, and paid family leaves from employment, cover a relatively small share of the costs of parenthood.

Fertility decline has tilted the population of many countries toward a larger share of elderly persons even as their life expectancy and need for medical and care services has increased. The burden of public pensions and medical services for the elderly weighs heavily on working-age adults who fear that coming generations may be unwilling or unable to provide them with the same level of support. Most of the elderly have already raised families and anticipate few direct gains from public investments in other people's children, particularly those that do not resemble their own. Such age-based divisions are exacerbated by the difficulty of understanding—and improving—the intergenerational bargain built into welfare state policies.

Poorly understood class and race/ethnicity dynamics also generate costly social division. Increased inequality in wealth and income, accompanied by a weakening of social safety nets, reduces physical and mental health and thwarts cooperative effects to respond effectively to common problems.[10] An ideological emphasis on Gross Domestic Product and stock market returns as measures of economic success creates confusion and misunderstanding. The true cost of inequality is obscured by national income accounts that treat care for others and investments in human capabilities as just another form of consumption, rather than a fundamentally important investment in human and social capital.

Welfare states, like families, have become less reliable sources of care for dependents and investment in human capabilities. Yet people, natural assets, ecological services, and social solidarity are all important inputs into sustainable economic development, as well as wellsprings of intrinsic value. Failure to establish institutions that can effectively protect these unpriced assets is now eroding capitalist structures of collective power—especially norms that legitimate the unrestricted pursuit of profit. The Covid-19 pandemic is now intensifying the resulting tensions: the putative policy trade-off between lives and livelihoods raises a big question: whose lives versus whose livelihoods?

Care Penalties, Care Crises

The uncertain future of the welfare state resembles the uncertain future of families in an economic system that primarily rewards the production of commodities—goods and services that easily be bought and sold in markets.

Conventional neoclassical economics treats the care of children and other dependents much like the care of pets—a source of personal satisfaction, an expensive luxury good. Yet

the creation and maintenance of human capabilities produces public goods—benefits for society as a whole that are diffuse, synergistic, and impossible to accurately price.[11]

Women are the primary caregivers in both the family and the labor market, and there's a reason they are called givers rather than takers. The difficulty of individually capturing the benefits of care often leaves them dependent on the good will or affections of men, without much recourse if and when such sentiments subside. Free riders often have free rein. A father who contributes little or nothing to the economic support or the hands-on care of a child can still lay claims on its affection or assistance; an employer who contributes little to public spending on education can still hire educated workers; nations that cut public spending on education can import ready-made college graduates from other countries; a woman who minimizes her care responsibilities in order to increase her market earnings can pay other women's children to help care for her in old age.

Individuals and groups who commit substantial time and effort to the unpaid care of others typically pay an economic penalty in reduced lifetime income. This penalty has been particularly well documented in the U.S., where many mothers bear primary responsibility for the financial support, as well as direct care, of children. Childless women now earn roughly the same as men with comparable levels of education and experience; much of the gender gap in pay reflects the costs and risks of motherhood. Many public policies, including Social Security and means-tested public assistance, restrict eligibility for benefits on the grounds that family care is not really "work."

Care penalties extend well beyond unpaid work. Both men and women who work in care industries (such as health, education, and social services) and/or care occupations (such as childcare, eldercare, teaching, or nursing) often earn less than others with similar

education and experience. In the U.S., women represent about 75% of the health care workforce that is especially vulnerable to Covid-19 contagion on the job. April of 2020, in the face of soaring mortality from Covid-19, many hospitals in the U.S., running out of money, cut the pay or reduced the hours of health care workers, even those serving on the frontlines.[12]

Bargaining power derives from the ability to withhold something until a satisfactory reward is offered for it. Children, individuals suffering illness or disability, and the frail elderly are often in a weak bargaining position, especially if disadvantaged by their race/ethnicity, citizenship, or class. Whether paid or unpaid, those who care for dependents share a vulnerability that increases with their level of commitment and participation; emotional attachment makes it difficult for them to threaten to withdraw their help. Many of the cultural norms and moral values that undergird care provision remain in force. but require institutional support in the form of collectively agreed upon rights to care and be cared for.

Division and Alliance

While feminism asserts that women share common interests, effective alliances among women depend on overcoming differences among them. The intersectional political economy developed in this book emphasizes the need to recognize, theorize, and address such differences. It explains why the weakening of patriarchal institutions can improve the relative position of women but nonetheless leave predominantly women in vulnerable positions colored by differences based on race/ethnicity, citizenship, and class. It also explains why unmediated capitalist dynamics undermine environmental, demographic, and social sustainability.

Group allegiances matter. Human capabilities are public goods, but not everyone enjoys equal access to them. Some of the benefits of human capabilities are captured by the families, groups, and nations to which people belong. Women in disadvantaged or subaltern groups often find themselves in especially contradictory positions: even a partial withdrawal of their under-rewarded care services would increase their bargaining power but could reduce the ability of their families and communities to resist other forms of institutionalized exploitation.

We all share an interest in the development of institutional structures that could promote just, equitable, and sustainable economic development. Nothing is more important than the creation of political coalitions designed to build robust democratic institutions that can effectively defend public interests and invest in the common good. The slogan "every man for himself" is both a principle of patriarchal power and a recipe for extinction.

---

[1] Heidi Hartmann, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union," *Capital and Class* 3:2 (1979), 1-33.
[2] Nancy Folbre, "Gender Bargaining in the Labor Market," Working Paper. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, forthcoming.
[3] Anne Marie Goetz, "The Politics of Preserving Gender Inequality: De-institutionalisation and Re-privatisation." *Oxford Development Studies* (2019), 1-16.
[4] Sarah Ashwin and Jennifer Utrata, "Revenge of the Lost Men: From Putin's Russia to Trump's America," *Contexts*, 2019, in press.
[5] Oxfam Briefing Paper, "An Economy for the 99," January 2017, accessed January 30, 2017 at https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/economy-99; Gerry Mullany, "World's 8 Richest Have as

Much Wealth as Bottom Half, Oxfam Says," *New York Times*, January 16, 2017, accessed that date at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/16/world/eight-richest-wealth-oxfam.html

[6] Liam Stackmarch, "'Fearless Girl' Statue to Stay in Financial District (for Now)" *New York Times*, Marcy 27, 2017, accessed November 27, 2017 at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/nyregion/fearless-girl-statue-de-blasio.html,

[7] See the Online Etymological Dictionary at http://www.etymonline.com/

[8] Roxane Gay, *Bad Feminist*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2014, p. 17.

[9] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 110-114 in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984. Accessed October 25, 2015 at at http://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Lorde_The_Masters_Tools.pdf

[10] Kate Pickett and Richard G. Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger.* London: Bloomsbury, 2009.

[11] Nancy Folbre "Children as Public Goods," *American Economic Review* 84:2 (1994), 86-90.

[12] Ellen Gabler, Zach Montague and Grace Ashford, "During a Pandemic, an Unanticipated Problem: Out-of-Work Health Workers," *New York Times*, April 3, 2020, accessed April 12, 2020 at https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/03/us/politics/coronavirus-health-care-workers-layoffs.html