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# Recasting the Global Political Economy: Counting Women's Unpaid Work

CATHERINE HOSKYNS & SHIRIN M. RAI

This article presents and seeks to make visible what could be an alarming scenario. There is, we believe, a widespread and growing depletion of the capacities and resources for social reproduction – that is, the glue that keeps households and societies together and active. This glue, as is well recognised, largely depends upon the unpaid work of women at home and in the community. The capacity to do this unpaid work is currently being affected across North and South by the globalisation of production, the move of women into paid work, the commercialisation of services and the changing functions of the state. However, because most of this unpaid work is still largely unmeasured – as we shall show, it is not counted as ‘productive’ in the United Nations (UN) System of National Accounts (SNA) – the depletion in social reproduction is not aggregated and is only ‘noticed’ in *ad hoc* and small-scale ways. We attempt in this article to assess the reasons for and the consequences of this failure to measure, and argue that it is an issue which demands the urgent attention of statisticians, economists and policy makers, alongside feminist academics and activists. Without unpaid services and their depletion being measured and valued, predictions are likely to be faulty, models inaccurate and development policies flawed. The history of the campaign on unpaid work over the last three decades illustrates, on the one hand, the salience of these issues and, on the other, the resistance which exists to taking them seriously.

In 1988 Marilyn Waring, a political economist and former New Zealand Member of Parliament, produced a seminal book *If Women Counted – A New Feminist Economics*. This was scathing about the fact that neither unpaid work (mainly done by women in the home) nor natural inputs from the environment were given value in current measurements of economic and productive activity. She was particularly critical of the SNA, which formalised the practice of governments in this respect. Her aim was to initiate a campaign to persuade policy makers that the failure to count unpaid work both lay at the roots of gender inequality and caused serious flaws in the way economic trends were evaluated.

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In 2005 the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College in the USA and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) held a well-prepared and comprehensive conference on unpaid work and the economy.<sup>1</sup> This reviewed current research on the different ways of measuring the unpaid economy, the degree to which governments were beginning to take this seriously and the consequences of not doing so. However, though the range of material was much denser and those involved more numerous, the purpose was still more or less the same as Waring's: to persuade governments and mainstream economists to take these issues seriously and understand the consequences of not doing so – to 'make the data speak to policy concerns'.<sup>2</sup> After 17 years, although the challenge is much better formulated, the task remains formidable.

The authors of this article are researchers and activists, analysing political economy and engaging with institutions in order to influence policy makers. The question that has troubled us, and which informs this article, is why it has been so difficult for feminist analyses of social reproduction (a term which encompasses all unpaid work in the home and the community) and feminist research more generally, to be incorporated into conceptualisations of the global political economy at the level both of theorisation and of policy making. This may seem an obvious question with obvious answers, but is it? Feminists encounter 'the travel metaphor' from policy makers and mainstream academics and are given the message that there is a continuing 'slow but steady progress' on the path to equality. This assumes that it is only a matter of time before women's equality becomes a reality and implicitly chides activists for being too impatient for change. The implication is that in the face of deep-rooted historical barriers to gender equality, women should yield in their insistence on changing gendered policy frameworks all at once, in the interests of incremental change. This is women's 'duty to yield' on gender equality.<sup>3</sup> The outcome of this strategic bargain has not been successful in shifting policy frameworks. Despite the length of time that feminist scholarship has been developing a theoretical as well as an empirical and policy-oriented body of literature, this work has largely remained on the margins of mainstream economics and policy making. Indeed, feminist political economists still seem to be defending the original critiques they made of mainstream economics, showing the resistance which meets their transformatory demands.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, we examine what has changed over the last three decades in terms of gendered analyses and shifts in policies to reflect these. We note that there has been significant rhetorical recognition of the importance of gender in political economy at the level of policy making. This has come about as a result of women's research and activism, and strategies of engaging with and mobilising against political institutions and policies. However, we argue that despite small and, for those involved, critical gains, the fundamental shifts in policy frameworks are not happening. Disconnect continues. To illustrate these points we take the example of the SNA, which provides a standard methodology for computing national economies, and outline the way the contribution and needs of the domestic sector are sidelined. Despite considerable advances, the shift to counting unpaid work and household production as part of the economy has not been fully made. Using recent developments in social and political theory

as a context, we then measure this evidence against criteria established in other areas of political economy, which aim to explain the ways in which substantial shifts in macroeconomic thinking and practice take place. We use in particular the study by William J. Drake and Kalypso Nicolaidis, which examines the paradigm shift in trade discourse to include trade in services (invisibles) within the regulatory scope of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).<sup>5</sup> It is evident that, despite rich material and cogent arguments, there are specific barriers and disconnections that inhibit the process of change where gender issues are concerned.

We go on to illustrate these by presenting diagrammatically and impressionistically the way the international political economy actually works, with the domestic, private and public sectors all given equal space. However, the reality is that, both conceptually and in policy terms, the domestic is downplayed and not 'counted'. If the household *is* given recognition in economic terms (and we acknowledge the extent to which the household is now being studied by economists), it is subsumed into current forms of economic analysis. We then outline briefly two alternative ways – 'separate but equal' and 'integrated' – in which domestic work could be accounted for in an overall analysis of the world economy.

Finally, we consider how near we are to what might be called the 'tipping point', which would bring consideration of these ideas, and the arguments upon which they are based, into the core areas of macroeconomic policy and into international political economy (IPE) as a discipline. While new trends in political and social theory provide useful tools for considering agenda setting and the filtering of ideas in policy processes, we believe that there are special factors that affect the progress of policies which would substantially empower women and alter the balance in gender relations. We see academics and the circulation of ideas as playing a key role in investigating and reforming these processes. What is needed is another step forward in the way IPE is defined. Just as the discipline of IPE was created by bringing together the study of the market (economics) with the study of the state (politics), so the discipline needs now to be extended by making visible and taking account of the contribution of the domestic. This would make clearer the contribution of social reproduction to the economy, as well as the extent of its depletion.

### **Feminist interventions: production and social reproduction**

Feminist political economy has a long and distinguished history, from the path-breaking book by Esther Boserup on women in development to the contemporary burgeoning literature on a wide spectrum of topics, including the gender bias of social adjustment programmes, the inadequate representation of women in macroeconomic policy making, the analysis of work and employment, and definitions of growth and development.<sup>6</sup> Feminist economists have challenged the rational choice model upon which much of economics is based and have developed sophisticated analyses of the family and the household as economic units.<sup>7</sup> In particular, feminists have argued that the labour involved in social reproduction should be counted as work and included in the measurement and evaluation of the economy.

Despite some differences of emphasis in feminist analyses, social reproduction can be taken to include the following: biological reproduction; unpaid production in the home (both goods and services); social provisioning (by this we mean voluntary work directed at meeting needs in the community); the reproduction of culture and ideology; and the provision of sexual, emotional and affective services (such as are required to maintain family and intimate relationships). These are all elements contributed to the economy and society in general by the household and the community. They are mainly contributed by women, regardless of their position in society and the resources they can muster to manage the pressures and rewards associated with social reproduction.<sup>8</sup>

This body of conceptual work, together with other forms of gender activism, has resulted in the politicisation of gender and has led to the highlighting of gender issues in policy forums, the funding of projects on women's development issues, such as education and health, and the bridging of gaps in representative politics through special measures such as quotas. There is widespread consideration of gender mainstreaming as a way of addressing gender inequality<sup>9</sup> and we now have a body of well-researched case studies, together with some advances in the collection of gender disaggregated data, which help to map gender inequality and in certain circumstances feed into policy making.

Evidence of the influence of this work can be found in the development by the UNDP of four new composite indices for human development – the Human Development Index, the Gender-related Development Index, the Gender Empowerment Measure and the Human Poverty Index.<sup>10</sup> The World Bank also has recently initiated a four-year 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics' programme (2007–2010).<sup>11</sup> Though important in themselves, these initiatives reflect a reformist rather than a transformatory approach to the issue, as is evident in the fact that the data used in constructing the UNDP indices, and the assumptions of the World Bank programme, are limited by mainstream economic boundaries.

As well as this important intellectual work, gender activists have been addressing particular issues in international economic policy. One of the most significant of these has been that of international trade policy, brought to a head in 2005 by the failure of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)'s Doha Development Round.<sup>12</sup> A gender analysis of international trade policy demonstrates the gulf that exists between the discourse and approaches of trade theorists and policy makers and those of gender activists. It also shows that while the disadvantages and problems resulting from trade liberalisation and open markets fall disproportionately on families and households, the advantages of trade expansion are less easily picked up by women entrepreneurs and producers than they are by men.<sup>13</sup> This chimes with our concern with social reproduction, since it can be argued that it is the failure to measure and take account of unpaid work that makes it easy for the downsides of trade liberalisation, and the consequences for social reproduction, to be ignored.

The results of this activism in the trade field are revealing. On the one hand, small initiatives have taken place in the margins – for example, programmes to help women entrepreneurs take better advantage of trade openings. On the other, more sympathetic trade officials ask for 'simple messages' on the gender issue that they can take to colleagues and negotiators. To produce simple messages

is neither easy nor probably in the long run effective, because what is being asked for is a translation of insights from one discourse into terms acceptable to the other, without any substantial modification of aims and assumptions.

We argue below that although a sophisticated and rigorous case is now being mounted, the transformative outcomes of feminist engagements with macroeconomics and economic policy have been small.<sup>14</sup> In order to understand the processes by which new concepts and policy agendas are placed on the table, and the resistances they meet, we now focus on the SNA. This is an area where a great deal of work has been done by feminist statisticians and economists over a long period of time, but where substantial change has not yet taken place.

### **Methodologies of exclusion: the UN System of National Accounts**

The SNA, established in 1993 and authorised by all major international institutions, sets out by common agreement how national accounts should be constructed across the different countries of the world.<sup>15</sup> The aim of the SNA is to map national economies in order to establish gross domestic product (GDP), identify national and global trends and to make cross national comparisons. What is important here is that the SNA sets the 'production boundary' for all countries. This establishes which activities are counted as 'productive' and therefore as part of the market economy, and which are 'not counted' because they are not deemed 'productive'. However, the SNA does include the government sector in its calculations even though this is a non-market category, and gives value to owner-occupied housing, which also is non-market. The argument given here is that, although non-market, the transactions within the government sector have monetary value because of the wages paid for work, which can then be accounted for, and that it is easy to impute a market value (rent) to owner-occupied homes. These sectors are also seen as 'too important' to be omitted. Goods produced by households, including agricultural items for home consumption or for sale, have with some exceptions been included in the national accounts and in the measurement of GDP. In the SNA, the remaining exceptions for household goods were removed. Here again the argument was that it was relatively easy to impute a monetary value to goods produced in this way and that the same goods could be used for own consumption or sold on the market. However, it was not felt possible at this time to include unpaid services in the home. The criteria of comparability and measurability applicable in the market were not seen as easily applied to the service side of unpaid work.<sup>16</sup> The SNA is to be revised in 2008.

For our argument, the fact that unpaid service work in the home is seen to be outside the production boundary is particularly important, since this renders it invisible and severs the link between domestic labour and other economic processes. On the face of it, exclusion of domestic services from the SNA is not surprising since the SNA focuses on the monetary economy. The reasons why the domestic sphere is not included within the production boundary would seem to be partly substantive ('no exchange takes place'), ('there is no value attached') and partly technical ('how could it be measured?'). The SNA report cites the following as reasons for the exclusion: 'the relative isolation and independence of



these activities from markets, the extreme difficulty of making economically meaningful estimates of their values, and the adverse effects it would have on the usefulness of the accounts for policy purposes and the analysis of markets and market disequilibria'.<sup>17</sup>

The disciplinary role of the SNA can be seen clearly in case of Norway, where the first estimates of the value of unpaid household work were compiled in 1912 and the national accounts for the period 1935–1943 and 1946–49 included estimates of the value of unpaid household work. However, the introduction of the first international standard for national accounts by the United Nations caused Norway to omit the value of unpaid labour from 1950 in the interests of internationally comparable national account figures.<sup>18</sup>

As a response to this situation, feminist economists and statisticians (and others) have been showing what methods can be used to measure and value unpaid work and have at the same time been setting out the arguments and rationale for such measurement. On questions of methodology, the main division has been between those who would measure inputs and time spent and those who would measure outputs – that is, meals prepared, children cared for and so on. Time spent can be measured either by giving it a 'replacement value' (how much it would cost to replace unpaid workers with paid workers), or by giving it an 'opportunity value'. calculated on the amount the unpaid worker would be earning if s/he were in the paid labour market instead of doing unpaid work. In Canada, the replacement value of unpaid work in 1992 came to \$284.9 billion and the opportunity value to \$318.8 billion.<sup>19</sup>

Alongside these debates have gone questions of how to conduct time use and other household surveys which would supply the data necessary for the above measurements. The European Union (EU), through Eurostat, for example, produces quite elaborate time use data for a sample of ten countries.<sup>20</sup> In the South, interesting experiments have recently been carried out on the most effective way of measuring time spent in unpaid work, using diaries, interview methods and samples.<sup>21</sup> Altogether, there is now considerable expertise on these issues and ways round measurement problems.

As well as presenting a powerful critique of the SNA, feminists have also presented a positive case for why unpaid work should be counted as part of the economy. The main points of this case are as follows:

- Households not only produce labour but also produce and distribute goods and services which need to be mapped. The economy is more than just the market.
- The predominance of unpaid work can become a constraint on economic development as well as on poverty reduction. Information on the value of unpaid work thus offers an important analytical tool to policy makers.
- The monetary valuation of unpaid work provides the key to challenging the systemic undervaluation of women's paid work.
- The economic and social implications of global market-to-non-market shifts (and *vice versa*) need to be analysed, and this cannot be done without an understanding of both the amount and value of unpaid work.
- Valuation becomes a communication tool by translating unpaid work into a language governments understand: money.<sup>22</sup>

The identification of the importance of the issue has gone hand in hand with the development of a variety of feminist networks which include individual academics, femocrats, non-governmental organisation (NGO) activists and lobbyists. The International Association of Feminist Economists (IAFFE), for example, is a non-profit organisation with around 600 members in 43 countries, which 'seeks to advance feminist inquiry of economic issues and to educate economists and others on feminist points of view on economic issues'.<sup>23</sup> IAFFE publishes the journal *Feminist Economics*, which contains cutting-edge articles on economic issues from a feminist perspective. There are also local initiatives such as the *Radstats Journal*, produced by the Radical Statistics Group, in the UK, which tries to demystify statistics and in so doing focuses on engendering them.<sup>24</sup> There are also regional and international networks such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) which, through research, disseminates and lobbies for changing the boundaries of macroeconomic frameworks and policies. The UN bodies working with and on issues related to women, such as the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), have also focused on the measurement of domestic work.<sup>25</sup> Together these groups have made for an active research community lobbying for change.

The work of these groups and networks together with the increasing sophistication of the methodology has contributed to the adoption of Household Satellite Accounts (HSAs) in a number of countries. These accounts are attached to but not part of the national accounting system. They are intended to provide additional material and test out different methods. In the context of the UK, HM Treasury accepted in 1998 that using household accounts would help to 'a) give a more complete picture of what is going on in the economy, recognizing the value of unpaid work; b) track movement between unpaid domestic work and paid labour; c) understand the implications of policies which draw labour from the household sector, or require the availability of voluntary workers; d) assess the gender impact of policies'.<sup>26</sup> Initially, money was put towards drawing up these household accounts for the UK and a full HSA was produced in 2002. HSAs can be useful in providing an integrating framework for relating different types of data, thus giving a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the economy. So, for example, in the field of health, HSAs can provide information about expenditure on health in both the national economy and in the household, as well as the 'outcomes' resulting from these expenditures.<sup>27</sup>

The production of HSAs is an important step. However, the adoption and use of these accounts remain patchy and there is no general agreement along the lines of the SNA as to what methodology to use. North American feminist statisticians and economists favour the 'input method', calculating unpaid activities through time-use surveys and replacement costs. British economists favour the 'output method', which requires an estimate of the total output produced, for example how many meals have been prepared in the household, independent of the knowledge of how much time has been spent on the activity. This is conceptually a more complicated process compared to an estimate of hours worked from a time-use survey. The experimental nature of this methodology meant it needed financial and political backing, which, given the crunch in public funding, did not



materialise. After a successful start, the Household Satellite Account is now in limbo in the UK.<sup>28</sup> Significantly, there has been little willingness among member states of the EU to use the data produced in the time use surveys to give a monetary value to unpaid work. It seems there is 'no demand'.<sup>29</sup>

What we have outlined above shows that feminist scholars and activists have developed strong arguments together with practical proposals and examples. Significantly, they have also drawn in and convinced some statisticians and a number of officials dealing with gender and development of the feasibility and need for such measurement. The global spread of those researching and dealing with these issues is now quite striking. As a result, the methodological questions have either been solved or could be solved relatively easily if there were a consensus to do so. However, carrying out and updating ongoing household surveys is an expensive business and there needs to be a clear and continuing commitment if this is to be carried through. In general this is not present, as the UK and EU examples show. The absence of senior statisticians and policy makers from the North is striking when one examines the paper givers and discussants in the Levy/UNDP Conference in 2005.

In this respect there is an interesting contrast with the pressure now being brought for 'environmental-economic accounting' in the context of the revision of the SNA in 2008. This would measure, on the one hand, environmental inputs into economic activity and, on the other, the depletion effects on environmental quality. Here there is a visible and increasingly measured and recognised 'problem' which is creating both popular concern and political will among decision makers. This is translating into serious debate about how to agree and harmonise standards for an accounting system which will measure, aggregate and value the overall costs of environmental depletion.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, despite a great deal of work and some progress made on the issue of measuring and valuing unpaid work in the home, the gap between this work and both effective policy implementation and a shifting of the underlying frameworks remains huge and well fortified. In an attempt further to investigate the nature and construction of this gap, we look first at relevant approaches in political and social theory. We then turn to an example of a successful campaign to shift macroeconomic thinking and examine the criteria which were judged to contribute to its success.

### **Translating convictions into policy?**

Political and social theory in different ways and at different stages goes some way to explain, and gives some tools to dissect, the ways in which political systems filter out and marginalise ideas which are seen by dominant elites as too costly or too damaging to prevailing interests. An early example was E. E. Schattschneider's discussion of the 'mobilisation of bias' in American democracy, showing how pressure-group politics and the articulation of special interests, together with the combined effects of values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures, work to exclude from influence groups which are more diffuse and have fewer resources. Joyce Gelb and Marian Leif Palley then applied this approach effectively to the marginalisation of women's issues in the US political system, demonstrating the

particular barriers which women's political organisations face.<sup>31</sup> More recently the analysis of competing policy frames, which illustrate the different ways in which policy ideas can be understood, thus enabling interests to be mobilised to support them, pursues the same themes at the level of implementation. Sonia Mazey and Maria Stratigaki have developed the idea of frames to consider, for example, rival interpretations of gender mainstreaming and their application.<sup>32</sup> Ideas about paradigm maintenance and paradigm shift are also useful. One example, with particular relevance here is the application of the idea of paradigm maintenance to the operations of the World Bank. A recent study by Robin Broad shows the ways in which certain ideas and research were prioritised over others in order to reinforce the Bank's prevailing ideology on the beneficial effects of open trade and foreign investment. Research which queried or contradicted this ideology was systematically downplayed.<sup>33</sup>

One helpful turn in the social sciences has been the development of new post-positivist analytical and methodological approaches, notably constructivism, discourse analysis, new institutionalism, policy networks and social movement theory. These developments have generated critical debate and reflection about the way in which ideas, norms, cultures and language impact upon policy-making processes and outcomes. This opens up the research agenda and accepts a far broader range of levels and factors as relevant to how interests and preferences are expressed and developed in political processes.<sup>34</sup> It also takes the emphasis away from the individual, autonomous actor towards the societal flows and restraints within which they operate. All of this opens space for gender research and analysis to develop. It also provides tools and examples of the complex processes of agenda setting and change. It should be noted, however, that all of the approaches outlined above are themselves on the margins of political science and international relations theory, though constructivism and its associated perspectives are beginning to be taken more seriously and produce some shifts in analysis.

When one comes to gender, it would seem that there is in addition a different kind of barrier which constructivist theories could, but at the moment do not, effectively reveal. When doing research for this article we were struck by the difficulties which some (mainly male) officials and statisticians had in engaging with the subject of measuring unpaid work. After a while it became apparent that this had to do with the fact that it appeared to be encroaching on matters which they were concerned to keep private, outside the public realm. The questions seem to invade the bedroom and the bathroom – areas which many people (and not only men) would like to keep private and unrecorded. So the issues we are looking at, namely, the measurement of unpaid work and the effects of its depletion, may constitute an additional challenge for those committed to mainstream approaches, just because they disturb dominant normative frameworks and challenge gender hierarchies. To deal adequately with this aspect would mean bringing into the study of IPE accounts of sex/gender relations and the emotional and affective issues which changes in the status of women imply.<sup>35</sup>

Bearing these approaches in mind, we now go on to look at an example of how a successful change, a 'paradigm shift', was brought about in the field of

international trade. We then compare in detail this example with attempts to bring gender issues into the field of macroeconomics.

*Shifting the paradigm: trade in services*

Detailed accounts of how change takes place in international political economy at the level of ideas are somewhat rare, especially ones that take seriously the interactions between officials, experts and political networks. We use here the model established by Drake and Nicolaidis to explain the successful campaign in the 1980s to get trade in services included under the regulatory system of the GATT.<sup>36</sup> This was a 'technical issue' of great economic significance, but absolutely no gender implications were raised or recognised. Despite the fact that this change was in tune with future economic needs, and was one where important economic interests stood to benefit, the process of affecting change was long and protracted.

How do Drake and Nicolaidis explain the process? The objective involved a major shift in trade discourse because, although services are traded, no concrete exchange is involved. According to Drake and Nicolaidis, the impetus came from a small group of experts who provided 'enticement for the negotiators' and created a network or 'epistemic community' around the issues. This consisted of two tiers: in the first, persons from governments, international organisations and firms; and in the second, academics, in particular lawyers, and experts in the various aspects of traded services. The latter played an important role in legitimating the demands and had the advantage of 'appearing objective'. The campaign was largely successful and Drake and Nicolaidis make three assertions – borne out in the text – about the reasons for this: it identified and made sense of a problem which already existed (that is, the growing importance of services as a component of trade and the barriers to this growth set by traditional forms of regulation); the epistemic community helped to frame the issues and suggest policy options to negotiators; and it had access to top policy makers and established independent channels of communication with them. At the start of the campaign there was little information and insufficient data.<sup>37</sup>

Using evidence already set out, especially from the account of the SNA, and applying it to Drake and Nicolaidis' three reasons for success, how would we evaluate the progress made so far in recasting the global political economy from a feminist perspective?

*Identification of the problem: accounting for social reproduction*

The failure to give social reproduction its proper place and value in the global economy, and measure its depletion, is leading to inaccurate and incomplete assessments both of the overall picture and of emerging trends. Since, formally at least, the job of economic analysis and of accounting is to be accurate in these respects and lay the basis for policy, these absences present a serious underlying problem. They also allow mainstream economists and policy makers to abstract economic decisions more easily from their social contexts and consequences. One result of this is that it is not possible accurately to measure the

shift (mostly of women) from unpaid to paid work and, as a result, the consequences for the household and the community are not properly evaluated. Similarly, the extent and effect of the increasing commercialisation of domestic services is not adequately recorded because there is no benchmark against which it can be measured. The proper identification of these problems and their consequences would add an important dimension to the debate on the changing role of the state in the North and the South. It would also define more accurately the ways in which existing forms of regulation (national accounts or trade policy, for example) shape and determine how issues to do with social reproduction are treated. These absences represent a serious problem but one which as yet is insufficiently recognised. It is obscured by the current structures of the international system and how people understand them. Though these structures and visualisations are embedded in custom and tradition, we would argue that they are becoming increasingly dysfunctional in the new commercialised global system.

Unlike the case of services, however, there are no powerful transnational corporations in the wings waiting to benefit directly from the recognition of social reproduction. The constituencies which would benefit immediately are more diffuse and in the domestic and public spheres rather than in the private.

#### *Feminist networks and their influence on policy*

Drake and Nicolaidis attribute great importance to the role of what they term the 'epistemic community' active in the services campaign. 'Epistemic communities' is a relatively new term attempting to encapsulate some of the characteristics of global regulation in the post-Cold War world. They are defined as groups of experts acting internationally to achieve a particular outcome and supplying technical and relevant information to policy makers.<sup>38</sup> They are said to embody detached expertise and are seen as apolitical, although, as the example of services makes clear, they often have an underlying political purpose. They suggest solutions to policy makers and 'ways out' in highly technical matters.

We have considered to what extent feminist networks active in the macroeconomic field could or should be called epistemic communities. On the one hand, they are normally international, inclusive and free floating, as is characteristic of epistemic communities. They frequently also have a considerable degree of expertise, as is clear in the case of those working on the time use surveys which can be used to measure unpaid work. Increasingly, this expertise is being recognised by a variety of international organisations such as the UN and the World Bank through consultations on gender matters with these experts. On the other hand, we are not clear that feminist networks constitute epistemic communities in the accepted sense of the term. This is for two different reasons: first, they choose to be overtly political and transformative in their approach to issues of gender equality. In this process they then come up against particular structural constraints which make difficult the seamless political influence which is characteristic of epistemic communities. Second, feminists often challenge the characterisation of expertise as the domain of 'objective knowledge' developed through research which is unconnected with the lived experience of people in specific contexts. To call feminist networks epistemic communities then seems to go against

this critical approach as well as against the spirit of transformation that explicitly moves feminist knowledge creation. We therefore prefer the term 'feminist networks', while recognising that questioning the label 'epistemic community', and the political neutrality that this seems to imply, may be a further barrier to achieving influence.

Feminist networks working in the sphere of macroeconomics include feminist activists who developed strategies in response to the structural adjustment policies imposed on the countries of the South in the 1980s, feminist theorists and academics challenging economics as a discipline and producing high-quality research in this area, and women who have gained positions within government bureaucracies and national and international institutions. These specialised groups, NGOs and individuals link at certain points to more general women's networks. Despite the impressive knowledge infrastructure, the achievements of these networks, as we have indicated, remain limited.

#### *Accessing power: channels of communication to top policy makers*

Over the years, while feminists have developed some channels of communication to policy makers and officials, this has not resulted in any systematic engagement. Feminist messages are not normally recognised by policy makers because on the whole these fall outside their accepted frames of reference. There are, of course, examples where the presence of an individual in a position of power has been able to break through such barriers. This, however, does not necessarily challenge the multi-layered nature of policy making, which means that such initiatives can either be undermined at another level or are not sustainable beyond the period of office of the individual. Gender mainstreaming has been adopted in many institutions. Such a move, which should have begun to counter deep-rooted resistances, has on the whole been unable to do so, illustrating paradigm maintenance and the dominance of certain policy frames.<sup>39</sup>

One particular factor that affects women's networking in a way not reproduced elsewhere is the continuing male hegemony in economics, both as a discipline and in policy making. Some figures illustrate this. In 2002, 94.5 per cent of the World Bank's Board of Governors were men as were 91.7 per cent of its Board of Directors. The figures for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were 97.8 per cent and 100 per cent. In the UN Statistics Division women make up around 20 per cent of the top bureaucrats (6 out of 25). At the level of the national states, the total percentage of women in parliaments the world is 16.6 per cent, with a regional variation from 7 to 40 per cent.<sup>40</sup> While we would not argue that the increased presence of women in these bodies would necessarily make a radical difference to the marginalisation of gender issues, such figures illustrate the continuing distance and impenetrability of these important institutions. The low numbers of women worldwide in economics as a profession increases the barriers and the filtering process. To give just one example: 'Twenty percent of academics in Australian economics departments are women. There are four women professors in a total economics staff of 667 in 36 Australian universities. The discipline rates poorly compared with the remainder of the university sector where 38 per cent of all academics are women.'<sup>41</sup>

*Making changes visible*

One of the key factors emphasised by Drake and Nicolaidis is the role the epistemic community plays in identifying and making visible changes already taking place. In this context we would argue that, while social reproduction has always played a key role in the economy, the connections between the ‘recognised’ economy and the household are becoming even more germane and salient in the context of the move from unpaid to paid work and the increase in the commercialisation of services. However, this situation and its effects have yet to be recognised and become visible, and this remains an important challenge for campaigns and actions on these issues. Though the arguments have been well made, dealing with them is still seen by most governments as too expensive and too challenging. Indeed there seems at the moment to be a lull in interest and activity. The contrast with the visibility of environmental issues and the attempts at translating these into accounting systems and policy is striking. There are a number of reasons for this, but one feature of the success of environmental-economic accounting debates has been its embedding in the measurement of environmental depletion. A second is that these debates still largely concentrate on the visible effects of environmental degradation in the public, as opposed to the private, sphere.

In the following section we illustrate and discuss the implications of making women’s work visible through a diagram representing the global political economy ‘as if women counted’.

### **Recasting the global political economy**

The previous sections have shown the ways in which gender issues have been addressed in the mapping of the economy. We have also outlined what we see are the challenges and opportunities of current campaigns for the recognition of social reproduction. Figure 1, which builds on work by Diane Elson, sums up these approaches and campaigning, and gives an impressionistic view of what the global political economy might look like if the domestic sector were incorporated alongside state and market.<sup>42</sup> It represents the three main sectors of the global political economy – the domestic, the state, and private capital – as largely separate entities. However, this is a heuristic device. The real-world interconnectedness and the interdependence of these sectors are illustrated through the use of arrows and hatched borders.

In Figure 1, the dominance of global private capital is evident, with inputs into other sectors in terms of marketised goods, services and wages. The domestic sector makes a considerable input into the global market, but receives little back for the provision of labour except through wages and some input from the state in the form of benefits and other social provision. Wages pay for the labour performed but inadequately for social reproduction. For example, calculations for South and Southeast Asia in 1997 show that unpaid work contributes the equivalent of 43–48 per cent to GDP (depending on the method used to calculate this) and that women contribute disproportionately towards unpaid work.<sup>43</sup>



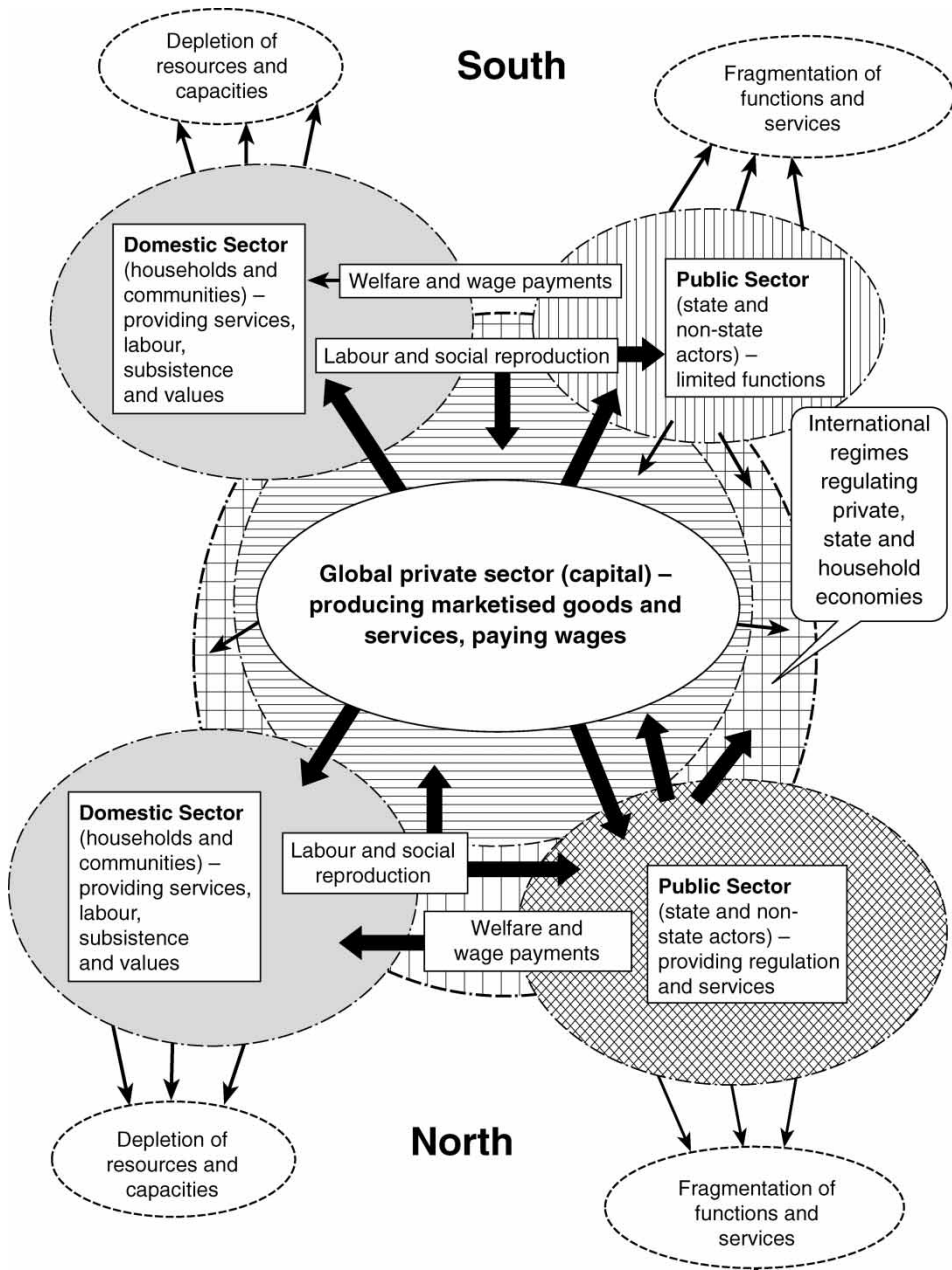


FIGURE 1. Recasting the global political economy.

As Figure 1 shows, while the domestic sector is as large in the South as in the North, the input from state benefits in the South is less and overall wages are lower. In some areas of the South, household income will be supplemented by non-wage returns through the sale of produce, small retail and so on. However,

the gaps in social provision resulting from the inadequate recognition of social reproduction in wages as well as in state services are met by the unpaid work in households and community in both North and South. This creates a depletion of resources unless support is given from elsewhere. The depletion presented in the diagram is at the moment unmeasured. However, while economists talk of the depletion (depreciation) of machinery, capital goods and the environment, they rarely talk about depletion or depreciation in terms of the household and social reproduction.<sup>44</sup> Depletion of household and social reproduction, if counted, could include increasing concerns about 'food security' in southern countries, variable access to health as commercialisation kicks in, and the patchy nature of child and adult care. While the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has initiated some discussion about the social costs of economic adjustment, these have not so far been represented in the economic accounting upon which economic policy is based. Yet the consequences of globalisation in a situation where these factors are not measured seem to us to warrant concern and further investigation, and not just by feminists. This gap in statistics also makes accurate research difficult as the following example shows. While attempting to assess the effect of women's employment in tourism on the family and social provision in three Central American countries, Lucy Ferguson was surprised to find that none of the criteria in which she was interested (forms of child and adult care, household maintenance and health provision) was measured in formal statistics. She has therefore had little statistical data to support and check interview material, which make her findings less easy to transpose and generalise. She reports that the governments concerned are only just beginning to realise that there might be social consequences as a result of the increased employment of women in these areas. No attempts seem to have been made beforehand to estimate or consider this possible depletion.<sup>45</sup>

It is striking that the state, which might mediate this situation, is either lacking (in the South) or changing functions (in the North) and suffering its own depletions. The size of the public services in the South is smaller than the North, as is its contribution to the domestic sector. However, economic restructuring is resulting in increased privatisation of public services in the North, thus reducing the contribution of the public sector to the domestic sector through wages. The restructuring of economies across North-South boundaries is posing particular gendered challenges. The restructuring of the economy in Tanzania, for example, resulted in a growing debt problem, which in turn resulted in government spending cutbacks. In 1997 the gender budget initiative of the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme was set up in collaboration with FemAct, a transnational women's group, in order to attempt to intervene in budgeting decisions that affected women, the elderly and the poorest sections of society.<sup>46</sup> In Canada, 'two different United Nations human rights committees have chastised Canada for reducing debt at the expense of Canadian women and minorities, who bear the disproportionate burden of social spending cuts'.<sup>47</sup> The reduction of state budgets makes it imperative that the issue of unpaid work is addressed urgently, as competition over scarce resources is currently leading to higher levels of depletion in the spheres of health, education and the lengthening of the working day. These developments affect women particularly negatively.

The global private sector, which binds the North and South together, is the biggest and fastest-growing sector in the global political economy. Private international capital has become a key investor in developing countries. The stock of foreign direct investment in 2004 is estimated at US\$9 trillion, which is attributed to some 70,000 transnational corporations and their 690,000 affiliates abroad.<sup>48</sup> It is also the sector which is bringing increasing number of women into the labour market and marketising previously non-market activities.

Regulatory regimes, as represented in the diagram, encompass the global private sector and impinge on state and household. These both facilitate and to some extent control the activities of private capital but have insufficient power to induce private capital to take on social responsibilities.<sup>49</sup> Southern states are critically affected by these regulatory regimes, but have relatively low input into setting the terms of regulation.<sup>50</sup> The domestic, especially in the South, has similarly a minimal input. The inadequate regulation of the global private sector both by national states and international bodies is a factor in the growing vulnerability of the domestic sector, South and North, to the economic influence of private capital.

What this new look at the system makes clear is, on the one hand, the crucial input made by the domestic and, on the other, its fragile position in the system as a whole – whether in the North or the South. Our diagram also makes visible the ways in which issues of production and social reproduction can be discussed across the boundaries that have traditionally divided the ‘developed’ from the ‘developing’ countries. There is a surprising degree of convergence, opening up new spaces to raise these issues and possibilities for common alternatives to be developed. We go on to suggest what changes at the conceptual level might be needed to continue this debate.

### **Conceptual starting points**

At a conceptual level we have picked out two possible avenues (we recognise that there may be others) which provide a solid base for arguing for the incorporation of the domestic into the global political economy. These take account of the fact that we are looking for remedies that are appropriate for both North and South and highlight the links between the two. While different in their approach, both of these starting points provide important challenges to the dominant representations of political economy.

#### *‘Separate’ but equal sectors*

From this perspective the public (state), the private (capital) and the domestic (household) appear as equally important sectors. All of them are interconnected and should be seen as together constituting the economy and providing the subject matter for economic analysis. All, though in different proportions, use or produce labour, consume goods and services, and contribute to governance and capital accumulation. As the diagram shows, and as we have discussed above, the particular character of the domestic, whether in the North or South, is that it experiences a steady drain on resources unless support is given by the other sectors. To conceptualise the economy in this way, with all three sectors

having equal importance, highlights the disproportionate levels of depletion of resources and capacities suffered by the domestic sphere. The recognition of this situation should make it a key issue in economic planning. This is in contrast to the situation now when such depletion is seen as constituting ‘a problem’ which is met in sporadic and *ad hoc* ways, and usually only where the domestic sector is organised and/or conditions become intolerable.

Such a conceptualisation would constitute a serious challenge to the current orthodoxy, which rates the activities of the domestic sector as of minor importance. It would thus play an important role in revaluing and making visible the unpaid work of women.

### *‘Integrated’ sectors*

The second option is in contrast to the above. Instead of seeing social reproduction as separate it would be seen as an integral part of production and therefore firmly within the economic sphere. In fact, as we noted above, the ‘production boundary’ – what counts as production and what does not – is fluid, and its demarcation has been an issue of lively controversy in the economic community. However, since one of the reasons for the keeping of national accounts is to identify changes taking place in the economy so that policy can be targeted, it would seem to make good sense to collect information about how social reproduction is being carried out and by whom, on the same basis as in other economic sectors. As in the first option, though by different means, the integration of domestic labour into the labour market, as a factor of production, highlights and makes more visible the unpaid work done mainly by women, and makes clear its importance to the economy. One objection to using this as a new starting point is that, unlike the first option, it obscures what is different and valuable about social reproduction and caring, and by its inclusion in production risks encouraging the commercialisation of these activities and their incorporation still further into the capitalist system.

In terms of our earlier proviso of relevance to North and South, both options are valuable, although the first, with its separate emphasis on the domestic, may give a greater emphasis to the importance of this sector for the South. However, if one is examining current trends, namely, the commercialisation of the domestic, the integrated option is the one more likely to be realised, although not necessarily in a way that reduces gender inequality or transforms the mainstream paradigm. In the long run, these options can only be starting points, and other equally valid ones may emerge.

### **‘Tipping points’?**

In the introduction we argued that feminists encounter both ‘the travel metaphor’ from policy makers and mainstream academics, as well as the metaphor of the ‘duty to yield’ – the necessity to wait until ‘the time is right’ for new priorities to be set. As our study of feminist economics and the SNA demonstrates, feminist work continues to make very slow progress in shifting entrenched positions in macroeconomics. Work on the consequences of specific macroeconomic policies

on women or on the need for satellite accounts for households are carefully bounded within the dominant frameworks of economic theory and definitions of the 'production boundary' for the market. As the SNA discussion shows in particular, the duty to yield on even these small but significant shifts is overwhelming. When financial constraints result in cutbacks on experimental work at the UK Office for National Statistics, it is the satellite account on household production that is frozen rather than that on the environment or other developments. Despite sustained and rigorous feminist critiques of prevailing positions, there is little sign of fundamental shifts in the mainstream positions here. What is also clear is that it is much easier for changes such as the Human Development Index or the Gender Empowerment Measure to be accepted since, however important, they are in the end 'add-ons' which leave the main system little altered. Measuring and giving prominence to social reproduction is much more challenging since it involves destabilising and transforming the system as a whole, and intrudes on intimate relations.

We also argued above that, while some new critical approaches have emerged to challenge mainstream IPE, sustained gendered analyses and 'paradigm shifts' still elude us. The question that we have tried to address above revolves around the invisibility of gendered analyses in mainstream IPE as well as the problem of the translation of research and advocacy into outcomes. Why have feminist ideas not travelled well in both these areas? Malcolm Gladwell has made the argument that ideas can be 'contagious' in exactly the same way that a virus is.<sup>51</sup> When they reach what he calls a 'tipping point', they gain the strength of an epidemic – in fashion, in taste, in policies. The 'tipping point' then is the moment when the accumulating evidence and argument results in its acceptance by those who make policy; it is the point when the virus of ideas reaches critical mass. Of course, this is not a new idea. Marx and Engels wrote about the ways in which the 'quantitative' accumulation of social forces can lead to 'qualitative' structural change. We have argued here that, despite increasing evidence of the importance of social reproduction collected and presented by feminist networks and alliances, this 'tipping point' has not been reached. The demand for 'simple messages' to convince policy makers of the need to engage with feminist economics has grown, but without as yet resulting in significant shifts in policy frameworks. While gender has been politicised, in that it now has a rhetorical presence within policy communities, this discourse has not yet been able to translate into new modes of thinking about economics and economic policy. There exists at the moment a seemingly unbreakable circle, whereby the need to measure unpaid work in order to aggregate the depletion of social reproduction requires the impetus of public disquiet, which only this measurement and the consequences it represents are likely to create. How this circle might be broken and the tipping point reached cannot be predicted, but the material changes that thicken the connections between market, state and household are likely to be crucial, as well as the ongoing work of feminist networks and alliances. We see the academic and intellectual as being crucial in this – as the solvent that begins to break up congealed discourses and erode political barriers.

However, it is not only simple messages, or demand- and supply-side explanations of policy shifts, and definitely not the lack of independent, high-quality



research that are at the heart of the non-recognition of social reproduction; rather, it is the structural constraints which demonstrate the importance of keeping domestic work out of the equation in order for labour to be valued in particular ways and at particular levels. It is these structural reasons that make it so difficult for the combined powers of economic institutions and of economics as a discipline to acknowledge the importance of accounting for social reproduction. Up to now IPE has prioritised the study of state and market; it needs to be expanded to include the social, the domestic and the household. The new discipline might be called International Social and Political Economy (ISPE). There are forceful arguments and rich materials upon which it can draw.

## Notes

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1. Levy Economics Institute and UNDP global conference, *Unpaid Work and the Economy: Gender, Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals*, Blithewood, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, 1–3 October 2005. A full report of the proceedings, and the texts of most papers, are available on the Levy Institute website, <http://www.levy.org> (accessed 1 March 2007).
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11. World Bank, 'Gender Equality as Smart Economics – a World Bank Gender Action Plan', 2006, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/GAPNov2.pdf> (accessed 1 March 2007).
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14. Transformative outcomes are defined differently by different feminist scholars. See Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution and Recognition* (Verso, 2003); Teresa Rees, *Mainstreaming Equality in the European Union: Education, Training and Labour Market Policies* (Routledge, 1998); and Jill Rubery, 'Reflections on Gender Mainstreaming: An Example of Feminist Economics in Action', *Feminist Economics*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2005), p. 2.
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21. Alfred Latigo, 'A New Round of Time–Use Studies for Africa: Measuring Unpaid Work for Pro-poor Development Policies' and Valeria Esquivel 'Time Use Surveys in Latin America: Approaches and Methods', both papers presented at Levy Economics Institute and UNDP global conference, *Unpaid Work and the Economy*.
22. Condensed from points made by Dresher, 'Valuing Unpaid Work' and papers presented at the Levy Economics Institute and UNDP Global Conference, *Unpaid Work and the Economy*. See in particular, Rebecca Grynspan, 'Unpaid Domestic Work: its Relevance to Economic and Social Policies' and Indira Hirway, 'Integrating Unpaid Work into Development Policy'.
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29. Authors' interview, European Commission DG Employment, Brussels, 14 February 2007.
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