

**Birthing Justice: Towards a Feminist Liberation Theo-ethical Analysis of Economic Justice and Maternal Mortality**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### Birthing Justice: Towards a Feminist Liberation Theo-ethical Analysis of Economic Justice and Maternal Mortality

Pregnancy is neither a disease nor an illness. Yet every minute of every day, a woman dies as an indirect result of being pregnant. What should be a positive, defining moment in a woman's life is often a time of profound fear, intense suffering and untimely death. Maternal mortality is a complex issue. However, it is predominately the plight of economically vulnerable women. Globally, it is estimated that at least 600,000 maternal deaths occur annually. In addition, the quality of life for many women who survive pregnancy is severely compromised: at least 50 million women also suffer chronic complications. The death and disability of women in pregnancy continue despite the fact that maternal complications are largely preventable. Maternal mortality is not simply a health issue or an unfortunate risk in the lives of women. It is a global injustice whose roots lie within the economic, social, cultural and religious inequities of women's lives, of which their poverty is a recurring dynamic.

My dissertation is a response to the lack of theological reflection on the qualitatively different poverty endured by women, a concrete manifestation of which is maternal mortality. I claim that the lack of theological reflection on women's poverty is not a benign phenomenon. It reinforces a world in which women's disenfranchised status perpetuates the injustice of maternal mortality. I also claim that the failure of liberation theology to attend adequately to the particular poverty of women compromises its commitment to solidarity with the oppressed.

Using a feminist liberation methodology, my dissertation is divided into a hermeneutical circle animated by "see-judge-act" dimensions. Within a liberation paradigm, the tasks of solidarity and theo-praxis are a multi-differentiated unity: all three dimensions of "see-judge-act" are theologically interdependent and critical to the goal of liberation.

Feminist liberation theological ethics begins by attending to the concrete injustices of women's

lives. Chapter 1 corresponds to the initial “see-judge” dimension of the hermeneutical circle. I provide a historically conscious analysis of maternal mortality. I draw on the feminist interpretive framework of multiple jeopardy and the “traffic” of women’s everyday lives to reveal the causal dynamics implicated in maternal mortality. I explore maternal mortality from a gender-sensitive economic lens, thereby substantiating my claim that maternal mortality is a sensitive indicator of economic justice for women.

In Chapter 2, I continue to develop the “see-judge” dimension of the hermeneutical circle. I situate maternal mortality within the structural jeopardy of inadequate health care. I then demonstrate how women’s marginal economic status is reflected in and reinforced by the minimal value placed on their health and well-being within global and national economic policies. I examine the implications for impoverished women of two specific economic policies: the global funding of reproductive health and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers implemented by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. To ensure that my insights into maternal mortality are consistent with a gender-sensitive and informed economic analysis, I introduce the discourse of feminist economics. I ascertain the methodological base points and central themes of feminist economics. I underline the relevance of this discourse for a feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality. In addition to the discourse of feminist economists, the sources for both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 are drawn from the discourse of trans-national feminism, as well as from social scientific, medical and health related studies.

Chapter 3 corresponds to the “judge-act” dimension of the hermeneutical circle: I evaluate maternal mortality through the eyes of faith. I introduce the work of the Christian social feminist liberation ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison. I submit that within Harrison’s corpus are resources that correlate well with the needs of a feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality. However, I note that while the theme of emancipatory praxis animates Harrison’s liberation social ethics, it is not explicit. I therefore make explicit Harrison’s pastoral, theological and theoretical commitments to emancipatory praxis. I then synthesize categories that I use to illumine and judge maternal mortality as a theo-ethical issue of injustice. I conclude the chapter by developing a praxis of resistance in solidarity with

economically marginalized pregnant women.

I deepen my analysis and judgement of maternal mortality in Chapter 4 by integrating Harrison's approach to justice and her social theory. I claim that Harrison's understanding of justice as right relation is the fruit of emancipatory praxis. I also claim that her social theory is a logical extension of her concept of justice and is, therefore, an important theo-ethical tool for appropriating the geo-political economy from the perspectives of economically marginalized women. Harrison's approach to justice and her social theory further clarify maternal mortality as an injustice experienced by impoverished women. These resources are necessary for an adequate theo-ethical understanding of the oppression of women.

In conclusion, I underline that the reality of maternal mortality presents both crisis and opportunity. The crisis presented is that as a global community, we continue to do little to counter the preventable deaths and disabilities of economically marginalized pregnant women. I indicate that this crisis not only denies pregnant women their dignity, well being, and often their lives, but is a dynamic that erodes our common humanity and reinforces a world of immense and unsustainable disparities. Alternatively, maternal mortality is an impetus for justice making: it can foster a world of right relation in which the structured jeopardies and the "traffic" of impoverished women's lives are concrete collective sites of resistance. Maternal mortality is a profound *locus theologicus* in which a God of life needs to be proclaimed and embodied in ways life-giving to impoverished women. This embodied proclamation is critical not only to ensuring the fullness of humanity granted in God to all women, but also to the eradication of poverty and progress toward a more just and sustainable world. It is also pivotal to the authenticity of liberation theological ethics commitment to a praxis of solidarity with the poorest of the poor.



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## INTRODUCTION

### I Setting the Stage

Feminism has ushered in historic social change and human progress.<sup>1</sup> Grounded in the diversity of women's<sup>2</sup> experiences, feminism is many things: a moral and intellectual revolution, a political liberation movement, and a lens of inquiry that looks at an inequitable world as though women, the impoverished and all who are marginalized matter.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, from its inception, feminism has articulated itself as a spiritual and religious response to the sin of women's dehumanization.<sup>4</sup> Feminism's links to theology are therefore strong: its goal of emancipation for all women is a profoundly religious quest for human interconnectedness and justice in relation to God. As Christian theology seeks conversion from sin and *metanoia*, a radical reorientation to a

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<sup>1</sup>Feminism is a dialectic of theory and activism; its central goal is the emancipation of women and all oppressed groups. See Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* (New York: Doubleday, 1984); Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Forever: The Women's Anthology for a New Millennium* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup>While there is no generic *woman*, I aim to include all women in the term *women*. I do this cognizant of the differences within and among women, the uniqueness of their humanity, and the diverse impacts of the socially constructed realities of gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and a legacy of colonialism. I also acknowledge that a rhetoric of commonality can be reductionist, deny inequalities, and render invisible the most vulnerable. Thus, while I accept the postmodern critiques of master narratives and the highly nuanced reality of subjecthood, taken to the extreme, these critiques can subvert solidarity. I therefore claim the epistemological and ethical significance of women's multiple situated identities as relevant loci for my research. See Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 265-313; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *The Woman, Gender and Development Reader*, ed. Nalini Visvanathan et al. (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1997), 79-86.

<sup>3</sup>Our world is one of poverty amid plenty: it is shaped by immense disparities in wealth, power and security. The world's richest 225 people have the equivalent annual income of the poorest 47 percent. Half of humanity struggles to survive on less than US\$2 a day, and one fifth, the majority of whom are women, on less than US\$1 a day. In richer countries, less than 5 percent of children under five are malnourished; in poorer countries, it is 50 percent. Every day, poverty and hunger claim the lives of 30,000 children. See John Zarocostas, "Brazil Drives Efforts to Fight Hunger and Poverty," *The Lancet* 363 (7 February 2004): 462; Pamela K. Brubaker, *Globalization at What Price? Economic Change and Daily Life* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001); "World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty," *World Bank 2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-12.

<sup>4</sup>See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology as Critical Sophiology," in *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), xii-xxxix.

new life in Christ, feminism also seeks conversion from the sin of women's multiple oppressions and *metanoia*, women's full humanity in a radically reoriented world free from systems of domination and exploitation. Feminism, like theology, seeks conversion and *metanoia*.

Feminism's agenda is multifaceted, its praxis continually evolving in response to the myriad oppressions or multiple jeopardy<sup>5</sup> of women's lives. Increasingly, both a global consciousness and cross-cultural solidarities<sup>6</sup> have inspired feminists to work collectively for women's human rights<sup>7</sup> and the rights of other oppressed groups.<sup>8</sup> These collective efforts are neither falsely universal nor reductionist in approach: they honour women's context-specific

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<sup>5</sup>Black feminist/Womanist thought has challenged the ideological blindness of white feminism by rejecting any monolithic approaches to women's oppression. Womanist scholarship has advanced feminist discourse with the concept of multiple jeopardy, a concept that captures the structural and the personal constraints of women's lives. Feminists from the neo-colonized South use the concept of multiple jeopardy to challenge hegemonic feminist discourse from the North, and its potential to reproduce relations of class privilege and economic domination. See Deborah K. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology," in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, ed. Diana Tietjens Meyers (New York: Routledge, 1997), 220-242; bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2000); Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Traffic at the Crossroads: Multiple Oppressions," in *Sisterhood is Forever*, 43-57.

<sup>6</sup>See Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global*; bell hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, 484-500; Johanna Brenner, "Transnational Feminism and the Struggle for Global Justice," *New Politics* [online journal] (9, no. 2, Winter 2003 [cited 20 December 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.wpunj.edu/~newpol/issue34brenne34.htm> Note: all citations from the Internet will comply with the guidelines established by James D. Lester and James D. Lester, Jr., in *The Essential Guide to Writing Research Papers* (New York: Longan, 1999), 141-145, 188-198.

<sup>7</sup>I do not underestimate the ongoing political, moral and theoretical tensions within the feminist movement. The complex diversity of women's lives challenges any simplistic approach to inclusivity. However, feminism is a global political force in which international connections, cross-cultural theoretical collaboration and joint activism is thriving. The significance of feminism is recognized globally. See Amrita Basu, "Globalization of the Local / Localization of the Global: Mapping Transnational Women's Movements," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 1, no. 1 (2000): 68-84; Valentine M. Mogahadam, "Feminist Networks North and South: DAWN, WIDE and WLUML," *Journal of International Communication* 3, no. 1 (1996): 111-125.

<sup>8</sup>Feminism's loyalty to women is not an exclusionary stance. Feminism is pro-woman in a way that is in solidarity with all oppressed people; its vision of liberation is holistic and inclusive. My dissertation affords a concrete example of this inclusive feminist stance: my focus on the conditions that ensure the well-being of pregnant women are also the conditions of possibility for the well-being of the children women bear and nurture into responsible personhood.

lives and their unique experiences across differences of class, culture, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, history and geographical location.<sup>9</sup> Based not on shared victimization but on global sisterhood,<sup>10</sup> these collective efforts are energized by shared knowledge, skills, resources, and a sensitivity to cultural codes.<sup>11</sup> Animating global sisterhood is a vision of a more just and equitable world, and the awareness that the progress gained by some women continues to be denied others. Within this inclusive feminist vision, the abolition of poverty and the re-conceptualization of wealth in ways that promote the well-being of all is central.<sup>12</sup> The cross-cultural constant of women's poverty is a challenge to this vision and an impetus for change.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>I recognize that while these collective feminist efforts aim to honour women's diverse and context-specific lives, solidarity among women remains an ongoing challenge in light of such structural exploitive dynamics of race, class, ethnicity and geographical location. For an exploration of some of the challenges of global sisterhood from a theological and ethical perspective, see Pamela K. Brubaker, "Sisterhood, Solidarity and Feminist Ethics," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no. 1&2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 53-66; Delores S. Williams, "Womanist/Feminist Dialogue: Problems and Possibilities," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no. 2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 67-73; Mary Grey, "Claiming Power-in-Relation: Exploring the Ethics of Connection," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7 (Spring 1991): 7-18; Barbel von Wartenberg-Potter, *We Will Not Hang Our Harps on the Willows: Global Sisterhood and God's Song* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988).

<sup>10</sup>Women bonding as *victims* is problematic as it reinforces a view of women as passive victims, who cannot resist oppression. It also is ideologically blind to elite women's complicity in the oppression of less elite women. See hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women," in *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, 484-500; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Harper-Collins Academic, 1990).

<sup>11</sup>Again, I do not assume women are a socially constituted homogenous, powerless group, bound together by a similar oppression. Feminists from the South have underlined how this reductionist approach to the oppression of women is a form of discursive colonialism. See Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 79-85.

<sup>12</sup>Poverty is more than the lack of material resources and economic income. Poverty is a multi-dimensional oppression that limits and constrains human development in multiple ways. Poverty limits the voice, socio-cultural representation, and civic participation of the impoverished. See "World Development Report 2000/2001," 3-12.

<sup>13</sup>It is critical to note that I consider neither "women" nor "the poor" as monolithic groups. A more accurate term than "the poor" is "the impoverished" because it honours the fact that the economically vulnerable are often *made poor* by exploitive systems that structure their poverty. Moreover, while women's poverty is a ubiquitous reality, it varies between societies and within the same society across divides of ethnicity, race, class, education, health and well-being. This reality is documented in both feminist and non-feminist analyses. See Theresa Funciello, "Poverty Wears a Female Face," in *Sisterhood is Forever*, 222-232; "World Development Report 2000/2001," 117-131.

## I.1 The Poverty of Women: A Central Concern of Trans-national Feminists

The poverty of women is not a new concern for feminists. Poverty, along with its attendant socio-political, educational and economic disempowerment, its links to ill health and its inherent inequity, has been a feminist concern for centuries.<sup>14</sup> Feminists have long understood that deep vulnerability rests on economic marginalization, and that the pervasive poverty of women renders women susceptible to multiple forms of exploitation. In their diverse analyses, feminists have linked the personal with the political by connecting the everyday realities of impoverished women's lives with wider socio-cultural and political dynamics. Within this rich and diverse feminist praxis, the work of contemporary trans-national feminists is significant.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>For centuries, women's poverty has been a recurring feminist concern. For example, Mary Collier (1689-1759) identified the economic implications of the double-duty workday of women; Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) argued that the division of the private and public economic spheres was economically disadvantageous to women; Harriet Martineau (1802-1867) connected women's lack of education with their low economic status; Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) considered the social and economic inequities of women a "shocking inhumanity of exclusiveness"; Barbara Bodichon (1827-1891) drafted legislation to give married women the right to control their earnings and their property; Lucy Stone (1818-1893) argued for remunerative employment for women; Matilda Joselyn Gage (1826-1895) stated that economic structures were established by men to suit their interests and that men owned the fruits of women's labour; Charlotte Perkins Gillman (1860-1935) named the economic independence of women a prerequisite for their autonomy. See Dale Spender, ed., *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

<sup>15</sup>Trans-national feminists are a vast group of activists/theorists, committed to global feminist praxis. They are a significant socio-political force at many international fora. For example, at the World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai, India, in 2004, feminists in the International Gender and Trade Network (IGTN), a woman's movement from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, examined the impact of global trade agreements on women. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) was the internal advisory committee for planning the WSF in Brazil in 2002. During the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, a group of indigenous women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) presented the Beijing Declaration on Indigenous Women which focused on collective rights of indigenous women worldwide. The World March of Women is a network of international feminists working for women's human rights. The International Association of Feminists Economists (IAFE) and the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ) are devoted to rethinking global economics from the perspectives of women. References for these groups are numerous. See Julie Mertus, *Local Action Global Change: Learning About the Human Rights of Women and Girls* (UNIFEM and The Centre for Women's Global Leadership, 1999). There are also multiple grassroots women's groups that form global coalitions, such as one organized by poor and homeless women called The Federation of Slum and Shackdwellers. This group, composed of 750,000 members in 70 of the poorest cities in the world, is funded by community-managed savings schemes. The success of their initiatives has improved their lobbying force with local governments. See David Satterthwaite, "Homing In, from the Bottom Up," *The Guardian Weekly*, 12-18 November 2004, 32.

Trans-national feminists attend to both the context-specificity of women's myriad experiences of poverty and to its structure as a pan-cultural phenomenon. They discern in the ubiquitous nature of women's poverty a systemic structure, a chronic disparity, an inequitable base that sustains women's disenfranchised social and economic status.

A metaphorical image used by trans-national feminists to analyze the complex issue of women's poverty within the multiple jeopardy of their lives is that of an intersection with several crossroads and heavy traffic.<sup>16</sup> In this image, the poverty of women is a central crossroad that comprises the intersection. However, while significant, women's poverty is not the only crossroad. Poverty intersects with other routes of disempowerment, such as patriarchy, racism, ethnicity, sexist religious traditions, gender-biased cultural norms, a legacy of colonialism and the geo-political economy. This intersection image also requires depth perception. This is because the multiple jeopardy of women's lives forms a circuitous structure: it is overlapped and reinforced in multiple ways. Insight into the multi-dimensional, circuitous nature of women's oppressions is key to understanding how multiple jeopardy functions and how women's poverty is enmeshed within other structural oppressions that limit their well-being. Moreover, these structural oppressions are not all that women navigate. Compounding these structural routes of disempowerment is the busy "traffic," or everyday realities of their lives. For some women, life's journey can be relatively problem-free. However, for those whose lives are circumscribed by poverty, intersected by other structural jeopardies and compounded by the constraints of their everyday lives, life's journey is perilous. The image of multiple jeopardy and the "traffic" of women's everyday lives is a useful tool for exploring the problem of maternal mortality.

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<sup>16</sup>"Intersectionality", a framework for analyzing women's oppression, is used by Kimberlé Williams, a black civil rights activist. See Kimberlé Williams, "Traffic at the Crossroads," in *Sisterhood is Forever*, 43-57.

## I.2 The Problem: Maternal Mortality as a Trans-national Feminist Issue

For many women, pregnancy is a natural occurrence.<sup>17</sup> However, for economically marginalized women,<sup>18</sup> whose structural oppressions and experiential realities converge in compound discrimination, pregnancy is hazardous. What should be a positive, defining moment in a woman's life is, instead, a time of profound fear, suffering and untimely death. Maternal mortality is a complex issue. However, it is predominantly the plight of economically marginalized women and it is also a litmus test for the social and economic status of women. Therefore, analyzing the links between women's poverty and maternal mortality in a framework of economic and gender justice is relevant.<sup>19</sup>

Few feminists have probed women's poverty through the lens of maternal mortality. The reasons for this theoretical void are multiple. One reason is that pregnancy and motherhood are controversial issues within feminist thought. For some feminists, pregnancy and motherhood are loci of sexist oppression: they are domestic hindrances that socially and economically limit women's claim for parity in the public sphere. For other feminists, pregnancy and motherhood are arenas of female power and control: they are pivotal life experiences that require complex affective, ethical and intellectual skills critical to the survival of families, communities, and

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<sup>17</sup>While pregnancy is a natural occurrence, I do not adopt a reductionist, biological approach to pregnancy. Nor do I appropriate pregnancy within a natural law framework that equates organic potentiality with actuality. Thus, while I consider pregnancy to be a natural phenomenon in the lives of women, I understand it also to be an evolving process that is shaped by culture, society, history and economics. As such, pregnancy cannot be appropriated in isolation from these dynamics. See Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 57-90, 119-155, 201-202.

<sup>18</sup>As I indicated previously, neither women nor the poor are homogenous groups. In particular, women's experiences of poverty differ: some are significantly poorer than others. However, women, and the children for whom they are largely responsible, are the majority of the impoverished worldwide.

<sup>19</sup>The connections between maternal mortality and women's poverty are beginning to be recognized by a wide range of health care workers, development agencies and human rights activists. See Zoë Matthews, "Maternal Mortality and Poverty," *Department for International Development* (London: DFID, 2002), 1-17.



nations.<sup>20</sup> Thus, on the one hand, pregnancy and motherhood are perceived as exploitive life events ideologically constructed under patriarchy. On the other hand, they are valued for shaping a collective identity for women and for legitimizing their claims for education, emancipation and equity.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the social constructions of pregnancy and motherhood are compounded further within a global analysis due to the culturally specific meanings given to these life-shaping events.

Other reasons for this theoretical void are that women's varied experiences of poverty and pregnancy are unique and not easily transferable. In addition, the links among poverty, pregnancy and maternal death are not straightforward: even history fails to clarify these links. For example, the reduction in poverty and improvements in living standards that dramatically reduced infant and general mortality rates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the

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<sup>20</sup>As indicated, feminist literature on pregnancy and motherhood is vast and controversial. Some feminists consider pregnancy and motherhood as alienating labour; others consider these experiences as humanizing labour. This diversity is seen in the following examples. bell hooks critiques the ideological blindness of white feminist analyses and their insensitivity to race, ethnicity and class; she claims that black women and poor white women are oppressed more by racism, unemployment and lack of education, than by pregnancy and motherhood. She also highlights elite women's patriarchal privileging in the exploitation of mothering services of poor white and black women. Delores Williams affirms the mothering heritage of African-American women who combined mothering roles with active resistance to the American slavocracy. Letty Russell and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz consider that motherhood can unite women across diverse backgrounds. For further examples of these themes, see Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Adrienne Rich, *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1985); Letty Russell et al., eds., *Inheriting Our Mother's Gardens: Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988); Anne Carr and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., "Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology," *Concilium: Religion in the Eighties*. (December, 1989); hooks, "Revolutionary Parenting," in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 133-147; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993); Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Also a Mother: Work and Family as Theological Dilemma* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Lerner, "Authorization through Motherhood," in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, 116-137.

West, did not appear to impact maternal mortality.<sup>22</sup> In fact, it was often elite, economically advantaged women who died in pregnancy, mostly as a result of medical iatrogenesis.<sup>23</sup> Declines in maternal deaths occurred only when adequate hygiene was practiced and medical treatment for obstetrical complications became more widely available. As a result of this historical legacy, adequate obstetrical care for women continues to be advocated by some sources as the principal means for preventing maternal deaths.<sup>24</sup> However, others advocate broader approaches: while affirming the importance of skilled care in pregnancy, the myriad ways in which women's social and economic inequities function also are considered causal dynamics in maternal mortality.<sup>25</sup>

I acknowledge that pregnancy and motherhood are controversial issues within feminist thought, and that the links among pregnancy, motherhood and women's poverty are complex. However, recent studies on maternal mortality have signaled the need for a greater comprehension of the role that underlying factors play as precursors to the medical crises that

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<sup>22</sup>See Alicia Ely Yamin and Deborah P. Maine, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue: Measuring Compliance with International Treaty Objectives," *Human Rights Quarterly* 21.3 (1999): 567.

<sup>23</sup>Iatrogenesis, or medically induced illness, historically resulted from the lack of medical understanding of basic hygiene, sterile technique and infection transmission. It was not uncommon for pregnant women in hospitals to contract infections and die in childbirth. The discovery of antibiotics, the availability of blood transfusion, better surgical and anaesthetic skills, and basic insights into sterile procedures reduced maternal deaths in the West. See Yamin and Maine, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 568; I. Loudon, *Death in Childbirth: An International Study of Maternal Care and Maternal Mortality 1800-1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>24</sup>Yamin and Maine, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 581. The World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) advocate access to adequate medical treatment as the most important means to reduce maternal deaths; barriers to medical care in pregnancy are considered discriminatory.

<sup>25</sup>Advocates at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 adopted a wider interpretation of maternal health; they underlined the importance of preventative measures in addition to improved access to adequate health services. See Yamin and Maine, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 578. As well, recent declines in maternal death in Brazil and Colombia have been associated with the implementation of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policies and better health infrastructures. See Adrienne Germain, "Reproductive Health and Human Rights," *The Lancet* 363 (3 January 2004): 65.

eventually claim the lives of pregnant women.<sup>26</sup> In response to this appeal, I focus on a recurring underlying factor in maternal mortality: the marginalized economic status of women. My central concern is to understand the multiple ways in which women's economic vulnerability is structured, interacts with and reinforces other jeopardies in poor women's lives, and functions as a causal dynamic in maternal mortality.<sup>27</sup> By appropriating maternal mortality through a gender-sensitive economic lens, I make the claim that maternal mortality is an issue of economic justice to which a theo-ethical response is required. By exploring the root economic causes of maternal mortality as an issue of theological justice, my research is a theo-ethical contribution to the evolving global discourse on both the economic injustices of women's lives and the problem of maternal mortality. Moreover, as maternal mortality is a global phenomenon, my dissertation is situated within the discourse of trans-national feminism. I also adopt the broader approach to maternal mortality. That is, while I explore the ways in which the jeopardy of inadequate health care functions in maternal mortality, I also identify other systemic inequities that increase the vulnerability of economically marginalized women to pregnancy-related death.

### **I.2.1 Maternal Mortality: A Persistent, Unrecognized Tragedy**

If hundreds of thousands of men were suffering and dying every year, alone in fear and in agony, or if millions upon millions of men were being injured and disabled and humiliated, [some] sustaining massive and untreated injuries and wounds to their genitalia, leaving them in constant pain, infertile and incontinent, and in dread of having sex, then we would have heard about this issue long ago and something would have been done.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>See Zoe Oxaal and Sally Baden, "Challenge to Women's Reproductive Health: Maternal Mortality," *Bridge: Development-Gender* (Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, 1996), iv-v, 1-5.

<sup>27</sup>Increasingly, connections are being made between poor maternal outcomes and socio-economic dynamics. For example, see Michael S. Kramer et al., "Socio-economic Disparities in Pregnancy Outcome: Why Do the Poor Fare so Poorly?" *Pediatric and Perinatal Epidemiology* 14 (2000): 194-210.

<sup>28</sup>See De Berns, "Contributing to Making a Difference," in *Maternal Mortality and Morbidity* (London: RGOC, 2002), 22-23, quoting Sister Anne Thompson in *Birth Rights: New Approaches for Safe Motherhood* (PANOS Institute, 2001).

This quote addresses the devastating, yet largely unrecognized, problem of maternal death and disability. It signals that a pervasive gender blindness has overlooked a serious, lethal challenge in many women's lives, and that this dismissal is linked to women's marginal status.<sup>29</sup> This quote also accents the fact that maternal mortality is not simply a biological problem: it has a foundational basis in the social and economic inequities of women's lives.<sup>30</sup> In the image of multiple jeopardy, maternal mortality is an intersectional injury in the life journey of economically marginalized women.

### **I.2.2 Maternal Mortality: An Issue of Economic Justice**

Maternal mortality is an issue of economic justice for women. The following six facts link maternal mortality to women's systemic economic inequity, thereby substantiating my claim.

One, maternal mortality is internationally recognized as the health indicator most sensitive to the differences between the rich and the poor of our world, both between and within nations.<sup>31</sup> Two, maternal mortality is the health indicator that has been the least responsive to global health initiatives.<sup>32</sup> When compared with other health indicators, such as infant mortality

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<sup>29</sup>Maternal deaths are preventable tragedies. Some sources estimate that 88 to 98 percent of maternal deaths are avoidable. See Wendy J. Graham, "The Global Problem of Maternal Mortality," in *Maternal Morbidity and Mortality*, 15; Germain, "Reproductive Health and Human Rights," 65.

<sup>30</sup>The 2005 World Health Report underlined that the well-being of mothers and children required an analysis that transcended women's biological vulnerability to explore the "adverse environments societies create for women." See "The World Health Report 2005: Making Every Woman and Child Count," *World Health Organization* [online report] (2005 [cited 29 September 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.who.int/whr/2005/chapter1/en/index3.html>

<sup>31</sup>Maternal mortality also targets the impoverished living in wealthier nations of the world. See "Women and Health," *Status of Women Canada, Beijing + 5* [data base on line] (June 2000 [cited 9 September 2002]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://sac-cfc.gc.ca/>. See also Rebecca J. Cook et al., "Advancing Safe Motherhood through Human Rights," *World Health Organization (WHO)* (Geneva: WHO, 2001), 4.

<sup>32</sup>See "Pregnancy and Childbirth: A Risky Business in the Developing World," *Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada* [online article] (October 2000 [cited 4 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://sogc.org/Sogcnet/sogc\\_docs/intl/pregn\\_e.shtml](http://sogc.org/Sogcnet/sogc_docs/intl/pregn_e.shtml)

and life expectancy, in which positive advances have been made, maternal mortality, generally, has failed to improve for several decades.<sup>33</sup> Three, the number of women who die in pregnancy, especially in poorer nations, is increasing.<sup>34</sup> These increases occur despite international awareness of inexpensive and highly cost-effective measures<sup>35</sup> to prevent the deaths of pregnant women.<sup>36</sup> Four, while it is theoretically possible for any woman to develop medical complications of pregnancy, it is predominantly economically marginalized women who die as a direct result of maternal complications.<sup>37</sup> This is one reason why pregnancy-related complications are the main cause of death and disability of women aged 15 to 44 in poorer nations of our world.<sup>38</sup> Five, in an economically inequitable world in which disparities between the rich and the poor are accelerating, the greatest toll of death and disability worldwide, when compared with all health problems of men or women, are complications related to pregnancy.<sup>39</sup> Six, there is growing international recognition of the deep interconnections between poverty and

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<sup>33</sup>See Wendy Graham and Julia Hussein, "Measuring and Estimating Maternal Mortality in the Era of HIV/AIDS," [online article] (August 2003 [cited 22 March 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://UN/POP/Mort/2003/8>

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>According to Dr. Pramilla Senanayake, Assistant Director General of *International Planned Parenthood Federation*, governments need to get priorities straight. She states, "While US\$7.9 billion will buy 243 Trident 11 submarine-launched missiles, US\$6 billion would provide maternal health care and education for all." See "Violence Against Women," *Face to Face: The Face of Women's Human Rights* [online report] (February 2000 [cited 12 December 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.facetoface.org>

<sup>36</sup>See Ann Starrs, *The Safe Motherhood Agenda: Priorities for the Next Decade, Report on the Safe Motherhood Technical Consultation, 18-23 October 1997, Colombo, Sri Lanka* (New York: Family Care International & Inter-Agency Group for Safe Motherhood, 1998), ii, 1-4.

<sup>37</sup>See Cook et al., "Advancing Safe Motherhood," 5.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 3; According to the WHO, women in sub-Saharan Africa face a one in sixteen chance of dying from pregnancy and childbirth; this has outpaced AIDS-related diseases as the main cause of death for women. See Emily Wax, "In Sudan Birth often Brings Death," *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 5.

maternal mortality. Not only is the poverty of women increasingly linked to maternal mortality, but the eradication of global poverty is linked to the reduction of pregnancy-related death and disability.<sup>40</sup>

These six facts signal the global significance of maternal mortality as a sensitive indicator of comparative disadvantage. They indicate the critical links between maternal mortality and the poverty of women. As stated, these links require greater clarification. Since the 1987 Safe Motherhood Initiative was launched at the international conference on maternal health in Nairobi, Kenya, there have been repeated calls for critical analyses of the underlying social, political, economic and religious issues within which the problem of maternal mortality emerges.<sup>41</sup> At this first of several international fora on maternal mortality,<sup>42</sup> the World Health Organization (WHO) described maternal morbidity and mortality as “a neglected tragedy, neglected because those who suffer it are neglected people, with the least power and influence

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<sup>40</sup>See Adrienne Germain and Ruth Dixon-Mueller, “Reproductive Health and the MDGs: Is the Glass Half Full or Half Empty?” *Studies in Family Planning* 36, no. 2 (June 2005): 137-140; see also “Efforts to Address Gender Inequalities Must Begin at Home,” *The Lancet: Editorial* 363 (29 October 2005): 1505.

<sup>41</sup>The aims of the global Safe Motherhood Initiative were to underscore the scope and consequences of maternal morbidity and mortality, to mobilize international attention and agency and to reduce maternal mortality by one-half by the year 2000. See Starrs, “The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda,” 9-61; Cook et al., “Advancing Safe Motherhood,” 1.

<sup>42</sup>Maternal mortality has been a concern at other international fora. These include the following: the 1992 Meeting of Partners for Safe Motherhood in Washington, DC; the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo; the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing; in Sri Lanka, The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda: Priorities for the Next Decade; the October, 1997, conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka; the United Nation’s Millennium Summit Goals which aim to reduce the 1990 levels of maternal mortality by 75 percent by 2015. As well, seven international agencies: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and the Population Council formed the Safe Motherhood Inter-Agency Group, a coalition to promote maternal health and well-being have focused on maternal mortality. While this interest is both significant and encouraging, the number of maternal deaths and disabilities worldwide has not decreased. See Starrs, “The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda,” 2; “Birth Rights: New Approaches to Safe Motherhood,” *Institute of Development Studies: id21 Society and Economy* [online report] (2003 [cited 3 August 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.id21.org/society/s5apilgl.html>

over how natural resources shall be spent; they are poor, the rural peasants, and, above all, women.”<sup>43</sup>

The description of maternal mortality as a “neglected tragedy” remains apt today.<sup>44</sup> While global initiatives since the Nairobi conference have aimed to counter this problem,<sup>45</sup> maternal deaths and disability continue unabated. Millions of women have died, and many more continue to die every day, as a result of pregnancy-related complications.<sup>46</sup> At the dawn of the new millennium, the 1987 Nairobi goal to reduce maternal mortality by 50 percent by the year 2000 had not been reached.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, while one of eight Millennium Development Goals aims to reduce maternal deaths by 75 percent by 2015, concern is being raised due to the lack of progress.<sup>48</sup> As we reach the midpoint in this schedule, targets are not being reached.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Statement by Dr. Halfdan Mahler, previous director general of the WHO, quoted in Starrs, “The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda,” 1.

<sup>44</sup>See Cook et al., “Advancing Safe Motherhood,” 5. The World Health Organization named the health of mothers, newborns and children the theme of World Health Day on April 7, 2005. Their report defines maternal mortality as a “silent epidemic” that leads to more than half a million deaths each year. See “World Health Day, 2005, Make Every Mother and Child Count: Report on Maternal and Child Health in Canada,” *Public Health Agency of Canada* [online report] (2005 [cited 8 June 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/rhs>; see also “World Health: Mothers and Children Count,” *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 1-12.

<sup>45</sup>These initiatives include the United Nations Guidelines adopted in 1997 and established by UNICEF, UNPFA, WHO and the Centre for Population and Family Health at the Columbia University School of Public Health. See Yamin and Maine, “Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue,” 564.

<sup>46</sup>See, “Mothers and Children Matter--So Does their Health,” *The World Health Report 2005: Make Every Mother and Child Count* [online report] (2005 [cited 29 September 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.who.int/whr/2005/chapter1/en/index1.html> This report signals that in some of the poorest countries of the world, including sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Asia, Pakistan, and northern India, maternal deaths are increasing.

<sup>47</sup>Yamin and Maine, “Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue,” i.

<sup>48</sup>The Millennium Development Goals are eight goals agreed on by world leaders from 189 countries at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September, 2000. See World Health Organization, “Millennium Development Goals-Indicators,” *WHO*, Geneva [online report] (2004 [cited 16 February 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.who.int/mdg/goals/MDGsList\\_smartformat.pdf](http://www.who.int/mdg/goals/MDGsList_smartformat.pdf)

<sup>49</sup>See John Zarocostas, “Many Countries Not on Target to Reach Millennium Goals,” *The Lancet* 363 (17 January 2004): 219; Xavier Bosch, “More Aid is Needed to Halve World Poverty,” *The Lancet* 363 (1 May 2004): 1448. See also J. D. Sachs and J. W. McArthur, “The Millennium Project: A Plan for

### I.3 A Theological Response to the Economic Injustice of Maternal Mortality

The status of maternal mortality as a neglected tragedy persists within the purview of Christian liberation ethics. Theological responses to the economic marginalization of women have been minimal, and maternal mortality, a concrete manifestation of women's poverty, has yet to be analyzed from a theo-ethical perspective of economic justice. That is, while maternal mortality has been analyzed from sociological, economic and development perspectives, there is a dearth of theological analyses.<sup>50</sup> This lacuna is indicative of a profound theological contradiction: to believe in a God of life and to fail to attend adequately to the ongoing suffering and untimely deaths of many pregnant women in the world is morally untenable. Moreover, this lacuna persists even though liberation theology<sup>51</sup> has been redefining the complex relationship between Christian faith and social reality from the perspectives of the poor for several decades.<sup>52</sup>

As a way of doing theology, liberation theology is a dialectic of two prophetic moments. The first denounces poverty as structural sin. The second embodies a commitment to all who are

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Meeting the Millennium Development Goals," *The Lancet* 365, no. 9456 (22-28 January 2005): 347-353.

<sup>50</sup>I do not dismiss the important feminist liberation work on the economic injustices of women's lives, such as that of Pamela K. Brubaker, *Women Don't Count: The Challenge of Women's Poverty to Christian Ethics* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1994) and Elizabeth M. Bounds et al., eds., *Welfare Policy: Feminist Critiques* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1999). However, there is a dearth of theological analyses on maternal mortality. I located only one analysis addressing this issue: a talk given by a Canadian physician, for the alternative youth day program in Toronto. See Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, "Imperilled Health of Women Worldwide," *Catholic New Times* 26, no. 14 (22 September 2002): 8-9.

<sup>51</sup>Because of the diverse and complex socio-cultural, historical and economic realities of the poor and the myriad ways in which liberation theology is oriented to these global realities, it is more accurate to speak of *many* liberation theologies rather than of *a* liberation theology. However, despite both the diversity of liberation theologies and the heterogeneity of the poor, all liberation theologies do share a common theological paradigm. This includes a praxis-based methodology, a structural critique of poverty, and a commitment to social justice in favour of the impoverished. See Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 1-85.

<sup>52</sup>One way in which liberation theology has redefined faith and social reality is in its rejection of Western theological dualisms. Liberation theology rejects the opposition of theory to praxis, the profane to the spiritual, the Christian believer to human history, and salvation to liberation. See Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 48-49.



impoverished.<sup>53</sup> These prophetic moments are not abstract, intellectual commitments. They are concretized in historical emancipatory praxis, that is, conscious human actions aimed at transforming social reality in favour of the impoverished. Therefore, for Christians, emancipatory praxis transcends both an “active presence in history” or even the “activity of peacemakers” and integrates the mutually constituting elements of faith with human actions.<sup>54</sup> Emancipatory praxis seeks to transform history in light of God’s reign. In concretely realizing the demands of faith, emancipatory praxis is the locus of all theologizing. Thus, within a liberation paradigm, historical emancipatory praxis, embodied in a “preferential option for the poor,” is realized *pastorally*, in the honoured obligation of Christians to participate in the well-being of the impoverished; *theologically*, in the re-interpretation of scripture and tradition in light of the anti-evangelical realities of the impoverished; *theoretically*, in the intellectual openness to critical, multi-disciplinary analyses of the complex realities of the impoverished.<sup>55</sup> In liberation theology, faith and emancipatory praxis are closely aligned: theology functions in an ethical and practical way in response to the scandal of poverty.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the fruit of emancipatory praxis, which is

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<sup>53</sup>Literature on liberation theologies is vast and evolving. While originating from within the contexts of the sufferings of Latin American peoples, liberation theologies are now global in scope, redefining Christian faith and social reality in diverse, context-specific ways. For example, see Sarah K. Pinnock, ed., *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003); Pierrette Daviau, ed., *Pour Libérer la Théologie: Variations autour de la Pensée Féministe d’Ivone Gebara* (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2002); Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998); Rita Nakashima Brock et al., *Casting Stones: Prostitution and Liberation in Asia and the United States* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); Katie G. Cannon, *Katie’s Canon: Womanish and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

<sup>54</sup>According to the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, praxis is dialectically bound up with theory. Praxis seeks to “transform history in light of the reign of God;” praxis can never be reduced to a simple application of faith to a historical situation. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), xxx, 6; Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 37-48.

<sup>55</sup>See Gutiérrez, “Introduction to the Revised Edition: Expanding the View,” in *A Theology of Liberation*, xvii-xlvi.

<sup>56</sup>See Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 54.

any realized liberation in history, is always partial and open to continual perfecting under the critical judgement of faith. Hence, the absolutizing of any historical liberation is resisted, while the human hope for God's reign is witnessed and celebrated in any concrete amelioration in the lives of the impoverished.<sup>57</sup>

A central concern of my dissertation is that despite liberation theology's central commitment to the poor, the lived realities of economically marginalized women, the poorest of the poor worldwide, have not been probed adequately. That is, there is a lack of theo-ethical attention to the complex particularities of women's poverty, such as their ongoing deaths and disabilities in pregnancy. I consider this theo-ethical oversight to be predicated on the following two interconnected problems:

The first problem results from what some liberation theologians have identified as a pervasive mood of economic determinism within the ethics-economics discourse of liberation theology.<sup>58</sup> This mood of economic determinism is not an abstract phenomenon: it functions in concrete ways. For example, it privileges the neo-classical economic paradigm as normative.<sup>59</sup> In so doing, it obfuscates the social and economic ramifications that its profit-oriented policies have

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>58</sup>Larry Rasmussen, "A Different Discipline," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review (USQR)* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 32-40. See also Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory," in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 58-67; John B. Cobb Jr. and Herman E. Daly, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 1-97; Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 33-123. See also p. 21-22 of my dissertation introduction for my definition of the term "geopolitical economy."

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.; see also Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The 'Fate' of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism," in *God and Capitalism: A Prophetic Critique of Market Economy*, ed. J. Mark Thomas et al. (Madison, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, Inc., 1991), 53-71.

on the well-being and survival of the most vulnerable members of our global community.<sup>60</sup> In my view, the disenfranchised economic status of women is one such profound obfuscation. A concrete illustration of how this obfuscation functions is demonstrated by the typical methods that are used to gather data on the economic status of countries. These methods are market-oriented and frequently render women, and their underpaid or non-paid work in the informal sector, invisible. Consequently, both the particular poverty of women and their essential, albeit non-remunerated, contributions to the economy are ignored. Thus, as women are invisible economically, any constraints they experience, such as their marginal material status, their increasing domestic burdens, their malnutrition and ill health, their lack of essential obstetrical services and their pregnancy-related death and disability, also are ignored. Therefore, in response to these trends, some liberation theologians have called for more grounded critiques of the strengths and weaknesses of the neo-classical economic paradigm from the perspectives of the impoverished.<sup>61</sup>

The second problem results from the fact that there has been an insufficient focus on gender issues within liberation theology. That is, critical explorations of the multi-faceted issue

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<sup>60</sup>See Valpy Fitzgerald, "The Economics of Liberation Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 218-234. Fitzgerald contends that human life should be the essential criterion for economic logic, as opposed to profit maximization and private wealth; the economy and theology are inseparable in theory and practice. He notes that theologians have been reticent to engage economic theory and calls for a theology of the economy to be elaborated.

<sup>61</sup>See Claudio de Oliveira Ribeiro, "Has Liberation Theology Died? Reflections on the Relationship between Community Life and the Globalisation of the Economic System," *The Ecumenical Review* 51, no. 3 (July 1999): 305-314. The author contends that many liberation theologians have overlooked the economy in their social analyses. See also Brubaker, *If Women Counted*, 59-143; Mary E. Hobgood, *Catholic Social Teaching and Economic Theory: Paradigms in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 227-257.

of gender have been undertaken by relatively few liberation theologians.<sup>62</sup> For example, the concept of “the poor” has been appropriated in a homogenous way, and minimal attention has been given to the *qualitatively* different poverty of women. Hence, women’s poverty, a root cause of maternal mortality, has not been probed adequately in both liberation analyses<sup>63</sup> and in the social theories<sup>64</sup> that have informed liberation debates concerning the political economy. As the central focus of liberation theology is appropriating the multi-faceted reality of the poor through the eyes of faith, the concrete experiences of economically marginalized women in pregnancy are critical to its epistemological integrity. That liberation analyses have not addressed adequately these experiences is indicative of how women have disappeared among the generality of “the poor” and been rendered invisible in a discourse that purports to speak of their impoverishment. Thus, as a central theological presupposition animating liberation theology is that all may experience a life of dignity and wellbeing,<sup>65</sup> this pre-supposition needs to be clarified, differentiated and enriched in light of the lived realities of economically marginalized pregnant women. Failure to do so raises serious questions regarding the authenticity of liberation theology’s commitment to emancipatory praxis.

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<sup>62</sup>Inadequate gender analyses within liberation theologies is a problem identified by many liberation theologians. In feminist discourses see Vuola, *Limits to Liberation*, 6-11, 16-18, 132-187; Kwok Pui-Lan, “The Future of Feminist Theology,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 63-76; Beverly Wildung Harrison, “Challenging the Western Paradigm: The ‘Theology in the Americas’ Conference,” *Christianity and Crisis* (27 October 1975): 251. In non-feminist liberation discourses see Clodovis Boff and George Pixley, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 91; Tissa Balasuriya, *Planetary Theology* (London: SAM. Press Ltd., 1984), 4, 45-49, 53, 74, 223-225; James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 122-139.

<sup>63</sup>See Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19-38. Gutiérrez claims that liberation theology is only beginning to address women’s cultural and economic exploitation.

<sup>64</sup>This applies to both neo-classical analysis and Marxist social theories.

<sup>65</sup>See Vuola, *Limits to Liberation*, 224.

### I.3.1 Methodological Summary: A Feminist Liberation Approach to Maternal Mortality

In response to the lack of theological reflection on maternal mortality, my dissertation is situated within the trans-national discourse of feminist liberation theological ethics. This feminist discourse is a “living, dialoguing, open theological paradigm”<sup>66</sup> that interprets Christian faith from the concrete historical sufferings of poor women, critiques the ideologies that structure their multiple sufferings, and rethinks theology in light of these sufferings. That is, feminist liberation theological ethics reveals the invisible distortions of power through the interpretive key of poor women’s lives, and provides an understanding of the poor that is “more concretely universal and more particular.”<sup>67</sup> In its orientation and advocacy to the “irruption within the irruption,”<sup>68</sup> feminist liberation theological ethics functions as an inner critique of liberation theology. From the perspectives of poor women, this discourse sees the world critically elucidated and in need of transformation so that the full humanity of all women can be fostered. Thus, conscientisation of the concrete injustices of poor women’s lives provides insight into individual and communal alienation, as well as alienation from God. Furthermore, challenging these injustices is a profound opportunity to deepen liberation theology’s solidarity and commitment to the most vulnerable.

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>68</sup>See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Reflections from a Third World Woman’s Perspective: Women’s Experience and Liberation Theology,” *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 24.

To explore maternal mortality as an issue of economic and gender justice, I use an analytical method within a feminist liberation methodology.<sup>69</sup> By this method, I mean the following three things:

First, I am committed to the well-being of economically marginalized women in pregnancy: their full humanity and progress toward a more just world are inextricably linked. I concretize this commitment by attending to the diverse experiences of economically marginalized women in pregnancy, experiences that are largely theologically invisible.

Second, the experiences of economically marginalized women are both the *point d'appui* and the empirical and theoretical resource for my dissertation. The accelerating poverty of women globally, and its concrete manifestation in maternal mortality, are the context and the starting point for my theo-ethical reflection.

Third, my dissertation is praxis-oriented: I seek to understand the social and economic inequity of poor women's lives in order to discern leverage points from which work for liberative change can begin. The economic marginalization of women and its concrete consequence in maternal mortality is the theo-ethical problematic to be explored and a locus of struggle from which strategies for political and socio-economic change are envisioned.

I aim to "hear into speech"<sup>70</sup> the concrete socio-economic realities of women who are vulnerable to maternal death, to understand and judge the oppressive socio-economic structures that limit their lives, and to strategize in the co-creation of more liberative social and economic

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<sup>69</sup>For more information on feminist methodologies, see Nancy C. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *Feminist Social Thought*, 462-483; Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

<sup>70</sup>This phrase originated with Nelle Morton; it invites women to break from their silence and tell their stories within the solidarity of a hearing community. See Nelle Morton, "The Rising of Women's Consciousness in a Male Language Structure," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (March 1972): 177-190.

options. My dissertation is animated by the following theological questions: What does it mean to speak of a God of life within the contexts of the profound sufferings and premature deaths of economically marginalized women in pregnancy? How can liberation theology's preferential option for the poor be made manifest within the context of the untimely deaths of pregnant women worldwide?

Three further clarifications are necessary:

First, informed by feminist insights into the intersecting structure of multiple jeopardy, I do not equate maternal deaths simply with women's poverty. I acknowledge that the eradication of women's poverty would not nullify other oppressions experienced by pregnant women. I stress the economic component of maternal mortality as a means by which this multifaceted problem can be understood in ways that attend to other oppressions, such as race, class, ethnicity, social location and gender discrimination.<sup>71</sup>

Second, I have yet to define the term "geo-political global economy." By this, I refer to the current worldwide economic infrastructure. The geo-political economy is a multifaceted infrastructure in which complex economic processes, such as international trade, deregulation of financial markets, currency speculation, flows of investments, technology, capital and people, themselves, evolve along with international political co-operation, codification of global norms and policies, and diverse forms of cultural globalization.<sup>72</sup> The geo-political economy is therefore not only a complex, evolving phenomenon. It is also an infrastructure with an equally complex

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<sup>71</sup>Thus, an economic approach to maternal mortality attends to the critique of womanist thinkers. See Toinette M. Eugene et al., "Appropriation and Reciprocity in Womanist/ Mujerista/ Feminist Work," in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Lois Daly (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 88-120.

<sup>72</sup>See Christien van den Acker, "Contemporary Slavery, Global Justice and Globalisation," in *The Political Economy of New Slavery*, ed. Christien van den Acker (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 15-36. See also Christine M. Koggel, "Equality Analysis in a Global Context: A Relational Approach," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 28 (2002): 247- 272.

historical past,<sup>73</sup> the legacy of which is the current dominant system of capitalism, in which powerful global markets and trans-national corporations exert widespread effects on people, cultures, politics and the environment. Moreover, as I have indicated, I reject any reductionist evaluation of the current geo-political economy as either the singular cause of women's poverty, or the principal means of its eradication. What I do propose, however, is that by exploring the poverty of women from the concrete reality of maternal mortality, insights into the personal and the political realities of women's economic lives can be afforded. I submit that attending to the problem of maternal mortality is a resource for learning what sustains the inequalities and powerlessness of vulnerable people and groups within the geo-political economy, and where challenges can be made in response to the economic injustices of women's lives.<sup>74</sup>

Third, while I focus on the constraints germane to women's lives, I reject any stance of women as either collective victims or passive recipients of gender bias. My research clearly demonstrates the opposite: it reveals that despite these constraints, women continue to contribute to the well-being and integrity of families, communities, nations and economies. I have witnessed the resilience, courage, dignity and ingenuity of women in many marginalized contexts: in the slums of Mumbai, among the "floating population" or homeless of Dhaka, in the gypsy camps of rural Britain, in the Aboriginal outpost settlements of the Canadian Arctic, in the shelters for survivors of domestic violence, and in the hospital emergency departments of urban centres in

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<sup>73</sup>The Christian ethicist Larry Rasmussen identifies the global economy as "not a new thing but an epic tale whose chapters must be read together and in sequence." He calls for a more comprehensive socio-historical account of globalization, attentive to conquest, colonization, commerce and Christianity, followed by a process of development, capital accumulation and consumerism in the post-World War II period, which led to the global triumph of liberal capitalism. See Rasmussen, "A Different Discipline," *USQR* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 29-52.

<sup>74</sup>Note that I use the terms geo-political economy and global capitalist economy interchangeably throughout my dissertation: both are consistent with the definition I give on pp. 21-22 of the introduction.



our world. These personal experiences have given me a fundamental insight: despite their diverse experiences of marginalization, women's life-giving contributions are far from marginal.

#### **I.4 Overview of Chapters**

Consistent with a liberation methodology, my dissertation is divided into an evolving hermeneutical circle animated by “see-judge-act” dimensions. However, it is important to note that within a liberation paradigm, the tasks of solidarity and liberation are a multi-differentiated unity. The three dimensions of “see-judge-act” are theologically interdependent and, therefore, theologically critical to the overall liberationist goals of solidarity and effective theo-praxis. Moreover, my use of the feminist image of multiple jeopardy renders the analytical distinctiveness of the tri-dimensional framework of “see-judge-act” more fluid. That is, by using the feminist framework of multiple jeopardy in “seeing” women's lives, I have infused the “see” dimension with a feminist evaluative perspective. As such, the “see” dimension is more accurately understood in terms of a “see-judge” dimension. Neither is the “judge” dimension of the evolving hermeneutical circle distinct: it is inextricably linked to the “act” dimension and, therefore, is more accurately appropriated within a “judge-act” dimensionality.

Feminist liberation theology begins by attending to the concrete injustices of women's lives in order to participate effectively in a transformative, justice-oriented process. Chapter 1 corresponds to the initial “see-judge” dimension of the hermeneutic circle;<sup>75</sup> I provide a

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<sup>75</sup>Juan Luis Segundo states that a theological hermeneutic circle has four phases. The first is a historically conscious, pre-theological commitment to a particular struggle. The second is a search for an emancipatory theory that illumines reality in light of this commitment. The third is a rethinking of theology as ortho-praxis in light of this historical commitment. The fourth is an articulation of a more authentic and richer theology in keeping with the gospel's thrust for liberation. These phases are neither sequential nor mutually exclusive. For example, praxis, the most central point of reference in liberation theology, is both the aim and the point of departure. See Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), especially pp.1-68. For further elaboration of a hermeneutic circle, see also Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* 15<sup>th</sup> ed., Maryknoll (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), xxxiii; Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 37-87; John Wilcken, “To Liberate Theology: Pursuing Segundo's Project in an Australian Context,” *Pacifica* 17 (February 2004): 55-70.

historically conscious approach to maternal mortality. I draw on the feminist interpretive framework of multiple jeopardy and the “traffic” of women’s everyday lives to probe the causal dynamics of maternal mortality. Note that in both Chapters 1 and 2, I provide detailed social and economic data on the concrete realities of economically marginalized pregnant women. As indicated, this social scientific data, or “see-judge” dimension is of profound theological relevance: it is a *locus theologicus*. Appropriating this data is a corrective to the historical silence that has shrouded and legitimized the injustices of pregnant women’s lives. It is a prerequisite for authentic solidarity and effective theo-praxis with economically marginalized pregnant women.

In Chapter 2, I continue to develop the “see-judge” dimension of my historically conscious analysis of maternal mortality. I demonstrate that women’s marginal social and economic status is reflected in, and results from, their exclusion from global and national economic policies. I show how this exclusion damages the health and well-being of pregnant women by exploring the impacts of two specific global economic policies: the funding of women’s reproductive health, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (formerly Structural Adjustment Policies). Contributing to the “see-judge” dimension of Chapter 2 are the global insights of contemporary feminist economists. I show how feminist economists are relevant dialogue partners in liberation theological ethics. I identify the ways in which their work provides critical data for theo-ethical reflection on maternal mortality.

In Chapter 3, I continue shaping the liberation hermeneutic circle by developing the “judge-act” dimension. I introduce the work of Christian social feminist liberation ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison.<sup>76</sup> Harrison has not focused on the problem of maternal mortality.

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<sup>76</sup>Beverly Wildung Harrison is a Christian feminist social liberation ethicist who is committed to a communitarian vision of society where economic power is democratized. In her view, Christian ethics is an impoverished discipline because it has not critiqued adequately the accelerating power of global capitalism. See Harrison, “Socialism-Capitalism” in *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Elizabeth M. Bounds et al., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 162-165; Larry Rasmussen, “A Different

However, she is a liberation theologian who attends critically to the global poverty of women.<sup>77</sup> She also raises concerns about the relative invisibility of economic reality in Christian liberation ethics, and is critical about the lack of attention to the economic vulnerability of women. I submit that Harrison provides theo-ethical resources that correlate well with the “judge-act” dimension of liberative praxis. Specifically, I explore how Harrison’s feminist liberation ethics is committed to emancipatory praxis within pastoral, theological and theoretical elements. The tasks of this chapter are first to analyze and then to categorize Harrison’s commitment to emancipatory praxis within its pastoral, theological and theoretical elements. Insight into Harrison’s emancipatory praxis are the tools that I use to illumine and then judge maternal mortality from a theo-ethical liberation perspective. My emphasis on Harrison’s emancipatory praxis is considerable because I discern critical connections among her emancipatory praxis and two additional theo-ethical resources: her approach to justice and her social theory, the focus of Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I deepen the theo-ethical analysis and judgement of maternal mortality by integrating Harrison’s approach to justice and her social theory. I submit that her social theory is a logical extension of her concept of justice and is a tool for critically appropriating the geo-political economy from the perspectives of poor women. Harrison’s concept of justice and her social theory have not dialogued with economics in this way, nor has a theo-ethical approach to maternal mortality been advanced using these resources.<sup>78</sup> As liberation theology seeks to

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Discipline,” *USQR* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 29-52.

<sup>77</sup>Over the years, Harrison has called for a critical historical analysis of the political economy. See “The Role of Social Theory in Christian Social Ethics,” in *Making the Connections*, 54-80; “Agenda for a New Theological Ethic,” in *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies in North America*, ed. William K. Tabb (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 89-99; “The ‘Fate’ of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism,” 53-71, and “Feminist Thea(o)logies at the Millennium” in *Liberating Eschatology*, ed. Margaret A. Farley (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 156-171.

<sup>78</sup>Pamela K. Brubaker signals the relevance and ethical application of Harrison’s social theory: “Harrison’s social theory functioned to clear a space for those of us who use this theory in our ethics.” See Brubaker, “To Feed the World: Gender, Class and Economic Justice,” *USQR* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 68.

proclaim a God of life and love in situations of chronic suffering and premature death,<sup>79</sup> I ask how Harrison's concept of justice and her social theory can proclaim God's love and judgement within the context of maternal mortality. The theo-ethical judgements of Chapters 3 and 4 signal the critical role theological ethics needs to play in challenging the injustice of maternal mortality.

In Chapter 5, I present the conclusions of my dissertation; I also indicate areas for further research. I name maternal mortality a concrete situation of chronic suffering and premature death from which liberation theological ethics has much to learn. That is, maternal mortality is a profound *locus theologicus* in which a God of life needs to be proclaimed and embodied in ways life-giving to impoverished women. In terms of future research, I encourage all theologians to work to transform the injustice of maternal mortality. I reinforce the relevance of the theo-ethical responses I have articulated in my pastoral, theological and theoretical commitments to emancipatory praxis. I emphasize the need for greater economic literacy for all liberation theologians, particularly in relation to the economics of women's lives. I highlight the theological injustice evident in the fact that many of the world's most impoverished women are denied basic reproductive health. I challenge all to address the global pandemic of violence against women.

### **I.5 Social Location and Personal History**

Feminist liberation methods privilege the concrete experiences of women, cognizant of the perspectival limitations from which these experiences emerge. I come to this analysis of maternal mortality as an issue of economic justice grounded in my experiences as a Roman Catholic Canadian feminist, a mother, a public health nurse and midwife, and a doctoral candidate in theological ethics. My social location and historical privilege as a white, middle class, educated, heterosexual Canadian woman have given me opportunities and a social status I know many women in my own country and throughout the world are denied. This insight has

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<sup>79</sup>Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxxiv.

strengthened my resolve to give voice to the resilience and resistance of so many women in the face of gender-based injustices and limited life chances. It has honed a deep sense of responsibility to work for a world wherein the dignity and well-being of all people are furthered. My theological studies over the past decade have guided and enriched my mothering experiences with my five children, as their lives have challenged and grounded much of my theological insights. My engagement in the multiple and challenging reproductive tasks of child-bearing, child-rearing, caring for aging parents, and community work has shaped within me a deep respect for the essential work of the informal, unpaid domestic sector of the economy.

Earlier insights into the systemic nature of women's poverty were pivotal in shaping my feminist consciousness. Working as a public health nurse and midwife in several countries, and travelling in India and Africa, connected me to the deep inequities between the rich and the poor of our world, and to the specific challenges of women's lives. At the time, I noted that while women appeared more vulnerable to poverty, their struggles to survive were other-oriented. Women were the primary caretakers of children and any other dependants. These memories are poignant when I now read United Nations reports that target women as central to the well-being of families and communities, and link the nutrition of children directly to the income of mothers.<sup>80</sup> In October 2005, I visited Bangladesh, the country with the greatest population density, where poverty and malnourishment are pervasive problems, and where more than 20,000

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<sup>80</sup>See Ann-Cathrin Jarl, "Women and Economic Justice," *Studies in Ethics, Economics and Feminism*, ed. Carl Henric Grenholm et al. (Sweden: Uppsala, 1998): 113. The survival of children up to the age of ten is linked to the survival of their mothers; when women's well-being is ensured, children's well-being and nutrition are more likely to be ensured. There are not similar correlations with fathers. See Lisa C. Smith, "The Importance of Women's Status for Child Nutrition in Developing Countries," *International Food Policy Institute Research Report* 131 (2003). This is also a global reality. See Canadian research on this subject: Lynn McIntyre et al., "Do Low-Income Lone Mothers Compromise their Nutrition to Feed their Children?" *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 168, no. 6 (18 March 2003): 686-691.

women die annually in childbirth, one of the highest rates in the world.<sup>81</sup> However, despite these challenges, Bangladesh is also a sign of hope: it has reduced its rate of maternal mortality.<sup>82</sup>

Insights from this experience inspired, grounded, and enriched my analysis of maternal mortality.

Finally, as a Roman Catholic, my faith has taught me that my human dignity and well-being are sacred and inextricably linked to that of all others. My faith has honed a deep respect for the common good as the moral foundation for social existence. Within this inclusive vision, the structural sexism of my Church and my experiences of gender exclusion are conflicting and painful. This structural sexism is a pervasive dynamic, functioning far beyond the religious sphere. Its legitimization of gender-biased power differentials in wider social realities is an issue of social justice that theological ethics needs to challenge. My dissertation is a response to one aspect of this sexist dynamic: the ubiquitous poverty of women and its concrete manifestation in maternal mortality. However, as a Christian feminist, my situation is ambivalent. While cognizant of the deep-rooted sexism of my faith and tradition, I also am nurtured and inspired by the love, hope and liberation that is its central message. My faith is revelatory of a relational Divine who wills the flourishing and well-being of all. Inspired by this image, I claim my faith's inclusive relationality and challenge that its oppressive dynamics contradict its liberatory ethos.

The theologian Beverly Harrison affirms the importance of theological images, or what she terms theological "phantasie"<sup>83</sup> for grounding our co-creative reciprocal power. She claims that in a liberation paradigm, there is a need for "an ethic grounded in images and concepts that

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<sup>81</sup>See A. K. M. Abdus Salam et al., "Inequalities in the Utilisation of Safe Delivery in Bangladesh: Barriers to Reducing Maternal Mortality," *Bangladesh Health Equity Watch Paper* no. 2 (March 2003): 1-19.

<sup>82</sup>See C. Ronsmans et al., "Decline in Maternal Mortality in Matlab, Bangladesh: A Cautionary Tale," *The Lancet* 350, no. 9094 (20-27 December 1998): 1810-1814.

<sup>83</sup>Harrison's concept of "phantasie" is influenced by the theologian Dorothee Soelle as elaborated in her book, *Beyond Mere Obedience* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1970); see also Harrison, "Dorothee Soelle as Pioneering Postmodernist," in *Justice in the Making*, 130-135.

affirm reciprocity in action, that embrace mutuality, and support the whole spectrum of human fulfilment, autonomy, and as yet unrealized possibility.”<sup>84</sup> Hence, I offer an image that has inspired and sustained me throughout my dissertation. This image has been my spiritual anchor, theologically grounding me in the study of maternal mortality as an issue of economic justice. It is an image of the Divine articulated by Aruna Gnanadason, a feminist liberation theologian from the Majority World.<sup>85</sup> She writes:

In Asia, the face of God can be discovered in many images, even in the image of a slum woman who holds her newborn baby in her arms and stares with brave eyes into an empty future with a determination that she and her child will live.<sup>86</sup>

This image of the Divine speaks to me of the God of life, a God whose preferential option is for the poorest of the poor. It speaks to me of the Divine’s desire for justice, alive in the flourishing of all persons. It speaks of a participatory justice to which we are all accountable and called to embody. This image also speaks to me of the privileged status of poor women, whose lives bear witness to both the failure of our human community and to the possibility of encountering God’s redeeming love in our contemporary world. For in the hope, courage and love that emanates from this slum woman is God’s summons to right wrong relations, to serve and honour in authentic solidarity the liberation of all people from the scandal of poverty.

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<sup>84</sup>Harrison, *Making The Connections*, 39.

<sup>85</sup>I use the term Majority World to refer to the nations in which most of the world’s people live. These nations conventionally are labelled Third World or developing world, in contrast to the Minority World or First World nations of the so called developed world. The terms Majority and Minority Worlds are more accurate, less value-laden and less pejorative. See Kevin Bales, “Going Cheap,” *New Internationalist* 337 [online article] (2001 [cited 15 June 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.newint.org/issue337/cheap.htm>

<sup>86</sup>See Aruna Gnanadason, “Women’s Oppression: A Sinful Situation,” in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 74.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**Maternal Mortality: A Concrete Consequence of Women's Poverty**

**1 Introduction: Towards a Historically Conscious Analysis of Maternal Mortality**

My goal in this chapter is to provide a historically conscious analysis of maternal mortality. That is, I begin to develop the “see-judge” dimension of the evolving liberation hermeneutical circle. At the outset, it is important to note that my analysis is provisional: much as a circle has no fixed start or end point, insights gained in the “see-judge” dimension of the hermeneutical circle are qualified throughout subsequent analytical phases. Hence, the operative word is *towards* a historically conscious analysis of maternal mortality. Furthermore, as the “see-judge-act” dimensions of the hermeneutic circle are theologically interdependent, they are all equally significant to the liberation goals of authentic solidarity and effective theo-praxis.<sup>1</sup>

Beverly Wildung Harrison highlights that within a liberation paradigm, the “descriptive” is never split from the “normative” theological and ethical perspectives. Harrison states:

The fact is that my way of doing theology and ethics is such that a theological and ethical analysis is simultaneously descriptive and normative. I cannot assume there is a morally or religiously neutral “situation” “out there” in the culture, in our churches or in our institutions of higher education, to which I can “apply” some presumed “theological” or “ethical” perspective. I understand my task--our task--as Christian intellectuals to be to “describe” the dynamics of the world around us from the standpoint of our living faith in One whose action is in, with and under our action, whose action aims, as ours should do, at real, concrete human and cosmic liberation.<sup>2</sup>

There are two main parts to this chapter's goal. First, I present evidence that further substantiates my claim that maternal mortality is an indicator of comparative advantage and an

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<sup>1</sup>See overview of chapters in dissertation introduction, pp. 22-25.

<sup>2</sup>In chapters 3 and 4, I focus on the work of the feminist liberation social ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison. Part of my analysis of her theoretical corpus includes research on the archives of Harrison from Union Theological Seminary, as seen in this reference. See “Working Paper: The Church's Ministry in Post-Secondary Education,” Box: Articles/Sermons/Lectures, Beverly Wildung Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship, Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York.



issue of economic justice for women. This evidence reveals the cross-cultural constant of women's poverty and their marginal status in the conventional economic indices of income, work and property. It also amplifies an interrelated global health consequence: women have the poorest health status worldwide. In light of this evidence, I name maternal mortality a concrete consequence of women's poverty. Second, I explore maternal mortality from a gender-sensitive economic lens. I use the feminist interpretive framework of multiple jeopardy to demonstrate how women's poverty, a key structural jeopardy in maternal mortality, intersects with other jeopardies to increase the risk of pregnancy-related death. I also show how the framework of multiple jeopardy illumines women's everyday realities, or the "traffic" on the structural routes of their disempowerment.

### 1.1 The Economic Status of Women: A Global Inequity

The poverty<sup>3</sup> of women is a pan-cultural phenomenon. The reasons women predominantly number among the poor of the world are multifaceted.<sup>4</sup> Feminist insights<sup>5</sup> into the

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<sup>3</sup>Poverty is not simply the absence of income. It is also the denial of opportunity and choices most basic to human development, including a healthy and creative life, an adequate standard of living, freedom, self-esteem and the respect of others. See Monica Townson, "A Report Card on Women and Poverty," *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives* [online report] (2000 [cited 8 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://policyalternatives.ca/>; Marika Morris, "Women and Poverty," *Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women* [online report] (2002 [cited 2 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://criaw-icref.ca/Poverty\\_fact\\_sheet.htm](http://criaw-icref.ca/Poverty_fact_sheet.htm); The *Beijing Platform for Action* and UNFPA's recent statistics claim women are the majority of the poor, and that poverty-related gender disparities are widening worldwide. See *Beijing Platform for Action*, paragraphs 47, 51, *The People's Movement for Human Rights Education (PDHRE)* [online report] (2003 [cited 8 October 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.pdhre.org/rights/women\\_and\\_economy.html](http://www.pdhre.org/rights/women_and_economy.html); see also "State of World Population 2002: Women and Gender Inequality," *UNFPA* [online report] (2002 [cited 4 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2002/english/ch4/index.htm>

<sup>4</sup>Women are not a homogenous group; neither are the poor. However, women are the poorest of the poor, and trends indicate that they will remain the poorest group in the world. See Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, "Thinking it Through: Women, Work and Caring in the New Millennium," in *Canadian Women Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme: Women, Globalization and International Trade*, ed. Luciana Ricciuti et al., 21/22, no. 4/1, Spring/Summer (Toronto: York University Publication, 2002): 44-50; Amartya Sen, "Varieties of Deprivation," in *Out of the Margins: Feminist Perspectives on Economics*, ed. Edith Kuiper et al. (London: Routledge, 1995), 51-58.

<sup>5</sup>Trans-national feminists have produced a broad-ranging analysis of women's poverty. For theological/activist/academic sources, see Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004). For secular/activist/academic sources, see *Canadian Women Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme: Women, Globalization and International Trade*; Lourdes Benería, *Gender, Development and Globalisation: Economics as if All People Mattered* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

ubiquitous poverty of women were documented for the first time in data collated by the United Nations during the *International Decade for Women* (1975-1984).<sup>6</sup>

This data was unprecedented: it provided the first global view of the economic status of women and it revealed an unexpected litany of recurring trans-cultural gender disparities. This data confirmed that despite the diversity of contexts, material deprivation, social subordination and political disempowerment qualitatively linked women's lives.<sup>7</sup> It indicated that while women comprise more than half the population of the world and perform two-thirds of the world's working hours, they receive less than one-tenth of the world's income. It signaled that women own less than 1 percent of the world's property, are everywhere poorer in resources, and are invariably under-represented in positions of decision making, influence and power.<sup>8</sup> With respect to the formal labour sector, this data detailed that women often earn less than what men earn for the same work.<sup>9</sup> Women also are concentrated in the service sector, where access to benefits, promotions and job security are minimal, and where they risk dismissal in the event of pregnancy.<sup>10</sup> This data showed that the gender bias of the formal labour sector also shapes the sphere of women's informal work:<sup>11</sup> a wide spectrum of income-generating ventures in

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<sup>6</sup>See V. Spike Peterson and Anne Runyan, *Global Gender Issues: Dilemmas in World Politics* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), 5-15.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 5-15.

<sup>8</sup>Peterson, *Global Gender Issues*, 5.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>10</sup>Dismissing women from their jobs due to pregnancy continues two decades later and is a major reason for women's economic vulnerability. See the 2005 report, "The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the MDGs," *UNFPA State of the World Population 2005* [online report] (2005 [cited 28 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/summary.htm>

<sup>11</sup>Some feminist researchers substitute informal sector (a term that can undermine the dynamic economy in which many women participate) with "microenterprises." I agree that a rigid, dualistic perspective is problematic in an interconnected economy, but to facilitate integrating global data, I adopt the framework of formal/informal sector.

subsistence agriculture, home-based businesses, food processing, crafts, piece-rate work and street vending.<sup>12</sup> Finally, this data revealed that whether or not women work outside the home, they are largely responsible for the daily demands of child-rearing, household maintenance, community volunteering, and care of the sick and aged.<sup>13</sup>

Awareness of the pervasiveness of women's marginal social and economic status stimulated a plethora of global analyses<sup>14</sup> and initiatives.<sup>15</sup> This international response bore witness to a conscientization of what feminists had long noted: the systemic, pervasive nature of women's economic inequity. However, while this widespread concern is laudable, it has produced few changes in the economic situation of many women.<sup>16</sup> That is, more than two decades after the United Nations' (UN) data on women's poverty was published, women's status as the "poorest of the poor" worldwide persists.<sup>17</sup> This gendered reality is reiterated annually in

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<sup>12</sup>The United Nations data signals a strong correlation between an active informal economic sector and women workers. See Mertus, *Local Action Global Change*, 159.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 91-105.

<sup>14</sup>For a analysis of women's poverty see Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Investing in Health for Economic Development* [online article] (January, 2002 [cited 6 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.global\\_policy.org/socecon/develop/2002/hltthsachs.htm](http://www.global_policy.org/socecon/develop/2002/hltthsachs.htm); Townson, "A Report Card on Women and Poverty," 1-15.

<sup>15</sup>This includes initiatives from international development circles, government and non-government agencies, economists, women's organizations and faith-based initiatives. The Cairo Conference on Population and Development and Beijing 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women are two examples of these initiatives.

<sup>16</sup>Global data on women's disproportionately greater work burdens and their poverty continues to be verified two decades after this initial study. Women are the main contributors to world food security. In many nations they are responsible for 80 percent of food production, yet are often malnourished and suffer the most in times of famine or drought. For example, during the course of one year on a one-hectare farm in the Indian Himalayas, a pair of bullocks work 1,065 hours, a man, 1,212 hours, and a women, 3,485 hours. See Shannon Storey, "Neoliberal Trade Policies in Agriculture and the Destruction of Global Food Security: Who Can Feed the World?" in *Canadian Women Studies*, 190-195; Seema Kulkarni, "A Local Answer to a Global Mess: Women's Innovations to Secure their Livelihoods," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 196-202.

<sup>17</sup>See Eileen Kerwin Jones, "Weaving Perspectives: An Exploration of Economic Justice Based on the Work of Beverly Harrison and Marilyn Waring," *Ecotheology*, 6.1, 6.2 (2001): 92-107.

the UN's publications of *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*.<sup>18</sup> Thus, despite international efforts to advance the position of women, many gender equity goals have not been realized. As the new millennium dawns, many women still struggle to secure the fundamental rights they know is their due: basic human needs for themselves and their dependants,<sup>19</sup> reproductive health,<sup>20</sup> education and literacy,<sup>21</sup> increased representation in government and corporate spheres,<sup>22</sup> shared responsibility for work in the informal sector,<sup>23</sup> civic freedom,<sup>24</sup> equal pay for equal work.<sup>25</sup> Women continue to be affected by an inter-structuring of deleterious socio-

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<sup>18</sup>See The United Nations, *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics 2000* (New York: United Nations, 2000), xii. See also Andrée Lévesque, "Le Travail des Femmes à l'Heure de la Mondialisation Neo-Libérale," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 51-55; Linda Christiansen-Ruffman, "Atlantic Canadian Coastal Communities and the Fisheries Trade: A Feminist Critique, Revaluation and Revisioning," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 56-63.

<sup>19</sup>*The World's Women*, xiv-xvi, 53-75.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*; according to the UN, reproductive health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well being in all matters related to the reproductive system and its functions and processes." See Danielle Nierenberg, "Correcting Gender Myopia: Gender Equity, Women's Welfare and the Environment," *Worldwatch Paper* 161, ed. Thomas Prugh (Danvers, MA: Worldwatch Institute, 2002), 8.

<sup>21</sup>*The World's Women*, xiv, 85-89.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, xvi, 92-95, 130, 163-164. Women hold 16 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide, an increase since 1990 of only 4 percent; Rwanda currently has the greatest number. See UNFPA, "The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the MDGs," *State of the World Population 2005* [online report] (2005 [cited 11 November 2005]); available on World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/summary.htm>

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 86, 132.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 151-171. In many nations of the world, women's rights to freedom of movement, property ownership, formal work, economic income and divorce are limited.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 109-111, 126. In 2005, women in the Minority World earn \$0.77 for every dollar earned by men, and women in the Majority World earn \$0.73. See "State of the World Population 2005," *UNFPA*.

cultural, political and economic factors.<sup>26</sup> Real progress in gender and economic equity has yet to be realized.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.1.1 Concrete Consequences of Women's Global Economic Inequity

These gender disparities reveal a profound global economic contradiction: despite women's contributions to the formal and informal sectors of all economies in the world, they frequently are denied equitable access to the material resources and the benefits accrued in society, fair participation in decision-making, and the basic autonomy to ensure their human flourishing. This contradiction is not an abstract phenomenon: it functions in concrete, multiple ways. It is the reason women's status is marginal in the key global economic indices of work, income and property; it is the reason women disproportionately number among the poor, the illiterate, the overworked and the underpaid of our world.<sup>28</sup> It is also the reason women have the poorest health status globally.<sup>29</sup> This economic contradiction functions in maternal mortality:

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<sup>26</sup>These gender inequities are reconfirmed annually. See Nierenberg, "Correcting Gender Myopia," 1-63; Mertus, *Local Action, Global Change*, 1-17; Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1994); Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 16.

<sup>27</sup>According to UNFPA, more women than men live in poverty, and the gender disparity in economic well-being has increased in the past decade. See UNFPA "Women and Gender Inequality: People, Poverty and Possibilities," *UNFPA State of the World Population, 2002* [online report] (2002 [cited 4 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2002/english/ch4/index.htm>; UNFPA, "The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the MDGs, *UNFPA State of the World Population 2005* [online report] (2005 [cited 11 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/summary.htm> See also Robin Morgan, "Introduction: New World Women," in *Sisterhood is Forever*, xv-lv.

<sup>28</sup>Women are (under)estimated to be the sole breadwinners in at least one-third of the families in the world. In situations of social unrest, such as armed conflict, women are solely responsible for at least 80 percent of households. See Mertus, *Local Action Global Change*, 39; see also The United Nations, *The World's Women 2000*, xiii-xvi, 53-126.

<sup>29</sup>See Khabir Ahmad, "Women Suffer First from Lack of Health Services," *The Lancet* 356 (23 September 2000): 1085; Mertus, "Women's Human Right to Health," in *Local Action Global Change*, 50-60; Yifat Susskind, "Women's Health in a Sick World," *MADRE: An International Women's Human Rights Organization* (2003 [cited 11 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.madre.org/art\\_ahSickWorld\\_09.03.html](http://www.madre.org/art_ahSickWorld_09.03.html)

women's economic marginalization and their poor health are precursors to their pregnancy-related deaths. It is important to note that while the WHO defines maternal deaths as deaths of women while pregnant and within forty-two days of termination of pregnancy, because maternal deaths are under-reported globally, late maternal deaths (up to one year following pregnancy) and pregnancy-related deaths (biological and social causes) currently are being monitored.<sup>30</sup>

### **1.1.2 Pregnancy and Motherhood: The Roots of Women's Economic Marginalization**

Half the women in the world are of reproductive age, and most are mothers.<sup>31</sup> Globally, women's free "reproductive work"<sup>32</sup> consumes their time, energy, health and economic well-being. For example, on average, women in the Majority World spend 60 percent of their lives either pregnant or lactating.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, health, education, socio-economic status, and whether or not they are employed outside the home, mothers are working women. In addition to the work women perform in both the formal and informal public spheres, they are primarily responsible for the myriad tasks associated with the domestic sphere. Economically, the estimated value of women's unpaid and under-paid domestic labour amounts

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<sup>30</sup>See Isabelle L. Horton and Diane Cheng, "Enhanced Surveillance for Pregnancy-Associated Mortality--Maryland, 1993-1998," *Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA)* 285, no. 11 (21 March 2001): 1455-1459; see also Victoria Frye, "Examining Homicide's Contribution to Pregnancy-Associated Deaths," *JAMA* 285, no. 11 (21 March 2001): 1510-1511.

<sup>31</sup>Globally, there are more than 1.7 billion women in their reproductive and productive years (15 to 49). See *UNFPA*, "State of the World Population, 2005." See also Ruth Sidel, *Women and Children Last* (New York: Viking Books, 1986), 30. Note: I am referring to both biological and social mothers, as many women, by virtue of being female, conform to prescriptive gender roles regarding "women's work."

<sup>32</sup>Women's "reproductive work" is not simply related to the biological reproduction of the species. It also includes all the work women do with respect to the reproduction and maintenance of daily life.

<sup>33</sup>See Carla AbouZahr, "Maternal Mortality Overview," in *Health Dimensions of Sex and Reproduction: The Global Burden of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, HIV, Maternal Conditions, Perinatal Disorders and Congenital Anomalies*, ed. Christopher J. L. Murray and Alan D. Lopez (World Health Organization: Harvard University Press, 1998), 158.

to “\$11 trillion of a total \$16 trillion global output.”<sup>34</sup> However, the economic significance of women’s labour in the domestic sphere frequently is dismissed. Sexist assumptions and prescriptive gender roles de-politicize, naturalize and undervalue the reproductive and productive work of women. Even in Canada, a liberal democracy famed for its highly advanced quality of life, and where women are beneficiaries of gender-sensitive affirmative action policies and have made gains in all areas of socio-cultural and political life,<sup>35</sup> barriers to their economic equality persist.<sup>36</sup> Canadian women, and the children for whom they largely are responsible, are the poorest Canadians, and their participation in waged labour has not enhanced their economic status.<sup>37</sup> Thus, if the “feminization of poverty”<sup>38</sup> is the economic reality of Canadian women, then the economic reality for women in less progressive countries can only be dismal.

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<sup>34</sup>See Mertus, *Local Action Global Change*, 140. The informal work of women is estimated to amount to one-third of the world’s Gross National Product, yet it is largely unaccounted for by economists and policymakers. See Pamela K. Brubaker, “Economic Justice for Whom? Women Enter the Dialogue,” in *Religion and Economic Justice*, ed. Michael Zweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 96.

<sup>35</sup>I was reminded of the historic gains Canadian women have made at a recent public forum. One of the speakers was Marian Dewar, Canadian social activist, former mayor of Ottawa, former federal member of Parliament and past president of the federal National Democratic Party. Dewar confided that as she was born prior to 1929, she was not considered a person until she was several years old. This is because it was only in 1929 that Canadian women were granted full status as persons under the law. Before 1929, Canadian women were “persons in the matter of pains and penalties, but not in the matter of rights and privileges.” See Penny Kome, *Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1985), 25-34.

<sup>36</sup>See Catherine McCourt et al., “Make Every Mother and Child Count: Report on Maternal and Child Health in Canada,” *Public Health Agency of Canada* (Government of Canada: Ottawa, 2005).

<sup>37</sup>Worldwide, caring for children and all other dependents is predominantly a female task. It is also a major reason why women are disproportionately poorer in comparison to most men. See Susan Donath, “The Other Economy: A Suggestion for a Distinctively Feminist Economics,” *Feminist Economics* 6, no. 1 (2000): 115-123; Alicja Muszynski, “Social Stratification: Class and Gender Inequality,” *Social Issues and Contradictions in Canadian Society*, ed. B. Singh Bolaria (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company Canada, 1995), 19-40.

<sup>38</sup>The sociologist Diane Pearce coined the term “feminization of poverty” in 1978 to describe a basic contradiction in the economic lives of *North American* women. This contradiction was that even though women were increasingly active in the formal economy and had made inroads into male-dominated professions, their poverty was increasing at a much greater rate than that of North American men. See Morley Gunderson et al., “Women and Labour Market Poverty,” *Canadian Advisory on the Status of Women* (June 1990); Colin Lindsay, “Women in Canada: A Gender Based Statistical Report,” *Statistics Canada* (1998). Note: my use of the term “feminization of poverty” does not infer that I view sexism as the main reason for women’s poverty. My dissertation underlines the ways in which sexism is inter-structured with class oppression, ethnicity, racism and colonialism to ensure the ongoing pauperization of women.

## 1.2 Maternal Mortality: Towards a Historically Conscious Economic Analysis

Thus far, I have provided evidence to substantiate my claim that maternal mortality is a sensitive global indicator of comparative advantage and an issue of economic justice for women. I also have indicated that a concrete consequence of women's disenfranchised economic status is their pregnancy-related deaths. I have completed the first part of this chapter's goal.

The second part of this chapter's goal is to develop further the "see-judge" dimension of the evolving hermeneutical circle. I do this by exploring maternal mortality through a gender-sensitive economic lens. I use the interpretive framework of multiple jeopardy to demonstrate how women's poverty both intersects with other oppressions and is reinforced by the "traffic" of their everyday lives in the problem of maternal mortality.

### 1.2.1 Lethal Intersections: The Poverty of Women and Maternal Mortality

Every day women bleed to death after giving birth, writhing in convulsions because of eclampsia, collapsing after days of futile contractions, knowing they have suffocated their babies to death.<sup>39</sup>

Pregnancy is neither a disease nor an illness. Nonetheless, the nurturing and bearing of new life brings death to many women: every minute of every day, a woman dies due to pregnancy-related complications. It is also likely that this pregnant woman is economically vulnerable.<sup>40</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that globally at least 600,000<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>See Yamin, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 563-607.

<sup>40</sup>See "The State of the World Population 2005," *UNFPA*.

<sup>41</sup> The WHO reports that only 35 percent of the world's vital statistics are known. In particular, statistics on maternal mortality are underestimated. Countries in the Majority World often lack vital statistics; in the Minority World, the cause of death is not always accurately recorded. For example, a recent study in the US concluded that half of all pregnancy-related deaths are not recognized. See Yamin, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 568; Carla AbouZahr and Tessa Wardlaw, "Maternal Mortality at the End of a Decade: Signs of Progress?" *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* [online article] (2001 [cited 23 May 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.scielosp.org/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0042-96862001000600013](http://www.scielosp.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0042-96862001000600013); John. B. Williamson, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency in Less-Developed Countries: A Cross-National Analysis," *Social Science and Medicine* 49 (1999): 202.



maternal deaths occur every year.<sup>42</sup> This loss of life is equivalent to that which would occur if three 747 planes crashed daily.<sup>43</sup> A Canadian obstetrician, working with poor women in the Majority World, put this daily loss of women's lives in the following temporal context: "From the time you had your morning coffee today until the same time tomorrow, 1,600 women will have died from complications of pregnancy."<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the quality of life for many women who survive pregnancy also is diminished: at least 50 million women annually suffer maternity-related illnesses with chronic debilitating complications.<sup>45</sup> Hence, in addition to the deaths of about 1,600 women every day from complications directly related to pregnancy, there are at least 300 million women who presently suffer pregnancy-related disabilities. As maternal death and disability occur most frequently in the Majority World, this statistic translates into the staggering fact that almost one in four of all adult women living in the poorer nations of our world are chronically disabled as a direct result of pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, whether through death or disability, there is an estimated annual loss of 250 million years of productive

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<sup>42</sup>Most recent figures compiled by UNICEF, the WHO and Johns Hopkins University show a 20 percent increase over previous estimates. See "The Girl Child," *Status of Women Canada: Beijing + 5*; [online database] (2000 [cited 16 September 2002]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca>; "Birth Rights: New Approaches to Safe Motherhood," The Panos Institute [online article] (2001 [cited 13 November 2002]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.id21.org/society/s5api1g1.html>

<sup>43</sup>See "Canada and the United Nations General Assembly: Special Session: Beijing + 5: Factsheets: Women and Health," *Status of Women Canada* [online publication] (March 2003 [cited 9 February 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.swc.cfc.gc.ca/pubs/b5\\_factsheets/b5\\_factsheets\\_7\\_e.html](http://www.swc.cfc.gc.ca/pubs/b5_factsheets/b5_factsheets_7_e.html)

<sup>44</sup>See Dr. Jean Chamberlain Froese, *Where Have All the Mothers Gone? Stories of Courage and Hope During Childbirth Among the World's Poorest Women* (Belleville, Ont: Epic Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>45</sup>There also are approximately 3 million stillbirths and 3.9 million infants who die in the first week of life. See Luc de Bernis, "Contributing to Making a Difference: The World Health Organization's 'Making Pregnancy Safer Strategy,'" in *Maternal Morbidity and Mortality*, 21.

<sup>46</sup>See Adam Jones, "Case Study: Maternal Mortality," *Gendercide Watch* [online article] (1999 [cited 23 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.gendercide.org/case\\_maternal.html](http://www.gendercide.org/case_maternal.html)

life connected to pregnancy.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, these numbers do not give the complete picture because estimates on maternal mortality and morbidity are underestimated globally.<sup>48</sup> Even in Minority World nations equipped with advanced information systems, miscalculation and omission obscure the real numbers of maternal deaths.<sup>49</sup>

### 1.2.2 Maternal Mortality: The Medical Context

The medical reasons for maternal death are well researched:<sup>50</sup> there are no puzzling reasons for the deaths of women in pregnancy. Despite marked differences in global frequency, the leading medical causes of maternal mortality are preventable and proportionally consistent.<sup>51</sup> The most common medical reasons for maternal death are: haemorrhage<sup>52</sup> (bleeding), sepsis (puerperal infection), hypertensive disorders (complications due to high blood pressure),

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<sup>47</sup>See UNFPA, “Reproductive Health Factsheet: UNFPA State of the World Population 2005,” [online article] (2005 [cited 8 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_rh.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_rh.htm)

<sup>48</sup>Many maternal deaths are never reported. See UNICEF, “Surviving Childbirth and Pregnancy in South Asia,” (Regional Office for South Asia, December, 2004): vii.

<sup>49</sup>Again, as high as these figures are, maternal deaths are under-reported. See “Safe Motherhood Fact Sheet: Maternal Mortality,” [database online] (2002 [cited 1 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.safemotherhood.org/factsandfigures/maternalmortality/>; Cook et al., “Advancing Safe Motherhood,” *World Health Organization* (Geneva: WHO, 2001), 11. See WHO and UNICEF, *Revised 1990 Estimates of Maternal Mortality* (Geneva: WHO and UNICEF, 1996); Wendy Graham and Julia Hussein, “Measuring and Estimating Maternal Mortality in the Era of HIV/AIDS,” [online article] (2003 [cited 23 March 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://UN/POP/MORT/2003/8>

<sup>50</sup>See “The Platform for Action of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing,” (UN, 1995 (1, c, 1061), quoted in Oxaal, “Challenges to Women’s Reproductive Health,” 1-3, 34-41. The United Nations’ Millennium Declaration, adopted in September 2000, aims to reduce maternal mortality by 75 percent by 2015.

<sup>51</sup>See Yamin, “Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue,” 566.

<sup>52</sup>The WHO estimates that 14 million women experience postpartum haemorrhage annually. Although this complication can be managed with minimal expertise, it remains the single most common cause of maternal death worldwide. See Malcolm Potts and Martha Campbell, “Three Meetings and Fewer Funerals: Misoprostol in Postpartum Haemorrhage,” *The Lancet* 364, no. 9440 (25 September-1 October 2004): 1110-1111.

complications from abortions,<sup>53</sup> and obstructed labour.<sup>54</sup> Indirect causes of maternal death--resulting from pre-existing illnesses such as anaemia, malaria, sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis and hepatitis--have also been identified.<sup>55</sup> For example, it is known that the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) virus exerts a synergistic impact on pregnant women, although the number of pregnant women who die of AIDS is not known.<sup>56</sup> What is known is that pregnancy is immune-suppressant, and that women with compromised immunity, secondary to HIV/AIDS, suffer more severe complications in pregnancy. Hence, the 2.2 million women presently living with HIV/AIDS who give birth each year<sup>57</sup> are less likely to survive any acute health crisis during their pregnancies.<sup>58</sup> It is also known that pregnant women are at risk for receiving blood contaminated with the HIV virus, because untested blood is

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<sup>53</sup>Globally, 20 million unsafe abortions are performed annually, causing the deaths of an estimated 80,000 women. See Judy Norsigan, "Our Bodies, Our Future: Women's Health Activism Overview," in *Sisterhood is Forever*, 269-284.

<sup>54</sup>There are effective ways of reducing the medical reasons for maternal death. However, many interventions are short-term, and broader determinants and long-term strategies need to be explored. My addressing the links between women's poverty and maternal mortality is a broader, long-term strategy. See Oxaal, "Challenges to Women's Reproductive Health," 37.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 9. Note that these main medical causes are generally the reasons for maternal deaths globally. However, in Canada, pulmonary embolism, pre-eclampsia, amniotic fluid embolism and intracranial haemorrhage are the leading causes of maternal death. See the 2005 report, McCourt, "Make Every Mother and Child Count," 3.

<sup>56</sup>In 2002, more than 42 million people were living with HIV/AIDS and 70 percent were from sub-Saharan Africa. Of this group, 58 percent were female, with African women the most severely affected group globally. See Kristin L. Dunkle et al., "Gender-based Violence, Relationship Power, and Risk of HIV Infection in Women Attending Antenatal Clinics in South Africa," *The Lancet* 363 (1 May 2004): 1415-1420; Graham, "Measuring and Estimating Maternal Mortality in the Era of HIV/AIDS," 4.

<sup>57</sup>See "Facts and Figures from The World Health Report 2005," *WHO* [online report] (2005 [cited 10 May 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.who.int/whr/en>

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 14. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls 15 to 19 are five times more likely to be HIV positive than boys. See "Women and Health," *Status of Women Canada: Beijing + 5* [online article] (June 2000 [cited 9 September 2002]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.swc.cfc.gc.ca/>

frequently used to treat common maternal complications, such as anaemia or hemorrhage.<sup>59</sup> Increasingly, it is also recognized that worldwide, more women than men, and at younger ages, are afflicted with HIV/AIDS,<sup>60</sup> and that the female face<sup>61</sup> of this global pandemic is not reflected in the statistics of those receiving anti-retroviral therapy.<sup>62</sup> For example, in Zambia, 70 percent of the reported 870,000 HIV-positive Zambians are women, but men are the main recipients of any therapeutic regimes aimed at combatting the disease.<sup>63</sup> While more needs to be understood about the links between maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, the poverty of women and their lack of financial autonomy increasingly are thought to be implicated.<sup>64</sup> Stephen Lewis, UN Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, spoke of the “rancid irony”<sup>65</sup> evidenced by the fact that women have

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<sup>59</sup> Sally Murray, “She’s Dying for Help: Global HIV,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 174, no. 4 (14 February 2006): 457.

<sup>60</sup>Worldwide, 62 percent of all young AIDS victims are female; in sub-Saharan Africa, it is 67 percent. See Germain, “Reproductive Health and Human Rights,” 65; Kate Hilpern, “Giving Hope for Generations to Come,” *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 8; UNAIDS, “Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic, June 2000,” (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2000): 11.

<sup>61</sup>Kofi Annan, the United Nations’ Secretary General said the following: “AIDS has a women’s face.” Quoted in Murray, “She’s Dying for Help,” 457.

<sup>62</sup>See Helen Frankish, “Coalition Launched to Boost Fight against HIV/AIDS in Women,” *The Lancet* 363, no. 9407 (7 February 2004): 457. According to Human Rights Watch, the “feminisation of AIDS” results from a combination of factors, including rape, women’s physiological vulnerability to infection, lack of access to information and services, fear of testing positive, cultural stigma, and the inability to ensure partner’s fidelity and condom use. See Niko Kyriako, “Africa at Large: Orthodox Strategy Falls Short,” *Inter Press Service* [online report] (2005 [cited 7 April 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.africa.no/Detailed.html>

<sup>63</sup>See “The Good Wife’s Sacrifice,” *The South African Mail and Guardian* [online article] (2004 [cited 9 March 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?ao=32362>

<sup>64</sup>See J. Kim et al., “Gaining a Foothold: Tackling Poverty, Gender Inequality and HIV in Africa,” *British Medical Journal* 331 (2005): 769-762.

<sup>65</sup> On a number of occasions, I have had the privilege of hearing Stephen Lewis, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, speak of the AIDS pandemic. For Lewis, this pandemic has a female face; he stresses that African women are not only the majority of those infected (with married African women the group at greatest risk for infection), but also the ones who bear a disproportionate burden of the nursing, care-taking and any of the additional labour associated with AIDS. See Stephen Lewis, “Women: Half the World Barely Represented,” in *Race Against Time* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005), 109-144; Stephen Lewis, “Needed: A Revolution Within the UN: Strong Advice for

received parity with respect to conflict and AIDS, but not with respect to human rights. Lewis' comment on maternal mortality is noteworthy:

This issue has been haunting the lives of women for generations. The same number of annual deaths has not changed for thirty years. You can bet that if there was something called paternal mortality, the numbers wouldn't be frozen in time for three decades.<sup>66</sup>

Maternal morbidity, or pregnancy-related disability, most commonly involves the following: chronic anaemia, necrosis of the pituitary gland with consequent long-term endocrine failure, pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, uterine prolapse, fistula (i.e., internal damage during childbirth which causes chronic bladder and bowel incontinence) and painful intercourse.<sup>67</sup> Maternal morbidity is beyond the scope of my dissertation. However, it is methodologically significant to my research for the following five reasons:

One, maternal morbidity situates maternal mortality as one inequity within a wider spectrum of gender-based inequities. Maternal mortality illumines the oppressions suffered by a larger number of women over a period longer than their reproductive years. Thus, attending to the reality of maternal morbidity underscores the significant point that women are not only mothers, whose well-being can be subsumed under reproductive (i.e., child-bearing) issues.

Two, maternal morbidity puts into context the ongoing hardships endured by many economically marginalized women who continue to struggle with the fatiguing effects of chronic anaemia, or the pain of pelvic inflammatory disease, long after their pregnancies have ended.

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how to Halt HIV/AIDS from Devastating Africa's Women and Africa Itself," *University of Pennsylvania's Summit on Global Issues in Women's Health, Philadelphia* [online article] (2005 [cited 12 May 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.straightgoods.ca/ViewFeature5.cfm?REF=237>; Stephanie Nolen, "Stephen Lewis has One Word for Us: Help," *The Toronto Globe and Mail*, 4 January 2005, sec. F, 5-8.

<sup>66</sup>Lewis, "Needed: A Revolution Within the UN."

<sup>67</sup>Starrs, "Safe Motherhood Action Agenda," 1.

Maternal morbidity thereby raises important theo-ethical questions about the well-being of pregnancy-disabled women who continue to perform the most arduous work within the formal and informal economies of the world, as detailed in the UN statistics.

Three, maternal morbidity highlights the plight of infertile women in a world where their intrinsic value often is contingent upon their ability to bear children, especially male children.<sup>68</sup> The morbidity of infertility often has life-denying implications for economically vulnerable women.

Four, maternal morbidity also draws attention to women who physically survive difficult labours with the morbidity of uterine prolapse or fistula,<sup>69</sup> only to die from social and economic causes<sup>70</sup> because they are stigmatized as unclean and are abandoned by their significant others.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>For women in certain cultures, childlessness is a humiliation that follows them to the grave. For example, traditionally, childless women in Zimbabwe are buried with a rat or corn husk placed on their back, indicating that the deceased possessed no honour, legacy or respect. See Froese, *Where Have All the Mothers Gone?*, 73-76.

<sup>69</sup>A fistula is a serious obstetrical injury, virtually absent in the developed world. It is a consequence of obstructed labour. If the mother survives, she often is left with an opening between the tissue walls of the bladder and vagina, or between the rectum and vagina, which cause chronic urinary and faecal incontinence. Often, her infant is stillborn. Moreover, reconstructive surgery, if available, is financially out of reach for many poor women. The WHO (under)estimates that more than two million girls and women are affected, with 50,000 to 100,000 new cases each year. See France Donnay and Laura Weil, "Obstetric Fistula: The International Response," *The Lancet* 363 (3 January 2004): 71-72.

<sup>70</sup>Some societies blame women for the obstetrical fistula; some women blame themselves, and many women are abandoned by their families. In a Nigerian hospital study of 899 fistula cases, 71 percent of women were divorced or abandoned; at the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, one in five women reported begging for food as their only means of survival, and women's suicide rate was high. There are similar results from studies in India and Pakistan. See "Obstetric Fistula: Ending the Silence, Easing the Suffering," *Information and Knowledge for Optimal Health (INFO) Project* [online report] (2004 [cited 26 January 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.infoforhealth.org/infoforeports/fistula/fistula2.shtml>; "Faces of Dignity: Seven Stories of Girls and Women with Fistula," *Women's Dignity Project* [online report] (Tanzania 2003 [cited 26 January 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.womensdignity.org>

<sup>71</sup>Obstetrical fistula is physically, socially and economically disabling; many women do not realize that they can be cured surgically. For example, in Bangladesh, an estimated 9 million women live with pregnancy-related disabilities, such as fistula; in Nigeria, there are from 800,000 to 1 million unrepaired fistula patients; in Tanzania, most women do not receive surgical repair due to user fees. See "Surviving Pregnancy and Childbirth," 8; "Safe Motherhood Situation Paper: Bangladesh," *Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)* (2003): 1-15.

Although they are considered a “near miss for maternal mortality,”<sup>72</sup> the residual disability of a morbidity like fistula often places a woman’s survival, and that of her newborn child, at severe risk.<sup>73</sup> Obstetrical fistula is therefore an example of a morbidity that is complexly related to women’s marginal economic status: it both causes and results from women’s poverty.<sup>74</sup>

Five, maternal morbidity is significant to my research because it further validates my broad-based methodological approach to maternal mortality: an approach that both attends to and transcends the medical crises of pregnancy and childbirth to probe wider economic and socio-cultural factors.<sup>75</sup>

### 1.3 Women’s Poverty: A Recurring Jeopardy in Maternal Mortality

I have signalled that women’s poverty is a recurring jeopardy, or root cause, of maternal death. However, poverty is not the only reason women die in pregnancy. Women’s poverty is intersected and reinforced by other jeopardies, such as patriarchy, racism, ethnicity, class, social

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<sup>72</sup>Donnay, “Obstetrical Fistula: The International Response,” 71.

<sup>73</sup>In Africa, 3 million women suffer from a fistula. An unknown number of women affected take their lives because of the attendant pain and ignominy. Typically these “women” are malnourished 14 year old girls who have been in labour for 3 to 4 days; their baby is too large to navigate their narrow pelvis and is often stillborn. Frequently, women experience damage to nerves in the pelvic area and footdrop subsequent to obstructed labour; they require long-term physio-therapy to regain the ability to walk normally. See UNFPA, “Saving Women’s Lives: The Challenges Continues,” Report on Meeting for Prevention and Treatment of Obstetrical Fistula [online report] (July 2001 [cited 18 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [www.unfpa.org/publications/index.cfm?fillerID\\_key\\_Issue=16](http://www.unfpa.org/publications/index.cfm?fillerID_key_Issue=16); Jo Revill, “Charity Provides Help for African Women Injured by Childbirth,” *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 6.

<sup>74</sup>See UNFPA, “Enduring and Overcoming the Ordeal of Fistula,” [online article] (19 October 2004 [cited 28 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/news.cfm?ID=519&LANGUAGE=1>.

<sup>75</sup>Presently, many countries are using an analytical model called “The Three Delays” to identify the physical, social and economic factors in maternal death and disability. The first delay is related to care-seeking behaviours; the second is related to decisions to transport pregnant women in order to access skilled care; the third is related to the quality of care provided. Despite different cultures, politics and religion, these delays have been shown to be linked to the following common factors that interfere with women’s urgent health needs: women’s status, health knowledge, economic vulnerability, and gender bias. See UNICEF, “Surviving Childbirth and Pregnancy in South Asia,” 9-12.

and geographical location, and the geo-political economy. In addition, the everyday realities of women's lives--that is, the ways in which socio-cultural, economic, religious, health and educational practices and policies shape women's interpersonal realities--comprise the "traffic" of women's lives. In varying degrees, both the structures and the traffic that the image of multiple jeopardy portends negatively impact all pregnant women, diminishing their opportunities to ensure their well-being. For impoverished women, however, whose lives are circumscribed by many jeopardies and reinforced by every-day gender bias, the implications are ominous. For these women, the intersectional injury of maternal death is a recurring risk that persists throughout their entire reproductive lives.

### **1.3.1 Women's Poverty and Geographic Location: Intersecting Jeopardies**

Maternal mortality represents the single greatest disparity in health and well-being between women in richer, industrialized countries and those in poorer nations.<sup>76</sup> Global data clearly details how the intersecting structural jeopardies of women's poverty and geographic location function. Maternal deaths are concentrated in conventionally labelled low-income countries of the Majority World.<sup>77</sup> In fact, ninety percent of all maternal deaths occur in south Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>78</sup> and seventy percent of these deaths are concentrated in thirteen of

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<sup>76</sup>I am aware that comparing health indicators between countries is not straightforward. Different countries use different strategies to arrive at estimates, and there are regional differences and changes over time. However, maternal mortality figures do highlight the global problem of disparities in women's health. See Public Health Agency of Canada, "Make Every Mother and Child Count," *Government of Canada*, 2005, 4.

<sup>77</sup>See Adrienne Germain, "Reproductive Health and Human Rights," *The Lancet* 363 (3 January 2004): 65-66; Catherine Maia, "Mourir en Donnant la Vie: Des Risques Accrus pour les Femmes du Sud," *Etudes: Revue de Culture Contemporaine* no. 4015 (November 2004): 473-482.

<sup>78</sup>South Asia is home to 1.25 billion people (22 percent of the world's population); this region disproportionately accounts for 30 percent of pregnancy-related deaths. See "Surviving Pregnancy and Childbirth in South Asia, 7; Starrs, *Safe Motherhood*, 1.



the world's poorest nations.<sup>79</sup> Thus, a woman's lifetime risk<sup>80</sup> of dying in pregnancy varies from 1 in 7 if she is Ethiopian, 1 in 90 if she is Filipina, 1 in 130 if she is Brazilian, 1 in 250 if she is Bangladeshi, 1 in 8,700 if she is Canadian.<sup>81</sup> Essentially, a pregnant woman living in a low-income country in the Majority World faces a risk of maternal death that can be between 80 to 600 times higher than the risk faced by pregnant women in the Minority World.<sup>82</sup>

The immense comparative disadvantage faced by pregnant women in the Majority World is compounded further by a rural setting.<sup>83</sup> This is because rural women often lack access to essential health care services:<sup>84</sup> distance from a health care facility and access to skilled care by pregnant women are inversely related.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, urban-rural differentials in the uptake of

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<sup>79</sup>The countries in which women are most at risk for maternal death are the following: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Angola, China, Kenya, Indonesia and Uganda. See Maia, "Mourir en Donnant la Vie," 476-477.

<sup>80</sup>Maternal mortality ratio refers to a woman's risk of dying in one pregnancy; lifetime risk takes into consideration both the average risk of maternal deaths and the average number of pregnancies per woman in a particular society. Lifetime risk allows for a more accurate assessment of the scope of the problem of maternal mortality than does maternal mortality ratio (number of deaths per 100,000 live births). See Yamin, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 566.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 1-12; see also Cook, "Advancing Safe Motherhood," 3.

<sup>82</sup>For example, the lifetime risk of a woman dying in childbirth is over 600 times greater in Niger than in Sweden. See John B. Williamson and Ce Shen, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency in Less-Developed Countries: A Cross-National Analysis," *Social Science and Medicine* 49 (1999): 197. See also "State of the World's Mothers 2003," *Save the Children* [online report] (2003 [cited 2 June 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.savethechildren.org/sowm2003/index.shtml-Irin/>

<sup>83</sup>For example, a comprehensive study on maternal mortality in Afghanistan revealed a direct relationship between high maternal deaths and increasing remoteness in Afghan rural areas, noting an "unprecedented magnitude of maternal mortality" in Badakshan, a remote Afghan district. Moreover, 74 percent of live-born infants died if their mothers died. See Linda A. Bartlett et al., "Where Giving Birth is a Forecast of Death: Maternal Mortality in Four Districts of Afghanistan, 1999-2002," *The Lancet* 365, no. 9462 (5-11 March 2005): 864-870.

<sup>84</sup>See Esnarst Shakulipa Namakando, "The Determinants of Maternity Service Utilization in Peri-urban Communities: A Case Study from Zambia," *International Perspectives on Midwifery: Midwives and Safer Motherhood*, ed. Susan F. Murray (London: Mosby), 1996, 39-41.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 38-54.

health care in pregnancy are a pervasive inequity: worldwide, fewer rural women receive skilled care during pregnancy, and fewer have access to health-facility based deliveries.<sup>86</sup> For example, rural Bangladeshi women are at least six times less likely than urban Bangladeshi women to deliver their babies in a health facility,<sup>87</sup> many rural villages are isolated, and linkages between communities and health infrastructures are minimal. In addition, inadequate road systems in rural sectors can impede transportation of any pregnant woman in need of skilled assistance. Not infrequently, roads are impassable due to seasonal rains, such as in the monsoon period throughout Asia,<sup>88</sup> or even due to land mines in armed conflict zones,<sup>89</sup> such as in Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup> These geographical constraints and the physiological fact that a pregnant woman can bleed to death in less than two hours explain why half of all women's deaths in rural Africa and rural South Asia are pregnancy-related.<sup>91</sup>

This geographical data signals that women's poverty and their geographical location are significant intersecting jeopardies in maternal mortality. However, these jeopardies do not function in isolation: they cannot be de-linked from a cluster of other jeopardies, both personal

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<sup>86</sup>See Salam, "Inequalities in the Utilisation of Safe Delivery Services," 4-6

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>88</sup>"Surviving Pregnancy and Childbirth in South Asia," 12.

<sup>89</sup>In 2002, there were 37 armed conflicts on the territories of 29 countries, with the Middle East and Africa the most war-torn regions. Economic security, malnutrition and the collapse of hospitals and schools are casualties of war. Women often are the most affected and the least consulted; pregnancy in war is hazardous. See Project Ploughshares, "Armed Conflict Report, 2003," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies* (Waterloo: CIDA), 2003.

<sup>90</sup>To be a rural, pregnant Afghan woman is to face many jeopardies. Along with geographical constraints, these women experience poverty, high fertility rates and low female literacy, and their health status is one of the worst globally. More than half of all deaths of Afghan women of reproductive age are pregnancy-related. In places such as Badakshan, for every 100,000 births, 6,500 mothers die, and male life expectancy exceeds that of females. See "Women's Right to Life and Health: A Book of Case Studies," *UNICEF* (UNICEF: Regional Office for South Asia, 2004): 33-37.

<sup>91</sup>Williamson, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency," 197-198.

and structural. For example, Bangladeshi rural women are burdened not only by poverty and inaccessibility to adequate health care. These women also suffer lower literacy rates, lower social status, and oppressive social customs related to pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, often the decision to seek care for life-threatening maternal complications is not made by the pregnant woman. Husbands or mothers-in-law are the familial decision-makers, and the continuation of a woman's domestic chores can take precedence over her urgent health needs.<sup>93</sup> The pursuit of emergency maternal care also is linked closely to economics. That is, any financial costs related to health care, transportation fees or medical supplies are strong deterrents for a family with meagre earnings. In addition, other jeopardies such as a history of colonialism and the chronic effects of a global economy in which some nations are economic winners, while others are economically disadvantaged, reinforce the vulnerability of pregnant women in the Majority World.<sup>94</sup> Clearly, the entrenched poverty of nations and the poor health of their inhabitants, of

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<sup>92</sup>A Bangladeshi study revealed that illiterate urban women were more likely than illiterate rural women to access skilled care during delivery, again underlining urban-rural differences. See Kaosar Afsana and Sabina Faiz Rashid, *Discoursing Birthing Care: Experiences from Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2000), 4-7.

<sup>93</sup>A study in Nepal showed that in 81 percent of cases, the husband decided whether to seek care for a pregnant wife needing medical intervention. This decision is taken within a cultural context that frowns on the delivery of a child outside the home. See "Surviving Pregnancy and Childbearing in South Asia," 12.

<sup>94</sup>In our global economy, children from low-income countries consume 50 times less than North America children; 20 percent of the global population living in wealthy countries account for 86 percent of global consumption; the poorest 20 percent account for 1.3 percent. In Africa, the average household consumes 20 percent less than it did 25 years ago, and two-thirds of the population live on less than US\$2 per day. The amount of money that Europeans spend on ice cream and Americans spend on cosmetics could provide basic education and sanitation to more than two billion people denied these amenities. See Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economics for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 88-90.

which maternal mortality is one concrete example, is a jeopardy with a complex economic and social history.<sup>95</sup>

### **1.3.2 Women's Poverty and Social Location: Trans-cultural Intersecting Jeopardies**

While rural settings are a structural jeopardy for economically marginalized pregnant women, recent studies of ten developing nations with varied levels of maternal mortality, and with diverse political, social, religious and economic systems, reveal an important association between women's class, or social location, and maternal death.<sup>96</sup> These studies show that the poorest pregnant women, even within low-income countries, are the most vulnerable to death in pregnancy. Again, a major reason for the vulnerability of these pregnant women is the inaccessibility of skilled maternal care. However, even when health programs are specifically designed to meet the needs of the poorest women, the uptake of these services is minimal.<sup>97</sup> For example, a recent study in Bangladesh concluded that substantial socio-economic inequalities in access to maternal care persist. The study revealed that even within a context of free obstetrical care in a national maternity care programme, the least poor Bangladeshi women were more likely to avail themselves of life-saving interventions.<sup>98</sup> Other studies show that in Ethiopia, poor

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<sup>95</sup>There are many analyses on poverty and the economic patterns of the global economy. For example, see *Canadian Women Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme: Women Globalization and International Trade*; Benaría, *Gender, Development and Globalization*; Michel Chossudovsky, *The Globalisation of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1998); Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, eds., *The Case Against The Global Economy: And a Turn Toward the Local* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996).

<sup>96</sup>The countries studied were Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kenya, Mali, Nepal, Peru, the Philippines and Tanzania. See Wendy J. Graham et al., "The Familial Technique for Linking Maternal Death with Poverty," *The Lancet* 363 (3 January 2004): 23-27.

<sup>97</sup>See Davidson R. Gwatkin, "How Well do Health Programmes Reach the Poor?" *The Lancet* 361 (15 February 2003): 540-541; Zoë Matthews, "Maternal Mortality and Poverty," *Department for International Development: Resource Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Health* (London: DFID, 2002), 4-5.

<sup>98</sup>See ICCDR, *B: Centre for Population Research Annual Report* (Dhaka: April 2005), 23-27.

women are 28 times less likely than wealthy women to have skilled care during delivery of their babies; in Chad and Niger, the figure is 14 times; in India, it is 7 times.<sup>99</sup> This trans-national data suggests that the inability of some women to access health services is not reducible to their geographical and rural location, or their lack of proximity to health facilities; other jeopardies are operative. What this data reveals is that access to skilled care during pregnancy and delivery, a critical factor in the prevention of maternal death, is often least available to the most socially disadvantaged pregnant women, whatever their geographical location. Women's social location is therefore a recurring structural jeopardy, intersecting and reinforcing the jeopardies of women's poverty and geographical location.<sup>100</sup>

### **1.3.3 Women's Poverty, Race, and Ethnicity: Trans-cultural Intersecting Jeopardies**

It is also significant that the causal link between women's poverty and maternal mortality persists even within richer nations of the world. That is, economically marginalized Western women, the poorest of the poor in the Minority World, are at comparatively greater risk for maternal death and disability.<sup>101</sup> For example, every day in the United States, the industrialized country with the highest ratio of poor women to poor men,<sup>102</sup> three women die from pregnancy-related complications. The American women who succumb to maternal death are most likely to

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<sup>99</sup>See UNFPA, "Progress Toward the Millennium Goals," *Department of Economic and Social Affairs-Statistics Division*, 2005 [online report] (2005 [cited 16 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/goals2005/goal\\_5.pdf](http://www.unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/goals2005/goal_5.pdf)

<sup>100</sup>A recent study by the World Bank discovered that many "pro-poor" health-related programs rarely benefit the poorest sectors of society. It revealed that disadvantaged population groups do not generally receive the services intended for them; these services usually benefit those who are socially and economically better off. The study underlines the importance of developing an evidence base for understanding inequities in the receipt of health services by monitoring services from a poverty perspective. See Davidson R. Gwatkin et al., "Reaching the Poor with Health, Nutrition and Population Services: What Works, What Doesn't and Why," *The World Bank*, 2005.

<sup>101</sup>See Hani K. Atrash et al., "Maternal Mortality in Developed Countries: Not Just a Concern of the Past," *Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 86, no. 4, part 2 (October 1995): 700-705.

<sup>102</sup>See Mertus, *Local Action Global Change*, 143.

be African American, Native American, Hispanic, or Asian immigrants.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, of all American women, African Americans are the most vulnerable to pregnancy-related death: their maternal death rates are four times that of Caucasian American women, and three times that of Hispanic American women.<sup>104</sup> In Canada, despite generally high standards of health, a similar pattern persists. That is, the positive health status of Canadians is not shared by all.<sup>105</sup> At highest risk for maternal mortality and morbidity are the poorest Canadian women: Aboriginal women<sup>106</sup> and women receiving social assistance.<sup>107</sup> This information suggests that social and economic factors are key determinants of maternal-child outcomes.<sup>108</sup> It also suggests that women's poverty is not the only jeopardy operative in the maternal deaths of Minority World women. Clearly, it is not the elite, white, economically advantaged Western women who generally die in pregnancy: the overwhelming majority are poor, economically marginalized ethnic women of colour.<sup>109</sup> In

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<sup>103</sup>See Donna L. Hoyert et al., "Maternal Mortality, United States and Canada, 1982-1997," *Birth* 27 (March 2000): 7.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>See the 2005 Canadian Government Report, McCourt, "Make Every Woman and Child Count," 5-6.

<sup>106</sup>Aboriginal women have higher rates of disease (i.e., diabetes, reproductive tract cancer, breast cancer, HIV/AIDS and a lower life expectancy) than the overall Canadian female population. See *Status of Women Canada: Beijing + 5: Fact Sheets*; McCourt, "Make Every Woman and Child Count," 6; David Johnson et al., "Influence of Aboriginal and Socioeconomic Status on Birth Outcome and Maternal Morbidity," *Canadian Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 24, no. 8 (July 2002): 633-640; Lindsay Edouard et al., "Pregnancy Outcome Among Native Indians in Saskatchewan," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 144 (June 1991): 1623-1625.

<sup>107</sup>See Deborah Maine and Wendy Chavkin, "Maternal Mortality: Global Statistics and Differences," *Journal of American Medical Women Association* 57, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 127-130; Yan Jin et al., "Influence of Aboriginal and Socioeconomic Status on Maternal Deliveries and Birth Outcomes," *Alberta Centre for Health Services Utilisation Research* (2000): 1-18.

<sup>108</sup>See "Make Every Mother and Child Count," 2, 5-9.

<sup>109</sup>See Z. C. Luo et al., "For the Fetal and Infant Health Study Group of the Canadian Perinatal Surveillance System: Risk of Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes among Inuit and North American Indian Women in Quebec, 1985-97," *Paediatric Perinatal Epidemiology* 18, no. 1 (2004): 40-50.

the maternal deaths of these Western women, the multiple jeopardies of poverty, racism, ethnicity, lower socio-economic class and inadequate health care all are functioning.<sup>110</sup>

It is also significant that despite different contexts and circumstances, economically marginalized pregnant women in the Minority World are confronted with similar jeopardies to those experienced by economically marginalized women in the Majority World. That is, the multiple jeopardies of women's poverty, social location, gender, race and ethnicity<sup>111</sup> appear to function trans-culturally in the problem of maternal mortality. For example, the vulnerabilities of African American women and Canadian Aboriginal women are reflected in the lives of other indigenous women in the world, such as the African-descent women of Nicaragua's North Atlantic Coast. These Nicaraguan women are the most economically marginalized people in their nation, and their maternal mortality rates are two to three times greater than the national average.<sup>112</sup> A similar situation unfolds in the lives of the indigenous women of Guatemala, whose economic vulnerability is mirrored in high maternal death rates.<sup>113</sup> Again, in Mexico, only 18 percent of Caucasian Mexicans are impoverished, while 80 percent of indigenous people are poor; the maternal mortality rate for indigenous Mexican women also exceeds the national

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<sup>110</sup>For an overview of the challenges Black Americans face with respect to both health and access to health care, and for a historical analysis of how racism, classism and sexism have legitimized abuses in ethical research, see Emilie M. Towes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care* (New York: Continuum, 1998).

<sup>111</sup>See William M. Callaghan and Cynthia Berg, "Maternal Mortality Surveillance in the United States: Moving into the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of American Medical Women Association* 57, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 131-139.

<sup>112</sup>See "MADRE: An International Women's Human Rights Organization," [online report] (May 2003 [cited 5 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.madre.org/country\\_nica.html](http://www.madre.org/country_nica.html); Yifat Susskind, "Women's Health in a Sick World," *MADRE: An International Women's Human Rights Organisation* [online article] (September 2003 [cited 11 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.madre.org/art\\_whSickWorld\\_09.03.html](http://www.madre.org/art_whSickWorld_09.03.html)

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

average.<sup>114</sup> This data appears to signal that despite the unique lives and cultures of various communities of indigenous women, they face similar jeopardies and are at an increased risk for maternal mortality.<sup>115</sup>

#### **1.3.4 Women's Poverty and Reductions in Maternal Mortality: Rare Success Stories**

The data thus far supports the claim that maternal mortality is the health indicator most sensitive to the differences between the rich and the poor of our world, both between and within nations. However, it is also important to note that while women's poverty is a recurring jeopardy in maternal mortality, attending to the context specificity of women's lives reveals important fluctuations in how jeopardies function. Understanding these fluctuations is critical to a historically conscious analysis of maternal mortality because it provides insight into why some economically marginalized women successfully navigate multiple jeopardies. This knowledge can be incorporated into constructive alternatives for change.

In the conventionally labelled low income countries of Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Costa Rica, Cuba, Malaysia and Bangladesh, poverty is a structural jeopardy for many women. To varying degrees, the jeopardies of race, ethnicity, a history of war, civic conflict, and the legacy of colonialism also are operative. However, recently, there have been important reductions in maternal deaths in these nations.<sup>116</sup> Cited as key to these rare, but significant, success stories are

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<sup>114</sup>See Giovanni Andrea Cornia, "Inequality and Poverty in the Era of Liberalisation and Globalisation," *United Nations University Millennium Conference* [online article] (2000: 1- 49 [cited 10 April 2004]); available on World Wide Web @ [www.unu.edu/millennium/cornia.pdf](http://www.unu.edu/millennium/cornia.pdf).

<sup>115</sup>See UNFPA, "The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Rights and the MDGs," *State of the World Population 2005* [online article] (2005 [cited 11 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_rh.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_rh.htm)

<sup>116</sup>See H. Gelband et al., "The Evidence Base for Interventions to Reduce Maternal and Neonatal Mortality in Low and Middle Income Countries," *Commission on Macroeconomics and Health CMH Working Paper Series WG5*, Paper no. 5 (2001): 1-83.



efforts to improve the status of women, along with the political will of governments to promote women's well-being and the basic human needs of the general population.<sup>117</sup> These reductions in maternal deaths signal that the many jeopardies of women's lives can be mitigated by targeting gender bias.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, the effectiveness of these strategies in resource-poor nations is proof that improving women's well-being is a viable, cost-effective economic strategy, even in low-income countries. That is, empowering and investing in women yields good returns.<sup>119</sup> However, a prerequisite is the moral and political will of governments to translate limited economic resources into the well-being of women.<sup>120</sup> Referring to the image of multiple jeopardy, these gender-sensitive progressive strategies are leverage points on the structural routes of women's disempowerment; they minimize the intersectional injury of maternal mortality and are proof that change is possible. Clearly, where there is a will, a way can be found to improve women's lives.

### **1.3.5 Global Fluctuations in Maternal Mortality Rates: Complex, Context-specific Jeopardies**

Global data reinforces the fact that maternal mortality is an inherently complex, evolving problem, with important fluctuations in prevalence rates. Thus, although poverty is a central,

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<sup>117</sup>See Starrs, *The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda*, 6-12.

<sup>118</sup>See Matthews, "Maternal Mortality and Poverty," 4.

<sup>119</sup>Bangladesh is a low-income country where maternal mortality rates have decreased; the reasons for this are not straightforward. Although obstetrical services at the sub-district level have been improved to allow isolated rural villages to access better health care, the majority (over 90 percent of Bangladeshi women) continue to deliver their babies at home, using the services of untrained, but trusted, traditional birth attendants. There also is a greater awareness and training of all health officials on gender issues and the human rights of women, zero tolerance of violence against women, an increase in both the general availability and encouragement of male responsibility for family planning, increased age of marriage for girls, an educational stipend for girl children, and efforts to improve the nutritional status of women and adolescent girls. Undoubtedly, all these factors support women in the realization of their rights to safe motherhood and a life free from violence and discrimination. See "A Book of Case Studies: Women's Right to Life and Health Initiative," *UNICEF Working Paper, Regional Office for South Asia* (Kathmandu, Nepal: Format Printing Press, 2004), 37-44.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

recurring jeopardy, appropriating maternal mortality accurately and holistically also requires context-specific analyses sensitive to the particularities of pregnant women's lives. For example, throughout Africa, high fertility is one major reason for high maternal deaths, although there are significant regional variations. The risk of women dying in pregnancy is greater in western, central and eastern Africa, and considerably less in northern and southern Africa.<sup>121</sup> In Asia, high population density is a significant reason for the generally high rates of maternal death.<sup>122</sup> However, maternal mortality is not high everywhere in Asia. For example, India displays the greatest regional disparities in maternal deaths worldwide; China has a slowly decreasing--yet relatively high--maternal mortality rate, particularly for rural women;<sup>123</sup> Japan has a maternal mortality rate that compares favourably with that of western countries.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the low incidence of maternal deaths in western and northern Europe is in stark contrast to the rising numbers in southern and eastern Europe. For example, in Russia, maternal mortality is increasing;<sup>125</sup> this reproductive health crisis is linked to regional political and economic

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<sup>121</sup>See Oxaal, "Challenges to Women's Reproductive Health," 6.

<sup>122</sup>There are approximately the same number of maternal deaths in Asia and Africa (253,000 versus 251,000, respectively). However, Asia has a higher population than Africa, and risks for maternal deaths are greater in Africa than in Asia (1 in 16 versus 1 in 94, respectively). See Yvette Collymore, "Tracking and Reducing Maternal Deaths Presents Major Challenges," *Population Reference Bureau* [online report] (April 2005 [cited 8 June 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.prb.org/Template.cfm?Section=Prb&template=/Content/ContentGroups/05>

<sup>123</sup>In 2003, China's maternal mortality rate for rural women was 2.4 times that of urban women--65.4 deaths for every 100,000 rural women as compared to 27.6 per 100,000 for urban women. See "Ministry Announces Gap in Rural, Urban Maternal Mortality," *Xinhua: People's Daily Online* [online article] (27 November 2004 [cited 9 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://english.people.com.cn/200411/27/eng20041127\\_165340.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200411/27/eng20041127_165340.html)

<sup>124</sup>Oxaal, 6.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

instabilities.<sup>126</sup> Latin America is another vast region with relatively high rates of maternal deaths; women's poverty, patriarchy and a history of colonialism are operative jeopardies. In addition, the WHO has identified two other major jeopardies with respect to the high maternal death rates in Latin America: rigid anti-abortion laws and the limited access women have to reproductive health information and services.<sup>127</sup> Demographic studies of Latin America indicate that 74 to 85 percent of women would like to, but frequently are unable to, space the births of their children;<sup>128</sup> 55 to 72 percent of women desire no more children, and one-quarter of all maternal deaths are abortion-related.<sup>129</sup>

Women's lack of reproductive health is not limited to Latin America. Health surveys conducted in more than 40 other low-income nations indicate that most married women in the Majority World desire, but do not have access to, adequate family planning. Essentially, between 100 million and 150 million women have an unmet need for family planning and would prefer not to become pregnant.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, this estimate is conservative, because it does not include the burgeoning unmet needs for many of the world's sexually active, unmarried adolescents.<sup>131</sup> Other studies indicate links between modern family planning methods and women's economic

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<sup>126</sup>The challenges pregnant women face in situations of political conflict or war is beyond the scope of my dissertation. However, I recognize that such conflicts and the attendant social chaos, human displacement, migration and environmental devastation are undoubtedly linked to increased maternal morbidity and mortality.

<sup>127</sup>South America has the greatest prevalence of unsafe abortion, followed by eastern Africa, then by central Africa and south Asia. See *Facts and Figures from the World Health Report 2005*; Susskind, "Women's Health in a Sick World."

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>130</sup> See Population Reference Bureau, "New Population Policies," *Population Bulletin* 56, no.1 (March 2001): 11.

<sup>131</sup>See Shanti R. Conly and Shyami de Silva, *Paying their Fair Share? Donor Countries and International Population Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: Population Action International, 1999), 2.

status: the poorest women in the world are the least likely to have any access to family planning.<sup>132</sup> In fact, studies reveal that wealth is a determinant for contraception use. That is, the poorest women are four times less likely than richer women to use modern contraception, and in some countries, there is a 12 fold difference between rich and poor women.<sup>133</sup> It is also significant that, globally, married women are the group most likely to seek abortion.<sup>134</sup> These women often are poor and struggling to feed their families and keep them healthy.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, it is (under)estimated that every year 20 million unsafe abortions occur globally: this amounts to one unsafe abortion for every seven births, at least 80,000 maternal deaths, and hundreds of thousands of chronically disabled women.<sup>136</sup> Unsafe abortion is not only a serious concern to all people and a major public health problem. In addition, from a narrow economic perspective, the health consequences of unsafe abortion put tremendous strain on scarce hospital resources in low-income countries, thereby severely limiting the possibility of urgent, life-saving maternity interventions.<sup>137</sup>

This global data underlines a basic tenet of many economically marginalized women's reproductive lives: wherever rigid legal, medical, social or religious laws restrict abortion and fail to provide women with adequate family planning, there is a resulting high rate of illegal,

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<sup>132</sup>See UNFPA, "Progress Toward the Millennium Development Goals."

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>See Susskind, "Women's Health in a Sick World," 279-284.

<sup>135</sup>See UNFPA, "State of the World Population, 2005."

<sup>136</sup>WHO, UNFPA and UNHCR, *The Inter-agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations* (UNHCR 1999): 1-135.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 275-284.

unsafe abortion,<sup>138</sup> along with maternal death and disability.<sup>139</sup> The global fact is that whether legal and safe, or illegal and unsafe, abortion is sought by women with unwanted pregnancies. However, poor women are the least likely to benefit from whatever hospital resources exist, and the most likely to suffer the chronic debilitating or lethal consequences associated with unsafe, unskilled abortions.<sup>140</sup> African data provides a clear illustration of this fact: unsafe abortion in Africa is at least 700 times more likely to end in maternal death than safe abortion in the Minority World.<sup>141</sup> However, the deaths of many economically marginalized pregnant women continue, despite the fact that studies, such as those from Brazil, Egypt and India,<sup>142</sup> consistently indicate that whenever women are empowered to manage their reproductive lives, there are substantial decreases in unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions: the two major reasons for maternal deaths. Women's reproductive health is therefore critical to the reduction of maternal deaths; its lack is a structural jeopardy in maternal mortality. The poorer the woman, the more likely is this jeopardy to function with lethal consequences. Ivone Gebara, a feminist liberation theologian who lives and works among poor women in Brazil, speaks candidly about the intersecting jeopardies of women's poverty and rigid, religiously sanctioned, anti-abortion laws. She states:

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<sup>138</sup>Unsafe abortion, as defined by the WHO, is "a procedure for terminating an unwanted pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards or both." See Carla AbouZahr and Elizabeth Ahman, "Unsafe Abortion and Ectopic Pregnancy," in *Health Dimensions of Sex and Reproduction*, ed. Christopher J. L. Murray and Alan D. Lopez (USA: The Harvard School of Public Health for the World Health Organization, 1998), 267-296.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, 274; this is a global reality in both industrialized and less industrialized countries of the world.

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*, 292; Matthews, "Maternal Mortality and Poverty," 6.

<sup>141</sup>See M. Berer, "Making Abortions Safe: A Matter of Good Public Health Policy," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 78, no. 5 (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2000): 580.

<sup>142</sup>See Susskind, "Women's Health in a Sick World."

The Catholic morality does not reach rich women. They abort having the economic resources to guarantee a surgical intervention in human conditions. Therefore the law which the church defends is detrimental to poor women. Abortion must be decriminalised and legalised. Even more, it must be realised at the expense of the state. Abortion is the fifth cause of feminine mortality in Brazil. Those who die are the poorest women.<sup>143</sup>

Gebara's insights regarding the links between pregnancy and the mortality of the world's poorest women are reinforced by the advocacy initiatives of many Majority World health care professionals. For example, in 1992, gynecologists and midwives from the Majority World began a letter-writing campaign aimed at enlightening religious leaders throughout the world about the concrete implications for poor women of rigid restrictions regarding family planning.<sup>144</sup> Whenever these health professionals encountered a woman or girl with a severe complication from the unavailability of contraception, in which religious precepts were implicated, they wrote to the religious leaders, whether Christian or Muslim, and related the life (and often lethal) circumstances of their patients. Because of the frequently tragic stories they communicated, the health professionals asked religious leaders to rethink restrictive family planning policies. Clearly, the voices of poor women and those who live and work with them need to be heard so that the lethal links between poverty and pregnancy are understood by all, especially those who wield power to shape the reproductive realities of poor women. While the words of these professional health care workers were written over a decade ago, they bear repeating as the ominous reality they depict has only worsened, as have the pregnancy-related sufferings and deaths of the world's poorest women.

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<sup>143</sup>See Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 201; see also Ivone Gebara, "The Abortion Debate in Brazil: A Report from an Ecofeminist Philosopher Under Siege," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11, no. 2 (1994): 129-135.

<sup>144</sup>See Douwe A. A. Verkuyl, "Two World Religions and Family Planning," *The Lancet* 342 (21 August 1993): 473-474; "Unholy Struggle with Third-World Genie," *The Lancet: Editorial* 342 (21 August 1993): 447-448.

We are aware that we lack detachment because we witness so many complications from unwanted pregnancies. We see families with eight malnourished children and no money for family planning and school fees. We struggle exhausted in the middle of the night, deep in the pelvis, to remove necrotic uteri from infected induced abortions, with bad light and a dangerous needle. Central and eastern Africa will see 6 million live births in 1993. At least one million of the parturients will be HIV positive. Is it only “natural” that 300,000 of the babies will be dead because of AIDS by 1995; a further 700,000 will be orphans a few years later. In 1994 nature will repeat this exercise.<sup>145</sup>

Thus far, I have demonstrated how women’s poverty is a root jeopardy in maternal mortality. I also have analyzed how women’s poverty intersects with other structural jeopardies in this complex problem. I now turn to the everyday realities of women’s lives, or the “traffic” on these structural jeopardies. This is because appropriating maternal mortality as an issue of economic justice for women requires more than a structural analysis of operative jeopardies. Exploring the “traffic” of women’s concrete lives allows for a more profound, context-specific historically conscious analysis.

#### **1.4 Women’s Everyday Realities: “Traffic” on the Routes of Multiple Jeopardies**

To varying degrees, non-egalitarian gender relations shape the everyday realities of most of the world’s women. For example, in some countries, women’s poverty and their marginal social and economic status are maintained by gender-exclusive norms.<sup>146</sup> By virtue of being female, women are not eligible for inheritance and property rights, which severely limits their economic self-sufficiency.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, many women have minimal access to material and

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<sup>145</sup>Verkuyl, “Two World Religions and Family Planning,” 474.

<sup>146</sup>See UNFPA, *State of the World Population*, 2005.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid. Rural women in the Majority World are responsible for 60 to 80 percent of food production, yet many cannot buy or sell land without their spouse’s permission. Widows in sub-Saharan Africa often have no rights to land or inheritance; women farmers get less than 10 percent of farm loans and 1 percent of agricultural sector credit.

financial resources; they also have poor leverage in family and kinship networks and lack the freedom to determine many of their life circumstances, such as their residence, their employment and their civic participation, their freedom and mobility, and their domestic workload.<sup>148</sup> In the interpretive framework of multiple jeopardy, these gender-biased customs, practices and policies constitute the “traffic” on the structural routes of women’s disempowerment. However, while the “traffic” of women’s lives constrains their everyday realities in myriad ways, during pregnancy, this “traffic” can prove particularly deleterious to their well-being and their survival.<sup>149</sup> In what follows, I present five aspects of the “traffic” of women’s everyday lives and highlight their ramifications for economically marginalized pregnant women. The five aspects of “traffic” I present are: one, women’s lack of reproductive autonomy, two, the status of the girl child, three, violence against women, four, female genital cutting, and five, the global trafficking of women and girls.

#### **1.4.1 “Traffic”: Maternal Mortality and Women’s Lack of Reproductive Health and Autonomy**

Reproductive health for women is a concept that is not reducible to family planning: it includes women’s capabilities for self-knowledge, as well as their social and economic empowerment to use this knowledge to ensure both their general well-being and their reproductive health.<sup>150</sup> However, the global reality is that the reproductive health and autonomy

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<sup>148</sup> Globally, many women do not move about freely without the permission of husbands or mothers-in-law. Neither can they visit health facilities, even if they recognize they are in need of medical help. Moreover, if lacking economic resources, any fees for service are often beyond the reach of poor women. See Mertus, 50-60.

<sup>149</sup>See Matthews, “Maternal Mortality and Poverty,” 8.

<sup>150</sup>See Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 188-233 for an analysis of women’s reproductive rights, women’s autonomy, and international population policies.



of many of the world's women, particularly the poorest, is marginal.<sup>151</sup> This reality is not without consequence:<sup>152</sup> it accounts for more than three million largely preventable deaths annually, it erodes economic gains made by low-income nations, and it accelerates the growing gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>153</sup>

It is well known that a woman's age and the number and the frequency of her pregnancies are critical determinants of maternal well-being.<sup>154</sup> Women who are either very young or older, along with those who have had multiple, frequent pregnancies, are most vulnerable to pregnancy complications. It is also known that improving the conditions of women's lives by ensuring their access to education,<sup>155</sup> employment and family planning<sup>156</sup> reduces fertility rates, improves women's nutrition and their health care access, and increases the health and survival of any dependant children.<sup>157</sup> Despite these insights, the United Nations Population Fund statement on maternal mortality describes the lethal reproductive scenario that

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<sup>151</sup>Studies relating cultural constraints to women's decreased autonomy with respect to health care access have been carried out in Senegal, India, Nigeria and Korea. See Namakando, "The Determinants of Maternity Service Utilisation," 38-54.

<sup>152</sup>Women's lack of reproductive health and autonomy are the seeds of "cascading problems." See Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 60-65, 72-73.

<sup>153</sup>See Conly, *Paying their Fare Share?*, iii.

<sup>154</sup>See UNICEF, "Surviving Childbirth and Pregnancy," 1-14.

<sup>155</sup>Despite diversity within the Majority World, gender disparities are significant in North Africa, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. See Shireen J. Jejeebhoy, *Women's Education, Autonomy and Reproductive Behaviour: Experience from Developing Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1995), 2-16.

<sup>156</sup>It is estimated that up to 100,000 maternal deaths could be avoided every year if women who desired no more children used effective contraception. "Facts and Figures from the World Health Report 2005."

<sup>157</sup>Williamson, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency," 199.

repeatedly unfolds in the lives of many economically marginalized women: “too young, too old, too many, too close.”<sup>158</sup>

This lethal reproductive scenario is acted out annually in the compromised lives of both young mothers and their newborns.<sup>159</sup> At least 14 million adolescent mothers aged 15 to 19 give birth every year;<sup>160</sup> there also are countless others who give birth at even younger ages.<sup>161</sup> While adolescent mothers comprise 11 percent of all global births,<sup>162</sup> they account for 25 percent of all maternal deaths.<sup>163</sup> According to the WHO, among girls aged 10 to 14, maternal deaths are five times higher than among women aged 20 to 24, and pregnancy-related complications are the most significant reason for death in the younger age group.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, many adolescent girls have life-altering, unplanned pregnancies. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, 35 to 52 percent of adolescent pregnancies are unplanned. They often result from girls’ lack of informed choice and insight into the basic facts of reproduction and family planning, as well as from rape, sexual abuse and incest.<sup>165</sup> The fact that globally, an estimated 5 million adolescents

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<sup>158</sup>See Kathleen M. Merchant, “Women’s Health and Development,” in *The Gendered New World Order: Militarism, Development and the Environment*, ed. Jennifer Turpin et al. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 182.

<sup>159</sup>There is a strong correlation between maternal death and disability and the death of newborn babies. Of 130 million babies born every year, about 4 million die in the first four weeks of life, and mortality is extremely high in the first 24 hours, especially if the mother is ill or has died. See UNFPA, “Reproductive Health Fact Sheet.”

<sup>160</sup>The infant mortality rate of 7.7 million in the first week of life is connected directly to maternal well-being, as is the mortality of children up to five years of age. See *The Safe Motherhood Agenda*, 4-16; Rosalind Powell, “The Silent Epidemic Stalking Women,” *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 2.

<sup>161</sup>See “State of the World Population 2005,” *UNFPA*.

<sup>162</sup>See Starrs, *The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda*, 20.

<sup>163</sup>See “The Girl Child,” *Status of Women Canada: Beijing + 5* [online report] (June 2000: 1-4 [cited 8 November 2002]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://swc-ctc.gc.ca/>

<sup>164</sup>See *Local Action Global Change*, 80.

<sup>165</sup>“State of the World Population 2005.”

undergo unsafe abortions annually, speaks to the profound vulnerability of these young, sexually active girls.<sup>166</sup> Pregnancy and childbirth before the completion of physiological maturity places adolescent girls and their newborns at high risk for death and disability: there is a strong correlation between the positive health status of females and later childbirth.<sup>167</sup>

From an economic perspective, both pregnancy and early marriage compromise the education and employment opportunities for young girls, whose social and economic status is likely to remain limited throughout their entire lives. Economic data from 56 countries indicates that in girls aged 15 to 19,<sup>168</sup> the poorest are three times more likely to become adolescent mothers and have twice the number of children than their wealthier peers.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, early initiation of sex also means that the intersectional injury of maternal death and disabilities are risks that begin at a young age and endure throughout a protracted reproductive life.<sup>170</sup>

Frequency of childbearing is another risk factor in maternal mortality. Repeated pregnancies are often an indication of women's disempowerment<sup>171</sup> and their inability to

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<sup>166</sup>Ibid. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, the area with the highest maternal mortality, 39 to 79 percent of those treated for complications subsequent to unsafe abortion were adolescents. In addition, half of the 10,000 Nigerian women who die as a result of complications from unsafe abortion are adolescents; in Argentina and Chile, one-third of the maternal deaths of mothers aged 15 to 19 are abortion-related.

<sup>167</sup>See Williamson, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency," 199.

<sup>168</sup>Girls of 15 to 19 are now at least five times more likely to be HIV positive than boys; HIV may soon overtake maternal mortality as the leading cause of death for girls worldwide. See "Beijing + 5: Fact Sheets," *Status of Women Canada*.

<sup>169</sup>See "State of the World Population 2005," *UNFPA*.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 199-200. In countries where the status of women is low, 40 percent give birth before the age of 20. Bangladesh is the country with the highest proportion of women who give birth before the age of 20. This reality is a major reason for its high maternal mortality rates, and it is the focus of efforts to advance women's status. See *CIDA*, "Safe Motherhood: Bangladesh," 2.

<sup>171</sup>For example, in Sudan, where fertility rates are among the highest in the world, the measure of a wife is the number of children she produces. In rural areas, girls are expected to produce as many as 10 children. In addition, after years of armed conflict, pressure is placed on women to replenish the population. See Emily Wax, "In Sudan, Birth Often Brings Death," *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 5.

negotiate sexual liaisons.<sup>172</sup> The estimated 76 million unwanted pregnancies that occur annually is global evidence of women's lack of reproductive autonomy,<sup>173</sup> as are the under-estimated 80,000 to 100,000 maternal deaths, secondary to unsafe abortions. Moreover, global evidence suggests that if the reproductive health and autonomy of women were guaranteed, the total number of maternal deaths would decrease by at least 30 percent.<sup>174</sup> That is, women's reproductive well-being would substantially reduce both the number of maternal deaths and the number of abortions globally.<sup>175</sup> Romania provides a clear example of this: between 1995 and 1999, abortion rates dropped dramatically in response to the establishment of accessible family planning services.<sup>176</sup>

#### 1.4.2 "Traffic": Maternal Mortality and the Global Status of the Girl Child

The global reality of girl neglect and son preference is another reason for the "traffic" of women's everyday lives.<sup>177</sup> The burden of girlhood is a worldwide phenomenon of gender bias

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<sup>172</sup>There is an emerging literature concerning the cultural acceptance of contraception and the inability of many women to negotiate sexual relations. For example, a South African study showed that 57 percent of women believe they could not refuse sex with their partners; in a UN study of women in Zambia, less than one-quarter of married women felt they could refuse sex with their husbands, even if he was HIV-positive, and only 11 percent felt they could insist on condom use. See "Violence Against Women," in *Face to Face: The Face of Women's Rights*, 3; Frankish, "Coalition Launched to Boost Fight Against HIV/AIDS in Women," 457.

<sup>173</sup>See Starrs, *Advancing Safe Motherhood*, iii.

<sup>174</sup>See Williamson, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency," v.

<sup>175</sup>See *Local Action Global Change*, 66. According to the WHO, 19 million women have unsafe abortions annually; 18.5 million of these are Majority World women. See Sarah Boseley, "Washington Tries to Block Abortion Pills," *The Guardian Weekly*, 29 April-5 May 2005, 11.

<sup>176</sup>The dramatic decline in Romania was from 52 to 11 per 1000 pregnancies in women aged 15 to 44. See UNFPA, "Progress Toward the Millennium Development Goals," *Department of Economic and Social Affairs* [online report] (2005 [cited 16 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/goals2005/goal\\_5.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/goals2005/goal_5.pdf)

<sup>177</sup>Gender analyses most often signal female disadvantage, except in the following contexts: male mortality in Russia and boys' educational under-performance in the Caribbean. See Naila Kabeer, "Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: Promoting Women's Capabilities and Participation, Presentation for the Inaugural Session of the Committee on Emerging Social Issues," *UN-*

that is sustained by overt and covert processes. Girl neglect varies from a relatively benign desire to have a first-born son,<sup>178</sup> to female infanticide and selective female sex abortion.<sup>179</sup> Girl neglect is therefore part of the reason why there are an estimated 100 million “missing women” worldwide,<sup>180</sup> and why there are seriously unbalanced sex ratios in some countries, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, China and India.<sup>181</sup> Girl neglect also is evidenced in the limited progress in global female education, where an equal enrolment and literacy rates for all children has yet to be achieved.<sup>182</sup> A gender gap in favour of male children persists, particularly in the poorest

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ESCAP (Bangkok, 4 September 2003); “Canada and the United Nations General Assembly: Special Session: Beijing + 5: Fact Sheets, Women and Health,” *Status of Women Canada* [online publication] (March, 2003: 1-5 [cited 9 February 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.swc.gc.ca/pubs/b5\\_factsheets/b5\\_factsheets\\_7\\_e.html](http://www.swc.gc.ca/pubs/b5_factsheets/b5_factsheets_7_e.html)

<sup>178</sup>A 1994 study done in the United States of America indicated that 86 percent of men and 59 percent of women would prefer a son if they only had one child. See United Nations, *State of Women in the World Atlas*, 1997.

<sup>179</sup>The International Planned Parenthood Federation reported on a study of a clinic in India where of 8,000 aborted fetuses, 7,997 were female. See “The Facts about Gender-Based Violence,” 3. See also Shirish S. Sheth, “Missing Female Births in India,” *The Lancet* 367, no. 9506 (21-27 January 2006): 185-186--to quote this author: “a careful demographic analysis of actual and expected sex ratios shows that about 100 million girls are missing from the world--they are dead.”

<sup>180</sup>See Amartya Sen, “Missing Women,” *British Medical Journal* 304, no. 586 (1992): 586-587; Douglas A. Hicks, “Gender, Discrimination and Capability: Insights from Amartya Sen,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30.1 (Spring 2002): 137-154; Dinesh C. Sharma, “Widespread Concern over India’s Missing Girls: Selective Abortion and Female Infanticide Cause Girl-to-Boy Ratios to Plummet,” *The Lancet*, 362 (8 November 2003): 1553; Stephan Klasen and Claudia Wink, “‘Missing Women’: Revisiting the Debate,” *Feminist Economics* 9: 1-2 (2003): 263-299; Prabhat Jha et al., “Low Male-to-Female Sex Ratio of Children Born in India: National Survey of 1.1 Million Households,” *The Lancet* 367, no. 9506 (21-27 January 2006): 211-218.

<sup>181</sup>See UNICEF, “About UNICEF in China: Overview,” [online article] (2002 [cited 8 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.unicef.org/china/about\\_643.html](http://www.unicef.org/china/about_643.html); for an in-depth historical and cultural analysis of gender relations and sex preference in a rural Chinese village, see Laurel Bossen, *Chinese Women and Rural Development: Sixty Years of Change in Lu Village*, Yunnan (Lanham, Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 273-311; “State of the World Population 2005,” *UNFPA*.

<sup>182</sup>Female literacy rates range from 40 percent for Nepal, 41 percent for Afghanistan, 42 percent for Pakistan, and 66 percent for India. These figures are dramatically lower when stratified for rural residence. See “Surviving Childbirth and Pregnancy,” 9.

countries.<sup>183</sup> Worldwide, one in seven children have no access to any education, and 70 percent of these children are female.<sup>184</sup> There is also evidence of many barriers to female enrolment in school; they include the lack of sustained government and community support, familial monetary concerns, gender expectations, and girls' release time from household work.<sup>185</sup> In general, girls receive less medical attention<sup>186</sup> and fewer immunizations, they have greater work burdens than boys,<sup>187</sup> they are the first to rise and the last to sleep, and they spend most of their lives overworked and exhausted.<sup>188</sup> Thus, the poor health of girl children is a global fact of life: UNICEF reports that more than a million girls die each year from preventable causes that they would not have experienced had they been born male.<sup>189</sup>

Girl neglect is also a causal dynamic in the higher levels of female malnutrition throughout the world.<sup>190</sup> For example, in the Majority World, an estimated 450 million females of

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<sup>183</sup>Apart from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, worldwide, school enrollment for girls lags behind that of boys at all levels of education. See M. Anne Hill, "Women's Education and Well-Being," *Feminist Economics* 1, no. 2 (1995): 21-46.

<sup>184</sup>See ECPTAT, *Trafficking in Children for Sexual Purposes from Eastern Europe to Western Europe: An Exploratory Research in Eight Western European Receiving Countries*, (Europe Law Enforcement Group: Amsterdam, 2001).

<sup>185</sup>*Ibid.*, 36-46.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, 53. Sex differences in medical care is a relatively new area of health research, and I have discussed this in relation to women and HIV/AIDS. As well, while malaria affects both sexes equally, studies revealed that only 16 percent of patients seeking treatment are female.

<sup>187</sup>Two-thirds of the 300 million children who do not have access to an education are girls; two-thirds of the 880 million illiterate people in the world are women. See Robin Morgan, "Introduction: New World Women," in *Sisterhood is Forever*, xxvii; see also "The Girl Child," *Status of Women Canada: Beijing + 5* [online article] (June 2000 [cited 16 September 2002]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/>

<sup>188</sup>Girl neglect is also evidenced by the fact that while girls are biologically stronger than boys, female infant mortality rates in some countries are higher than for boys. See Afsana, *Discoursing Birthing Care*, 7.

<sup>189</sup>See *Local Action, Global Change*, 77.

<sup>190</sup>Vuola, *Limits of Liberation*, 181-186.

child-bearing age suffer disabilities secondary to nutritional deficiencies experienced during childhood.<sup>191</sup> At least 60 percent of women in South Asia have anaemia,<sup>192</sup> as do 44 percent of those in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>193</sup> In many countries of the world, it is customary for girls and women to eat little, and only after male family members.<sup>194</sup> There is also higher female mortality in times of famine and drought, and seasonal variations in body weight are more common among women than men.<sup>195</sup> Girls are often deficient in protein and iron, and are more malnourished.<sup>196</sup>

This systemic discrimination against female children is implicated in future maternal deaths.<sup>197</sup> That is, girl neglect is not simply a pervasive gender inequity:<sup>198</sup> it can be lethal within the context of pregnancy. This is because the malnutrition of girls and women<sup>199</sup> places them at high risk for such problems as anaemia and the stunting of growth, particularly in the pelvic

<sup>191</sup>“Surviving Pregnancy and Childbirth,” 9.

<sup>192</sup>A Study in Delhi of pregnant women living in the slum region found that more than half were malnourished, and 80 percent of women ate less than the recommended daily amount. As well, two-thirds of Indian women deliver their babies at home, and 60 percent of these births are unattended by any skilled person. See Raekha Prasad, “Giving a Life, Losing a Life,” *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 6.

<sup>193</sup>See Mertus, *Local Action, Global Change*, 53-54.

<sup>194</sup>Consequently, malnourished girls are often unable to withstand the rigours of pregnancy and childbirth. See Maia, “Mourir en Donnant la Vie,” 478-479.

<sup>195</sup>Kabeer, “Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and the Millennium Development Goals,” 9.

<sup>196</sup>Williamson, 199.

<sup>197</sup>See Carla AbouZahr, “Obstructed Labour,” in *Health Dimensions of Sex and Reproduction*, 243-266.

<sup>198</sup>Gender disparities throughout the world are uneven; however, in no country in the world is the quality of life of women (based on United Nations’ Human Development Reports) equivalent to that of men. This global fact is detailed in diverse sources and from a variety of different disciplines. From a philosophical perspective, see Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>199</sup>The Nutritional Foundation of India has indicated that the health and nutritional status of many rural women and girls has deteriorated in the wake of cash cropping strategies, which translates into money for husbands and increased drudgery and food shortages for women and their dependants. See Kulkarni, “A Local Answer to a Global Mess,” 196-202.

area.<sup>200</sup> Anaemia predisposes pregnant girls and women to blood loss and infection, and also renders them less able to cope with the rigours of pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, anaemia is reported to increase the risk of maternal death 30 fold.<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, a malformed pelvis, due to malnutrition, predisposes pregnant girls and women to obstructed labour, one of the major causes of maternal death. These gender-based inequities form an inter-generational pattern that is repeated, precipitating an unending cycle of sub-optimal growth, chronic malnutrition, iron-deficiency anaemia and fatigue, all of which set the stage for lethal maternal outcomes.<sup>203</sup>

The poor health status of females also limits their potential to realize their rights in all areas of their lives. From an economic perspective, girl neglect both is driven by and reinforces economic structures. That is, because the general status of women and girls, relative to men, is marginal, not only do they generate less money in the wage economy, they often lack the requisite human capital, in terms of good nutrition, health and education that would link them to economic opportunities.<sup>204</sup> Consequently, their lower earning potential validates their continued

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<sup>200</sup>According to one study on maternal deaths in Afghan women, obstructed labour was the cause of death and was linked to malnutrition and growth stunting of 59 percent of women. See Jeffrey M. Smith and Gilbert Burnham, "Conceiving and Dying in Afghanistan," *The Lancet* 365, no. 9462 (5-11 March 2005): 827-828.

<sup>201</sup>See "Maternal Mortality in 2000: Estimates Developed by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA," [online report] (updated January 2005 [cited 29 September 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.childinfo.org/areas/maternalmortality>

<sup>202</sup>See Wendy J. Graham, "The Global Problem of Maternal Mortality: Inequalities and Inequities," in *Maternal Morbidity and Mortality*, ed. Allan B. MacLean and James P. Neilson (London: RCOG Press, 2002), 4. Also, studies in Bangladesh showed that women's iron-deficiency anaemia is economically costly as well; it amounted to losses in agricultural productivity of 5 billion dollars over a 10 year period. See *The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda*, 16.

<sup>203</sup>For a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of girl neglect, see the works of Martha C. Nussbaum in *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice*.

<sup>204</sup>In no country in the world is the economic status of women equivalent to that of men. As stated, even in Canada, women's average earnings in any profession or occupation are not equivalent to men's average earnings. See "Women in Canada," *Statistics Canada 2000*.



social and cultural neglect. Moreover, the higher status afforded to males shapes the economic structures that perpetuate gender-biased value differentials. A self-fulfilling prophecy is operative: it ensures that women's socio-economic status remains marginal, which, in turn, reinforces gender bias, and deepens the economic and social inequality of women. All these factors make for heavy "traffic" in the everyday realities of poor women's lives: they intensify their vulnerability to maternal mortality.

### 1.4.3 "Traffic": Maternal Mortality and Global Violence Against Women

Violence is an everyday reality for many women, and it is another reason for the "traffic" of their lives.<sup>205</sup> The UN's 1993 recognition of violence against women as a human rights issue remains one of the most significant international achievements of the last decade.<sup>206</sup> However, the magnitude and underlying causes of gender-based violence, both domestically and internationally, are only beginning to be appreciated, as are effective strategies for change.<sup>207</sup> The

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<sup>205</sup>In the 2002 *World Report on Violence and Health*, Gro Harlem Brundtland, then WHO director general underlined the global scope of domestic violence against women by intimate partners. She wrote, "Violence pervades the lives of many people around the world, and touches all of us in some way. To many people, staying out of harm's way is a matter of locking doors and windows and avoiding dangerous places. To others, escape is not possible. The threat of violence is behind those doors, well hidden from public view." Gro Harlem Brundtland in E. G. Krug, et al., *World Report on Violence and Health* (Geneva: WHO, 2002), Preface; Mahmoud F. Fathalla, "When Home is No Longer Safe: Intimate-Partner Violence," *The Lancet* 366 (3 December 2005): 1910-1911.

<sup>206</sup>Violence and abuse can be defined differently from within different cultures. Violence can be both direct (verbal, sexual and physical abuse) and indirect (passive neglect). In making connections between violence and maternal deaths, I use the definition adopted in the *United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (1993) as "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in sexual or psychological harm or suffering of women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in private or public life." See Khurram Nasir and Adnan A. Hyder, "Violence Against Pregnant Women in Developing Countries," *European Journal of Public Health* 13 (2003): 105-107; International Planned Parenthood Association, "Violence Against Women, Face to Face: The Face of Women's Rights" [online report] (February 2000 [cited 12 December 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.facetoface.org/nl>

<sup>207</sup>See Christine E. Gudorf, "Our Increasing Prospects for Reproductive Coercion," *USQR* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 187-203. It is noteworthy that despite this pervasive gender bias, 30 countries have not signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

WHO states that at least 52 percent of women globally are physically assaulted by an intimate partner at least once in their lives.<sup>208</sup> In 2003, the UN estimated that as many as one in three girls will be “raped, beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.”<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, violence against women causes more death and disability in women of reproductive age (15 to 44) than do cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war.<sup>210</sup>

Global statistics on violence against women are shockingly consistent;<sup>211</sup> they signal that the greatest risk factor for violent abuse is simply being born female.<sup>212</sup> For example, in South Africa a woman is raped every minute, and intimate partner violence is associated with an increased risk of HIV infection for females.<sup>213</sup> Similarly, in Uganda, marital rape by husbands is recognized as a contributing factor in the pandemic of HIV/AIDS; in the city of Alexandria,

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<sup>208</sup>Forty studies conducted in 24 countries on four continents revealed that the rate of gender-based violence by an intimate partner to be between 20 to 50 percent, and as high as 60 percent in some places. See International Planned Parenthood Federation, “The Facts about Gender-Based Violence,” [online report] (November 1998 [cited 15 December 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.ippf.org/resource/gbv/ma98/1.htm>

<sup>209</sup>UNIFEM, *Not a Minute More: Ending Violence Against Women* (New York: UNIFEM, 2003).

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup>In a recent United Nations commission on the status of women, more than 50 speakers from different countries linked women’s poverty and their socio-economic and cultural inequalities to domestic violence, exploitation and human trafficking. The commission concluded that despite greater awareness of the problem of violence against women as a human rights issue, it continues to be a global fact of life. See United Nations Commission on Status of Women, Forty-seventh Session, “Women’s Social, Economic Inequality Leads to Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Exploitation, Say Speakers in Women’s Commission,” United Nations [online press release WOM/1390] (March 2003 [cited 29 August 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/wom1390.doc.htm>

<sup>212</sup>See Claudia García-Moreno, “Violence Against Women: Consolidating a Public Health Agenda,” in *Engendering International Health*, ed., Gita Sen et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), 127.

<sup>213</sup>See Dunkle et al., “Gender-based Violence, Relationship Power and Risk of HIV Infection,” 1418-1420.

Egypt, domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women.<sup>214</sup> In Bangladesh, 50 percent of all married women who are murdered are killed by their husbands; in France, 95 percent of the victims of domestic violence are female. In Costa Rica, one out of every two women can expect to be a victim of gender-based violence at least once in their lifetime; in Chile, 60 percent of women living with partners are subject to ongoing violence.<sup>215</sup> Every hour in the United States, 240 women are battered by their intimate partners; in Canada, one in four women can expect to be assaulted sometime in their lives, and half of these “women” will be under eighteen years of age.<sup>216</sup> A report by Amnesty International indicated that Canadian indigenous women were five times more likely than non-indigenous women of the same age to die as a result of violence at the hands of strangers and intimate partners.<sup>217</sup>

Violence against women is now recognized as a reason for pregnancy-related death: it is estimated that globally, at least one woman in four is physically or sexually abused during

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<sup>214</sup>See Human Rights Watch, “Uganda: Domestic Violence Worsens AIDS: Battered Women Face Greater Vulnerability to HIV,” [online report] (13 August 2003 [cited 10 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.hrw.org/press/2003/08/uganda081303.htm>

<sup>215</sup>See Susskind, “Women’s Health in a Sick World.”

<sup>216</sup>See “The Facts about Gender-based Violence,” 1-9.

<sup>217</sup>The Amnesty International report “Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada” indicates that Canadian indigenous women aged 25 to 44, are five times more likely to die of violence at the hands of strangers and intimate partners than non-indigenous women of the same age. The report is also critical of Canadian authorities for their failure to address the needs of indigenous women; it names racism, economic inequalities, erosion of indigenous culture, lack of educational opportunities, and sex work as factors in this ongoing violence. See “Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada,” *Amnesty International* (London: International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House, 2004): 1-67.

pregnancy.<sup>218</sup> Confidential inquiries into maternal deaths<sup>219</sup> in the United States,<sup>220</sup> Canada,<sup>221</sup> the United Kingdom and South Africa<sup>222</sup> have identified homicide as an emerging reason for “pregnancy-associated” deaths.<sup>223</sup> Studies from Bangladesh,<sup>224</sup> India,<sup>225</sup> China and Mexico<sup>226</sup> confirm the critical links between domestic violence and maternal mortality. For example, in Bangladesh, 14 percent of pregnant women’s deaths result from violence and injury, and although maternal mortality rates are declining, the incidence of violence against Bangladeshi

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<sup>218</sup>See Marika Morris, “Violence Against Women and Girls,” *Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women: Factsheet on Violence Against Women* [online report] (2002 [cited 2 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.criaw-icfef.ca/Poverty\\_fact\\_sheet .htm](http://www.criaw-icfef.ca/Poverty_fact_sheet.htm)

<sup>219</sup>This is an elaborate technique for investigating maternal deaths undertaken at the national level and involving multi-professional teams. See Cook et al., “Advancing Safe Motherhood,” 11.

<sup>220</sup>See Sarah Ramsay, “Study Uncovers ‘Disturbing’ Level of Pregnancy-Associated Homicide,” *The Lancet* 357 (31 March 2001): 1021; Julie A. Gazmararian et al., “Prevalence of Violence Against Pregnant Women,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 275, no. 24 (26 June 1996): 1915-1920; Isabelle L. Horon and Diane Cheng, “Enhance Surveillance for Pregnancy-Associated Mortality: Maryland, 1993-1998,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 285, no. 11 (2001): 1455-1459; Catherine Deneux-Tharoux, “Underreporting of Pregnancy-Related Mortality in the United States and Europe,” *Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 106 (2005): 684-692.

<sup>221</sup>See “Violence Against Women and Girls,” *Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women* (CRIA W ICREF 1998): 2; B. Lent, “Obstetrical Issues in Wife Abuse,” *Canadian Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Women’s Health Care* 4, no. 5 (1992): 330-333.

<sup>222</sup>See Rachel Jewkes, “The Impact of Violence Against Women on Sexual and Reproductive Health,” *International Planned Parenthood Federation* (1999 [cited 13 September 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.ippf.org/resource/gbv/chogm99/jewkes.htm>

<sup>223</sup>See note #30 in this chapter for a definition of pregnancy-associated death; see also Frye, “Examining Homicide’s Contribution to Pregnancy-Associated Deaths.”

<sup>224</sup>See Cook et al., “Advancing Safe Motherhood,” 13.

<sup>225</sup>In India, a study revealed that 16 percent of all deaths during pregnancy were due to domestic violence. See Ahmad A. N. Neaz and H. Rashid, “Violence Against Women: Legal and Social Security Measures,” *UNFPA and Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Ministry of Planning, 2005): 5.

<sup>226</sup>See Roberto Castro et al., “Violence Against Women in Mexico: A Study of Abuse Before and During Pregnancy,” *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 7 (July 2003): 1110-1116.

women is rising.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, global research signals that for some women, violence begins or is exacerbated by pregnancy.<sup>228</sup> There is also evidence that women who have an unwanted pregnancy suffer increased levels of violence,<sup>229</sup> and that the pregnancy itself may be the result of sexual violence.<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, recent international research is beginning to link a history of physical or sexual intimate partner abuse with women's requests for abortion, particularly repeat abortions; these studies indicate there is a greater history of familial victimization and violence in women who seek a termination of pregnancy.<sup>231</sup> In light of these disturbing findings, appeals have been made for more research.<sup>232</sup> Recently, The American College of Nurse-Midwives referred to the "hidden epidemic" of domestic violence against pregnant women, and called for routine screening for abuse during pregnancy.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>227</sup>See Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh: National Strategy for Maternal Health* (Dhaka: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2001), 1-4.

<sup>228</sup>See Saskatchewan Institute on Prevention of Handicaps, "Domestic Violence: Pregnancy," [online report] (2003 [cited 14 March 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca/domestic.html>; see also E. H. Newberger et al., "Abuse of Pregnant Women and Adverse Birth Outcome: Current Knowledge and Implications for Practice," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 267, no. 17 (May 1992): 2370-2372.

<sup>229</sup>See Lori L. Heise, "Reproductive Freedom and Violence Against Women: Where are the Intersections?" *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics* 21 (1993): 207, 211.

<sup>230</sup>See García-Moreno, "Violence Against Women," 121-123.

<sup>231</sup>See William A. Fisher et al., "Characteristics of Women Undergoing Repeat Induced Abortion," *Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ)* 172, no. 5 (March 2006): 637-641; Susan P. Phillips, "Violence and Abortions: What's a Doctor To Do?" *CMAJ* 172, no. 5 (March 2006): 653-654.

<sup>232</sup>See Nasir, "Violence Against Pregnant Women in Developing Countries," 105-107; see also Terri Ballard et al., "Violence during Pregnancy: Measurement Issues," *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 2 (February 1998): 274-276.

<sup>233</sup>See C. J. Krulewitch, et al., "Hidden from View: Violent Deaths Among Pregnant Women in the District of Columbia, 1988-1996," *Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health* 46, no. 1 (2001): 4-10; The American College of Nurse Midwives press release on the subject (2001 [cited 28 January 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [www.midwife.org](http://www.midwife.org); Ephrat Livini, "Deadly Pregnancies Study," ABC News [online news report] (1996 [cited 4 October 2003]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://more.abcnews.go.com/sections/living/dailynews/pregancyhomicide>

Violence against pregnant women offers a disturbing explanation for the recalcitrant nature of maternal mortality. It suggests that even when women successfully navigate multiple structural jeopardies and access adequate health care, their deaths in pregnancy continue as a result of the everyday violence of their lives.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, economic factors appear to play a role in violence in pregnancy. Research linking pregnancy and women's poverty with violence<sup>235</sup> indicates that not only is a women's marginal socio-economic status a predictor of abuse,<sup>236</sup> but that women's increased economic dependency, often coterminous with pregnancy, traps women in abusive situations.<sup>237</sup> It is therefore important to underline that violence exacts a chronic and devastating toll on the physical, emotional and psychological well-being of women, and also on children who witness the abuse.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, violence limits a survivor's perception of options for escape--a perception that is often reinforced by financial constraints, by the absence

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<sup>234</sup>See Heise, "Reproductive Freedom and Violence against Women," 206-216. This article indicated that in the Maternity Hospital of Lima, Peru, 90 percent of mothers aged 12 to 16 had been raped by their fathers, stepfathers or other close relatives; a report on young mothers under 15 in Costa Rica stated that 95 percent were victims of incest.

<sup>235</sup>See "Battering and Pregnancy," *Midwifery Today* 19 (1998); "Violence During Pregnancy," *World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe: Women, Health and Development Program* No. 24 (November 2000); Khurram Nasir, "Violence Against Pregnant Women in Developing Countries: Review of Evidence," *European Journal of Public Health* 13 (June 2003): 105-107; Vilma E. Cokkides et al., "Physical Violence During Pregnancy: Maternal Complications and Birth Outcomes," *Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 102, no. 6 (1999): 661-666.

<sup>236</sup>See Castro, et al., "Violence Against Women in Mexico, 1110-1116; Nasir, "Violence Against Pregnant Women in Developing Countries," 106; Heise, "Reproductive Freedom and Violence against Women," 211.

<sup>237</sup>Garcio-Moreno, "Violence Against Women," 126.

<sup>238</sup>See Jane Gurr et al., "Breaking the Links Between Poverty and Violence Against Women: A Resource Guide," Health Canada, Ottawa: Minister of Health [online report] (March 1996) [cited 2 September 2003]; available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/html/fem1nspvrt\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/html/fem1nspvrt_e.html)

of alternative living arrangements, by communal and religious reprisals,<sup>239</sup> and also by threats of escalating violence from the abuser.<sup>240</sup>

From a narrow economic perspective it is difficult to estimate, with any degree of accuracy, the costs of gender-based violence. Often, this abuse is not reported. However, it is recognized that the costs of health care, police and court proceedings, and the loss of women's work productivity, are immense. For example, in Canada, this amount is estimated to be approximately \$1.6 billion annually;<sup>241</sup> estimates for the United States are in the range of \$12.6 billion annually.<sup>242</sup> Studies in Chile concluded that violence against women resulted in \$1.56 billion in lost earnings, which represents nearly 2 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product; economic losses in Australia are estimated to be about \$6.3 billion annually.<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, these estimates do not calculate the real costs to women and their dependant children: the loss of their physical, psychological and spiritual well-being, and sometimes their lives, are beyond calculation. The full scale of this violence of women in pregnancy is only beginning to be explored. Much remains to be understood before we can effectively challenge the

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<sup>239</sup>Even in a country such as Canada, there is a shortage of affordable housing and subsidized child care. As such, economically marginalized women are vulnerable to being locked into abusive situations; many have few options for escape. See Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, "Fact Sheet on Violence against Women, 2002," [online resource] (2002 [cited 9 June 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.criaw-icref.ca>

<sup>240</sup>Studies from many countries confirm that women who leave abusive partners are at considerable risk of assault and murder in terms of retribution from their estranged partners; women in abusive situations are well aware of this fact. See "State of the World Population 2005," *UNFPA*.

<sup>241</sup>A five year cross-Canada collaborative study is being conducted by the Universities of Victoria, Western Ontario, New Brunswick and Simon Fraser on the physical, mental and economic effects of spousal abuse. The study is targeting 300 women; preliminary results indicate that there are deleterious long-term emotional, physical and economic effects on women. See Lynn Haley, "Study Tallies Costs of Spousal Abuse," *The Medical Post* (11 January 2005): 53; see also their web page, <http://www.women-health.ca>

<sup>242</sup>See "The Facts about Gender-Based Violence," *International Planned Parenthood Association*, 1.

<sup>243</sup>See "State of the World Population 2005," *UNFPA*.

globally entrenched culture of male violence against women.<sup>244</sup> However, this initial data on pregnancy-related deaths suggests that for some women, particularly those who are economically marginalized, the “traffic” of their everyday lives is more life-threatening than any of the biological rigours associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

#### 1.4.4 “Traffic”: Maternal Mortality and Female Genital Cutting

Female genital cutting (FGC)<sup>245</sup> is a complex and culturally sensitive issue.<sup>246</sup> It also is linked to maternal death and disability, and is, therefore, a reason for the “traffic” in the everyday lives of pregnant women. Although traditionally practised in Africa, parts of Asia and in the Middle East,<sup>247</sup> increasingly, FGC is a global issue due to migration and the persistence of this cultural practice among refugees and immigrants.<sup>248</sup> It is estimated that worldwide, 132 million

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<sup>244</sup>See Terri J. Ballard et al., “Violence During Pregnancy: Measurement Issues,” *American Journal of Public Health* 88, no. 2 (February 1998): 274-276; Judith McFarlane et al., “Assessing for Abuse During Pregnancy: Severity and Frequency of Injuries and Associated Entry Into Prenatal Care,” *JAMA* 267, no. 23 (17 June 1992): 3176-3178.

<sup>245</sup>According to UNFPA, FGC is “partial or total removal of the external prepuce, clitoris or genitalia, or female genitalia or any other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or non-medical purposes.” FGC also is referred to as female genital mutilation or female circumcision. I use the term female genital cutting because it is less culturally demeaning and less value-laden than mutilation. Judgmental labelling can demonize cultures and create a backlash that reinforces this practice. Moreover, cutting is also more accurate than the term circumcision, which obscures the extent of this procedure on female bodies. For example, if males experienced the same degree of surgical intervention as infibulation, this would involve removal of the penis and the scrotal sacs. See UNFPA, “Frequently Asked Questions about Female Genital Cutting.” [online report] (2002 [cited 28 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.unfpa.org/gender/faq\\_fgc.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/gender/faq_fgc.htm)

<sup>246</sup>The work of global feminists and African groups who have been campaigning against this practice for years has led to increased visibility of FGC. See Mertus, *Local Action Global Change*, 28-29.

<sup>247</sup>See Layla M. Shaaban et al., “Reaching the Tipping Point against Female Genital Mutilation,” *The Lancet* 366 (30 July 2005): 347-349.

<sup>248</sup>For example, in a recent United Nations commission on the international status of women, speakers from the following countries raised the issue of FGC as a problem endemic to their country: Burkina Faso, Denmark, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, South Africa and the United States. FGC is banned by law in many countries. See “Women’s Social, Economic Inequality Leads to Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Exploitation, Say Speakers in Women’s Commission.” *United Nations Commission on Status of Women, Forty-seventh Session*. As well, Australia, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom have passed laws against FGC. See also UNICEF/UNFPA, “What is Female Genital Mutilation?” [online fact sheet] (October 2000 [cited 18 October 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.un.org/geninfo/faq/factsheets/FS3.HTM>



girls and women have experienced some form of genital cutting, and that every year, this procedure is performed on approximately two million girls.<sup>249</sup> Moreover, FGC is performed often in unsanitary conditions with unsterilized instruments,<sup>250</sup> the majority of girls are aged between four to eight.<sup>251</sup>

There are deep-rooted cultural justifications for this ancient practice which predates the rise of Christianity.<sup>252</sup> Among these justifications are the communal sanctioning of a female's initiation into womanhood, as well as myths related to fertility, hygiene and aesthetics.<sup>253</sup> However, increasingly, the eradication of FGC is advocated by some women from within

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<sup>249</sup>See Lars Almroth et al., "Primary Infertility after Genital Mutilation in Girlhood in Sudan: A Case-control Study," *The Lancet* 366 (30 July 2005): 385.

<sup>250</sup>FGC occurs largely in Africa, to a lesser degree in Asia, but also increasingly throughout the world as a result of immigration. For example, in 1992 in France, the Groupe Femme pour l'Abolition des Mutilations Sexuelles, comprised of African women immigrants, stated that 27,000 women and girls had undergone or were at risk of undergoing this procedure. See Nahid Toubia, *Female Genital Mutilation: A Call for Global Action* (New York: Women, Ink, 1993), 26.

<sup>251</sup>The cultural relevance of FGC as an initiation rite to womanhood is cited by some proponents. Those opposed to this procedure require great sensitivity to cultural codes and an understanding of the complexity of this issue; I cannot explore explicitly these requirements in my dissertation. However, I wish to underscore that stereotyping and cultural slander by Western reactionaries does little to further the respectful cross-cultural dialogue that is needed regarding FGC. It is also important to remember that, historically, FGC was practised by all religions, including Christianity, although no religious source for this procedure has been identified. FGC also was performed by Western physicians in England and the United States up until the 1950s for "treating" what was considered to be deviant female behaviour or medical problems, such as hysteria, lesbianism, melancholia and masturbation. See Toubia, "Female Genital Mutilation," 21-47.

<sup>252</sup>Predating Christianity and Islam, FGC has been part of cultures over the ages: FGC has been practised in Egypt, throughout Eurasia, in Africa, the Phillipines, in Mexico, by the Incas, in many Amazonian tribes, in Australia by the Arunta tribe, and among the Romans and the Arabs. See "Frequently Asked Questions about Female Genital Cutting," *UNFPA* [online report] (2002 [cited 28 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.unfpa.org/gender/faq\\_fg.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/gender/faq_fg.htm)

<sup>253</sup>These include arguments of tradition, cultural and religious cohesion, fertility enhancement, rites of initiation, enhancement of male sexual pleasure, and the elimination of female promiscuity. The feminist economist Gita Sen of DAWN indicates that while FGC is traditionally conducted on young women by older women, it is male power, the sexual control of women, and male monopoly over property and inheritance that undergirds these practices. See Sen, *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions*, 27; Susan Sherwin, *No Longer Patient: Feminist Ethics and Health Care* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 58-74.

cultures that traditionally practice this ritual.<sup>254</sup> Trans-national feminists have supported these initiatives and work collaboratively to generate strategies for change: they aim to increase awareness of FGC as an aspect of violence against women,<sup>255</sup> and a means by which patriarchal attitudes continue to legitimate the domination and colonization of women's bodies for the interests and satisfaction of men.<sup>256</sup> These growing numbers of global voices also are signalling that FGC reinforces the powerlessness of women, since it is the male elites, rather than the young girls or women themselves, who define and legitimate this custom.<sup>257</sup>

FGC is recognized also as a female health hazard: it has both short-term and long-term negative effects. Apart from FGC being an extremely painful procedure,<sup>258</sup> death can result from haemorrhage, tetanus or other severe infection. In addition, many girls who survive the surgical procedure suffer chronic physical, sexual and psychological disabilities, such as recurring cysts and abscesses, limb paralysis, urinary incontinence, increased vulnerability to HIV infection,

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<sup>254</sup>Read Betty Cheboi's story in "Struggling to End Female Genital Cutting in Uganda," *UNFPA* [online report] (September 2004 [cited 28 November 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/news/news.cfm?ID=506a>. The Canadian government, the Status of Women Canada, in collaboration with Canadian International Development Agency, are supporting a project conducted by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children in Africa. See "Beijing + 5 Fact Sheets: Women and Health," Status of Women Canada.

<sup>255</sup>See Mertus, *Local Action, Global Change*, 28-30.

<sup>256</sup>Western androcentric notions of femininity also legitimize invasive practices such as breast implantation, cosmetic surgery, and unrealistic body types that can lead to severe eating disorders, such as extreme dieting, anorexia and bulimia. All of these can have negative health consequences for females. I focus on FGC because of its significance in pregnancy, child bearing, and maternal mortality. For a critique of invasive Western notions of femininity, see Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies," in *The Politics of Women's Bodies*, ed. Rose Weitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 147-166.

<sup>257</sup>Some collective global voices denouncing FGC are Uganda's *REACH* program, Egypt's *CEOSS* organization, Maendaleo's, Kenya's *MYWO* group, women in Sudan, Mali, Nigeria, and Cote d'Ivoire. See UNFPA, "Frequently Asked Questions about Female Genital Cutting."

<sup>258</sup>*Ibid.*

behavioural disorders and sexual dysfunction.<sup>259</sup> There are also social and economic components of FGC, which do not necessarily benefit women and girls. That is, females who have not had this procedure are considered by some to be less feminine, and therefore less marriageable. Essentially, those who have not been genitally cut are viewed as potential financial burdens by their families of origin. In addition, as a procedure, FGC is lucrative:<sup>260</sup> it generates more income than work as a traditional midwife or nurse, a significant financial consideration in the context of deteriorating economies in poor nations.<sup>261</sup> Finally, recent evidence linking FGC to female infertility is hailed as key to the eradication of this practice.<sup>262</sup> While a positive turn of events, we may also note that it is the social, cultural and economic impacts on families and societies of female infertility, rather than the intrinsic well-being of women and girls, which appear to be key to eradicating FGC.

Within the context of pregnancy, any female who has undergone FGC, particularly the most extensive form of infibulation,<sup>263</sup> is more likely to experience severe health complications during pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>264</sup> This is because subsequent to FGC, formation of scar tissue around the vagina can narrow the birth passage, delay labour, and endanger the well-being of both mother and baby. Moreover, often, a surgical incision is required to prevent obstructed

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<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 146-166; These disabilities can include leg paralysis subsequent to nerve damage during the procedure. See UNFPA, "Struggling to End Female Genital Cutting in Uganda."

<sup>260</sup>Ibid.; often this relatively lucrative job is passed from generation to generation within specific families.

<sup>261</sup>Toubia, 29.

<sup>262</sup>Shaaban, "Reaching the Tipping Point," 347-349.

<sup>263</sup>Ibid.; 20 percent of women undergoing FGC have infibulation, which is excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching/narrowing of the vagina. This occurs in Somalia, Northern Africa and Djibouti.

<sup>264</sup>These complications include chronic urinary and reproductive infections, sepsis, renal stones, dermoid cysts, infertility and psychological trauma. See Maia, "Mourir en Donnant la Vie," 477.

labour (this is termed de-infibulation), and following delivery, re-suturing of the women's genitalia is performed to ensure virginal tightness (this is termed re-infibulation).<sup>265</sup> With every pregnancy, this cutting and restitching is repeated; health risks rise significantly for both adolescents and women who have had multiple pregnancies. In situations where there are no skilled birth attendants who can safely incise and re-suture a woman (as is normally the case among poor women), maternal morbidity and mortality are significant. In fact, a recent WHO study of six African countries where FGC is prevalent indicated that greater birth complications of post-partum haemorrhage, caesarean section, extended maternal hospital stay, need for infant resuscitation, and inpatient peri-natal death rates were associated with FGC.<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, the risk of complications were shown to be greater with the more extensive form of FGC.<sup>267</sup> This study also underlined that its results represented the tip of the iceberg, as the women studied were those able to access skilled obstetrical care during delivery.<sup>268</sup>

It is important to underline that FGC is not the only example of how the "traffic" of women's lives serve the interests of men at the expense of women. There are other cultural practices that are detrimental to the well-being of pregnant women. For example, in rural Bangladesh, widespread supernatural notions of impurity and pollution are connected to the birthing process:<sup>269</sup> women may be secluded during and after childbirth, a period when maternal

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<sup>265</sup>See WHO, UNFPA and UNHCR, *Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations: An Inter-agency Field Manual* (UNHCR, 1999): 1-135.

<sup>266</sup>See "WHO, Female Genital Mutilation and Obstetric Outcome in Six African Countries," *The Lancet* 367, no. 9525 (3-9 June 2006): 1835-1841.

<sup>267</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup>See N. Eke, "Female Genital Mutilation and Obstetric Outcome," *The Lancet* 367, no. 9525 (3-9 June 2006): 1799-1800.

<sup>269</sup>Chris Vickery, ed., *Newborn Care Practices in Rural Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Save the Children Federation, 2003), 59-90.

complications are most frequent.<sup>270</sup> Pregnant women may also be deprived of food and water during delivery, and cultural ideas around childbirth can contravene critical health-seeking behaviours, such as obtaining skilled assistance in the event of complications. Women also may be stigmatized if they are unable to give birth at home in traditional ways, and consequently are less likely to seek the skilled assistance they need.<sup>271</sup> These cultural attitudes are undoubtedly linked to Bangladesh's high maternal mortality rate, especially in rural regions. These examples demonstrate how a cultural framework for human survival often fails to include women and can jeopardize the survival of pregnant women.

#### **1.4.5 “Traffic”: Maternal Mortality and the Global Trafficking of Women and Girls**

The human trafficking of girls and women for sexual slavery is a further reason for both the “traffic” of women's everyday lives and their deaths and disabilities in pregnancy.<sup>272</sup> However, unlike other aspects of the “traffic” I have explored, the links between human trafficking and maternal mortality are not well established. Yet many of the risk factors I have identified in maternal mortality also occur in the lives of trafficked women and girls.<sup>273</sup> In this section, I make these links explicit by first introducing human trafficking and sexual slavery and

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<sup>270</sup>See Afsana, *Discoursing Birthing Care: Experiences from Bangladesh*, 1-40.

<sup>271</sup>*Ibid.*, 32-41.

<sup>272</sup>The UN defines trafficking as “illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national and international borders, largely from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition, with the end goal of forcing women and girl children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations for the profit of recruiters, traffickers, and crime syndicates, and other illegal activities, such as forced domestic labour, false marriages, clandestine employment and false adoption.” See “Women as Chattel: The Emerging Global Market in Trafficking,” *USAID: Gender Matters Quarterly* no. 1 (February 1999).

<sup>273</sup>For a list of health-related problems of trafficked persons, see “Common Health Issues Seen in Victims of Human Trafficking,” *US Department of Health and Human Services* [online article] (November 2005 [cited 26 January 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/campaign\\_kit\\_health/health\\_problems.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/campaign_kit_health/health_problems.html)

then by indicating the relevance of this problem to maternal mortality.<sup>274</sup> I also suggest that a reason maternal deaths are underestimated globally is the failure to appreciate these links.<sup>275</sup>

Human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar business that is flourishing in our current global economy.<sup>276</sup> It is at once a criminal enterprise, an issue of illegal migration, a gross economic injustice, and an extreme abuse of women's human rights.<sup>277</sup> It is also one of the most opportunistic and humanly costly forms of international trade: it is costly both to its victims and

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<sup>274</sup>For further information on human trafficking, see my article "Sex in the City: Human Trafficking and the Sexual Slavery of Women and Children," *Counselling and Spirituality* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 73-100.

<sup>275</sup>Research on sex trafficking is beginning to underline both the theoretical lacuna that exists with respect to the health consequences of trafficked women and girls, and the need for studies in this area. For example, see Paola Monzini, *Sex Traffic: Prostitution, Crime and Exploitation* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2005), vii- x.

<sup>276</sup>Human trafficking is estimated to be a global annual enterprise of \$US12 to \$US19 billion dollars. See "Trafficking in Women and Girls: An Initiative of the Canadian Council for Refugees," in *Canadian Council for Refugees* (3 October 2003). It is a global problem, even though most countries have ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. In 2000, the Palermo Protocol, also known as the *UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime* afforded both an international definition of trafficking and a means by which international strategies can be harmonized to prevent and protect victims and prosecute offenders. This protocol names poverty, underdevelopment and lack of economic opportunity as root causes of human trafficking. See "Trafficking in Women and Children in Asia and Europe," Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Department for Asia and the Pacific [online article] (2001 [cited 11 April 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/02/03](http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/02/03)

<sup>277</sup> My focus on females in sexual slavery is not meant to dismiss the fact that many persons of varying ages and sexes are trafficked for a variety of exploitive purposes, including forced labour in sweatshops, domestic and agricultural work in agribusinesses, illicit adoption, military conscription, camel jockeys and forced marriage. See Kevin Bales, "Going Cheap," *New Internationalist* [online article] (2001 [cited June 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.newint.org/issue337/cheap.htm>. For example, in 2005, I visited a shelter for trafficked children in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Half of the 130 children living at this shelter were Bangladeshi boys who had been trafficked to Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates as camel jockeys. See Salma Ali, ed., "Hundreds of Bangladeshi Small Boys Need to be Rescued from Camel Jockeying," *Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association* (Dhaka: Sheba Printing Press, 2002): 1-16; Salma Ali, "Trafficking: An Issue of Concern," *Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association* (Dhaka: BNWLA, 2004), 5-10.

to the social and cultural fabric of the places in which it occurs.<sup>278</sup> Human trafficking involves a sequence of interconnected events that transpires in places of origin, transit and destination, all of which are aimed at securing the successful recruitment, transfer and exploitation of vulnerable women and girls.<sup>279</sup> It can operate either at the micro level, where it is controlled by regional criminal gangs, or at the macro level, where it is engineered by subterranean crime syndicates and fuelled by sophisticated technology, such as the Internet.<sup>280</sup>

The clandestine nature of this illicit trade and the silencing of trafficked persons through violence, isolation and fear of deportation, make it difficult to assess with accuracy the scale of the problem.<sup>281</sup> However, what we do know is that no country is immune from this illegal economic activity, the third most profitable after sales of drugs and armaments, and that all countries act as either receiving or sending or transit sites.<sup>282</sup> It is also known that while anyone can be trafficked, those who are socially, politically or economically vulnerable are targeted. It is therefore no surprise that women and girls comprise the majority of those trafficked for sexual exploitation. That is, this illicit trade is fuelled by the global economic crisis and by the desperate

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<sup>278</sup>Criminal networks are central to human trafficking. See Andrea M. Bertone, "Transnational Activism to Combat Trafficking in Persons," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* X, issue 2 (Winter/Spring 2004): 9-22.

<sup>279</sup>See "Fact Sheet: Sex Trafficking," *US Department of Health and Human Services* [online article] (2005 [cited 26 January 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/fact\\_sex.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/trafficking/about/fact_sex.html)

<sup>280</sup>For analyses of how the Internet functions as a tool in human trafficking, see Victor Malarek, *The Natashas: The New Global Sex Trade* (Toronto: Viking Canada), 1-7; Julie Pehar, "e-Brides: The Mail Order Bride Industry and the Internet," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 171-175.

<sup>281</sup>See Donna M. Hughes, "The 'Natasha Trade': Transnational Sex Trafficking," *National Institute of Justice Journal* (January 2001): 8-15.

<sup>282</sup> Estimates are that 8,000 to 16,000 people are either trafficked or smuggled yearly into Canada, accounting for US\$120 million to US\$400 million per year; the number of women trafficked specifically for sexual exploitation is unknown. See "Migrant Sex Workers from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: The Canadian Case," *Status of Women Canada* (2000 [cited 1 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/>; Lyne Kurtzman and Diane Matte, "Travailler à l'Élimination du Traffic des Femmes," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 88, 86-93.

social, cultural, educational and economic plight of many of the world's women. It also is fuelled by a patriarchal mind-set which dominates many economic, cultural, legal and kinship systems and regards young girls and women as lucrative commodities.

The supply side of this illicit flesh trade is driven by the disenfranchised socio-economic status of many girls and women, while the demand side is driven by the global entertainment business, patriarchy, and the burgeoning commercial sex industry.<sup>283</sup> Women and children are trafficked across continents, across nations and domestically, between cities within national boundaries. The global routes of trafficked women have been described in terms of four waves, where each wave is linked to deteriorating socio-economic conditions in countries of origin and the specific economic vulnerability of women.<sup>284</sup> These waves of trafficked females are contingent on international and national economic and gender differentials: they are the flow of young, economically marginalized females from the South to older, resource-rich males from the North.<sup>285</sup>

Traffickers are adept at ensnaring their victims. They use a variety of techniques, including false employment promises, subversive advertising schemes, and overt kidnapping.<sup>286</sup> In all cases, traffickers are willing to deceive, coerce, abduct and often violently subdue women,

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<sup>283</sup>There are many sources linking commercial sex work and sexual slavery. For example, see Nakashima Brock et al., *Casting Stones*, 120-126, 191-205; Richard Poulin, *La Mondialisation des Industries du Sexe: Prostitution, Pornographie, Traite des Femmes et des Enfants* (Ottawa: Les Editions L'Interlinge, 2004), 127-175.

<sup>284</sup>The first wave of trafficked women were from Southeast Asia; the second from Africa; the third from Latin American; the fourth from the emerging states of the former USSR. See Malarek, *The Natashas*, 1-7.

<sup>285</sup>See Richard Poulin, "Globalisation and the Sex Trade: Trafficking and the Commodification of Women and Children," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 38-43.

<sup>286</sup>See "End Child Exploitation: Stop the Traffic!" *UNICEF* [online report] (2003 [cited 7 September 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.endchildexploitation.org.uk>



in order to exploit them in a global sex trade that accrues billions of dollars annually.<sup>287</sup> The economic benefits of this trade are clear: trafficked females are profitable, low-risk ventures, in which penalties for perpetrators are relatively lenient.<sup>288</sup> For example, a girl or woman in sexual slavery can accrue for her captors US\$75,000 to \$250,000 per year<sup>289</sup>—a financial incentive well appreciated not only by traffickers, but also by opportunistic entrepreneurs and officials.<sup>290</sup> Young girls are particularly lucrative commodities: their highly marketable status is due to their capacity to quell consumer fears in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.<sup>291</sup> Research indicates that a girl child can service up to 2,000 men annually.<sup>292</sup> However, these profits are relatively short-lived. Within a few years, most of those in sexual slavery succumb to serious trauma or illness; when no longer lucrative, they are disposed of and replaced by other available recruits.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>287</sup>See “Trafficking of African Women and Children Fact Sheet,” International Commission for Women of African Descent [online report] (2004 [cited 7 July 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.npcbaw.org/newweb/icwad\\_04\\_trafficking\\_facts.htm](http://www.npcbaw.org/newweb/icwad_04_trafficking_facts.htm); Hughes, “The ‘Natasha’ Trade,” 8-15.

<sup>288</sup>Compare contemporary slavery with the 1880s African-American slavery: profit margins of a girl in sexual slavery today are as high as 800 percent per annum, while in the 1880s, a slave generated profit margins of only about 5 percent per annum. See Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 18-24.

<sup>289</sup>See Malarek, *The Natashas*, 46.

<sup>290</sup>Those trafficked often experience corruption from both criminal and legitimate agencies, such as police, military, government officials, peace keepers, airport personnel and taxi drivers. See Victoria Firmo-Fontan, “Responses to Sexual Slavery,” in *The New Political Economy of Slavery*, ed. Christien van den Acer (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 97-100; Nadra Qadeer, “Canada Take Note: A Comparative Perspective on Trafficking,” in *Canadian Women Studies*, 72-77.

<sup>291</sup>Angela Miles, “Prostitution, Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry,” in *Canadian Women Studies*, 31.

<sup>292</sup>Kevin Bales would substitute the words “serially raped” for my term “service” to describe the reality of girls in sexual slavery. See Bales, *Disposable People*, 55-56.

<sup>293</sup>*Ibid.*, 57-61. Children’s survival and development are at great risk in sexual slavery. See UNICEF, “End Child Exploitation: Stop the Traffic! [online report] (July 2003 [cited 7 September 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.UKtraffickingreport14\\_07SS.QXD](http://www.UKtraffickingreport14_07SS.QXD)

The international community is only beginning to appreciate the magnitude of this women's human rights abuse: every year, 700,000 to four million women and girls are trafficked globally.<sup>294</sup> Many of these "women" are, in fact, young girls, as the current increase in trafficked females is associated with a decrease in the ages of females trafficked.<sup>295</sup> Transported to unknown destinations, with passports and identity papers confiscated, many trafficked women and children suffer profound social and cultural isolation.<sup>296</sup> They also have minimal power to negotiate any conditions of their enforced labour.<sup>297</sup> Moreover, any dream of ameliorating their desperate economic conditions is short-lived. Instead, they are victims of deceit, coerced to work as prostitutes in debt bondage,<sup>298</sup> sexually servicing many men on a daily basis.<sup>299</sup> Deprived of

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<sup>294</sup>See The Protection Project, "Human Rights Report on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. A Country-by-Country Report on a Contemporary Form of Slavery," [online report] (2002 [cited 12 May 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.protectionproject.org/main1.htm>; Monzini, *Sex Traffic*, 14-18.

<sup>295</sup>See Patience Elabor-Idemudia, "Race and Gender Analysis of Trafficking: A Case Study of Nigeria," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 120. UNICEF maintains that of 1.2 million children trafficked each year, 1 million are sold in the sex trade. See UNICEF "Trafficking Statistics," [online report] (2004 [cited 7 September 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unicef.org/programme/protection/focus/trafficking/stats.htm> The UN maintains that more than 60 percent of girls trafficked into sex work in South Asia are aged 12 to 16. See "Youandaids: The HIV/AIDS Portal for Asia Pacific, Trafficking," *UNDP* [online report] (2005 [cited 11 July 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.youandaids.org/Themes/trafficking.asp>

<sup>296</sup>Read about this social and cultural isolation in a Canadian analysis of Thai sex workers in Toronto "Trafficking in Women, including Migrant Thai Sex Workers in Canada," *Status of Women Canada* [online report] (June 2000 [cited 25 July 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.mhso.ca/mhso/trafficking\\_women.html](http://www.mhso.ca/mhso/trafficking_women.html)

<sup>297</sup>I am cognizant of the feminist critique of conflating female migration, human smuggling, sex work and trafficking for sexual slavery. I focus on trafficking for sexual slavery. While some women may have been active participants in their transport to foreign places, studies show that few are aware of the exploitive conditions they eventually experience. Those in sexual slavery have the least power of all sex workers; they are at the greatest risk for abuse. See Carolina J. Wennerholm, "HIV/AIDS Prevention and Access to Trafficked Women: Kvinnoforum's Work in the Baltic Sea Region," in *Canadian Women Studies*, 179; Bales, *Disposable People*, 34-79.

<sup>298</sup>Debts are hard to clear; they escalate whenever the person is sold. See Krishna Upadhyaya, "Bonded Labour in South Asia: India, Nepal and Pakistan," in *The Political Economy of New Slavery*, 118-136.

<sup>299</sup>See *UNICEF* "Stop the Traffic!" 1-10.

freedom, legal aid, health care, and, not infrequently, the basic necessities of life, many struggle to survive in situations of profound terror and chronic violence.<sup>300</sup> They also have few possibilities for escape, without severe reprisals both for themselves and their families.<sup>301</sup> In the event that they escape their captors, they often experience corruption, complicity and deceit from official authorities,<sup>302</sup> and are stigmatized further by legal structures insensitive to their complex plights.<sup>303</sup> For example, they often are treated as criminals and deported to their country of origin, where they face immense challenges of re-integration.<sup>304</sup>

From a health perspective, there is little concrete data on the mental, physical and social consequences for girls and women trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation.<sup>305</sup> Nor is there accurate data on the links between human trafficking and maternal morbidity and mortality. However, there can be little doubt that the damage to the general well-being and reproductive

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<sup>300</sup>Testimonies indicate violence is extreme. See Hughes, "The 'Natasha' Trade," 11-12; Gillian Caldwell et al., "Crime and Servitude: An Exposé of the Traffic in Women for Prostitution in the Newly Independent States," *Global Survival Network in Collaboration with The International League for Human Rights* (1997).

<sup>301</sup>Threats of violence are extended to family members; this reinforces compliance. See Anne M. Spevacek, "Trafficking in Russian Women: Sexual Exploitation as a Growing Form of International Trade," *TED Case Studies* [online report] (May 2000 [cited 21 July 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.american.edu/TED/traffic.htm>

<sup>302</sup>See Hughes, "The 'Natasha' Trade," 12-13.

<sup>303</sup>Spevacek, "Trafficking in Russian Women," 4-6.

<sup>304</sup>It is important to note that in May 2006, the Canadian government established a temporary resident permit of 120 days for trafficked persons that is not contingent on their testifying against traffickers. While not fully responsive to the complex needs of trafficked persons, the residency permit is a progressive move that is aimed at protecting trafficked persons. It is an improvement on previous policies that have been largely concerned with the legal prosecution of traffickers. See Janet Dench, "Canadian Religious Conference Applauds New Measures," *Canadian Council for Refugees* [online report] (12 May 2006 [cited 18 May 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.web.ca/ccr>

<sup>305</sup>See Charlotte Watts et al., *The Health Risks and Consequences of Trafficking in Women and Adolescents: Findings from a European Study* (London: School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), 2003.

health of trafficked girls and women is severe.<sup>306</sup> Moreover, it is recognized that gynaecological complications are among the most common reproductive health problems for trafficked women and girls.<sup>307</sup> It is also known that they are at increased risks for physical violence, gang rape, sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS.<sup>308</sup> They are most certainly at great risk for unwanted pregnancy,<sup>309</sup> illegal and frequent abortions,<sup>310</sup> and post-abortion complications,<sup>311</sup> all of which I have linked directly to pregnancy-related death and disability. In addition, the pregnancy itself may be a major liability for a trafficked girl.<sup>312</sup> This is not only because it is unlikely that she will be provided with adequate maternal health care, even if she is permitted to bring her pregnancy to term. It is also due to a trafficked person's precarious status as an illegal alien and her inability to navigate the local language and culture to access support or assistance, should any be made available.<sup>313</sup> Finally, pregnancy can be a risky predicament for the following reason: it can be the decisive factor changing a trafficked female's status from lucrative business opportunity to costly, and, therefore, disposable commodity.

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<sup>306</sup>See "Trafficking in Women and Children in Asia and Europe," 12-13.

<sup>307</sup>See Watts, *The Health Risks and Consequences*, 48.

<sup>308</sup>*Ibid.*, 48-49.

<sup>309</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-63, 83-99. See also Justin McCurry, "Smuggling for Sex." *The Lancet: World Report* 364 (16 October 2004): 1393-1394.

<sup>310</sup>See Bales, *Disposable People*, 34-79.

<sup>311</sup>See "Trafficking in Women and Children in Asia and Europe," 12-13; see also "Poverty and Trafficking in Human Beings," *Swedish Department for Global Development* [online article] (2003 [cited 11 April 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/02/03/>

<sup>312</sup>Bales contrasts old and new slavery; once slaves were pressured to breed to produce more slaves. This is not the case for modern day slaves, especially women forced into sex work. Pregnancy incurs medical costs; it is therefore cheaper to dispose of pregnant women and traffic new recruits. See Bales, *Disposable People*, 1-33.

<sup>313</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

## 1.5 Conclusions from Chapter 1

Using the interpretive framework of multiple jeopardy, I have provided a historically and contextually conscious analysis of maternal mortality. I have situated maternal mortality within a gender-sensitive global economic framework and explored its causal dynamics. I have shown that women's marginal economic status is a cross-cultural constant, or root jeopardy, in maternal mortality. I also have shown how other jeopardies function: I have explored how geographical and social location function, and how issues of race and ethnicity reinforce women's poverty and increase the risk of maternal mortality. I concluded that maternal mortality cannot be appropriated fully by a limited focus on women's poverty, and that context-specific analyses are required to comprehend its complex genesis. I also have provided evidence that maternal mortality is amenable to change by cost-effective and relatively inexpensive strategies. I have suggested that given the political and social will to attend to the well-being of girls and women, pregnancy and childbirth need not be a death sentence for many women in our world.

In attending to the everyday realities of economically marginalized women's lives, or the "traffic" on their routes of disempowerment, I have demonstrated that maternal mortality is a consequence of the myriad inequities they experience. I have shown that economically marginalized women die in pregnancy not only because they lack skilled attendance during childbirth. They also die because they are unable to ensure their reproductive health and autonomy; they die because they have minimal control of the frequency and timing of their pregnancies; they die because they have limited access to effective family planning; they die because the desperate choices they make render them vulnerable to unsafe, illegal abortions; they die because their childhood is a struggle to survive rather than a time of growth and development; they die because they are physically and sexually abused by their families and

intimate partners; they die because culture and tradition compromise their well-being; they die because they are trafficked as commodities in the sex trade.

My historically conscious analysis of maternal mortality has revealed the systemic injustices germane to being female, pregnant and economically marginalized; it has provided the following critical data for theological reflection.

First, maternal mortality is not simply an unfortunate life event: it is an injustice that is preventable if women are not the poorest of the poor, and if their social, cultural and political status is other than marginal.

Second, women die in pregnancy because of a lifetime's accumulation of social, cultural and economic inequity. Their ongoing deaths suggest that the recalcitrant nature of maternal mortality is due as much to moral indifference, the systemic devaluation of women's lives, and the economic marginalization of women, as to any of the biological rigours of pregnancy and childbirth.

Third, behind both the structural jeopardies and the "traffic" of women's lives are the concrete sufferings and painful deaths of real women and girls: each maternal death is a tragic and untimely loss of life.

Fourth, maternal death is not an isolated tragedy: it portends severe consequences for all newborns who also are at great risk of dying, along with any other dependent children.

Fifth, the welfare of families (especially those headed by women), communities and nations is compromised severely by maternal death. Clearly, the demise of women curtails many essential, life-maintaining activities, such as the basic needs for all dependants, household income, volunteer and unpaid work, subsistence farming, agricultural trade production, and the care of the sick and aged. Furthermore, it is a bitter irony that women's value is only recognized in the void that follows their demise. What needs to be recognized globally is the fact that against

all odds, women strive to secure not only their own well-being, but that of their dependants, their communities and their nations.

I conclude this chapter with the words of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African feminist liberation theologian, who speaks to the value of women and mothers and the essential contributions they make in their everyday lives. Her words also help us to see and judge the injustice of maternal mortality:

Mothering is what a good socio-political and economic system should be about if the human beings entrusted to the state are to be fully human, nurtured to care for, and take care of themselves, one another, and of their environments. States and other institutions have not found a way of mothering the human community. Only women and biological mothers continue to see this mothering as a sacred duty. Being poor, women make their communities rich, they guarantee survival.....against all odds.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>314</sup>See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Motherhood and Poverty," *Concilium: Religion in the Eighties* 206 (December 1989): 24-28.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Maternal Mortality: Global Economics and the Well-being of Women**

#### **2 Introduction**

My research in Chapter 1 concluded that maternal mortality is an economic injustice resulting from the convergence of women's poverty, multiple jeopardies and the "traffic" of their everyday lives. In this chapter, I continue to develop the "see-judge" dimension of the hermeneutical circle. I offer further evidence that maternal mortality is an issue of economic justice for women. I demonstrate that women's marginal economic status is reflected in, and is reinforced by, the minimal value placed on their well-being within global and national economic policies. My point is that the general lack of awareness and commitment to women's well-being are a function of women's economic invisibility. My goal is to highlight the lethal maternal consequences this invisibility portends.

There are three parts to this chapter's goal. First, I situate maternal mortality within the structural jeopardy of inadequate health care. Second, I explore the impact of two global economic policies on the health and well-being of pregnant women. In so doing, I provide concrete reasons why women are denied access to the essential health care they require during pregnancy. The two economic policies are the global funding commitments for reproductive health and the economic reforms established by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Third, to ensure my insights into maternal mortality are consistent with a gender-sensitive, yet informed, economic analysis, I look to the discourse of feminist economics. I ascertain the methodological base points and the central themes of feminist economics. I also begin to signal the theological relevance of feminist economics for a historically conscious feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality.



## 2.1. Women's Poverty, Inadequate Health Care and Maternal Mortality: Intersecting Jeopardies

My research has clarified the critical links between adequate, accessible health care and the well-being of pregnant women.<sup>1</sup> As any woman, rich or poor, healthy or unwell, can develop life-threatening pregnancy complications quite suddenly,<sup>2</sup> skilled obstetrical care over a short, but specific, time period (i.e., several hours before, during and after childbirth) is critical to any mother's survival.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that maternal complications are often unpredictable<sup>4</sup> but treatable, and that the care of skilled birth attendants can prevent most pregnancy-related deaths.<sup>5</sup> That is, most women who receive adequate obstetrical care survive pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>6</sup> In addition, health care for pregnant women allows for the screening of women who may be at risk for pregnancy complications, many of which are treatable if detected early, but life

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<sup>1</sup>By adequate, accessible health care, I refer to institutional facilities for deliveries, and/or outreach domiciliary midwifery services by well-trained individuals, and an infrastructure of essential drugs, supplies and a functional health system. Initiatives, such as training birth attendants and antenatal screening, have not always reduced maternal death and disability. See Zoë Matthews, "Maternal Mortality and Poverty," *Department for International Development: Resource Centre for Sexual and Reproductive Health* (London: DFID, 2002), 4.

<sup>2</sup>Even a healthy woman can die from postpartum bleeding, the main cause of maternal death, in less than two hours if unattended. Sepsis and unsafe abortion are the second and third most frequent causes of maternal death. See WHO, "Facts and Figures from the World Health Report 2005," [online report] (2005 [cited 10 May 2005]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.who.int/whr/en>

<sup>3</sup>Starrs, *The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda*, 1; Women often die in pregnancy from preventable or treatable causes that are detectable by simple, low-cost measures. For stories of tragic, preventable maternal deaths, see Froese, *Where Have All the Mothers Gone?*; Rosalind Powell, "I Saw Dead Babies for the First Time," *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2005, 5.

<sup>4</sup>Starrs, *The Safe Motherhood Action Agenda*, i-iii; Yamin, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 567. Yamin states that high-risk women can deliver without incident, while low-risk women can develop problems suddenly. Obstetrical complications are not necessarily predictable, but they are treatable. See Jeffrey M. Smith et al., "Conceiving and Dying in Afghanistan," *The Lancet* 365, no. 9462 (5-11 March 2005): 827-828.

<sup>5</sup>Matthews, "Maternal Mortality and Poverty," iv, v, 1-8, 16-41. Between 11 to 17 percent of maternal deaths occur during childbirth; 50 to 71 percent occur in the postpartum period; almost half occur in the first day after childbirth and more than 66 percent in the first week. See "Facts and Figures from the World Health Report 2005."

<sup>6</sup>See Yamin, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 572.

threatening if they are ignored.<sup>7</sup> For example, sexually transmitted infection can cause potentially lethal ectopic (i.e., extra-uterine) pregnancy, or severe puerperal infection; untreated hypertensive disorders can lead to fatal convulsions; chronic anaemia can weaken a mother's ability to physically cope with any degree of blood loss and infection.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, health care for pregnant women is one of the most cost-effective of all interventions. Declines in maternal deaths are linked directly to the proliferation of community-based health care centres, improved midwifery services and women's access to family planning.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the cost-effectiveness of maternal health care intervention is evident even within the context of refugee camps, where access to obstetrical care has been shown to substantially decrease maternal death and disability rates, even in comparison with both host and home countries.<sup>10</sup> Historical evidence also supports the importance of maternal health care. For example, in the early 1950s, Egypt had only 216 maternity and infant health care centres. A decade later, there were 1,743 centres, and maternal

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<sup>7</sup>The benefits of antenatal care in preventing maternal death are questioned by some, who advocate that limited funds should be directed to emergency obstetrical care. Others link the availability of antenatal services to reductions in maternal morbidity and mortality. See Shakulipa Namakando, "The Determinants of Maternity Service Utilisation in Peri-urban Communities," 38-54.

<sup>8</sup>Yamin, "Maternal Mortality as a Human Rights Issue," 563-607.

<sup>9</sup>See AbouZahr, "Maternal Mortality Overview," 152.

<sup>10</sup>In comparison with host and home countries, health care for pregnant women in refugee camps reduced morbidity and mortality. See Michelle Hynes et al., "Reproductive Health Indicators and Outcomes among Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons in Post-emergency Phase Camps," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 288, no. 5 (2002): 595-603; Judith O'Heir, "Literature Review: Inter-agency Global Evaluation of Reproductive Health Services for Refugees and Internally Displaced People," *UNHCR* (1999): 17-44.

mortality had declined by 50 percent.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Egypt's advances in maternal care have been reversed due to recent economic austerity measures and the attendant health care cutbacks.<sup>12</sup>

Research linking skilled health care and reductions in maternal deaths is conclusive: health care for pregnant women is a medical, social and moral imperative that makes good economic sense. However, despite this awareness, UNICEF describes the current level of unmet health care needs of pregnant women as "shocking." This is because only 53 percent of Majority World women deliver their babies with skilled assistance,<sup>13</sup> and only 40 percent deliver in a health care facility.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, worldwide, more than 60 million women deliver their babies every year without any skilled care.<sup>15</sup> Recently, the World Health Report 2005, *Make Every Mother and Child Count*, indicated that in a study of 2.7 million deliveries in seven Majority World countries, only 32 percent of women who required life-saving intervention received any skilled health care.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>See Mervat F. Hatem, "Privatisation and the Demise of State Feminism in Egypt," in *Mortgaging Women's Lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment*, ed. Pamela Sparr (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994), 46-47.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. Some reasons for the reversal of advances for pregnant women in Egypt include the following: economic cutbacks in public health spending; decreased availability of health care; the importation of unsafe banned contraceptives, such as Depo-Provera; the privatization and management of health services by conservative Islamic entrepreneurs with rigid attitudes towards women's sexuality, dress, contraception use and formal work.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>14</sup>In the last decade in sub-Saharan Africa, an area of high maternal death, skilled attendance during childbirth is declining, suggesting further deterioration in the fragile health care system. See Chris Simms et al., *The Bitterest Pill of All: The Collapse of Africa's Health Systems* (London: SC UK, 2001), 1-27.

<sup>15</sup>See Anne Tinker et al., "A Continuum of Care to Save Newborn Lives," *The Lancet* 365, no. 9462 (5-11 March 2005): 822-825.

<sup>16</sup>See "Facts and Figures from the World Health Report 2005." These figures are in stark contrast to a country like Canada, where a 2005 report indicated that 97 percent of mothers receive prenatal care and virtually 100 percent have skilled attendance during childbirth. See McCourt, "Make Every Woman and Child Count," 5.

I have indicated that the lack of adequate, accessible and affordable health care is a structural jeopardy that predominantly endangers the health and well-being of economically marginalized pregnant women. Along with women's poverty, I have identified other factors that make it less likely for pregnant women to receive adequate care. To recap, these factors include the limited availability of medical expertise, inadequate organizational infrastructures, the social and financial burden of chronic disease, ecological and geographical constraints, national and civic unrest, gender-biased cultural traditions, and a patriarchal mind set that reduces maternal death to an inevitable risk of women's reproductive lives. In addition, the failure of good governance and the misuse of limited funds by corrupt officials are further obstacles to the goal of adequate health care for pregnant women.<sup>17</sup>

All these factors can, and do, impede the provision of adequate maternity services. However, a fundamental reason why many impoverished women lack the health care they require during pregnancy is linked to the economic dependency status of the Majority World nations they inhabit, and their attendant marginal socio-economic position *vis-à-vis* the global economy. This is not to deny that the global economic structures of free markets, liberalized trade, and international aid have improved the lives of many people.<sup>18</sup> My point is that these same structures have rarely promoted the health and well-being of the world's poorest people. This is because the poorest majority of the global population (i.e., women) often lack both the political influence and

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<sup>17</sup>The scale of political corruption is an international problem to which no country is immune. For example, in March 2005, the Canadian Liberal government was embroiled in a sponsorship scandal over the misuse of millions of Canadian taxpayers' dollars. The international advocacy group *Transparency International* and the London-based lobby group *Global Witness* estimate that over the past two decades, repressive regimes in Indonesia, the Philippines and Zaire have stolen \$50 billion in funds meant to assist the poor. My point is that whatever the locale, when corruption occurs, it is the poorest people who suffer and against whom the most egregious offences and deprivation of vital public resources occur. See Charlotte Denny, "Suharto Comes Top of Corruption Table," *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2004, 3; Denny, "Oil Firms Financing Crooked Regimes," *The Guardian Weekly*, 1-7 April 2004, 23.

<sup>18</sup>See Robert Heilbroner, *Twenty-First Century Capitalism* (Concorde, Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1992), 1-39.

any equitable relation with these global economic structures. Consequently, poor women are disenfranchised further by global economic policies and strategies. Hence, while it is undeniable that global economic structures have stimulated some economic development in low-income countries, in general, social inequality between and within many people in these nations, particularly the poorest, has accelerated.<sup>19</sup> On critical reflection, this accelerating inequality is not surprising, given that monetary benefits donated by affluent nations amount to billions of dollars less than the annual repayments of capital and interest donor countries receive *from the indebted countries they allegedly are supporting*.<sup>20</sup> In these unbalanced global economic arrangements, the progress of “receiving” countries is highly unlikely,<sup>21</sup> as is any adequate provision for the most economically vulnerable people within these nations.<sup>22</sup> The global reality is that many highly indebted countries have experienced declines in public services subsequent to adhering to the dictates of conventional economic recipes for progress and development. Consequently, their poverty has accelerated massively.<sup>23</sup> The words of the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, provide an accurate picture of the implications of global economic strategies on the lives of the poorest people within many highly indebted nations of our world:

Throughout much of the developing world, globalization is seen, not as a term describing objective reality, but as an ideology of predatory capitalism. Whatever reality there is in this view, the

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<sup>19</sup>See Cornia, “Inequality and Poverty in the Era of Liberalization and Globalization,” 42; Simms, “The Bitterest Pill of All,” 1-27.

<sup>20</sup>For example, in the world’s poorest region, sub-Saharan Africa, debt payments amount to US\$10 billion, while the total cost for education and health amounts to four times less than this amount. See Susan F. Murray, “The Costs of ‘Adjustment’: User Charges for Maternity Care,” in *International Perspectives on Midwifery*, 55-64.

<sup>21</sup>Joan French, “Hitting Where it Hurts Most: Jamaican Women’s Livelihoods in Crisis,” in *Mortgaging Women’s Lives*, 165-182.

<sup>22</sup> Simms, *The Collapse of Africa’s Health System*, 1-27.

<sup>23</sup>van den Anker, “Contemporary Slavery, Global Justice and Globalization,” 22-36.

perception of a siege is unmistakable. Millions of people are suffering; savings have been decimated; decades of hard-won progress in the fight against poverty are imperiled.<sup>24</sup>

This global economic climate is not without consequence for women. Two concrete and inextricably linked consequences are that the status of economically marginalized women, the poorest of the poor, is worsening, and that maternal mortality rates have failed to decline. In fact, in many of the poorest countries, the number of maternal deaths is increasing. Moreover, studies are beginning to explore the complexly gendered implications of international trade.<sup>25</sup> these studies indicate that an indebted nation's trade dependency is linked to impeding declines in women's fertility and to compromising women's access to education, reproductive well-being and availability of health care, all of which are causal dynamics in maternal mortality.<sup>26</sup> In this light, the recalcitrant nature of maternal mortality can be interpreted as a concrete example of how current economic modernization policies and strategies have failed the poorest women of our global community. In order to illumine these deleterious dynamics further, I focus on two specific global economic strategies from the perspectives of economically marginalized pregnant women. These strategies are the global funding of reproductive health, and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs, now termed Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

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<sup>24</sup>Kofi Annan, cited in Brubaker, *Globalization at What Price?* 15.

<sup>25</sup>The complex interconnections between trade and gender are not confined to the Majority World. For example, in a study conducted on industrialized OECD countries between 1987 and 1995, trade liberalization policies reduced women's manufacturing jobs far greater than any effects they had on male employment. See David Kucera and William Millberg, "Gender Segregation and Gender Bias in Manufacturing Trade Expansion: Revisiting the "Wood Asymmetry," *World Development* 28, no. 7 (2000): 1191-1210.

<sup>26</sup>See Williamson, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency," 206; C. D. Miller, "Trade Dependency and Maternal Mortality," *Humbolt Journal of Social Relations* 18 (1992): 147-161; J. C. Caldwell, "Cultural and Social Factors Influencing Mortality Levels in Developing Countries," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 510 (1990): 44-59.

## 2.2 Global Funding for Women's Reproductive Health

The immense toll reproductive health problems exact on the world's poorest people, especially poor women and their dependants, is not matched by the necessary global commitment to reproductive health funding. Almost two decades ago, the World Bank calculated that at an additional cost of US\$2 per woman, maternal mortality could be halved within a decade.<sup>27</sup> The World Bank's calculation was reiterated a decade later at the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).<sup>28</sup> The ICPD estimated that the necessary programs for reproductive health would cost about US\$18.5 billion by 2005; the international community agreed that one-third of the necessary funds would be provided by wealthier donor countries, while the remaining funds would be procured from the individual countries involved.<sup>29</sup> There were 180 nations who endorsed the 1994 ICPD plan, the importance of which was not only financial.<sup>30</sup> It also signaled an important shift in thinking, from an initial narrow focus on family planning and population control to a broader interpretation of the social, moral and ethical rights of women to reproductive health and well-being.<sup>31</sup> However, to date, monetary commitments

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<sup>27</sup>See Williamson, "Maternal Mortality, Women's Status and Economic Dependency," 211.

<sup>28</sup>At the 1994 Cairo Conference, reproductive health was defined as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system." It also was agreed that reproductive and sexual health are universally recognized rights that take into account issues of equity, dignity and responsibility in relations. These agreements were reinforced at subsequent international fora, such as the 1995 World Summit for Social Development Conference in Copenhagen, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and ICPD + 5. See Population Reference Bureau, "New Population Policies: Advancing Women's Health and Rights," *Population Bulletin* 56, no. 1 (March 2001): 5-7.

<sup>29</sup>See "Reproductive Health: Ten Years' Hard Labour," *The Economist* (September 2004): 74-76.

<sup>30</sup>See Conly, *Paying their Fair Share?*, iii.

<sup>31</sup>"Reproductive Health: Ten Years' Hard Labour," 74; "New Population Policies," 1-6; Susan A. Cohen, "The Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health," *The Alan Guttmacher Institute* [online article] (2005 [cited 5 January 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/ib2004no.4.html>

from the international community have not been honoured.<sup>32</sup> In fact, funding from many donor countries has declined;<sup>33</sup> there is neither public awareness nor moral indignation around the negative implications of this funding failure.<sup>34</sup> Even economic self-interest is lacking, in the shape of long-term benefits of a more politically and socially equitable world, together with improved prosperity for the entire global community.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, within this unsupportive international atmosphere, many low-income countries have failed to meet their monetary commitments for reproductive health.<sup>36</sup> Finally, out of the limited funding available, only about 5 to 11 percent of total donor contributions to the health sector of countries in the Majority World is directed at maternal health services.<sup>37</sup> Some sources fear the re-framing of a demographic “population crisis” into the broader context of “women’s reproductive health needs” is at the root

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<sup>32</sup>Estimates are that approximately one-third of the money pledged has been provided. Only Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway have honoured the pledges they made at Cairo; Sweden is close to meeting its pledges, while the US, Japan, Germany and the UK are far from meeting their pledges, as is Canada. See Population Reference Bureau, “New Population Policies,” 30-31; Pramilla Senanayake and Susanne Hamm, “Sexual and Reproductive Health Funding: Donors and Restrictions,” *The Lancet* 363 (3 January 2004): 70; Conly, *Paying their Fair Share?*, iv-vi; Lewis, “Context: It Shames and Diminishes Us All,” in *Race Against Time*, 1-36.

<sup>33</sup>Conly, *Paying their Fair Share?*, 12.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>35</sup>This economic self-interest has been proven historically. For example, the Marshall Plan initially restored Europe to economic health after World War II by expanding trade and economic opportunities for many nations. However, this Plan is critiqued as the beginning of the economic structure that initiated the flow of capital and resources from the global South to the global North.

<sup>36</sup>The failure in pledge commitments of donor countries is not limited to the area of reproductive health. Donor countries worldwide have not met the agreed pledge of 0.7 percent of their gross national product (GNP) for development assistance; the current developed world average commitment is 0.25 percent of GNP. See J.D. Sachs and J.W. McArthur, “The Millennium Project: A Plan for Meeting the Millennium Development Goals,” *The Lancet* 365, no. 9456 (22-28 January 2005): 347-353.

<sup>37</sup>Wendy J. Graham, “Now or Never: The Case for Measuring Maternal Mortality,” *The Lancet* 359 (23 February 2002): 701-704. It is noteworthy that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donated the single largest amount for maternal health, an amount greater than the WHO’s entire Making Pregnancy Safer Initiative.



of both the failed global interest and the limited funding.<sup>38</sup> Clearly, the ongoing deaths of women in pregnancy is not a consistent global concern. For example, at a recent G8 economic summit meeting, maternal mortality was given minimal attention, even though the greatest toll of death and disability worldwide is due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>39</sup>

The failure of the international community to honour its financial commitments to reproductive health services is not without consequence: it reduces the availability of skilled care for many economically marginalized pregnant women, particularly those living in the Majority World. For example, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that for every shortfall of US\$1 million in investments in women's reproductive health, there are 360,000 unwanted pregnancies, approximately 150,000 induced abortions, and at least 800 maternal deaths.<sup>40</sup> Further compromising a failing global interest in women's reproductive health needs are the political and ideological restrictions which some donor countries attach to their financial aid. That is, reproductive health increasingly is engulfed in a global controversy stemming from clashing positions regarding the position and status of women, and issues of human sexuality, religion and politics. A clear example of this is the Mexico City Policy, referred to by its critics as the "Global Gag Rule": an American policy decision that restricts family planning activities in foreign countries, specifically in relation to family planning counseling or abortion services.<sup>41</sup> While the United States has always been a significant financial donor in the area of global

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<sup>38</sup>The source is Steve Sinding, the head of IPPF. See "Reproductive Health: Ten Years' Hard Labour," 75.

<sup>39</sup>The G8 summit was in Kananaskis, Alberta in 2002; see Graham, "Now or Never," 701-704.

<sup>40</sup>Senanayake, "Sexual and Reproductive Health Funding," 70.

<sup>41</sup>At the 1984 World Population Conference in Mexico City, the American government announced restrictions on funding for reproductive health. Implemented first by the former president Ronald Reagan, this policy was re-introduced by President George Bush in 2001. See "Reproductive Health: Ten Years' Hard Labour," 75-76; "New Population Policies," 4.

reproductive health,<sup>42</sup> the present administration's conservative views regarding women's reproductive health, particularly pertaining to contraception, condom use and abortion, have led to significant losses in essential maternal health services.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the drop in American funding occurs even though most organizations working in the area of women's reproductive health leave abortion policies to the discretion of individual countries.<sup>44</sup> For example, UNFPA does not advocate abortion as a family planning method, but it does advocate improved access to family planning as an effective method of decreasing the prevalence of abortion.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, as a consequence of the Mexico City Policy, organizations must adhere to the American agenda or forfeit their donor funding, even if abortion services are funded by other sources.<sup>46</sup>

Some critics point out how ironic (if not hypocritical) it is that the United States lacks a domestic anti-abortion policy,<sup>47</sup> but still exports a coercive anti-abortion policy to Majority

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<sup>42</sup>The United States is the largest source of development funds. However, it ranks last among donor countries in terms of percentage of GNP spent on development; it is also lagging far behind in aid commitments. See "New Population Policies," 30-31; Conly, *Paying their Fair Share?*, 12.

<sup>43</sup>Before 1996, the United States administration increased support for family planning; after 1996, the newly elected Republican administration cut family planning assistance by 35 percent. In the 2000 budget, the "Global Gag Rule" was enacted. See Population Reference Bureau, "New Population Policies," 31-32.

<sup>44</sup>"Reproductive Health: Ten Years Later," 75.

<sup>45</sup>The Cairo conference consensus documents make it clear that "in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning." See United Nations, "Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development," in *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development* (Cairo, 5-13 September 1994): para. 8.25 [online article] (1994 [cited 9 February 2002]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/reports&doc/icpdpoae.html>

<sup>46</sup>The politically charged nature of funding for reproductive health has also limited funding from Australia. See Conly, *Paying their Fair Share?*, 7.

<sup>47</sup>The 2004 Washington March for Women's Lives was the largest global march for reproductive rights; it is in stark contrast to the restrictive agenda the current American administration exports to poor countries. The infringement on the freedom of speech embodied by the Mexico City Policy would be considered unconstitutional in the United States. See *International Women's Health Coalition Annual Report 2000*, 3 [online report] (2000 [cited 28 April 2005]); available on World Wide Web @ <http://www.iwhc.org/docUploads/2000annualreport.pdf>

World nations, where pregnant women are the most vulnerable to abortion-related maternal disabilities and death.<sup>48</sup> They also underline that this policy is counterproductive, since it undermines family planning projects, arguably one of the most effective ways of curbing abortion prevalence.<sup>49</sup> In addition, they signal the negative impacts this policy has with respect to national sovereignty, the progress of democracy, freedom of speech, and the sanctity of the doctor-patient relationship.<sup>50</sup>

Critics also calculate the financial penalties inflicted on grassroots health-related organizations who refuse to comply with this American neo-colonial tactic, such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). The IPPF immediately lost US\$12 million in funding, and they expect to lose another US\$75 million in funding pledged over the next several years.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, UNFPA, an organization that provides multiple reproductive health services to women in more than 140 countries, lost US\$34 million of its funding for 2002.<sup>52</sup> Hence, UNFPA's local associations, such as the Family Planning Association of Kenya, lost a considerable part of its reproductive health funding, which meant the loss of health care services to approximately 56,000 women.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>I have indicated previously that unsafe, illegal abortion in Africa carries as much as 700 times greater risk for maternal disability and death than legal, safe abortion in the Minority World.

<sup>49</sup>The link between reducing abortion and availability of family planning is well-founded. See Susan A. Cohen, "Global Gag Rule: Exporting Anti-abortion Ideology at the Expense of American Values," *The Alan Guttmacher Institute* [online article] (2001 [cited 5 January 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/tgr/04/3/gr040301.html>

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Senanayake, 70.

<sup>52</sup>See Rebecca Wind, "Top 10 Ways Sexual and Reproductive Health Suffered in 2004," *Guttmacher Institute* [online article] (December 2004 [cited 5 January 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.agi-usa.org/media/nr/2004/12/20/>

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 70.

For many African countries, such as Kenya, the funding cuts to reproductive health care are devastating. As Kenya presently struggles both to reduce its high birth rate and to control its HIV/AIDS pandemic, acute shortages of reproductive health care facilities, family planning counseling and available contraception could not have come at a worse time. Not only is maternal mortality significantly increasing in this African nation, but Kenya is also experiencing an epidemic of illegal, and often lethal, abortions. Each year an estimated 300,000 abortions take place in Kenya, leading to the deaths of 5,000 Kenyan women.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, in 2003, Kenya's total fertility rate increased for the first time since 1977: an alarming demographic statistic in view of the fact that the largest cohort of young people the world has ever known currently is reaching reproductive age.<sup>55</sup> That is, presently, there are 3 billion young men and women under the age of 25 in our global community, 85 percent of whom live in the Majority World, with the poorest countries having the greatest numbers.<sup>56</sup> The right to reproductive health and well-being of this burgeoning group of young people will require much greater international attention, political commitment, activism and monetary support than is presently offered by the global community.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, there is an urgent need for fundamental shifts in attitudes concerning the crucial importance of reproductive health for all persons, particularly young women. However, the outlook is not encouraging. Even though the amount of money that would ensure reproductive

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<sup>54</sup>See Shelley Page, "Saving Africa's Mothers: West Can Prevent Cause of Death," *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 October 2004, A1, A7.

<sup>55</sup>Presently, there are 1.3 billion teenagers in our world, and many are sexually active. See Shelley Page, "Special Report: Safe No More, Canada to Help Fill the Gap," *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 October 2004, A1, A10.

<sup>56</sup>See "State of the World Population 2005," UNFPA.

<sup>57</sup>See comment from PLAN, an international non-governmental organization working with children in the Majority World on adolescent sexual health; Sophie Gbesso et al., "Adolescent Sexual Health? Let Us Get Real!" *The Lancet* 367, no. 9518 (15-21 April 2006): 1221-1222.

health for all would cost wealthy countries only US\$0.10 per person per week, the global community appears unable and unwilling to afford this human investment.<sup>58</sup> Undoubtedly, a crippling global military budget that exceeds US\$1 trillion is at the root of this funding failure.<sup>59</sup>

At this point, I want to reiterate that women are not passive victims when confronted with the jeopardies of inadequate health care during pregnancy, failed international funding, neo-colonial and patriarchal politics, and the gender bias of their everyday lives.<sup>60</sup> Many women narrowly avoid the intersectional injury of maternal death by navigating these intersecting oppressions with resilience, courage and ingenuity. For example, a recent article in a Canadian national paper testifies to the agency of women in the face of limited options. The article described how an economically marginalized Mexican woman, living in a rural area without electricity and running water, was unable to access medical help when she experienced complications during labour. Transportation was impossible, since the health clinic was located an eight-hour distance from her home. In desperation, she self-performed a caesarean section, delivering a healthy baby before an older child managed to return with the local nurse.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>58</sup>Conly, *Paying their Fair Share?* 37.

<sup>59</sup>In contrast to the global military budget which increased by about 11 percent in real terms in 2003, the international community spent only US\$69 billion on aid and development. See "State of the World Population 2005," UNFPA; Anup Shah, "Arms Trade: A Major Cause of Suffering," [online article] (2005 [cited 15 January 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/Armstrade/Spending.asp>

<sup>60</sup>Kenya provides an inspiring example of the creative resilience of women in the face of incredible challenges in the person of Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel peace prize winner. In 1977, Maathai encouraged ordinary women and disabled people to form a green belt movement. Since then, they have planted 30 million trees in 20 countries. This collective action celebrates the hope and power of many women and their willingness to work for an inclusive common good. See John Vidal, "Nobel Peace Prize for Woman of 30m Trees: Kenyan is First Female African to Win the Award," *The Guardian Weekly*, 15-24 October 2004, 9.

<sup>61</sup>See "Mother Does C-section on Herself; Baby is Fine," *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 April 2004, A20; "Mother and Child are Doing Fine," *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 April 2004, A16. The challenge of surviving childbirth for many poor women in the world also is captured by a poster by Marie Stopes International. It depicts a very young child standing near a pregnant woman who is crouched on a mud floor. The poster reads, "YOU THOUGHT POLICEMEN WERE GETTING YOUNGER THESE DAYS, LOOK AT THE

article praised the woman's courage and her resourcefulness in saving her newborn, describing these attributes as "extraordinary." However, what this article also should make clear is the systemic injustice inherent in the lack of adequate health care for all pregnant women, and the fact that the "extraordinary" courage of this woman is an ordinary attribute of countless other women.<sup>62</sup>

### **2.3 Structural Adjustment Policies /Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers**

I now focus on a set of global economic reforms that have been endorsed by the world's major international financial institutions for the purposes of alleviating poverty in heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). As I have indicated, these are the nations with the highest rates of maternal death worldwide. At the outset, it is important to note that these global economic reforms are complex and evolving, a full exploration of which is beyond the scope of my dissertation. In addition, I do not underestimate the fact that poverty reduction is a contentious, complex and perplexing issue, fraught with fierce debate over divergent approaches. Neither do I dismiss the fact that from a market-oriented perspective, global economic reforms have translated into improved conventional national economic indicators, such as greater foreign investments, increased exports, improved growth rates and lower inflation rates.<sup>63</sup> However, the critique I offer is that these global economic reforms have failed to advance the well-being of the most impoverished in our world.<sup>64</sup> In particular, the deleterious impacts these reforms have on poor

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*MIDWIVES.*" The poster goes on to explain that in 2004, 94 percent of Ethiopian women gave birth without any skilled care and often in unsanitary conditions. See Marie Stopes International, London, UK [online information] (2004 [cited 4 July 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.sexpositions@mariestopes.org.uk>

<sup>62</sup>For more stories of women's courage and resilience during pregnancy and childbirth, see Froese, *Where Have All the Mothers Gone?*

<sup>63</sup>Benería, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 54.

<sup>64</sup>Marcus, "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers," 1121-1124.

women are onerous, yet rarely noted.<sup>65</sup> Thus, after introducing these reforms, I examine the hidden costs for economically marginalized women.

For more than two decades, the IMF and the World Bank have supported economic strategies and policy initiatives for many HIPCs. These strategies and initiatives are designed to reshape developing economies more along the lines of free market capitalism. They are also a means by which countries in financial need can access donor funding for poverty reduction, increase their economic growth and development, and avoid defaulting on loan repayments. Initially, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were introduced.<sup>66</sup> However, these reforms were critiqued for exacerbating poverty and inequality in many of the HIPCs they were intended to assist.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, in 1999, in response to widespread dissatisfaction, the IMF and the World Bank re-designed their approaches to poverty reduction, introducing economic initiatives called Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).

In comparison with the SAPs, the PRSPs are more focused on reducing poverty. They also are designed to be more collaborative in nature, and they involve the joint efforts of

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<sup>65</sup>The gender blindness in economic policies increasingly is being challenged. See "Ignoring the Experts: Poor People's Exclusion from Poverty Reduction," *Christian Aid* (London: Christian Aid, 2001); "The Gender Dimensions of Poverty Reduction Strategy of Ethiopia," *The Donors Group for the Advancement of Women (GAW)* (July 2001); Khadija Haq, "Reinventing Poverty," *DAWN* [online article] (2000 [cited 14 March 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [www.dawn.com/events/century/eco11.htm](http://www.dawn.com/events/century/eco11.htm); "Structural Adjustment Programs," *The Halifax Initiative* [online background paper] (2004 [cited 18 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [www.web.net/rain/sap.htm](http://www.web.net/rain/sap.htm); Ayesha Imam, "SAP is Really Sapping Us," *New Internationalist* 257 [online article] (July 1994 [cited 23 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.newint.org/issue257/sap.htm>

<sup>66</sup>Structural adjustment programs are a global phenomenon and affect countries in both the Majority and Minority Worlds. For example, within the Canadian context, economic restructuring has ushered in deregulation, trade liberalization, foreign ownership, cutbacks to health care and public services, increasing unemployment, inequality and poverty. See Maude Barlow, "The Canada We Want: A Citizen's Alternative to Deep Integration," *The Council of Canadians* (2004): 1-26; Marilyn J. Legge, "Negotiating Mission: A Canadian Stance," *International Review of Mission, World Council of Churches* 93, no. 368 (January 2004): 119-130.

<sup>67</sup>See Simms, *The Bitterest Pill of All*, 3-8, for an estimate of the negative impact of expenditure cuts during the 1980s in many HIPCs.

governments, civil society, donors and creditors. Globally, it is estimated that at least one and a half billion people are affected by the PRSPs, the majority of whom are the world's most socially and economically disenfranchised people.<sup>68</sup> Hence, the PRSPs are of great potential significance to the poor. This is not only because their main focus is poverty reduction, but also because the participation of economically vulnerable people in policy formation and decision making is theoretically part of the spirit of these economic reforms.<sup>69</sup> That is, the PRSPs are linked to pro-poor outcomes, as both participatory consultations between national governments and a wide range of civil society, and transparency with respect to public expenditure, resources, accounting and funding are mandated.<sup>70</sup> The PRSPs are also context-specific: for any country to access a loan, a PRSP is required, detailing how funds received will be directed towards particular poverty-reduction strategies.

The PRSP's explicit orientation to the poor initially generated much optimism. However, increasingly there are concerns regarding the drafting, design and implementation of these economic reforms. For example, there is criticism that while PRSPs were meant to transform and replace the inadequate SAPs, real change in the economic strategies and agendas of many indebted countries has not occurred.<sup>71</sup> In fact, there is speculation that structural adjustment

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<sup>68</sup>See "Ignoring the Experts: Poor People's Exclusion from Poverty Reduction Strategies," *Christian Aid* London, UK [online article] (2001 [cited 19 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/0110prsp/prsp.htm>

<sup>69</sup>Many critics feel that the degree of empowerment and participation of economically disadvantaged groups in PRSPs is questionable. See Rachel Marcus et al., "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: Fulfilling Their Potential for Children in Poverty?" *Journal of International Development* 14 (2002): 1117-1128.

<sup>70</sup>See Ann Whitehead, "Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty: Gender in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers," *Christian Aid: Report for the UK Gender and Development Network* (May 2003), 11.

<sup>71</sup>See Nancy Alexander and Charles Abugre, "PRSP: Whitewashing Blackmail," *Economic Justice News* 3 no. 2 [online report] (August 2000 [cited 7 April 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.50years.org/ejn/v3n2/prsp.html>



measures are sometimes legitimized by PRSPs.<sup>72</sup> There also is considerable criticism regarding the degree of freedom and flexibility national governments actually have to design their country's strategic responses to poverty.<sup>73</sup> This criticism stems from the fact that many HIPC's often are required to follow previously devised economic initiatives as a condition for receiving monetary loans.<sup>74</sup> That is, many PRSPs appear to have pre-designed economic policies that adhere rigidly to neo-liberal frameworks. Thus, despite the reality of diverse contexts, unique poverty-related causal dynamics of HIPC's, and the complex, heterogeneity of the poor, the PRSPs appear uniform in nature and are largely continuous with the established structural reforms and liberalization agendas that have been in place for several decades.<sup>75</sup>

Other criticisms are directed at the participatory nature of PRSPs. Critics maintain that PRSPs' participatory process is little more than empty rhetoric, and that the actual participation of civil society remains superficial. They also claim that the design and implementation of PRSPs' policies are intensely political processes, and that the voices of poor men, and especially of poor women, have been superseded by the voices of the economically powerful within the structures of international financial institutions and national governments.<sup>76</sup> For example, critics point to the facts that PRSPs often fail to be circulated in national and local languages, and, if

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<sup>72</sup>See "Ignoring the Experts," *Christian Aid*.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 4-13.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 10-12.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 5-12. For example, in Bolivia, civil society organization has advocated radical economic changes, yet the government has pursued a rigid path of neo-liberal economic reform. (This might alter with the new government that has come to power.) In Tanzania, similar organizations have spent more than a decade campaigning for more radical solutions to the debt crisis. Many people in these countries view their PRSPs as "structural adjustment in disguise." See Emma Bell, *Gender and PRSPs: With Experiences from Tanzania, Bolivia, Vietnam and Mozambique* (Brighton: BRIDGE, 2003), 17.

translated, require sophisticated economic literacy to comprehend.<sup>77</sup> They also cite PRSPs' constrained time frames as an additional factor inhibiting participatory analyses.<sup>78</sup> Again, critics link the PRSPs' failed participatory processes to their rigid adherence to neo-liberal policies, which effectively foreclose any discussion on alternate economic models.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, civil society opposition to entrenched neo-liberal macroeconomic responses is suppressed.<sup>80</sup> Thus, a central concern is that the voices of poor people are neither heard nor integrated into the drafting of the PRSP documents and into any subsequent policy-making and implementation. The following quote provides a concrete example of the exclusionary process by which Bolivia's PRSP was shaped--a process that reportedly is not an isolated case.

A small circle of government economists undertook drafting for more than four months without including or even informing civil society organizations that had participated in the National Dialogue. Bolivian organizations tried repeatedly to pressure the government, even appealing to international agencies including the World Bank and the IMF, but to no avail.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>A concrete example of this is the case of Bolivia, where the colonial language of Spanish was used in the PRSP documents. This is not the first language of the local people, and particularly the poor women of Bolivia. See Whitehead, "Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty," 21.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 26-27. Malawi offers an example of time constraints and where the government planned a structured consultation process over a short time frame. In response to this, the Malawian Economic Justice Network was formed and campaigned for a longer time frame so as to improve the consultation process. The time frame was extended by several months, but the process generally was controlled by the government. In Tanzania, participatory consultations also were rushed. For more critiques and analyses of the participatory processes in PRSPs, see Mary J. Osirim, "The Dilemmas of Modern Development: Structural Adjustment and Women Micro-entrepreneurs in Nigeria and Zimbabwe," in *The Gendered New World Order*, 126-160.

<sup>79</sup>Marcus, "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers," 117-128; Whitehead, "Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty," 12.

<sup>80</sup>See Whitehead, "Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty," 4-5.

<sup>81</sup>See Catholic Review Services, *Review of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Initiative Based upon the Experiences of CRS Partners in Bolivia, Honduras, Zambia and Cameroon* (Baltimore: Catholic Relief Services, 2001), 10.

It is also significant that as economic reforms, PRSPs are oriented primarily toward economic growth and that a fundamental aim is to re-shape economies to promote foreign exchange. In general, this economic re-shaping takes the form of liberalizing trade, increasing exports, decreasing imports, devaluing domestic currency and privatizing public services and utilities. However, the degree to which the economies of HIPCs have been reshaped successfully remains highly questionable. Mexico provides an example of how a national economy was adversely affected by these economic reforms. That is, global trade liberalization policies did not provide Mexico with a level playing field in which it could sustain its critical corn production sector. Consequently, Mexico's agricultural economy was undermined as a flood of imports from the heavily subsidized American agri-business caused its corn production to stagnate. The price of Mexico's corn declined and small-scale Mexican farmers were increasingly impoverished. In fact, 700,000 Mexican agricultural jobs were terminated, rural poverty escalated and exceeded 70 percent, and the Mexican poor lost a significant degree of their purchasing power. Predictably, the health consequences for the Mexican poor were considerable, and maternal and child mortality rates increased.<sup>82</sup>

These negative health consequences for the Mexican poor underscore the critical and pervasive impacts PRSPs have on issues of national health and equity. Research indicates that in the HIPCs that have implemented PRSP reforms, there has been significant reductions in national government spending on social and public services, such as education, health and housing.<sup>83</sup> These reductions in public spending are legitimized as deficit-cutting priorities, and in many domains, the application of user fees for public social, educational and health care services have

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<sup>82</sup>See "Mobilising Civil Society Around an Alternative World Health Report," *Global Health Watch* [online report] (2005/2006 [cited 9 January 2006]); available from World Wide Web @ [http://www.gwatch.org/2005\\_report.php](http://www.gwatch.org/2005_report.php)

<sup>83</sup>See Mertus, *Local Action Global Change*, 145-153.

been implemented.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, in many HIPC, the deterioration of social and public infrastructures has resulted, such as the interruption of children's schooling, especially that of girls.<sup>85</sup> Urgent social and economic problems have ensued, and the PRSPs are cited as reasons for the failure of HIPC to achieve the millennium development goals.<sup>86</sup> Thus, from the perspectives of the poor within many low-income countries, PRSPs, in general, have failed to usher in any real advancements in their social and economic status.<sup>87</sup> Instead of improving the lives of the poor, PRSPs have led to a loss of control of not only local and national policies, but also of natural resources, land and traditional practices. Moreover, indebted countries also are experiencing greater environmental degradation, more widespread impoverishment, and the burden of larger debts, along with increasing inequality and social disintegration.<sup>88</sup> Thus, for the vast majority of people in many poor countries, a recurring spiral of deteriorating living standards, financial and economic instabilities and rising inequalities feed social tensions that are proving to be increasingly untenable.<sup>89</sup> However, despite clearly negative outcomes, many HIPC have little option but to follow the dictates of these policies, or risk ostracism from the global economic community.<sup>90</sup> Argentinian President Duhalde speaks to the unsettling socio-economic pattern presently shaping Latin America society:

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<sup>84</sup>Marcus, "Poverty Reduction," 1121- 1122; see also Simms, *The Bitterest Pill of All*.

<sup>85</sup>Benaría, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 54.

<sup>86</sup>See Sachs and McArthur, "The Millennium Project," 347.

<sup>87</sup>See Benaría, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, ix-xv, 50-54.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.; Osirim, "The Dilemmas," 129-134. See also *MADRE: An International Women's Human Rights Organization: Nicaragua*. In 2003, Nicaragua spent 85 percent of its tax revenue on debt payments; little money was left for public services such as utilities, health and education, which increasingly are privatized.

<sup>89</sup>Benería, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 47-53.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid. See also Lewis, *Race Against Time*, 1-36.

The dream of economic growth, peace and democracy has been shattered. In its place, there is depression, populism, and deteriorating personal security. Argentina itself has been caught in a vicious circle of repression, unemployment, falling living standards, social unrest and political paralysis.<sup>91</sup>

If the criticism that PRSPs have done little to improve the lives of the poor is valid, then the negative repercussions for poor women are profound. However, attending to the negative repercussions for poor women is not a central concern. This is because PRSP's major focus is on paid production: the sphere of unpaid economic activities, that is, women's everyday realities, including subsistence labour, domestic work, volunteer work and the sphere of reproduction, largely remains out of PRSP's selective focus. Indeed, only a few progressive national governments, civic and non-governmental organizations have begun to attend critically to issues of gender within the design and implementation of PRSPs.<sup>92</sup> In general, poverty is not analyzed as a gendered phenomenon, nor is there any awareness of gender-related asymmetry with respect to the hidden costs of adjustment.<sup>93</sup> Hence, the facts that women and men are poor for different reasons, that women's experiences of poverty are qualitatively disparate and that most of the poor in the world are women, are overlooked. Neither are gender relations advanced as a root cause of women's poverty, nor is data on human poverty desegregated by sex. Predictably, the uses of gender indicators and gender-sensitive monitoring also are extremely limited. Essentially,

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<sup>91</sup>Taken from *The Financial Times* 7/2/02, quoted in Benería, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, xii.

<sup>92</sup>See work on gender and poverty and PRSPs in Elaine Zuckerman, *A Primer on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Gender* (Gender Action, 2002); Helen Derbyshire, "Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in Oxfam's Advocacy Work on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: Stage 1," *Briefing Paper for Country Case Studies* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2001); "Contribution to the World Bank and IMF PRSP Review," *UNIFEM*, 2001.

<sup>93</sup>It is important to reiterate that gender is not reducible to women; a gendered analysis speaks as much about men's realities as it does about women's realities. See Benería, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 40, 50-51.

most governments neither consult nor hear the voices of poor women.<sup>94</sup> “Shockingly limited” is the term that has been used to describe PRSPs’ attention to the complexly gendered nature of poverty.<sup>95</sup>

### **2.3.1 PRSPs : Impacts on Economically Marginalized Women**

In light of this failure to attend to women’s economic and social realities, I now consider some concrete implications of PRSPs for economically marginalized women. I also make the links to maternal mortality.

First, PRSPs’ failure to adopt a gender perspective has worsened the lives of poor women because the disproportionate burden economic policies have on women are not addressed. For example, PRSPs’ rigid adherence to neo-liberal approaches means that any awareness of women’s unpaid work or their ubiquitous poverty within a free market capitalist economic system is absent.<sup>96</sup> This lack of awareness is demonstrated concretely by the pervasive failure of PRSPs to factor in any increases in the intensity of women’s domestic workloads as a direct result of governmental cutbacks in public service expenditures. The fact that increased work burdens for women often create untenable conditions, exacerbating their pre-existing constraints of income, livelihoods, and physical and psychological resources, is neither an economic nor a social concern. This oversight is clearly patriarchal, since women’s domestic and unpaid labour is presumed to be a free, inexhaustible and expendable resource. The operative economic presumption is that there are infinite informal resources to absorb and endure any adverse effects generated by these market-driven economic reforms.<sup>97</sup> However, in real terms,

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<sup>94</sup>See Whitehead, “Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty,” 4-5, 28-33.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>96</sup>Osirim, “The Dilemmas of Modern Development,” 126.

<sup>97</sup>Benarfa, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 50-52, 162-164.

this presumption translates into substantial increases in women's workloads, along with growing insensitivity to the decline of their well-being. Essentially, women's social, economic and health status is more precarious.<sup>98</sup>

A concrete example of the failure of PRSPs to attend adequately to the complex social and economic realities of women's lives was seen by the World Bank's response to Brazil's economic crisis in 1998. As the loss of mostly male jobs resulted from the adopted austerity measures, the World Bank recommended initiating employment programs for women. However, the World Bank neglected to consider that the same austerity measures that affected male employment also had slashed subsidies for day care, which thereby compromised women's availability for formal work.<sup>99</sup>

Second, as PRSPs' consultation processes are inadequate, women's voices and attention to their specific poverty-related concerns will be very limited.<sup>100</sup> This reality is hardly surprising, since it is unlikely that women, preoccupied with ensuring daily survival and performing most of the world's work, will have the time, energy or opportunity to engage in any consultative processes where they could advance a more multi-dimensional understanding of poverty. Moreover, not only are women's voices relatively absent, there also is no guarantee that the few women who may participate in any PRSP consultative processes are trained in gender advocacy. It is also questionable whether women's voices will be heard in a non-hostile, legitimizing environment in which patriarchal, sexist oversights can be challenged openly and constructively.

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<sup>98</sup>The increased distress and poverty for women is documented by empirical economic analyses. See Lourdes Benaría and Breny Mendoza, "Structural Adjustment and Social Emergency Funds: The Cases of Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua," *European Journal of Development Research* (Spring 1995). This paper prepared for United Nations Research Institute for Social Development's Project on Economic Restructuring and New Social Policies.

<sup>99</sup>Benaría, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 49-53.

<sup>100</sup>See Whitehead, "Failing Women, Sustaining Poverty," 14-18.

Even in situations where women's advocacy groups are relatively advanced, such as in Tanzania, progress on poverty-related gender inequities are limited since the government appears unable to respond to gender-sensitive budget initiatives.<sup>101</sup> There is also evidence that if women's voices are integrated into the drafting of PRSP proposals, they do not necessarily influence subsequent policy priorities and budgetary spending.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, the fact that women, the world's expert witnesses on poverty, are unlikely to be involved in formulating approaches and solutions to poverty stands as evidence of PRSP's radically flawed participatory model. Furthermore, it signals that women's economic marginalization will continue to be addressed inadequately.

Third, in many Majority World nations, minimal consideration is given to PRSPs' endorsement of export-oriented production and its effects on women's work within the context of a gender-segregated labour market. Zambia provides a clear example of this oversight. Following the introduction of adjustment strategies, and the increased costs of fertilizer, the production of maize (a crop requiring fertilizer and traditionally cultivated by men) was abandoned in favour of soyabean (a crop not requiring fertilizer and traditionally cultivated by women). Habitually, any profit generated from bean production was considered women's income. However, due to the abandonment of the maize production, men increasingly claimed this income and thereby reinforced the economic vulnerability of all women, and especially those who were married.<sup>103</sup>

Fourth, there is also little awareness that export-oriented production often is incompatible with what is socio-culturally deemed acceptable work for women. That is, when women's traditional work, especially in situations where women are the major agricultural

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 31-33.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>103</sup>Benaria, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 51-52; Gisela Geisler and Karen Tranberg Hansen, "Structural Adjustment, the Rural-urban Interface and Gender Relations in Zambia," in N. Aslanbeigui et al., eds., *Women in the Age of Economic Transformation* (London: Routledge, 1994), 95-112.



workers, is replaced by occupational alternatives that are gender-specific and deemed unacceptable for women, the economic vulnerability of women is intensified immensely. For example, studies in Egypt, Argentina and Sri Lanka illustrate increased gender-based wage differentials.<sup>104</sup> Hence, while PRSP policies, in theory, have increased the number of women seeking income-generating work, in reality, women's unemployment has risen in many countries.<sup>105</sup> The consequent widening of gender-based wage differentials has augmented women's social and economic vulnerability, especially those in female-headed households. Women's success as micro entrepreneurs in the informal sector also has been constrained, even though SAPs and PRSPs were expected to generate informal sector work.<sup>106</sup> This is because gender segregation also functions within the informal economic sector. As a group, women are the most involved in low-return ventures, yet they are the least likely to utilize capital, technology, education and government support.<sup>107</sup> Men are more likely than women to access these supports, and as I have indicated, whenever men are displaced from their more traditional positions in the formal sector, they encroach on women's informal enterprises. In addition, the removal of price controls and the resulting inflation decreased consumer spending and increased the commodity costs for women entrepreneurs.<sup>108</sup> For example, cutbacks in public transport and police harassment of women vendors of imported cloth, discouraged under the import bans of austerity measures, also create additional constraints for poor women.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 126. There are more *de facto* female-headed households because of male migration to urban centres in search of employment.

<sup>106</sup>See Osirim, "The Dilemmas of Modern Development," 128-134.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 132-133.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 138.

Finally, from a health perspective, rising costs of basic food and essential amenities in response to PRSP initiatives have caused pervasive and profound increases in hunger and malnutrition. These deteriorating social and health conditions are particularly deleterious for the already precarious nutritional status of many economically marginalized pregnant and nursing mothers. For example, studies of women in Brazil, Jamaica, Java, and in Amazon communities, have linked PRSPs with poorer nutritional status for women and girls.<sup>110</sup> Intensifying the effects of malnutrition are cuts in hospital services and the imposition of hospital user fees. The direct effect of these debt-reducing, “cost-saving strategies” that theoretically increase economic growth and maintain foreign exchange can be lethal for pregnant women. Such “cost saving strategies” ensure that essential obstetrical care becomes financially unattainable for many economically marginalized pregnant women: those at greatest risk for maternal mortality.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, pregnancy-related death in many low-income countries has risen, as the most vulnerable women are denied the timely maternal health care they require to survive pregnancy.<sup>112</sup> In many poor nations, the benefits of PRSPs for women, even from compensatory initiatives, remain minimal. Poor women also have experienced significant setbacks in maternal and child health services, basic education and training, childcare and the provision of credit, and a wide range of other support services.<sup>113</sup> In sum, the number of maternal deaths has increased consistently in countries that followed the SAP austerity measures,<sup>114</sup> this has not altered with the more recent implementation of PRSPs. For economically marginalized pregnant women in the

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<sup>110</sup>See Sparr, “Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment,” 13-39.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 13-39.

<sup>112</sup>See Maia, “Mourir en Donnant la Vie,” 474-475.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 33; Conclusions on SAP drawn by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

<sup>114</sup>See Simms, *The Bitterest Pill of All*, 6-10.

Majority World--throughout Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East and the Caribbean--the experience of pregnancy is more precarious, and the number of maternal deaths and disabilities are rising.<sup>115</sup>

#### **2.4 Feminist Economics: Structural Origins and Ongoing Dynamics of Women's Poverty**

Thus far, I have situated maternal mortality within the jeopardy of inadequate health care. I have analyzed the ways in which two global economic policies compromise the well-being of economically marginalized women and the availability of essential health services during pregnancy and childbirth. In my clarification of the links between these economic policies and maternal mortality, I further substantiate my claim that maternal mortality is an issue of economic justice for women. I have completed the first two parts of this chapter's goal.

To accomplish the third part of this chapter's goal, I turn to the global discourse of feminist economics. I integrate feminist economics at this point in the evolving hermeneutical circle to ensure that my appropriation of maternal mortality as an issue of economic justice is grounded in a gender-sensitive, yet informed economic analysis. I also submit that the insights of feminist economists correlate well with the needs of a feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality. This is because feminist economists provide economic answers to the questions surrounding the ubiquitous poverty of women; they also help clarify why minimal value is placed on women's well-being within global and national economic policies. Furthermore, in their critical and holistic analyses of the structural origins, ongoing causal dynamics and impacts of women's poverty, feminist economists elucidate the links among women's poverty, their diminished well-being, and the problem of maternal mortality. Therefore, I submit that feminist

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<sup>115</sup>"Economic Recession, Structural Adjustment and Health," *International People's Health Council (IPHC)* [online article] (1994 [cited 9 February 2004]); available from World Wide Web @ [www.twinside.org.sg/title/sap-ch.htm](http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/sap-ch.htm)

economists provide critical data for theological reflection on maternal mortality as an issue of economic justice.

In this next section, after introducing the main critiques of feminist economics, I present six common methodological base points I have drawn from a literature review of the discourse. Following this, I identify and explore six central themes that flow from these methodological base points. Finally, I underline why the discourse of feminist economics is of theological significance for a historically conscious feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality.

At the outset, two clarifications are necessary regarding my integration of feminist economics. First, the broad scope of feminist economics is beyond the parameters of my dissertation. The feminist economic insights I present are therefore illustrative, and not exhaustive, of the field. Second, I attend to the discourse of feminist economics not as a trained economist, but as a feminist liberation theologian seeking historically conscious insights into the origins and causal dynamics of women's poverty. The claim I make is that my appropriation of the insights of feminist economists clarifies the complex injustice of maternal mortality.

#### **2.4.1 Feminist Economics: Contemporary Advances in the “Queen of the Social Sciences”<sup>116</sup>**

The labour of women in the house certainly enables men to produce more wealth than they otherwise could; in this way women are economic factors in society.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1900<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Despite its metaphorically female gender name, “Queen of the Social Sciences,” mainstream economics generally has not attended critically to (what is perceived conventionally as) female reality. This domain has been considered non-economic, and therefore peripheral to the market. See Ann Mari May, “The Feminist Challenge to Economics,” *Challenge* 45 (November/December 2002): 45-69.

<sup>117</sup>See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

Feminists have long highlighted the links between the economic status of women and their marginal social and cultural well-being.<sup>118</sup> It would therefore seem logical for a fruitful, historical dialogue to exist between feminism and economics.<sup>119</sup> However, until relatively recently, economics has been advanced minimally by feminist thought.<sup>120</sup> In general, the discourse of economics has been the purview of men, and women have been dismissed as economic subjects, scholars and practitioners.<sup>121</sup> Consequently, the theory, practice and policies of mainstream economics have been limited by a reductionist and androcentric world view.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>While I focus on the work of contemporary feminist economists, I do not dismiss the historical significance of feminist economists fore-sisters. For example, in the 1850s, Barbara Bodichon's groundbreaking work on women's property and marriage rights was instrumental in the passing of the married women's property acts in 1870: one of the greatest redistributions of wealth in English history; in the mid 1800s, Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau were advocates for women's economic education; in 1898, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote *Women and Economics*. See *Women of Value: Feminist Essays on the History of Women in Economics*, ed. Mary Ann Dimand et al. (Aldershot, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 1995). It is significant that women's economic agency is dismissed both currently and historically. For example, historically, most women have been economically active in all spheres, but this activity was obfuscated in order to coincide with cultural prescriptions, such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western cult of domesticity. See Jane Humphries, "Enclosures, Common Rights and Women: The Proletarianization of Families in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of Economic History* 2, no. 1 (March 1990): 17-42.

<sup>119</sup>May, "The Feminist Challenge," 46.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-69. It is important to qualify that traditionally termed "women's issues" have not been ignored totally by mainstream orthodox approaches. However, if analyzed, these issues have been devoid of feminist insights and have been examined from orthodox frameworks, insensitive to issues of power, subordination or unequal divisions of labour. See Benara, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 31-39.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 47-61. Current statistics on women economists attest to this gender exclusivity. For example, in its 117-year history, The American Economic Association, the largest organization of economists, has had two female presidents. At the IMF, women economists comprise 2.2 percent of members of the board of governors, 5.5 percent of the board of governors at the World Bank, and none of the seats on the World Bank's board of directors. The Nobel Prize has been awarded to a woman in all categories except economics. See Marianne A. Feber and Julie A. Nelson, "Introduction: The Social Construction of Economics and the Social Construction of Gender," in *Beyond Economic Man*, ed. Marianne A. Feber and Julie A. Nelson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1-22.

<sup>122</sup>It is important to note that feminist economists have not been the sole critics of the main assumptions within neo-classical economics: other economists and social scientists have provided these. For example, Thorstein Veblen, the founder of American institutionalism, noted the "perverse tendency" of neo-classical economics to dismiss the value of activities that ensured basic human needs. See Ann L. Jennings, "Public or Private? Institutional Economics and Feminism," in *Beyond Economic Man*, 112-115.

In response to this partial interpretation of economic reality, an international community of feminist economic scholars/activists are raising theoretical and empirical concerns within mainstream approaches.<sup>123</sup> Their efforts are animated by the central insight that the practice and policies of economics need to reflect more than the experiences, thinking and privileges of elite men. Feminist economists maintain that their discipline needs to be redefined and reformed to be more inclusive, and thereby attend more holistically to the rich diversity of human experience.<sup>124</sup> They therefore challenge the mainstream's claim to appropriate "economic behaviour" when it is devoid of insights into the economic realities and constraints experienced by women: more than half the economic agents of our world.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, feminist economists discern, in the mainstream's economic dismissal of women, the roots of women's ubiquitous poverty and their attendant marginal social, cultural and physical well-being.

#### 2.4.2 Feminist Economics: Six Common Methodological Points

There are varying theoretical traditions within the evolving discourse of feminist economics. Apart from the dominant neo-classical approach, there are also institutional, radical,

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<sup>123</sup>There are three self-defined generations of feminist economists: first (pre/early 1970s), those who analyzed women and economics prior to the contemporary feminist work; second (late 1970s), those influenced by feminist work, critiqued economics from a marginal position outside main discourse; third (1990s), those who formed *IAFE* and now integrate global feminist issues *within* traditional economics. See Martha MacDonald, "What is Feminist Economics?" *Status of Women Canada* (November 1993): 100-124.

<sup>124</sup>I do not dismiss Ester Boserup's foundational economic analyses of women and development. In the 1960s, Boserup explored gender as a cross-cultural factor in migration patterns and in the division of labour; she also compared female and male farming, signaled the unaccounted subsistence work of women, and explored women's status in relation to colonialism and capitalism. Feminist economists, such as Gita Sen, have used Boserup's work to advance analytical frameworks in economics. See Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970); Lourdes Benería and Gita Sen, "Accumulation, Reproduction and Women's Role in Economic Development: Boserup Revisited," in *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*, ed. Nalini Visvanathan et al. (London: Zed Books, 1997), 42-50.

<sup>125</sup>See Rebecca M. Blank, "What Should Mainstream Economists Learn from Feminist Theory?" in *Beyond Economic Man*, 134.

political economic and capabilities approaches.<sup>126</sup> Despite this diversity, all approaches share a common vision, which is the evolution of economics from a hypothetical-deductive discipline to a more empirically based social science. The following methodological base points ground the discourse of feminist economics.

First, feminist economics is a non-essentialist discourse: it advances neither a specific economics for women, nor does it presume that change will emerge with greater female representation in an overwhelmingly male-dominated discipline.<sup>127</sup> Feminist economics is not reducible to ameliorating career opportunities for women; its aim is to advance orthodox methods and approaches through the integration of the economic realities of women.<sup>128</sup>

Second, feminist economics is an emancipatory discourse: it is loyal to the well-being of disenfranchized women and other economically marginalized groups.<sup>129</sup> Its emphasis on the origins and implications of inequalities in women's economic well-being is the means by which economic inequities are identified, analyzed and challenged. Feminist economics critically analyzes the effects the economy has on women, and it also makes visible the myriad ways in which women affect the economy.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>See Marilyn Power, "Social Provisioning as a Starting Point for Feminist Economics," *Feminist Economics* 10, no. 3 (2004): 3-19.

<sup>127</sup>Feminist economics is a multifaceted discourse; it is also an evolving, collaborative global discourse that attends to the context-specificity of economic realities. For an exploration of the diverse work of feminist economists, see *Beyond Economic Man; Out of the Margin: Feminist Perspectives on Economics*, ed. Edith Kuiper and Jolande Sap (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>128</sup>Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson, "Introduction: The Social Construction of Economics and the Social Construction of Gender," in *Beyond Economic Man*, 5.

<sup>129</sup>Feminist economics is influenced by post-structural theory; it rejects generalized categories and false universalizations. Thus, "women" are not appropriated in an undifferentiated way, homogenizing their diverse realities, nor is gender understood as a static social and symbolic phenomenon. See Rhonda M. Williams, "Race, Deconstruction and the Emergent Agenda of Feminist Economic Theory," in *Beyond Economic Man*, 144-148.

<sup>130</sup>See Susan Donath, "The Other Economy: A Suggestion for a Distinctly Feminist Economy," *Feminist Economics* 6, no. 1 (2000): 115-123.

Third, feminist economics is a holistic analysis. It examines the economic implications of women's gendered status within the complex interacting jeopardies of class, race, ethnicity, a history of colonialism, and other socio-cultural realities.<sup>131</sup> As an innovative discourse, it maintains that accurate measures of women's well-being require different economic research models and conceptual frameworks, sensitive to gender-desegregated data.<sup>132</sup>

Fourth, while committed to women's well-being, the challenges which feminist economics bring to bear upon traditional approaches also transcend women's poverty. Feminist economics explores the human agency and the power dynamics shaping the economic, political and social processes worldwide. In addition, feminist economics highlights the non-sustainability and injustice inherent in the economic exploitation of the natural world.

Fifth, feminist economics is a grounded critique and analysis. Its context-specific approaches are empirically oriented to the real economic variables which shape peoples' lives, as opposed to the selective data that correlates well with the dictates of mathematical models. Feminist economics therefore challenges the myopic and deeply political nature of the theoretical

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<sup>131</sup>Feminist economists analyze women's economic marginalization in relation to multiple constraints, such as racial and ethnic discrimination, sexual orientation and gender. Thus, gender can be understood as a metaphor for a host of problems within conventional economic analyses. See Otrude N. Moyo et al., "The Dynamics of a Racialised, Genderised, Ethnicized, and Economically Stratified Society: Understanding the Socio-economic Status of Women in Zimbabwe," *Feminist Economics* 8, no. 2 (2002): 163-181; Sakuntala Narasimhan, "Gender, Class and Caste Schisms in Affirmative Action Policies: The Curious Case of India's Women Reservation Bill," *Feminist Economics* 8, no. 2 (2002): 183-190; Carla L. Brown, "Sexual Orientation and Labour Economics," *Feminist Economics* 4, no. 2 (1998): 89-95; Margaret A. Villanueva, "Racialization and the Latina Experience: Economic Implications," *Feminist Economics* 8, no. 2 (2002): 141-161.

<sup>132</sup>For example, feminist economists have constructed an indicator of comparative gender inequality among countries. See A. Geske Dijkstra and Lucia C. Hanmer, "Measuring Socio-Economic Gender Inequality: Toward an Alternative to the UNDP Gender-Related Development Index," *Feminist Economics* 6, no. 2 (2000): 41-75. For other analyses using gender-desegregated data, see Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, "What Does Feminization of Poverty Mean? It Isn't Just Lack of Income," *Feminist Economics* 5, no. 2 (1999): 99-103; Maria Sagrario Floro, "Women's Well-Being, Poverty and Work Intensity," *Feminist Economics* 1, no. 3 (1995): 1-25; A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, "'You are not Excused from Cooking:' Peasants and the Gender Division of Labor in Pakistan," *Feminist Economics* 2, no. 2 (1996): 87-105.



models, metaphors,<sup>133</sup> and the market-oriented, mathematical mentality<sup>134</sup> of the conventional discipline of economics.<sup>135</sup>

Sixth, feminist economics is an epistemologically sound discourse.<sup>136</sup> It is shaped by contemporary insights into the theory and philosophy of science, by research into language and cognition, and by advances in feminist theory.<sup>137</sup> Feminist economists are standpoint theorists:<sup>138</sup> they reject any claim of abstract universality and fact/value distinction within the history, methods and rhetoric of economic discourse.<sup>139</sup> They attend to the socially constructed nature of knowledge claims, including economic ones.<sup>140</sup> For feminist economists, the myth of value

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<sup>133</sup>The central neo-classical economic metaphor is *Homo Economicus*. While feminist economics consider this a valid model of an aspect of economic reality, they contest its exclusive use and the attendant dismissal of other relevant economic data. See Gillian J. Hewitson, *Feminist Economics: Interrogating the Masculinity of Rational Economic Man* (Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 1999), 145-165.

<sup>134</sup>Again, feminist economists *do not* dismiss the abstract, mathematical approach of mainstream economics, they utilize conventional models in their work and also consider the economic data that this model excludes. See Cristina Echevarria et al., "On the Need for Gender in Dynamic Models," *Feminist Economics* 6, no. 2 (2000): 77-96.

<sup>135</sup>Discriminatory gender-based wage differentials, occupational segregation, the dismissal of unpaid work, and the gendered nature of the public/private economic spheres are some examples of the politically motivated gender bias of conventional economics. Considered to be economic "choices," they structure women's marginal economic status and ensure that men are not similarly situated. See May, "The Feminist Challenge," 51-57.

<sup>136</sup>See Sandra Harding, "Can Feminist Thought Make Economics More Objective?" *Feminist Economics* 1, no. 1 (1995): 7-32.

<sup>137</sup>Julie A. Nelson, "The Study of Choice or the Study of Provisioning? Gender and the Definition of Economics," in *Beyond Economic Man*, 28-29.

<sup>138</sup>A standpoint is an engaged socio-economic position from which social reality is interpreted, and from which collective emancipatory action can be initiated. Standpoint theory emerged from the work of Sandra Harding, who was influenced by Thomas Kuhn's insights into scientific revolutions and paradigm shifts. See Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>139</sup>See Donald M. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

<sup>140</sup>Feminist economists claim that economics is replete with values, both constitutive (such as desires for accuracy, mathematical rigour and data preservation), and contextual (such as a focus on scarcity, competition and power). Moreover, they show that what are presumed contextual values and

neutrality is neither possible nor desirable in economics.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, they discern in their discipline's positivistic legacy<sup>142</sup> the subjective dismissal of values and interests within the complex interweaving of economic theory, data and methods.<sup>143</sup>

### 2.4.3 Feminist Economics: Probing the Economics of Women's Poverty

Connected to these methodological base points, I discern six themes that animate the discourse of feminist economics. I now explore these themes and highlight the insights they provide concerning the origins, structure and ongoing dynamics of women's poverty: insights that are critical to understanding maternal mortality. That is, these themes demonstrate the myriad ways in which mainstream economic approaches negatively impact upon the social and economics status of women; these themes clarify why women are poor and, ultimately, why poor women die in pregnancy. These themes therefore are critical to the "see-judge" dimension of the liberation hermeneutical circle: they provide critical data for theological reflection on the economic injustice of maternal mortality.

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interests, such as androcentrism, are, in fact, constitutive values. See Harding, "Can Feminist Thought Make Economics More Objective?" *Feminist Economics*, 7-11.

<sup>141</sup>It is important to note that feminist economists' critique of value neutrality does not mean that they adopt a relativistic position with respect to all knowledge claims. Rather, feminist economists attend to connections between vantage points and economic inquiry. In so doing, they widen both the community of economic practitioners and context-sensitive analyses; they identify cultural values intrinsic to economic analyses so as to progress toward more objective and reliable economic insights. See Janet A. Seiz, "Epistemology and the Tasks of Feminist Economics," *Feminist Economics* 1, no. 3 (1995): 110-118.

<sup>142</sup>Adam Smith understood economics in a two-fold way: how society was organized by exchange and by provisioning. However, the discipline of economics increasingly became defined in the first way, not by its subject matter but by a specific method, which led to an overemphasis on mathematical models. This legacy also resulted from a Cartesian influence and concepts in 19<sup>th</sup> century physics. See Nelson, "The Study of Choice," 23-28.

<sup>143</sup>May, "The Feminist Challenge," 56; Julie A. Nelson, "Breaking the Dynamic of Control: A Feminist Approach to Economics Ethics," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 27-45.

### **Theme I: Advancing Orthodox Methods: Critique/Revision of Economic Androcentrism**

First, feminist economics seeks to advance orthodox methods. A central animating theme within the discourse is that the androcentric subtext embedded within the theoretical structures of conventional approaches renders invisible both women's contributions to the economy and the power and advantage of elite men.<sup>144</sup> Feminist economists therefore maintain that the mainstream's focus on competitive market production and exchange, conducted by independent rational agents, is too simplistic.<sup>145</sup> From their feminist perspectives, an inadequate appropriation of economic reality results from the failure to consider such fundamental issues as human constraints and interdependence. They also consider problematic mainstream's abstraction from an intrinsically intertwined economy and its subsequent dismissal of women's unpaid contributions to the economy.<sup>146</sup>

It is important to note that the key issue feminist economists contest is not simply that a partial appropriation of economic reality is presumed to be the whole: it is that the implications of this misappropriation are far from benign. Feminist economists underscore that these exclusionary economic presuppositions shape misguided gender-biased policy judgements in a

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<sup>144</sup>While contemporary feminist economics began initially in the 1960s with a critique of the social roles of women in Marxian and neo-classical analyses, it was in 1990 that the International Association of Feminist Economists (IAFE) was formally organized at the annual meeting of the American Economic Association. The publishing of the journal, *Feminist Economics*, began in 1995. See Emily Satterthwaite, "Feminist Economics: An Introduction," *The Yale Political Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (November 1995): 1-4. Feminist economics is an international discourse. This is apparent in most issues of *Feminist Economics*. For example, in the July 2004 issue, analyses are contributed from the United States, post-Soviet Union countries, Norway, Britain, Germany, Sri Lanka and China.

<sup>145</sup>Mainstream economic assumptions highlight certain valid aspects of economic reality. However, these assumptions also suppress other, equally valid, aspects of economic reality. Consequently, only a part of economic reality is captured, a part that then is presumed to be the whole. See Strassmann, "Not a Free Market," 54-62.

<sup>146</sup>While there are markets, competitive individuals and exchange, there is also reciprocity and gifts in the production and care of human beings and care of the environment. See Donath, "The Other Economy," 115-123.

variety of global contexts.<sup>147</sup> Hence, understanding the implications of these policy judgements is a means by which the systemic roots of women's poverty are revealed.

One misappropriation signaled by feminist economists is related to conventional economic measurements of productivity gains. For example, from within an exclusive market framework, early discharge from hospital translates into improved productivity and reduced labour costs. However, considered from an economic framework wider than the market, and attentive to the unpaid work of home caregivers, who are predominately women, an increased intensity and burden of work results. Thus, despite the economic relevance of this work, women's labour is dismissed economically, and often, socially.<sup>148</sup>

From the purview of feminist economics, this dismissal is economically disenfranchizing, particularly for poor women. That is, the failure to factor into the economic equation the opportunity costs to women in terms of their physical, mental, spiritual and economic well-being as a result of their essential caregiving labour, reinforces their impoverishment. Moreover, unrecognized by the conventional economic calculus, women's intergenerational care giving entrenches their poverty and conceals their disproportionately overburdened lives; it also has the effect of limiting their political voices. A clear example of this oversight is evident with respect to PRSPs' macroeconomic analyses and their failure to consider the hidden work burdens of structural adjustment: an oversight that I have shown to be particularly deleterious for economically marginalized women. According to feminist economists, the fact that women caregivers expend significant time and energy navigating rigid

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<sup>147</sup>For example, the failure to consider the economic reality of women and children within mainstream approaches has led to inappropriate and discriminatory policy decisions regarding such issues as income distribution, welfare, taxation and economic development. See Strassmann, "Not a Free Market," 59.

<sup>148</sup>Donath, "The Other Economy," 118-121.

economic constraints that fail to acknowledge their life-sustaining work is untenable, both morally and economically. Hence, in its dismissal of the productive dynamics of women's unpaid work, the structure of mainstream economics is fundamentally inequitable. It also reinforces gender and economic differentials that ultimately impoverish women and compromise their well-being in multiple ways, including their capacities to navigate the structural oppressions and the gender bias of their everyday lives during pregnancy.

### **Theme II: An Emancipatory Discourse: Challenging Women's Economic Invisibility**

Second, the emancipatory thrust of feminist economics is demonstrated by its loyalty to women and to other marginalized groups. Its methodological starting point is the concrete economic realities of poor women; economic reflection begins with their lives, analyzes their constraints, and challenges their marginal status. That is, as an emancipatory discourse, it does not simply describe, but analyzes and critiques the structural origins of women's poverty from a historical perspective. Essentially, feminist economics deconstructs the value neutrality of conventional theory and practice using the interpretive key of poor women's lives.

Feminist economists reveal, for example, that a major cause of women's poverty is their economic invisibility in the most widely used global system of economic measurement, the United Nations Systems of National Accounts (UNSNA).<sup>149</sup> Nationally, UNSNA is considered an accurate estimate of the total economic activity of a country, and internationally, it serves as a primary economic referent for such global institutions as the UN, the IMF and the World

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<sup>149</sup>Much of my information regarding the UNSNA is from studying the work of Dr. Marilyn Waring, who was a member of the New Zealand Parliament, and chairperson of the Public Expenditures Committee. Waring travelled to over 35 countries to analyze their accounting systems within the United Nation System of National Accounts. See "Sex, Lies and Global Economics: Counting the 'Invisible' Workforce," [online report] (1997 [cited 6 August 2000]); available from World Wide Web @ <http://www.idrc.ca/books/reports/1997/25-01e.html>

Bank.<sup>150</sup> It is also the basis of a country's estimation of its gross national product (GNP): a figure of immense geo-political influence. From GNP measurements, regional programs and development strategies are appraised and major funding and development decisions are made by governments, donor nations and multinational corporations.<sup>151</sup>

UNNSA and the GNP play key roles in public policy formation and in the setting of national and international priorities.<sup>152</sup> However, their market-oriented economic calculus, along with their narrow definition of economic activity, has the following critical implication for women: many of the world's hard-working women fail to meet the criteria of "economically active persons."<sup>153</sup> Consequently, women are economically invisible, despite the fact that their labour is fundamental to the overall functioning and political stability of every economy in the world.<sup>154</sup>

The global evidence gathered by feminist economists challenges this dominant economic oversight. According to the calculations of feminist economists, women are the world's main workers, and in all age groups, their work consistently exceeds that of men.<sup>155</sup> Hence, from their economic perspectives, it is logically inconsistent to consider women and the economy in

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<sup>150</sup>Marilyn Waring, *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New Zealand: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 43.

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>153</sup>Waring, *Three Masquerades: Essays on Equality, Work and Human Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 52. An economically active person is defined as "one who provides labour for the production of economic goods and services." This definition is from the International Labour Organization in 1982; see "Thirteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians. Report II," *Labour Force, Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment* (Geneva: ILO, 1982).

<sup>154</sup>Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 58.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

anything but mutually inclusive ways.<sup>156</sup> Again, their central concern is not reducible to an inaccurate and inequitable economic dismissal of the world's main workers. It is that these highly selective, gender-biased economic "facts" institutionalize women's poverty. That is, the cost of women's invisibility in global economic ledgers is their invisibility with respect to public policy decisions, distribution of benefits, allocation of resources, available credit, continued educational or training services, and adequate health care provision.

What feminist economists clearly identify, therefore, is a self-perpetuating, systemic feature of women's poverty. They clarify not only that women's economic invisibility is a main reason why they are overlooked with respect to any possible poverty-reducing resources, funding aid, health care or credit. In addition, they clarify that poverty-reducing strategies cannot attend to their qualitatively different poverty because of the paucity of economic data on their lives.<sup>157</sup> This self-perpetuating, systemic feature sheds light on why minimal global priority is given to reproductive health funding, why PRSPs' impacts on women's informal sector and gender segregated work are overlooked, and why public service cuts and the implementation of hospital user fees make conventional economic sense. Clearly, international and national poverty-reduction policies and strategies are missing the data on women's lives. In fairness, these policies and strategies cannot respond to data that is not available.

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<sup>156</sup>Waring, *Three Masquerades*, 78.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

Feminist economists<sup>158</sup> identify another self-perpetuating, recurring feature of women's poverty: their global gender oppression.<sup>159</sup> Their research uncovers the multiple ways in which women's gender oppression both has functioned historically and remains a living legacy which entrenches their poverty. For example, feminist economists recall the economic costs to women of traditionally sanctioned, gender-biased attitudes that legitimized women's unsuitability for education and paid employment; they also underline the economic costs to women resulting from the current global pandemic of sexist violence.<sup>160</sup> Feminist economists therefore maintain that complex economic analyses and responses, attentive to issues of economic equity, are needed to transform a legacy of gender oppression. They also suggest that gender equality strategies are not necessarily the best response: they highlight the fundamental need to eradicate the roots of gender bias.<sup>161</sup> For example, with respect to global economic development policies, feminist economists argue that due to the biological differences between women and men, monetary cuts and lack of funding for reproductive health services have a much greater negative impact on the

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<sup>158</sup> For example, Gita Sen is an internationally known feminist economist, scholar, and founding member of Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era (DAWN). Her work is in the economic area of women and development, gender, poverty, reproduction and health equity.

<sup>159</sup> Although myriad in its expression, women's gender subordination is a consistent feature of their poverty. For example, Western paternalism (which was not extended to economically marginalized women of colour), fostered a notion of women's natural frailty, which legitimized their social exclusion from male-dominated, lucrative careers. In other countries, such as Peru, illness was thought to result from supernatural airborne causes; women were considered disadvantaged due to their "open" physiology, a handicap that prevented their travelling to parts of the country where they could find remunerative employment. See Gita Sen and Caren Grown, *Development, Crisis and Alternative Visions* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 2-6.

<sup>160</sup> Sen notes that studies only are beginning to address the economic and social implications of the global pandemic of violence against women. See Sen et al., "Engendering Health Equity: A Review of Research and Policy," in *Engendering International Health: The Challenge of Equity*, ed. Gita Sen et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002), 13.

<sup>161</sup> Due to biological differences between women and men, feminist economists approach gender equality in terms of the goal of achieving an absence of bias. This is because gender equality can be an injustice as, for example, with respect to reproductive health, the lack of which poses major consequences for women. See Gita Sen et al., "Engendering Health Equity: A Review of Research and Policy," in *Engendering International Health*, 8-10.



health and well-being of women, since they conceive, give birth and frequently die in childbirth.<sup>162</sup> Hence, equal access to reproductive health is not the most effective economic or social response to the problem of gender inequity. Eradicating gender bias in ways that attend to gender differences and the cluster of factors that make women economically and socially vulnerable is what is required to support women's well-being and to decrease the prevalence of their death and disability in pregnancy.

Other feminist economists examine the gender-based economic inequities in health research. They analyze how the very resources for understanding gender inequity, women's poverty and their inextricably linked ill health, and for shaping the necessary economic reforms and policies that can begin to address these inequities, are biased. They discern that at the root of this bias is the reality that health research is influenced by market demands and driven by the lucrative profits available in certain health arenas. Hence, research into the factors that affect the health of the burgeoning numbers of the global poor, such as the mortality and morbidity of economically marginalized pregnant women, is dismissed in favour of more lucrative research into diseases that largely affect the global rich. Feminist economists therefore identify the economic implications of the fact that worldwide, of the US\$70 billion spent annually on health research, only 10 percent of this funding is targeted for illnesses that are responsible for 90 percent of the disease burden.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, they discern that these same market-driven influences

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<sup>162</sup>From a reproductive health perspective, women bear the greatest burden of illness. For example, while both women and men suffer from sexually transmitted infection (STI), women often are asymptomatic, and infection can progress with severe health consequences. Moreover, if a woman is pregnant, STI can infect her developing baby. See Population Bureau, "New Population Policies: Advancing Women's Health and Rights," 8, 15-16.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., 7-42.

also affect the arena of medical publications.<sup>164</sup> They note that illnesses that affect the poor also are less likely to be published, and, in general, minimal attention is given to the diseases that diminish the health and well-being of women.<sup>165</sup> Neither are the interrelationships among gender, poverty and health a significant research focus.<sup>166</sup> These factors help explain why there is little public consternation regarding the negative implications for economically marginalized women of funding cuts to reproductive health. Clearly, these skewed economic realities feed a global gender myopia regarding women's lives and livelihoods. Furthermore, the market-driven focus on profit in health research discourages bio-medical and social research into the diseases that limit the well-being and survival of many poor women. Essentially, what feminist economists clarify is that these market factors ultimately limit the well-being of women and, consequently, do little to counter their pregnancy-related death and disability.

### **Theme III: Holistic, Innovative Analyses: Accenting Women's Economic Agency**

Third, feminist economists' innovative research efforts are geared to making women, and the essential contributions they make to all economies of the world, more visible. Hence, their efforts challenge women's conventional *visibility* as economic problems, or as welfare.<sup>167</sup> For example, feminist economists creatively enhance narrow, quantitative economic analyses by

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<sup>164</sup>Ibid. Sen notes that more than 90 percent of scientific publications in health research are published by researchers from high-income countries, whose work may not intersect with health issues of people in the Majority World. Sen underlines that editorial board members do not miss this fact when choosing what will be published.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid. For example, Sen notes the harmful effects to women due to the failure to investigate the prevalence of women's reproductive tract infections, despite decades of research into family planning. Also more data is needed on the health consequences of indoor air pollution in smoke-filled kitchens; the dearth of studies on the pandemic of violence against women, the exclusion of female participants from study populations, and the universalization of this exclusive data are other examples of this problem.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 742. A survey of five leading medical journals indicated that the frequency of publications dealing with issues related to the poor was the following: 0 percent for the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 2 percent for *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 4 percent for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 6 percent for the *British Medical Journal*, and 16 percent for the *Lancet*.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 52- 58.

integrating qualitative economic data. They accomplish this through such strategies as participant observation, and interviews with economic agents traditionally silenced by a gender-biased econometric system.<sup>168</sup>

Feminist economists also contest women's visibility as an economic problem by accenting the economic significance of women's reproductive work, which they affirm as "irreplaceable wealth."<sup>169</sup> Their valuing of women's reproductive work is grounded in a holistic understanding of the multiple, interrelated dynamics that ensure the functioning of an economy. Thus, for feminist economists, biological reproduction, including the work of pregnancy, birth and lactation, along with the daily reproduction of the multiple activities of motherhood, is of vital importance to the stability of any economic system, to say nothing of its continuous need for human capital. They therefore underline the inconsistency animating a market-oriented economic calculus that is dependent upon, but devaluing of, the reproductive work of women, except in the technical market of surrogate mothers or in the black market for babies.<sup>170</sup>

A concrete way in which feminist economists creatively contest this pejorative evaluation of women is through the development of time-use surveys.<sup>171</sup> These tools clarify the economic import of women's work and concretely reveal how economic facts have been

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<sup>168</sup>See Jennifer C. Olmsted, "Telling Palestinian Women's Economic Stories," *Feminist Economics* 3, no. 2 (1997): 141-151.

<sup>169</sup>Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 30.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>171</sup>It is important to note that while contemporary economists have refined analyses that estimate the value of women's informal work, in 1934, the American economist Margaret Reid also thought the exclusion of domestic work from national accounts was a grave economic oversight. Thus, she devised a method for estimating the value of housework. See Margaret Reid, *Economics of Household Production* (New York: John Wiley, 1934).

misconstrued.<sup>172</sup> For example, a critical insight provided by time-use surveys is that while households are dismissed economically they are the single largest productive sector in the global economy.<sup>173</sup> This economic fact questions the conventional “efficiency” of not counting women’s household work.<sup>174</sup> Time-use surveys also reaffirm that, from a global labour perspective, women generally work harder and longer than men. They also point out that if they were deprived of female input, most rural households within our global community would cease to function.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, they demonstrate that the rural women of the world are the major contributors to the four basic subsectors of rural economies, including crop and livestock production, cottage industries, and household and family maintenance activities.<sup>176</sup>

Time-use analyses thereby substantiate the trans-cultural fact that women work longer days than men, perform more tasks (and often several tasks simultaneously, as opposed to the uninterrupted uni-tasks of men), have less leisure time, and do most of the world’s menial work.<sup>177</sup> In view of these findings, it is of little surprise that the unbalanced sexual and economic divisions of labour within our global economy frequently limit the health and life expectancies of many women in the world.<sup>178</sup> Hence, time-use studies not only affirm the economic import of the productive labour of the silenced half of humanity. They also reveal the inequitable,

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<sup>172</sup>Read Waring’s stories of women’s work lives in *Counting for Nothing*, 27, 65-67, 70-71, 87-88, 108-109, 124-125, 172, 185, 189-190.

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid.*, xxvii.

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid.*, 185-187.

<sup>175</sup>*Ibid.*, xxvii.

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>177</sup>Waring, *Three Masquerades*, 87-92.

<sup>178</sup>See Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 186, for a discussion of how rural African women and girls’ lives are limited by their overburdened work days.

overburdened lives of many women. They therefore substantiate the fact that the feminine face of poverty is deeply etched on the features of the world's hard-working women, those at greatest risk for maternal death and disability.

Time-use studies also illumine the complexly gendered nature of poverty. For example, they indicate that in Africa, even though a large proportion of food producers are women, the majority of women cannot own land, nor can they have access to credit, modern technologies and resources.<sup>179</sup> In fact, studies demonstrate that national and international policies often neglect the agricultural concerns of women, despite the fact that women are the majority of the world's farmers.<sup>180</sup> This imbalance is evidenced further by the fact that most agricultural supports are provided for men.<sup>181</sup> Consequently, the agricultural potential of women farmers is weakened, while the burdens of their work and their impoverishment are increased. Furthermore, these economic oversights seriously undermine efforts aimed at poverty-reduction because they inevitably compromise women's capacities to ensure national food security. Thus, the political and social instability linked to threatened food sources needs to be linked to the economic oversights that have dismissed women's agricultural contributions and have failed to recognize their critical roles as food producers.<sup>182</sup>

Feminist economist analyses of time-use surveys also clarify other antecedents to the recurring contemporary food crises: they signal how the dual legacies of colonialism and patriarchy marginalize women. For example, they link the historical reorientation of agricultural land to export production for Minority World markets with the exacerbation of the already onerous burdens of

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 144.

<sup>181</sup>See Waring, "Why is Gender an Important Issue in APEC Science and Technology Development?" *School of Public Policy Studies* (New Zealand: Massey University, 1998), 4.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 82.

women's work in food provision, fuel and water collection.<sup>183</sup> Feminist economists also indicate how the introduction of private property policies in many colonized nations abolished women's traditional land-use rights, as well as their access to the land they had once cultivated for subsistence purposes.<sup>184</sup> Essentially, what feminist economists elucidate is how patriarchy and colonialism have bequeathed to many already impoverished, overworked women in the Majority World the following legacy: harder and longer working days, greater malnourishment for themselves and their dependants, decreased educational opportunities, and increased fertility rates. This legacy is witnessed in many ways, including their pregnancy-related deaths and disabilities.<sup>185</sup>

Finally, feminist economists' time-use surveys also reveal insights into the economic lives of Minority World women. They demonstrate that a major reason why women in wealthier nations are poor is due to the fact that the costs and risks associated with parenting implicate women, economically, socially and emotionally, to a much greater degree than they do men.<sup>186</sup> These surveys link motherhood directly to women's lowered earnings, and they signal maternal economic disadvantage in comparison not only with childless women, but also with men, whose earnings tend to increase with the arrival of children.<sup>187</sup> For example, studies in the United States indicate the greater parental emotional costs for mothers, because, on average, American fathers spend less than

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<sup>183</sup>Most colonized nations are consistent in these features. See Sen, *Development, Crisis*, 28.

<sup>184</sup>*Ibid.*, 29-47. This means that, increasingly, women became landless and comprised the majority of seasonal, casual and temporary labourers, who, if paid, received the lowest wages.

<sup>185</sup>Waring, *Three Masquerades*, 65.

<sup>186</sup>Nancy Folbre, *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values* (New York: New York Press, 2001), 107-135.

<sup>187</sup>*Ibid.*, 33-35, 111-135. Folbre states that all women would be economically more secure if they allowed the state to assume the care of their children. Folbre notes that motherhood lowers women's earnings, even if they do not lose much time in employed work; the more children a woman has, the more she is economically penalized. This difference occurs even if women do not lose much time from waged work, work the same amount as childless women, and remain with the same employer for the same length of time.

three hours per week caring for their children.<sup>188</sup> Thus, as the primary caretakers of children, American mothers are economically disadvantaged due to the general lack of public responsibility for recognizing, rewarding and supplementing the work of parental care. From social policies that fail to attend to income inequalities, to tax structures that benefit the affluent over the poor, to deductions for home owners that far exceed government spending on low-income housing assistance, to a rhetoric that defines welfare as a female problem, the resulting feminization of poverty is hardly surprising.<sup>189</sup>

Essentially, what feminist economists highlight through time-use surveys is that the work of women and mothers subsidizes the global capitalist need for future workers. It also provides a free public good to which employers and nations have contributed nothing.<sup>190</sup> That is, globally, all biological and/or social mothers bestow important public and economic benefits to all members of societies; they contribute enormously to improving the lives of people, communities and nations. As such, feminist economists maintain that the minimal expenses required to adequately support the work of mothers need to be balanced against the economic debits that are directly linked to the demise of mothers: weakened familial solidarity, diminished health and well-being of all dependants, decreased educational opportunities, especially for girl children, mounting crime rates, and general socio-cultural tensions and strife.<sup>191</sup>

Feminist economists therefore champion the efforts of certain nations that publicly recognize the work of mothers by ensuring strong, supportive national family policies.<sup>192</sup> According

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<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid. Sweden is an example of a nation that has supported strong pro-family economic policies.

to them, these few nations embody the respect and recognition of the critical economic and social significance of the work of care; their practice of social reciprocity makes good economic sense, because it targets the social obligations that are necessary for a sustainable economy. Feminist economists also underline the critical point that the work of caring and nurturing needs to be defended and developed, or it will be weakened and wasted by market-driven economic forces. However, this critical point makes little conventional economic sense. Consequently, the failure to nurture the work of mothers and the caregiving work of many women worldwide continues to perpetuate male privilege and female poverty.

**Theme IV: Transcending Women's Poverty: Wider Economic Dynamics of Poverty**

Fourth, feminist economics explores wider, yet interconnected, causal dynamics in women's poverty. That is, they raise other caveats besides the omission from current global economic measurements of the unpaid reproductive and productive work of women, voluntary work, and subsistence agriculture. Feminist economists claim that mainstream economic measurements also fail to distinguish between destructive and productive forms of economic activity. For example, UNSNA's primary focus on market growth and productivity allows for the inclusion of conventional measurements, such as the consumption of goods and services, investments and government spending. However, while women's life-sustaining work is dismissed as non-economic, war is counted as an income-generating activity. This is because in the conventional economic calculus, there is no debit for the war-associated death, poverty, ruined food sources, long-term ecological devastation, and mass migrations of people and the resultant vulnerable refugee populations--80 percent of whom are women and children.<sup>193</sup> Nor is there any debit in terms of the false security inherent in an increasingly militaristic world, where it is now theoretically possible to annihilate

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<sup>193</sup>Ibid., 49.



every person on the planet more than 12 times.<sup>194</sup> Feminist economists underline the ludicrous nature of these economic facts; they also question the logic behind the economic fact that trillions of dollars continue to be spent globally on military budgets, while funding commitments for basic reproductive health are not honoured. Feminist economists link genuine economic security not to increasing militarism, but to increasing equity in ensuring the basic human needs for all persons.

Another measurement concern raised by feminist economists is that the “statistical discrepancy,” or the illegal economy, is also counted as economic growth. Hence, this inclusion means that the global trafficking of women and children, the third largest sector of the hidden economy and a critical component I have shown to be linked to maternal mortality, is measured in terms of profit and growth. Therefore, in conventional economic thinking, sexual slavery is presumed to enhance general well-being. Feminist economists also raise measurement concerns regarding the economic insignificance of the natural environment, since cleanups from ecological devastation are measured as GNP growth, along with other environmentally rapacious economic productivity.<sup>195</sup> Feminist economists recognize the social and economic consequences of conventional approaches to growth: they make visible an economic legacy of air and water pollution, climate change, ozone depletion, deforestation, diminishing aquifers, habitat decimation and species extinction.<sup>196</sup> In so doing, they underscore that the minimal economic thought given to the inextricable links among human well-being, poverty reduction and the integrity of the natural world is a serious economic oversight within mainstream approaches.

In view of these faulty econometrics, feminist economists offer an explanation for the conventional preference for measurements of cash-generating, rather than productive, life-sustaining

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<sup>194</sup>Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 7.

<sup>195</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*, 203-220.

economic activities. They maintain that cash-generating activities, such as demonstrated in the PRSP strategies, are preferred because they facilitate donor countries' estimations of the monetary capacity of indebted nations to honour balance of payments and to meet loan requirements.<sup>197</sup> Above all, they show that the economic focus on short-term cash generating initiatives do little to alleviate poverty. What feminist economists therefore underline is the fact that poverty-reduction is contingent upon meeting the concrete challenges of everyday survival. This requires supporting the life-sustaining work women do daily, and supporting the environment they require to accomplish their multiple, essential tasks. Hence, feminist economists are highly critical of what they view as banal excuses regarding the "inconvenience" of integrating women's unpaid work and the assurance of sustainable environments into the accounts. These excuses are indefensible in view of the creative ingenuity displayed by many orthodox economists in integrating the hidden economy of drugs, arms and sexual slavery. These counterproductive econometrics may further conventional economic measurements of growth and deliver reliable estimates of loan repayments. However, they further the exploitation of women and the environment; they also perpetuate women's poverty and their diminished well-being in multiple ways, including their pregnancy-related death and disability.<sup>198</sup>

#### **Theme V: Grounded in Real Economic Variables: Beyond Mathematical Models**

Fifth, a common theme in feminist economics is a methodological emphasis on the "real" economic variables that shape "real" people's lives. That is, while acknowledging the utility of market-oriented mathematical models, feminist economists also challenge their rigid, conventional foci. Their feminist position is that all economic models are approximations of economic reality: while valid, they are still only partial interpretations of the real world. Thus, feminist economists

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<sup>197</sup>Waring, *Three Masquerades*, 49-50.

<sup>198</sup>Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 37-40.

discern in the singular pursuit of mathematical models both the exclusion of relevant data, and the foundational basis of inadequate economic policy decisions that sustain women's poverty.<sup>199</sup>

For example, feminist economists critique the central neo-classical economic metaphor, *Homo Economicus*: the empowered, autonomous, self-interested, utility-maximizing monad with given preferences and choice in the public sphere, who transforms into an altruist<sup>200</sup> in the domestic sphere.<sup>201</sup> Feminist economists deconstruct this androcentric metaphor.<sup>202</sup> They demonstrate how it not only perpetuates institutional arrangements which ensure its continuity,<sup>203</sup> but also an image of the world in which informal sector work is concealed, along with ethical issues of gender and (male) power, race and class.<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, for feminist economists, this isolated, autonomous monad

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<sup>199</sup>See Helen E. Longino, "Economics for Whom?" in *Beyond Economic Man*, 158-161; Cristina Echevarria et al., "On the Need for Gender in Dynamic Models," *Feminist Economics* 6, no. 2 (2000): 77-96.

<sup>200</sup>Feminist economists challenge the Nobel laureate Gary Becker's "New Home Economics" for not furthering realistic insights into family life. They question several of Becker's premises, such as the reducibility of the family to a single economic unit with an altruistic wage-earner, and the conclusions regarding women, polygamy, fertility and the benefits of family life arrived at by his supply and demand curves. See Barbara Bergmann, "Becker's Theory of the Family: Preposterous Conclusions," *Feminist Economics* 1, no. 1 (1995): 141-150; Frances Wooley, "Getting the Best of Becker," *Feminist Economics* 2, no. 1 (1996): 114-120; Nancy Folbre, *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint* (London: Routledge, 1994). Feminist economists advance alternative models for family and intra-household analyses. See Jane Wheelock, "Getting By with a Little Help from your Family: Towards a Policy-Relevant Model of the Household," *Feminist Economics* 9, no. 1 (2003): 19-45; Sara Cantillon and Brian Nolan, "Poverty within Households: Measuring Gender Differences Using Non-monetary Indicators," *Feminist Economics* 7, no. 1 (2001): 5-23; Michael Bittman, "Parenthood without Penalty: Time Use and Public Policy in Australia and Finland," *Feminist Economics* 5, no. 3 (1999): 27-42; Shelly Lundburg and Robert A. Pollack, "Separate Spheres Bargaining and the Marriage Market," *Journal of Political Economy* 101, no. 6 (1993): 988-1010.

<sup>201</sup>See Gillian J. Hewiston, *Feminist Economics: Interrogating the Masculinity of Rational Economic Man* (Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 1999), 145-165.

<sup>202</sup>See Marilyn Power, "Social Provisioning as a Starting Point for Feminist Economics," *Feminist Economics* 10, no. 3 (2004): 3-19.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid; Hewiston, *Feminist Economics*, 145-165.

<sup>204</sup>See Paula England, "The Separative Self: Androcentric Bias in Neo-classical Assumptions," in *Beyond Economic Man*, 37-43; Ulla Grapard, "Robinson Crusoe: The Quintessential Economic Man?" *Feminist Economics* 1, no. 1 (1995): 33-52.

obscures the fact that as social human beings, our interconnected lives are shaped by periods of dependency and interdependency, along with periods of relative self-sufficiency.<sup>205</sup>

Feminist economists maintain that the conventional mathematical model needs to be transcended; they signal that appropriating the real economic variables in people's lives requires insight into the interdependent nature of human economic activity. Hence, feminist economists signal how the *invisible hand* of the market economy is not an autonomous dynamic; it functions in synchrony with the *invisible heart* of the care economy. Feminist economists trace the origins of this economic oversight. They identify that, historically, a division of labour was based on biological differences, and that this division severed the links between the hand and the heart of the economy and, in so doing, secured the social and economic control of women by men.<sup>206</sup> They also underline how women's presumed altruism and comparative advantage in providing care for others reinforced a gender ideology of women as the natural social buffers of the market's competitive forces of self-interest.<sup>207</sup> In light of these insights, it is interesting that some feminist economists argue that the social resistance to contraception, both historically and contemporaneously, needs to be understood within a fear of women's abnegation from responsibility for the care economy--an abnegation that would severely impact the stability of the market economy.<sup>208</sup>

These insights of feminist economists illumine how an economic system that places caregivers at a competitive disadvantage and fails to reward their work of care is both inequitable

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<sup>205</sup>See Strassman, "Not a Free Market: The Rhetoric of Disciplinary Authority," in *Beyond Economic Man*, 59-61; Benaría, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 42-43.

<sup>206</sup>This ideology romanticized family life and stressed women's self denial over the needs of others. In addition, it facilitated male control over women's wealth, income and property, and it restricted women's access to education and lucrative employment. This ideology also excused economics from studying the economic relevance of care, love and altruism. See Nancy Folbre, *The Invisible Heart*, 1-35.

<sup>207</sup>*Ibid.*, 7-30.

<sup>208</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

and impoverishing to caregivers. Moreover, they also signal the economic non-sustainability of the care penalty: they warn that as the public good on which the market forces rely is eroded by such policies, the social and moral foundations on which it depends are undermined. In so doing, feminist economists clarify that the impoverishment of women is symptomatic of an economic system that not only has dismissed the economic significance of social relationships and the need for a continuous supply of human capital.<sup>209</sup> It is also symptomatic of an economic system that has disregarded a fundamental tenet: the fact that free markets function best in democratic situations in which the well-being and basic needs of all are met.<sup>210</sup> Thus, in the long term, the conventional economic logic of rigid mathematical models is unsustainable to all; in the short term, it reinforces the systematic impoverishment of women and, ultimately, their pregnancy-related death and disability.

#### **Theme VI: Feminist Epistemological Analyses: Standpoint Theorists**

Sixth, feminist economists are standpoint theorists: they reject any economic claim of abstract universality and discredit the myth of economics as a value neutral discipline. They critically analyze how the social construction of economic language is a powerful tool of domination that perpetuates the status quo and does little to mitigate the pervasive poverty of women.<sup>211</sup> Their point is that all language, and particularly economic language, functions. That is, as conventional economic language largely reflects market concerns, the attendant skewed definitions of economic reality are generally not contested. For example, feminist economists indicate the ways in which economic language is ideologically embedded within patriarchal and class structures and thereby

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<sup>209</sup>Ibid., 76-89.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., 208-225.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., 66.

serves the purposes of perpetuating these structures.<sup>212</sup> Their central point is that the use of uncritical mainstream economic language has profound consequences for poor women: it normalizes and further reinforces their conventionally defined economic obscurity.

I now give several concrete illustrations of how feminist economists deconstruct the conventional economic language that reinforces women's disenfranchised status. First, UNSNA is replete with uncritical use of economic language. For example, UNSNA's narrow, interchangeable concepts of work, labour and the economy shrink reality to ensure value is given only to activities that produce surplus value, or profit in the market.<sup>213</sup> In this selective use of economic language, the productive and reproductive work of women is obfuscated. As well, the primary means by which women can lay claim to a fair share of the benefits accrued in the market economy also is forfeited.<sup>214</sup> The selective use of economic language also entrenches gender-based power differentials. For instance, historically, the economic decision to separate households from enterprises separated the work done in homes from any concept of economic production.<sup>215</sup> This narrowed linguistic interpretation of production boundaries and producers rendered women's productive and reproductive work of no economic import, thereby perpetuating gender bias within economic theory and practice.<sup>216</sup>

Another selective, patriarchal privileging of economic reality that contributes to women's poverty is UNSNA's economic concept of "head of household".<sup>217</sup> This title is attributed mostly to

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<sup>212</sup>Benarfa, *Gender, Development and Globalization*, 15.

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>215</sup>Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 39-40.

<sup>216</sup>Waring, *Three Masquerades*, 60-61.

<sup>217</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

male income earners, despite the rising number of female single-parent families worldwide<sup>218</sup> due to divorce, desertion, urban migration and widowhood.<sup>219</sup> As well, the economic term “consumption boundaries” ignores household domestic and personal services if consumed in the same household, and yet is counted when they are paid for, or supplied by the government.<sup>220</sup> This means that within household industries, only a portion of workers are credited with work that many others actually perform, and the invisibility of these workers conceals often appalling work conditions and the fact that profits accrue only to visible workers ( i.e., the male face of the industry).<sup>221</sup> In like manner, the economic concepts of “holder” and “holding” disenfranchise the most economically vulnerable farmers, the majority of whom are women. This is because there is a size requirement for a holding to be registered on an agricultural census, and most women farmers have smaller holdings, while men typically have larger cash-crop production areas.<sup>222</sup> Consequently, women farmers are excluded in the accounts, and along with information that should be critical to policies on food security and the real conditions of the rural poor.<sup>223</sup>

A limited, biological definition of reproduction is another way in which economic language has obfuscated the value of women’s reproductive work and reinforced their poverty. In response to this reductionist definition, feminist economists provide an expanded definition of reproduction. They reject the neo-Malthusian notion that equates women’s poverty with high fertility rates, or the notion that women are poor due to their non-participation in a well-designed economic system that

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<sup>218</sup>Waring, *Counting for Nothing*, 78-81.

<sup>219</sup>Waring, *Three Masquerades*, 69.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., 71. The 1993 revised system of national accounts excludes all production of services for final consumption within households.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 35.

eventually would abolish their poverty.<sup>224</sup> Their expanded definition of reproduction reveals what is actually being reproduced by conventional economic approaches. This includes the reproduction of relations of production in the labour force, where the exploitation and secondary status of women is perpetuated globally in the form of poorer salaries, less favourable working conditions, minimal job security, and infrequent chances for advancements. In addition, there is the reproduction of the relations of reproduction, in which the unpaid, unending work of women reproduces the social relations of domination within the family. This reproduction also is reflected in the cuts to health care and the devolution of care to the households, where the increased work burden for women is normalized.<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, there is the reproduction of relations between men and women, where women are defined as the property of men, and where religious, legal and cultural practices reproduce women's disenfranchised social and economic status in overt and covert ways.

Finally, feminist economists challenge that a reductionist appropriation of the concept of reproduction leads to a narrow focus on fertility and population control as the central means of alleviating women's poverty--an approach that ignores several crucial economic points. One point ignored is that women's poverty is a multi-factorial phenomenon, linked to such gender bias as women's reduced access to arable land, their denial of grazing rights in the privatization of common land, and their hardships in securing the food, fuel and water resources necessary for their daily living and that of their dependants.<sup>226</sup> A second point is that poverty eradication is unlikely to occur

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<sup>224</sup>Poverty eradication, with its links to women, fertility and economic growth, has a complex and ongoing history with many twists and turns in the evolution of both debate and action, from supply-side advocates accenting economic growth, to an emphasis on human needs, human entitlements and the definition of a decent life. See Gita Sen, "Development, Population and the Environment: A Search for Balance," in *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights*, ed., Gita Sen (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1994), 63-74, and "What is a Decent Life," a talk given at World Social Forum (Mumbai, 16-21 January 2004).

<sup>225</sup>*Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>226</sup>Sen, *Development, Crisis*, 47.



in conditions of gender bias. Empowering women, not rigidly controlling their fertility and denying them autonomy and freedom in their reproductive lives, is the more viable economic, social and human approach. As women are the central protagonists in ensuring the basic essentials of daily living, then transforming their marginalized social and economic status is the key to poverty reduction.<sup>227</sup> Clearly, in its obfuscation of unequal economic and gender-based power differentials, conventional economic language conceals both the gender inequity and global poverty of many women's lives.<sup>228</sup>

#### **2.4.4 The Theological Relevance of Feminist Economics for a Feminist Liberation Methodology**

I have indicated that feminist liberation theology begins by reflecting on the concrete everyday realities of poor women. I also have signaled that the qualitatively different poverty of women has been attended to inadequately within the liberation paradigm. My central point has been that accurate, comprehensive historical data on women's economic realities is fundamental to the intellectual and moral integrity of feminist liberation theology. Without sufficient data that correlates well with the lived economic experiences of poor women, the theo-ethical liberatory processes of solidarity and praxis are mired in oversight. Essentially, understanding the economics behind the limited life chances of the majority of women in our world is morally critical to appropriating the poverty of women and the complex, inextricably linked problem of maternal mortality.

In my analysis of the discourse of feminist economics, I identified its main critiques, methodological base points and central themes. I made explicit the ways in which this non-essentialist, emancipatory economic discourse seeks to understand the roots of women's economic

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<sup>227</sup>For feminist economists, gender-bias does not function in isolation; it operates with other social markers and can either reinforce (eg., more than 70 percent of the poor are women) or counteract inequity.

<sup>228</sup>Sen, "The Challenge of Equity," 6-7.

inequity. I indicated the myriad ways in which feminist economics uses the interpretive key of women's economic lives both to promote women's social and economic equity and to advance orthodox economic approaches.<sup>229</sup> I demonstrated that feminist economics affords both a more holistic analysis of the complex features of global economic reality and unprecedented insight into the complexly gendered realities of women's economic lives. I indicated how feminist economists link women's marginal economic status to power issues of intra-household resource allocation, make connections between women's poverty and child care policies, underscore the relationships among gender bias, health care access and health research, explore the implications of women's economic invisibility with respect to international trade policies, make visible the female face of world poverty, and make links between women and environmental exploitation.

Clearly, feminist economics is critical to the elaboration of a more inclusive, objective economics capable of responding in more accurate and ethical ways to the impoverishment of more than half the economic agents in the world.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, because feminist economics aims to comprehend the complex and qualitatively different poverty of women, it is a discourse that is relevant to feminist liberation theological ethics. That is, the claim I make is that the global discourse of feminist economics is not only relevant from the purview of advancing mainstream economics. In its provision of critical insights into the root causes and ongoing dynamics of women's poverty, it allows for critical discernment of leverage points from which the economic inequity of women's lives can be challenged and transformed. Therefore, feminist economics is a

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<sup>229</sup>See Harding, "Can Feminist Thought Make Economics more Objective?" 11-28.

<sup>230</sup>For example, conventional definitions of production boundaries are market-oriented; they marginalize non-market economic activity. Their implicit Minority World assumptions are imperialistic and ethnocentric, and they further marginalize non-market activity in the Majority World. See Cynthia A. Wood, "The First World/Third Party Criterion: A Feminist Critique of Production Boundaries in Economics," *Feminist Economics* 3, no. 3 (1997): 47-68.

component part of the multi-differentiated unity that empowers authentic solidarity and effective theo-ethical praxis within a liberation paradigm.<sup>231</sup>

## 2.5 Conclusions from Chapter 2

In this chapter, I have signaled the central role that adequate, accessible health care plays in the well-being of pregnant women. I also have identified an economic injustice in the fact that many economically marginalized women within our global community are denied the basic care that would ensure their survival in pregnancy. To substantiate further my claim that women's lack of adequate health care is an economic injustice, I have analyzed the impacts of two global economic policies on the provision of maternity care. In so doing, I have signaled that both globally and nationally, there is a lack of political will, of awareness of gender equity issues, and of commitment around issues of women's well-being. These are the reasons for the international community's failure to fund reproductive health and to acknowledge and counter the negative aspects of PRSPs. In light of these findings, the recalcitrant nature of maternal mortality can be understood to result from a rhetoric of safe motherhood that is proclaimed by an international community that fails to honour in an authentic way, its commitments to the poor women of our world.

A central goal of this chapter was to seek economic resources that could deepen my understanding of the root causes of the pervasive poverty of women and the dismissal of their well-being. I also wanted to ensure that my insights into maternal mortality were grounded in a holistic, gender-sensitive, yet informed economic analysis. By integrating the discourse of feminist economics, I uncovered the deleterious implications for women of an economic system that dismisses both the significance of their unpaid work, and the power and economic advantage of men.

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<sup>231</sup>I have explored the ways in which the theologian Beverly Harrison and the feminist economist Marilyn Waring are significant dialogue partners for a feminist liberation analysis. See Kerwin Jones, "Weaving Perspectives: An Exploration of Economic Justice Based on the Work of Beverly Wildung Harrison and Marilyn Waring," 92-107.

I have focused on how feminist economists signal that their supposedly “value neutral” discipline makes women and their essential economic contributions to all economies of the world invisible, dismisses their disproportionately overburdened working lives, their attendant poverty, and their lack of political voice. I also have demonstrated that feminist economists clarify how conventional econometrics are faulty and foster misshapen economic policies and strategies, in which no account is made of the intricate links between poverty and ecological integrity. Feminist economists also show that mainstream approaches fail to calculate any economic debit for the destructive economic productivity or the expanding militarism that ultimately impoverishes all of life. Finally, feminist economists signal how mainstream’s rigid mathematical models and exclusive economic language perpetuate gender and power differentials that entrench women’s poverty.

What feminist economics clarifies in my historically conscious analysis of maternal mortality is that the theory, practice and strategies of conventional economics are at the root of women’s lack of political and public power and their entrenched poverty. By association, mainstream economics is implicated in their deaths in pregnancy. The multiple ways in which the economic erasure of women occurs are fundamental causal dynamics in the injustice of maternal mortality. Thus, feminist economics is methodologically pivotal to the subsequent “judge-act” phase of the evolving hermeneutical circle; this discourse has provided the critical data that has legitimized the theological evaluation of maternal mortality as an issue of economic justice for women.

I conclude this chapter and the “see-judge” dimension of the evolving hermeneutical circle with a quote from Noeleen Heyzer, UNIFEM’s executive director. Expressed in the preface to *Progress of the World’s Women 2000*, Heyzer’s words encapsulate both the disenfranchised status as well as the hope and aspirations for change that animate the lives of many of the world’s women. Her words coincide with the changes that I have indicated are necessary for eradicating maternal

mortality; they also speak to the global vision and the project of feminist economics in advancing economics in ways that can make real the hope and the aspirations for change.

Women want a world in which inequality based on gender, class, caste and ethnicity is absent from every country and from the relationships among countries. Women want a world where fulfilment of basic needs becomes basic rights and where all forms of violence are eliminated. Where women's unpaid work of nurturing, caring and weaving the fabric of community will be valued and shared equally by men. Where each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity. Where progress for women is recognized as progress for all.

Noeleen Heyzer<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>232</sup>See UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2000* (New York: UNIFEM, 2000), 6.

## CHAPTER 3

### The “Judge-Act” Dimension: A Theo-ethical Response to Maternal Mortality

Life and death issues are at stake in the way we perceive, analyze and envision the world and therefore in what we say of God and human hope.<sup>1</sup>

#### 3 Introduction

In Chapters 1 and 2, the “see-judge” dimension of the evolving hermeneutical circle, I explored the problem of maternal mortality. Using the framework of multiple jeopardy, I demonstrated how women’s oppressions function in maternal mortality. I provided further insight into the structural nature of maternal mortality by analyzing the negative impacts two global economic policies have on the health and well-being of economically marginalized women. Finally, I indicated why the discourse of feminist economics is critical to appropriating maternal mortality as a systemic issue of economic injustice. My conclusion from Chapters 1 and 2 is that maternal mortality is a preventable tragedy resulting from the myriad injustices of women’s lives, of which their marginal economic status is a recurring dynamic.

This chapter corresponds to the subsequent “judge-act” dimension of the hermeneutical circle: it is a theo-ethical response to the injustice of maternal mortality. It is important to underline that within a liberation paradigm, the “judge-act” dimension transcends critical reflection on issues of injustice. That is, the solidarity required with economically marginalized pregnant women is not reducible to identifying the social, cultural and economic causal dynamics implicated in their untimely deaths. Solidarity also demands active, collective engagement in a multi-faceted process that fosters liberative change. Hence, the critical theo-ethical task of the “judge-act” dimension is evaluating maternal mortality through the eyes of faith. The resulting judgement inspires a collective commitment to transformative justice--a commitment that is both an intra-historical phenomenon and deeply embedded in salvation history.

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<sup>1</sup>Beverly Wildung Harrison, “Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation,” in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 245.

### 3.1 Towards a Feminist Liberation Theo-ethical Analysis of Maternal Mortality

A central tenet of feminist liberation theological ethics is that a just society must guarantee the well-being of women. A just society judges the socio-cultural, political, economic and religious policies of exclusion that limit the life chances of women as morally untenable. Therefore, from a feminist liberation theological perspective, the daily preventable deaths of 1,600 pregnant women, most of whom are economically marginalized, are judged to be both sinful and unjust. Maternal mortality is a profound theo-ethical contradiction; it requires an equally profound response and resolution.

In the introduction to my dissertation, I indicated the need for liberation analyses to attend more critically and holistically to the qualitatively different poverty of women. I indicated that impoverished women often are dismissed within the generality of the poor, and are invisible in a liberation discourse that purports to speak of their lives. I identified maternal mortality as a concrete illustration of both this dismissal and of the failure of liberation discourses to dialogue effectively with the geo-political economic system from the perspectives of poor women. My point is that economically marginalized women are not only invisible economically, socio-culturally and politically: they are also invisible theologically. This theological invisibility is not a benign phenomenon. It functions in myriad ways to reinforce a world in which women's disenfranchised status sustains and perpetuates the injustice of maternal mortality.

Evaluating maternal mortality through the eyes of faith requires theo-ethical resources from which both an intellectual/theological judgement can be made and a pragmatic/strategic elaboration of solidarity can be embodied in emancipatory praxis. These resources are the tools that illumine maternal mortality from a theo-ethical perspective and shape effective responses. These resources need to be grounded in poor women's lives: they must speak *from* their perspectives and *to* their everyday realities.

### 3.1.1 Harrison's Feminist Liberation Ethics: Resources for Analyzing Maternal Mortality

The Christian theo-ethical resources that I submit correlate well with these requirements are found within the work of Beverly Wildung Harrison. Harrison is a white, North American, Christian, feminist social liberation ethicist who stands firmly in the traditions of liberal and neo-orthodox Protestant theology. From 1968 to 1999, Harrison was a professor of Christian ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City; she retired from academic life in 1999. Initially influenced by the teachings of social gospel and Christian realism, as interpreted by her mentor, Reinhold Niebuhr, Harrison's theological method was radically reshaped both by feminism and by liberation theology. Harrison also was influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr's brother, H. Richard Niebuhr. Her doctoral thesis focused on the historical perspective of H. Richard Niebuhr; she felt his emphasis on the inter-connectedness of all of life, his insight into the non-duality of self and society, and his claim that the major substantive task of religious ethics was the reinterpretation of structures of power within social reality, provided critical foci for theological reflection.<sup>2</sup> These themes were instrumental in shaping Harrison's Christian social ethics, along with the insights of radical social theory, Christian realism,<sup>3</sup> and a critical feminist appropriation of Roman Catholic social thought

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<sup>2</sup>In examining the archival material on Harrison, I realized that while Reinhold Niebuhr was Harrison's professor and mentor, his brother, H. Richard Niebuhr was also a great influence in her work. For example, Harrison's doctoral dissertation explored H. Richard Niebuhr's attempts to elaborate a historically informed ethical methodology. She also was influenced later by the historical approach of the ethicist James Luther Adams. See "A Personal and Methodological Note on the Importance of Racism and Other Structures of Oppression for Clarifying the Task of Religious Ethics," Beverly Wildung Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship, Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary (UTS) in the city of New York; "November 8<sup>th</sup> Lecture: H. Richard Niebuhr," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection) Archives, UTS; "Working with Protestant Traditions: Liberalism and Beyond: Interview by Elizabeth M. Bounds," in *Justice in the Making*, 83.

<sup>3</sup>Christian realism is a movement associated with Reinhold Niebuhr. It is a complex response to the social gospel tradition in Protestantism. See Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," in *Justice in the Making*, 178-182.



and natural law teachings.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Harrison has focused on significant issues in economic-ethics; she credits her doctoral supervisor, John C. Bennett, with stimulating her interest in this area.<sup>5</sup>

Harrison's theological work is notable for its attention to the dual strands of contemporary feminist ethical work--namely, a critique of received tradition and an accent on current ethical issues.<sup>6</sup> While Harrison's theological corpus is not vast, it is profoundly influential in its contributions to the emerging field of Christian feminist social ethics.<sup>7</sup> Harrison's writings are classics within theological ethics; she is considered by many in feminist theological circles to be a

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<sup>4</sup>Harrison accepts certain assumptions within Christian natural law, such as the affirmation of the power of moral reasoning in all human beings, the practice of using moral reason rather than theological claims alone to address moral dilemmas, and the need to distinguish between the morality of a specific act and the social policies that generate the optimal social morality. See Harrison, *Making the Connections*, 286 n. 2; "Theology and Morality of Procreative Choice," in *Making the Connections*, 133; Pamela K. Brubaker and Rebecca Todd Peters, "Christian Ethical Praxis and Political Economy: Introduction," in *Justice in the Making*, 154; "Religion and Politics: Talk given for *Water*," 10/23/84, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>5</sup>For an historical exploration of the connections among social gospel, Christian realism and liberation theology, see Gary Dorrien, *Soul in Society: The Making and Renewal of Social Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). For Bennett's insights into the need for a discourse between ethics and economics, see John C. Bennett, *The Radical Imperative: From Theology to Social Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 1975.

<sup>6</sup>See Elizabeth M. Bounds, "Introduction to the Issue," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 7-16. All of Harrison's work in Christian feminist ethics is beyond the scope of my dissertation. After introducing Harrison's feminist liberation ethical method through the pastoral, theological and theoretical lens of emancipatory praxis, I focus on her approach to justice and her social theory, which I discern illumine maternal mortality as a moral problem.

<sup>7</sup>Harrison has written three books, co-authored a book, co-edited a book, and written over 40 articles. Her published works are milestones in feminist social ethics. Her work on the ethics of procreative choice, especially her substantive theological analysis in *Our Right to Choose: Toward a New Ethic of Abortion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983) and her integrated collection of feminist social issues in *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, are foundational references. Her most recent book, *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics*, is equally noteworthy.

“source mother.”<sup>8</sup> For example, her 1980 essay entitled “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love”<sup>9</sup> has contributed significantly to the evolution of feminist liberation ethics: it has been circulated worldwide and translated into seven languages.<sup>10</sup> Harrison also is credited by feminist scholars, including many foundational thinkers, as being influential to their own theo-ethical work.<sup>11</sup> Harrison names Nelle Morton, Dorothee Soelle, Letty Russel, Carter Heyward, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith and Delores Williams as pivotal figures in her intellectual and moral pilgrimage.<sup>12</sup> In 1983, Harrison became the first woman president of the Society of Christian Ethics: a notable achievement since women comprised less than 5 percent of its members at that time.

While doing archival research on Harrison at Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York,<sup>13</sup> I had the opportunity to appreciate her diverse intellectual and academic

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<sup>8</sup>Harrison reported that years ago, she was chastized by Nelle Morton for referring to Morton as “the mother of us all.” Morton wanted to be considered a feminist sister, not a mother or hierarchical leader. I am unsure how Harrison, herself, would respond to this maternal image! See Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life: The Vocation of Feminist Theology,” *Drew Gateway* 54, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 48.

<sup>9</sup>Harrison, “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love,” in *Making the Connections*, 3-21.

<sup>10</sup>See, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Justice in the Making*, ed. Elizabeth M. Bounds et al., xii.

<sup>11</sup>The following are some of the feminist scholars who credit Harrison as influencing and supporting their feminist theological work: Dorothee Soelle, Carter Heyward, Nelle Morton, Letty Russell, Rosemary Radforth Ruether, Delores Williams, Katie Canon, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Margaret Farley, Christine Gudorf, Carol Robb, Pamela Brubaker, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Marilyn Legge and Ann-Cathrin Jarl. According to the eco-theologian Larry Rasmussen, theological ethics is a “different discipline” due to Harrison’s thought and influence. See Larry Rasmussen, “A Different Discipline,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review (USQR)* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 29-52; Ann Cathrin Jarl, *In Justice: Women and Global Economics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 62-81, 119-129. Read other testimonies to Harrison’s influence in the field of Christian ethics in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion: Special Issue in Honor of Beverly Wildung Harrison* 9, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 1993) and *Union Seminary Quarterly Review (USQR): Festschrift for Beverly Wildung Harrison* 53, no. 3-4 (1999).

<sup>12</sup>See Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life,” 39-48; Harrison, “Dorothee Soelle as a Pioneering Post-modernist,” in *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. Sarah Pinnock (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 239-255; “Working with Protestant Traditions: Feminist Transformations,” Interview by Marilyn J. Legge, in *Justice in the Making*, 145-151; “Making Connections: Becoming a Feminist Ethicist,” Interview by Traci C. West, in *Justice in the Making*, 5-13.

<sup>13</sup>During the month of June 2003, I went to Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary in New York to research the archival material on Harrison. At this point, Harrison’s archival material had only recently been collected and was largely unprocessed; it consisted of many boxes, the majority of which were

contributions. I also was made aware of the broad scope of her pastoral ministry and her social and political activities over her 35 year career as a professional Christian ethicist.<sup>14</sup> It became evident that Harrison was not only an inspiring mentor and educator to countless scholars, students, lay activists and members of the clergy. She also participated in the life, struggles and ministry of many Christian communities and local congregations. In my view, Harrison has achieved what few academic religious ethicists have accomplished: she is a profound theologian, an insightful, innovative writer, an inspiring educator and a committed public activist.<sup>15</sup>

Harrison's theo-ethical work is multifaceted: it probes many foundational issues at the heart of feminist liberation theologies, such as perspectives on justice, mutuality, embodiment, racism, ethnocentrism, classism, sexism, compulsory heterosexism, ageism, reproductive health, gender equity, energy politics and economic ethics. Her genre of feminist religious ethics also includes research into Christian history, tradition and ministry and an integration of radical political and

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not categorized or labeled, and various collections of lectures, papers, sermons, course syllabi, newspaper clippings and personal records. Researching and integrating Harrison's archival material has enriched my appropriation of her wide-ranging insights and has been critical to my constructive synthesis of her work in relation to maternal mortality.

<sup>14</sup>For example, Harrison has devoted time and energy to parish ministry, student pastoral work and pastoral counselling in various settings. Harrison was a regular participant in the Theology in the Americas Conferences, a founding member of the Feminist Ethics Consultation, a frequent public speaker, and an active member of the national public education and advocacy partnership with women in prison. Harrison is credited by both scholars and students for her excellent skills as a teacher and a mentor, especially by first-generation feminist social ethicists, non-white and Majority World feminists. Harrison embodies "the doing" of Christian ethics: she is a grassroots ethicist. For example, she does not simply intellectually incorporate womanist critiques into her ethics, she co-taught a course with her colleague, the womanist theologian Delores Williams at Union Seminary from 1991 to 1992.

<sup>15</sup>As I researched in Harrison's archival material, it became apparent to me that she was a much-sought-after speaker and scholar and was held in high esteem by her colleagues, students, friends and members of various congregations. She frequently was invited to deliver sermons at the ordination of women ministers. For example see "Introductory Remarks by Mary Pellauer: Inaugural Lecture of Beverly Harrison, James Chapel, 1980," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; "Sermon for the Ordination of Frances Overman Mercer," March 29, 1987, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; Daniel C. MacGuire, "The Passions of Genius," *USQR* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 205-220.

social theories.<sup>16</sup> Maternal mortality is an issue that Harrison has not addressed. However, for the following five reasons her work is relevant to my analysis.

One, Harrison's Christian social ethics is justice-centred. She focusses on concrete injustice and declares her solidarity with all who are oppressed. Her ethical insights are innovative and progressive; they provide a clear lens through which previously overlooked issues of injustice, such as maternal mortality, can be made visible theologically.

Two, Harrison is a theologian who attends to the global poverty of women and is critical of the silence surrounding their lack of reproductive health and well-being.<sup>17</sup> She is sensitive to the constraints of poor women's lives and emphasizes that morality cannot flourish where conditions of choice are either absent or severely limited.<sup>18</sup> In Harrison's view, the accelerating poverty of women and children is a worldwide problem;<sup>19</sup> she also underlines that the way societies shape and determine the procreative abilities of women is a fundamental ethical issue.<sup>20</sup> I believe that Harrison would support my claim that the social, cultural, economic and religious dynamics that negatively impact the reproductive lives of poor women are issues of the most profound moral concern. She also would agree that any ethical evaluation of maternal mortality which ignores these dynamics is theologically inadequate.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>See Harrison, *Making the Connections*, for examples of her genre of feminist Christian ethics.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, xiv. Harrison's research on reproductive health issues, especially *Our Right to Choose*, is an extremely significant theo-ethical contribution to discourse in this area.

<sup>18</sup>See Jane E. Hicks and Traci C. West, "The Tasks of Liberatory Feminist Ethics: Introduction," in *Justice in the Making*, 1-3.

<sup>19</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Realism," in *Justice in the Making*, 39-44.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 39-40.

Three, Harrison is deeply concerned about the complex moral and social ramifications of the geo-political capitalist economy. She does not assume, *a priori*, that current economic arrangements are either economically or morally legitimate. In particular, as Harrison's main communities of accountability are economically marginalized women, she views the global economy as ethically problematic.<sup>22</sup> She insists that moral reflection on the geo-political economy requires a systematic and gender-sensitive structural analysis: this is because women's poverty is both institutionalized and historically embedded.<sup>23</sup>

Four, Harrison's aim is to broaden theo-ethical knowledge by integrating the voices and experiences of those who hitherto have been excluded. She therefore would affirm that the voices and stories of poor women who struggle to survive pregnancy and childbirth are critical resources from which theological ethics has much to learn.

Five, Harrison is an inspiring visionary who honours the aesthetic dimensions of moral theory. Her approach in Christian ethics is both profound and powerful. That is, while rigorous and critically attentive to the reality of injustice, her approach is infused with hope-filled imagery and metaphor. Harrison aspires to an inclusive, just society which would be "beautiful to behold."<sup>24</sup> Her insights encourage me to envision a "justice imaginable" in a global community that would work

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<sup>22</sup>See "Editor's Introduction," in *Justice in the Making*, xvi.

<sup>23</sup>See Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," in *Justice in the Making*, 16.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, 17; this is a term Harrison explains as directing our "purposeful sense of vocation."

collectively to ensure that maternal mortality became a relic of a barren moral past.<sup>25</sup> Harrison writes:

We are called of God to life abundant, and in the struggle for justice we discover that genuine abundance of life comes from embodying a solidarity with one another that is deeply mutual, that is reciprocal. We need desperately to learn that it is the struggle for justice itself which empowers us to learn to dance together, celebrating in anticipation the co-humanity into which we are called. In solidarity born of the struggle for justice we can joyfully live, empowered, toward those right relationships in which all that abundant life is the birthright of those God brings to life.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.2 Emancipatory Praxis: The Tools of Theo-ethical Judgement and Response

In my introduction, I indicated that within a liberation paradigm Christian faith and emancipatory praxis are aligned.<sup>27</sup> This alignment enables theology to respond in both practical and ethical ways to the complex reality of poverty. Emancipatory praxis, embodied in a preferential option for the poor, is manifested in pastoral, theological and theoretical commitments.<sup>28</sup> In view of women's theological invisibility and the dearth of data on the qualitatively different poverty they experience, I bring Harrison's emancipatory praxis to bear on the problem of maternal mortality. I ask how Harrison's pastoral, theological and social and moral theoretical commitments to emancipatory praxis realize the demands of faith within this context.

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<sup>25</sup>Harrison is indebted to Dorothee Soelle for her insights into how theology is both the poetry of Christian life and the medium where our hopes and dreams are shared. See Harrison, "Working with Protestant Traditions: Feminist Transformations," in *Justice in the Making*, 148-151. Harrison uses the term "justice imaginable" to underline her view that justice is not a moral norm inferior to love, but the central norm of feminist ethics. See "Feminist Ethics: An Alternative Paradigm?" Talk broadcasted 24 May 1987, on New York radio station WQXR New York Society for Ethical Culture, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>26</sup>Harrison, "Human Sexuality and Mutuality," in *Justice in the Making*, 65.

<sup>27</sup>See Introduction p. 15.

<sup>28</sup>See dissertation introduction, pp.15-18, where I explore the meaning of "preferential option for the poor."

The problem I have encountered in exploring this question is that while the theme of emancipatory praxis is central to Harrison's feminist liberation social ethics, it is not explicit. That is, her approach to emancipatory praxis is not systematically constructed nor categorized in a framework that could readily illumine the problem of maternal mortality. Therefore, I have analyzed Harrison's published and unpublished corpus using the methodological framework of emancipatory praxis and its pastoral, theological and theoretical components. In light of my analysis, I have constructed categories that I discern to be useful for the purposes of clarifying, judging and responding to maternal mortality as a theo-ethical issue of injustice.<sup>29</sup>

My emphasis on Harrison's commitments to emancipatory praxis is considerable. This is not only because appropriating Harrison's corpus through the framework of emancipatory praxis shapes my theo-ethical judgement and response to maternal mortality. It is also because I discern critical links between Harrison's emancipatory praxis and two additional resources that further illumine maternal mortality: Harrison's concept of justice and her social theory. In my view, Harrison's emancipatory praxis, her concept of justice and her social theory function as heuristics<sup>30</sup> in my analysis of maternal mortality. Thus, making emancipatory praxis self-evident in Harrison's work is

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<sup>29</sup>I do not dismiss the importance of the recently edited book containing Harrison's work by the feminist scholars Elizabeth M. Bounds, Pamela K. Brubaker, Jane E. Hicks, Marilyn J. Legge, Rebecca Todd Peters, and Traci C. West in *Justice in the Making: Feminist Socialist Ethics*. Their assemblage and editing of Harrison's work in an accessible framework for both researchers and students is a tremendous resource; the thoughtful interviews the feminist scholars conduct with Harrison are also very insightful and helpful in understanding Harrison's feminist liberation social ethics.

<sup>30</sup>My understanding of the word *heuristic* is influenced by the theologian Bernard Lonergan who noted that the words *heuristic* and *Eureka* had similar etymological roots. For Lonergan, heuristic devices designate and explicitly guide and invite insights with respect to the designated unknown. These insights include yet transcend commonsense approaches and consider the intended unknown within a relational context, all of which directs a more holistic knowledge of the unknown. See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1996, c1971), 22-23, 224-233; *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1997, c1957), 57-70; *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Topics in Education*, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1993), 136-141.

a prerequisite for understanding her concept of justice and her social theory, which are the theological focus of Chapter 4.

### 3.2.1 Harrison's Commitment to Emancipatory Praxis

At the outset, it is important to note that Harrison's understanding of praxis weaves together the dialectic of theory/praxis and reflection/action. Critical for Harrison is the understanding that theory is but a moment in praxis: it is judged by the solidarity it generates.<sup>31</sup> Praxis inspires and infuses liberating change. Harrison writes:

[Praxis is] our total engagement as embodied selves and communities in whatever historical project we understand ourselves to be concretely engaged in. Our faith, and all our modes of knowing are, in fact, shaped in a fundamental way by whatever is our historical praxis. [Praxis is] concretely understood as engaged solidarity with the poor and disinherited and critical reflection on Christian tradition in light of that engagement.<sup>32</sup>

Having clarified Harrison's understanding of praxis, I now analyze her theological corpus within the framework of emancipatory praxis. That is, I make explicit how Harrison realizes emancipatory praxis *pastorally* in her commitment to embodied social radicalism, in her rejection of reformist strategies in justice work, and in her communities of accountability. I also make explicit how Harrison realizes emancipatory praxis *theologically* in the resources she appeals for moral norms, in her work in emancipatory historiography, and in her feminist re-envisionment of divine transcendence. Finally, I make explicit how Harrison realizes emancipatory praxis *theoretically* (with respect to both moral theory and social theory) in her mixed approach to moral reasoning, in

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<sup>31</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Thea(o)logies at the Millennium: "Messy" Continued Resistance or Surrender to Postmodern Academic Culture?" in *Justice in the Making*, 115-116.

<sup>32</sup>See Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language: Toward a Normative Theory of Justice," in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen (Dallas: Society of Christian Ethics, 1981), 10.



her awareness of the need for critical dialogue partners in liberation ethics, and in her critique of ideology.

### 3.2.2 Schematic Representation of My Synthesis of Emancipatory Praxis in Harrison's Work

#### [A]: Pastoral Emancipatory Praxis

- (i) embodied social radicalism
- (ii) rejection of reformist strategies not linked to radical social transformation
- (iii) communities of accountability

#### [B]: Theological Emancipatory Praxis

- (i) sources for moral norms
- (ii) emancipatory historiography
- (iii) feminist re-envisioning of divine transcendence

#### [C]: Social and Moral Theoretical Emancipatory Praxis

- (i) mixed theoretical approach to moral reasoning
- (ii) critical dialogue partners
- (iii) critique of ideology

#### [A] **Harrison: Pastoral Emancipatory Praxis**

The pastoral component of emancipatory praxis is realized in the honoured obligation of Christians to participate in the well-being of the oppressed.<sup>33</sup> Harrison's pastoral commitment is evident in her four decades of theological scholarship, in her pioneering of a comprehensive agenda within feminist liberation ethics, and in her public activism. More specifically, her pastoral commitment is demonstrated in her concept of embodied social radicalism, in her rejection of reformist strategies in justice coalitions, and in her accountability to marginalized women.

#### (i) **embodied social radicalism**

Harrison's pastoral commitment to emancipatory praxis is not reducible to a method or an approach in theological ethics. It is a summons to a life-praxis of embodied social radicalism.

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<sup>33</sup>Within a liberation paradigm, this obligation is an *honour* and not a charitable duty for Christians, as God is present in the anguish and the hope of the oppressed. The signs of the time call not simply for intellectual analyses, but for concrete creative commitments of service in solidarity with others. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Introduction to the Revised Edition: Expanding the View," in *A Theology of Liberation*, xvii-xlvi.

Embodied social radicalism is the fruit of Harrison's insight that faith in God nurtures moral accountability for our world, a moral accountability that needs to be actualized in a spirituality of worldly engagement.<sup>34</sup> For Harrison, the human capacity to co-create "a world of moral relations"<sup>35</sup> is a God-given, embodied gift, which all of us are called upon to develop to the best of our abilities.<sup>36</sup> She writes, "The world and the cosmos are inexhaustibly rich in potential for moral fulfilment in spite of the active and powerful presence of evil. Moral life...must honor this insight."<sup>37</sup>

Harrison's approach to embodied social radicalism is animated by her belief in a God who participates in history through each one of us, a God who is experienced in collective works for justice. She maintains that in the moral struggle to embody just patterns of human community, God's living presence unfolds.<sup>38</sup> She is equally clear that any abdication from collective justice-making denies God's presence and amounts to what she terms "practical atheism."<sup>39</sup> For Harrison, God's transcendence is mediated through the praxis of radical solidarity--understood as "cohabitation, embodied commitment and accountability"<sup>40</sup> with the oppressed. Loving God and loving others are

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<sup>34</sup>Harrison, "Keeping Faith in a Sexist Church," in *Making the Connections*, 224.

<sup>35</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in *Making the Connections*, 46.

<sup>36</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 15.

<sup>37</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Realism," *Christianity and Crisis* (14 July 1986): 233.

<sup>38</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 91.

<sup>39</sup>I acknowledge that the term "practical atheism" can be problematic, particularly in the context of inter-religious dialogues with non-theistic religions. However, I discern that Harrison's use of this term refers to the de-sacralization of historical reality arising from our failure to work for justice and our lack of desire to create an inclusive world of mutual well-being. See Harrison, "Agenda for a New Theological Ethic," in *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, ed. William K. Tabb (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 90-91.

<sup>40</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation," 242.

“life-shaping commitments,”<sup>41</sup> honed in concrete justice coalitions which nurture and deepen our common humanity.

Influenced by the social gospel heritage of Protestant liberal ethics, Harrison stresses that justice must be linked to responsible social action in the shaping of a good that is genuinely common to all.<sup>42</sup> Faith in God and justice-making are therefore inseparable: to witness to what is central to Christian faith is to incarnate justice. Essentially, Harrison’s embodied social radicalism calls upon individuals and institutions, particularly the churches, to practice right relations--a practice that requires acknowledging and challenging injustice,<sup>43</sup> or risking complicity in unaccountable social power.<sup>44</sup>

It is significant that Harrison’s embodied social radicalism celebrates the “carnality, physicality and materiality”<sup>45</sup> of life and calls our human body the “integrated locus of all our knowing.”<sup>46</sup> For Harrison, our body is the source of our power to act each other into well-being: our body is pivotal to making right relation and to our capacity to know something of God.<sup>47</sup> Harrison also maintains that the love and passion for justice that animates embodied social radicalism are

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<sup>41</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 115.

<sup>42</sup>See Elizabeth M. Bounds and Marilyn J. Legge, “Working with Protestant Traditions: Theological Liberalism and Feminist Transformations,” in *Justice in the Making*, 75-77.

<sup>43</sup>Harrison, “Agendas for a New Theological Ethic,” in *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, ed. William K. Tabb (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 89-98.

<sup>44</sup>Harrison, “Feminist Social Ethics: Social Policy and the Practice of the Churches,” in *Making the Connections*, 81-190.

<sup>45</sup>Harrison, “The Dream of a Common Language,” 26.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

contingent upon both individual and communal bodily integrity.<sup>48</sup> She writes, “Personal well-being and deeply grounded relationships to others are intimately inter-structured possibilities.”<sup>49</sup> Hence, the human capacity to be other-oriented—that is to be authentic moral agents—presupposes active commitment to ensuring personal and collective bodily integrity.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Harrison claims that our experiences of being lovingly formed by the care and concern of others, and eventually returning this care and concern, are the relational dynamics that shape communities of mutuality and solidarity, communities that embody Christian ministry.<sup>51</sup>

Harrison’s insights demonstrate very clearly that economically marginalized women, who struggle daily to maintain the integrity of their own bodies and that of their dependants, can teach us a great deal about the human passion for love and justice at the heart of embodied social radicalism.<sup>52</sup> Thus, it is by learning from their lives that we can gain insight into the things that must be changed “to enable common effort for common well-being.”<sup>53</sup> Embodied social radicalism therefore clarifies that the chronic institutional violence and structures of power and privilege that hitherto have justified the silencing and suffering of women need to be challenged and transformed in ways life-giving to women.

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<sup>48</sup>Harrison, “Human Sexuality and Mutuality,” in *Justice in the Making*, 57-60.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 59; Harrison, “Challenging Sexual Ethics and Social Order: Interview by Jane Hicks,” in *Justice in the Making*, 68-69.

<sup>51</sup>“Reflections on Feminism and Ministry,” Address to Executive Staff Conference, Mount Augustine Retreat Centre, Staten Island, New York, 20-22 November, Box: Articles/Sermons/Lectures, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>52</sup>Harrison, “The Dream of a Common Language,” 25.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 24-25.

**(ii) rejection of reformist strategies not linked to radical social transformation**

While utopic,<sup>54</sup> Harrison's commitment to embodied social radicalism is not abstracted from a deeply conflicted world. Harrison attends to the suffering of the world. Her pastoral response to suffering is unequivocal: human beings have the power to act each other into well-being, to denounce injustice and to announce new, inclusive ways of being in community.<sup>55</sup>

Harrison's pastoral commitment is therefore discontinuous with reformist strategies. Her moral praxis is based on "human concern for the conditions of our life together, including our life in relation to the rest of nature and to God,"<sup>56</sup> and calls for radical transformation of unaccountable social power. She eschews "thin"<sup>57</sup> approaches to justice as further disadvantaging the oppressed. In her view, moral theory must examine the causes and ongoing dynamics of injustice, and also clarify concrete strategies for liberating change.<sup>58</sup> Thus, while acknowledging her roots in theological liberalism,<sup>59</sup> Harrison is clear that reformist approaches fail to acknowledge adequately the profound

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<sup>54</sup>Harrison's utopic commitment is shared by all liberation paradigms. Utopic commitments and visions are open-ended: they honour the dialectic of history, human consciousness and response to the divine initiative. They image an inclusive world where all flourish; they accent the radical power humans have to co-create this image with God. See Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 20; Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle," 251- 253; Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 11-13.

<sup>55</sup>As moral living is a collective enterprise, Harrison maintains that it needs to be informed by the insights of those outside the Christian community. See Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 4-5.

<sup>56</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 192.

<sup>57</sup>By "thin" approaches to justice, Harrison means non-substantive approaches, approaches that amount to a "balancing of interests and divergent notions of the good along with certain minimalist commitments to fairness." For Harrison, a thin approach to justice presupposes basic human needs and does not adequately consider issues of bodily integrity as fundamental moral requirements. See Harrison, "Preface," in *Justice in the Making*, ix-xii.

<sup>58</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle," 243-259.

<sup>59</sup>While Harrison shares theological liberalism's concern over issues of justice, autonomy, reason and moral norms, she is critical of its failure to consider these issues from the perspectives of women. She challenges liberalism's attenuated theory of rights; she envisions a more inclusive ethics reshaped by attending critically to women's concrete experiences. Harrison applies this same critique to liberation theology: while indebted to its method, she challenges liberation theology to attend more thoroughly to gender and the inter-structuring of women's oppressions. Harrison's dialectical reasoning acknowledges

suffering endured by those on the underside of history, and are unable to stimulate the necessary response of communal accountability. She finds fault with theological liberalism, therefore, because it lacks a historical interpretation of social power, because it tends to preserve the status quo, because it abstracts the individual from the relational matrix of social life, and finally because it fails to challenge entrenched relations of domination and exploitation. Harrison also underlines the inadequacy of liberal theory to address the roots of the pervasive exploitation of women:

The tendency of liberal political theory to image human beings as isolated and discrete entities who may, if they choose, enter into society flies in the face of most women's experience. Such libertarian assumptions reflect social privilege, power and wealth. Women know, especially through child bearing and child rearing, that our social interrelations are basic even to our biological survival and are not now, nor have they ever been, entirely optional.<sup>60</sup>

A second example of Harrison's rejection of reformist strategies is demonstrated by her ethical evaluation of the geo-political economy.<sup>61</sup> She maintains that the geo-political economy is unjust because its profit-oriented policies reflect the insights and interests of a select few, while disenfranchizing the majority and exploiting the natural world. Moreover, Harrison views it as being highly undemocratic, because it consistently rewards the advantaged while further marginalizing the disadvantaged.<sup>62</sup> Her position is clear:

The dynamics of this system [political economy of capitalism] impinge on all human life in the poorest and the richest nations, in villages and urban centers everywhere. The uprooted and impoverished peasant in

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value in traditional ethical approaches, but it signals the need for their critical evolution toward a feminist perspective. See Harrison, "Challenging the Western Paradigm," 253; Harrison, "Situating the Dilemma of Abortion Historically," *Conscience* (March/April 1990): 15- 20.

<sup>60</sup> Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 51. Not only is the ahistorical abstractionism of liberal theory problematic for Harrison, she contends that liberal insights reflect social privilege, power and wealth--experiences contrary to most women's lives--and fail to acknowledge the primal sociality of all of life.

<sup>61</sup>Harrison's understanding of the geo-political economic system is consistent with the definition I presented in the introduction to my dissertation: see pp. 21-22 of Introduction.

<sup>62</sup>Harrison, "Forward to Welfare Policy," xi.

the third world and the homeless, hungry unemployed worker in the cities of the advanced capitalist nations are both victims of global patterns of exploitation. Since the global capitalist mode of production pervades and controls all our social relations, we can no longer afford to analyze any of the patterns of exploitation shaping our own and our community's reality in discrete isolation.<sup>63</sup>

Harrison also claims that because the economy is construed ahistorically, it is severed from personal and communal accountability. She challenges this fragmented understanding of the global economy, maintaining that the contradictions within the system are at the root of oppressive conditions for most people, and, in particular, are tenacious dynamics in the oppression of women.<sup>64</sup> For example, Harrison discerns in conventional economic logic both the subordination of women's well-being to the efficient workings of a capitalist mode of production and the geo-political economy's structured incapacity to be equitable to women.<sup>65</sup> She therefore favours a re-ordering of the global economic system in ways that favour fairer access to the wealth produced in society, and more equitable participation in economic decision making. Harrison's fundamental point is that most operative structures of oppression cannot be understood from either an economic or a theological standpoint without a holistic economic analysis: a point pivotal to an adequate analysis of maternal mortality.

### **(iii) communities of accountability**

Harrison underlines that humans are profoundly relational beings whose individual identities are embedded in a complex, interconnected social matrix. As a Christian ethicist, she interprets this

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<sup>63</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle," 8.

<sup>64</sup>Harrison connects the material changes in advanced industrial capitalist economies with the systemic decimation of women's culture and the emergence of the private, child-centred nuclear family. She maintains that many feminists in the Minority World are in a complex ideological situation: seeking justice for women while participating in the contradictory culture of global capitalism. Harrison's economic critique includes a feminist call to recover women's culture. See "Feminism and the Spirituality of Late Capitalism," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>65</sup>Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," in *Making the Connections*, 28; Harrison, "Misogyny and Homophobia," in *Making the Connections*, 144.

relational orientation within what traditionally is called the kingdom of God: a kingdom of inclusiveness where the circle of divine blessedness is a collective birthright.<sup>66</sup> For Harrison, the central Christian ethical task is living in and working toward this kingdom by ensuring that none are denied their collective birthright.<sup>67</sup> It is, therefore, theologically consistent that Harrison's primary communities of accountability are marginalized women.<sup>68</sup> That is, loyalty towards and empowerment with marginalized women, within a praxis of justice-oriented activism, animates her pastoral commitment.<sup>69</sup> Insight into the injustices experienced by poor women fuels creative resistance and collective passion against all "enduring patterns of violence...concrete sources of life threat, the 'primary emergencies' that require daily encounter in women's lives."<sup>70</sup> This creative resistance and collective passion is the lifeblood of Harrison's feminist liberation theology and the measure of her ethics.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Harrison, "Doing Christian Ethics," 33-35.

<sup>67</sup>What is foundational for Harrison's liberation ethics is the belief that the prophetic vocation of seeking inclusive communities grounded in God belongs to all of us. See "Sermon for the Ordination of Frances Overman Mercer," Judson Baptist Church, 19 March 1987, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>68</sup>Harrison's loyalty to marginalized women is consistent with loyalty to all who are marginalized. However, as a feminist liberation ethicist, she connects women's oppression to wider, systemic dynamics of oppression. Harrison's feminism transcends identity politics: she pursues an evolving solidarity politics of shared collaboration. As a non-essentialist, Harrison also calls on men diminished by hegemonic masculinity and other oppressions to a feminist vision of a world where there are "no excluded ones." See Harrison, "Feminist Musings on Community," in *Justice in the Making*, 47; Harrison, "Keeping Faith in a Sexist Church: Not for Women Only," in *Making the Connections*, 206-234; "To the Jubilee Group," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>69</sup>Harrison reports being viewed by male colleagues as the "exceptional successful woman." Her emerging awareness of the ubiquity of women's oppression provided insight into her own oppression, and to her conviction that the feminist critique was intellectually and theologically fundamental to the integrity of Christianity. See Harrison, "Keeping Faith in a Sexist Church: Not for Women Only," in *Making the Connections*, 214.

<sup>70</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Thea(o)logies at the Millennium," 122.

<sup>71</sup>Harrison, "Agendas for a New Theological Ethic," 89-92.



The complex, context-specific realities of women on the underside of history are both the theo-ethical starting points and the *telos*<sup>72</sup> of Harrison's inductive approach to ethics.<sup>73</sup> Marginalized women are epistemologically privileged:<sup>74</sup> their cries for justice are given primacy because they are the non-persons who struggle daily to "lay hold of the gift of life and to unloose what denies life."<sup>75</sup> In particular, Harrison underlines the moral problem evident in the deteriorating conditions necessary for women to bear and rear children. She is cognizant that for millions of economically marginalized women, their dignity and well-being, and that of the children for whom they are largely responsible, rest precariously on a thin margin of survival. Harrison states:

The accelerating pauperization of women and their dependant children is a massive global phenomenon. While the conditions for procreative choice among the minority of the really affluent improve dramatically, the possibilities for providing food, shelter, health care and adequate education for children deteriorate for most. Increasingly, children are dependant--exclusively dependent--upon the maternal lifeline. It is those who neglect this historical setting who are individualistic in their ethics.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>By *telos*, or teleological impulses, Harrison means that which "shapes our understanding of our purposes and directions as moral agents and moral communities...a purposeful sense of vocation or lifestyle...shap[ing] our sense of what sort of community would be beautiful to behold." See Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," in *Justice in the Making*, 16-17.

<sup>73</sup>In an inductive approach, moral reasoning begins with concrete experiences of liberation struggles and builds theologically from this experience; it attends to experiences of injustice, and then moves to a definition of the moral situation. Thus, in an inductive approach, social ethics is not deducible from abstract theological reflection, or first principles, uninformed by contextual contingencies. Rather, ethics arises from socio-political conflict and *is* the effort to reassess and clarify such conflicts. For Harrison, women's experiences are a necessary component for re-evaluating traditional ethics; feminist theology is not only inductive, but also synthetic and imaginative. See Harrison, "Situating the Dilemma of Abortion Historically," 15-17; see Carol Robb's explanation in her introduction to *Making the Connections*, 1; see Harrison et al., *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985), 157-166.

<sup>74</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle," 251. Disenfranchized women are epistemologically privileged because their voices are critical to directing justice work. Accountability to marginalized women is a corrective to male-dominated moral theology and its traditional dismissal of women's experiences.

<sup>75</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 8.

<sup>76</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Realism," 40. "Feminist Realism" was first published in *Christianity and Crisis* 46, no. 10 (1986): 233-236. The insights into economically marginalized pregnant women's lives remain valid two decades later.

From a methodological perspective, Harrison acknowledges gender discrimination as a recurring, historical oppression. However, she does not privilege gender as the main discursive analytical category.<sup>77</sup> Gender is not an adequate paradigm for understanding women's complex, structural oppressions and the challenges of their lives: it does not give an adequate account of the inter-structuring of women's economic, social and political inequities, or of their varied experiences of privilege and power. Rather, an inter-structural analysis is required, one that integrates gender with other intersecting oppressions within historical and global frameworks.<sup>78</sup>

Essentially, Harrison's accountability to women is exhausted only when all women achieve full historical ethical agency. Until this becomes every woman's reality, she views theological liberation ethics as a compromised discipline.<sup>79</sup> She articulates her feminist commitment in the following way:

To be sure, the full world historical project that feminism envisages remains a distant dream, that is, that every female child in each and every community and culture will be born to share the full horizon of human possibility, that she will have the same range of life options as every male child. This is, and remains, "the longest revolution." But this revolution, for which we have every right to yearn, will come sooner if we celebrate the strength that shines forth in women's lives...[and] learn what we are to know of love from immersion in the struggle for justice.<sup>80</sup>

While Harrison's explicit communities of accountability are marginalized women, she transcends an anthropocentric framework to affirm the moral claims the natural world makes on

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<sup>77</sup>"Feminist Theology: Placing It in an Adequate Ideological Context," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>78</sup>Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," 24.

<sup>79</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 93.

<sup>80</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 7-8.

human agency.<sup>81</sup> For Harrison, co-relational respect for nature is integral to feminist liberation social ethics: the common good requires appropriation within personal, social and cosmic parameters.<sup>82</sup>

She considers that our collective failure to view all of life as sacred and our inability to appreciate our historical situation within a web of complex interrelationships are profound moral problems. She laments the human insensitivity witnessed daily in the plundering of the Earth's resources and the exploitation of almost all of its life forms. She warns that we are running out of time to become "decent inhabitants of our violated planet."<sup>83</sup>

Harrison's dream of living "in a world where there are no excluded ones"<sup>84</sup> therefore embraces both the human and the natural worlds. She writes, "Within a feminist liberation theological vision, we stress that the planet, indeed the whole cosmos, is not only our gracious home. It is an intricate web of life that is as much a part of us as we are of it."<sup>85</sup> While not a fully developed

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<sup>81</sup>Harrison's ecological consciousness is present in her early works. For example, see Harrison, "That Earth Might be Fair: When Faithfulness and Blessedness Diverge," *Religion in Life* 41, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 480-496 and her 1985 article, "The Politics of Energy Policy," in *Making the Connections*. Her ethical concerns about the exploitation of the natural world also are evident in her archival collection. See for example, "Theology, Economics and the Church," Kellogg Lecture, 1986, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS. In her archival collection, cultural historian Tom Berry and ecotheologian Larry Rasmussen are noted. Analyzing Harrison's overall corpus, I discern a shift in her ecological consciousness from a more human-centred to a deeper awareness of the intrinsic rights of the non-human world. This is evident in a contrast of her early work with her later contributions in *Justice in the Making*, 51, 108, 146, 158, 177, and 188, and especially in "Living in Resistance: Interview by Pamela K. Brubaker," 215-219. See also in her tribute to Larry Rasmussen in "Mediating and Deepening Union's Legacy," *USQR* 58, no. 1-2 (2004): 169-177. Harrison's feminist ethical method also has contributed to shaping ecological ethics. See Elly Haney, "Toward a White Feminist Ecological Ethic," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 75-93.

<sup>82</sup> Other ethicists affirm Harrison's ecological sensibilities in her theological ethics. See Marvin M. Ellison and Marilyn J. Legge, "Justice in the Making: Doing Christian Ethics in a Feminist Liberationist Mode," *USQR* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 1-9.

<sup>83</sup>Harrison, "The Task of Liberatory Feminist Ethics," in *Justice in the Making*, 12.

<sup>84</sup>I would add that Harrison's feminist spirituality of embodiment (to be discussed in a later section) is also a contribution to ecological ethics; it challenges abstract, dualistic thinking that has split the spiritual from the material, dismissed the interconnections in all of life and legitimized the exploitation of the natural world.

<sup>85</sup>Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," in *Justice in the Making*, 173.

theme within her theological corpus, Harrison underlines the necessity for a wider ecological and cosmic consciousness in feminist liberation analyses. Her theological insights into energy policies, her holistic concept of embodiment, inclusive of planetary systems,<sup>86</sup> and her analyses of the environmental implications of global economic policies provide a theoretical basis for this critical theo-ethical work.<sup>87</sup>

**[B] Harrison: Theological Emancipatory Praxis**

The theological component of emancipatory praxis is realized in the re-interpretation of both scripture and Christian traditions in light of the scandalous condition of poverty.<sup>88</sup> This re-interpretation is a two-fold task. It involves a deconstruction of received tradition, such as the invisibility and devaluation of women, the monopoly of male symbolisms, and the inherited dualisms that have thwarted a holistic, healthy reverence for the Sacred. It also involves a search for alternative contributions to a living, evolving Christian theology, inclusive of the experiences and insights of oppressed women. Harrison's theological emancipatory praxis is witnessed in the sources she chooses for moral norms, in her emancipatory historiography, and in her feminist re-envisaging of divine transcendence.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Harrison, "Challenging Sexual Ethics and Social Order," 70.

<sup>87</sup> For example, see my article in *Ecotheology*, where I make connections between Harrison's social ethics and the work of eco-feminist economist Marilyn Waring. See Kerwin Jones, "Weaving Perspectives: An Exploration of Economic Justice Based on the Work of Beverly Wildung Harrison and Marilyn Waring."

<sup>88</sup>In a liberation framework, poverty has several meanings, one of which is an ideal of spiritual poverty that is consistent with faith and trust in God, as expressed in the Beatitudes. I speak here of poverty as being a scandalous condition, because it is an unjust reality that is to be rejected as inimical to human dignity and well-being and is therefore against the will of a just and loving God. See Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 162-173.

<sup>89</sup>In rethinking transcendence/immanence, Harrison is indebted to the work of theologians Dorothee Soelle, Carter Heyward and Tom Driver.

**(i) sources for moral norms**

Harrison maintains that theological ethics needs to function in an evocative rather than in an explanatory way:<sup>90</sup> its primary task is to make the world numinous.<sup>91</sup> Theological emancipatory praxis emerges not from pre-critical obeisance to received doctrine. It flows from the passion, energy and creativity that re-images hope and resistance in response to injustice.

Harrison claims both Christian scripture and tradition<sup>92</sup> as foundational sources for her feminist liberation ethics.<sup>93</sup> However, she does not do so uncritically: her consciousness of Christianity's complicity in the trans-cultural subordination of women is acute.<sup>94</sup> For example, from the perspectives of women, Harrison points out that the Bible is a struggle-ridden text requiring a hermeneutic of suspicion in light of women's oppressions.<sup>95</sup> She insists that what is biblically authoritative, or revelatory of the Divine, is that which honours women's moral claim to full

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<sup>90</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 102.

<sup>91</sup>See Harrison, "Dorothee Soelle as a Pioneering Postmodernist," in *The Theology of Dorothee Soelle*, ed. Sarah K. Pinnock (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2003), 241-242.

<sup>92</sup>Although a Christian, Harrison maintains that our moral work must be informed by the sensibilities and values of all morally serious beings outside our religious communities. She advocates for ecumenical, interreligious and post-Christian dialogues. See Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 5; Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 96-103. Appealing to belief systems outside the Christian tradition is characteristic of feminist ethics.

<sup>93</sup>Harrison describes herself as a Christian feminist, "one who knows and owns the call of God through the biblical story but who also sees and acknowledges Christianity's involvement in the subjugation of women." She considers to be in "ambiguous and rebellious tension" with the tradition; she frequently addresses the ambiguities related to being a Christian feminist. See "Banff Women Conference," and "Women and Theology: The Sound of Silence Breaking," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>94</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle," 241.

<sup>95</sup>Harrison claims that women throughout the ages have heard and claimed the Christian message of liberation--a message the institutional churches often had not intended them to hear. See "Reflections on Feminism and Ministry," Box: Articles/Sermons/Lectures, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

humanity.<sup>96</sup> Essentially, women's full humanity is Harrison's moral compass. Harrison also affirms the positive influences resulting from the neo-orthodox renewal and its insights into historical critical biblical approaches. However, she underlines that much contemporary biblical theology continues to construe women ahistorically, to mystify their natures within natural law ontological categories and to demand from them a supererogatory morality.<sup>97</sup> Harrison's point is that an abstract, essentialist construal of women neither furthers their well-being and dignity nor honours their life-giving human agency.

Guided by these feminist theological insights, Harrison identifies the life and teachings of Jesus and the prophetic-messianic critique of injustice, the "usable tradition," or "authoring past," in her feminist liberation work. In her view, Jesus and the prophets of ancient Israel condemned oppressive political, social and economic systems and challenged all to work for justice within a preferential option for the poor.<sup>98</sup> She emphasizes that the ministry of Jesus did not advocate unquestionable obedience to an established order. Jesus' life was about changing the world, and His "good news" was about living a new consciousness and openness with others.<sup>99</sup> Harrison also maintains that Jesus called us all to a lifetime of "questioning, challenging and correcting moral

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<sup>96</sup>Harrison's vision of women's full humanity is shared by all feminists; it is considered essential to a genuine common good. See Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," 5; see also "With Eyes Wide Open: Sermon Preached by Dr. Beverly Harrison," Jessie Ball du Poet Chapel, Hollis College, Virginia, April 29, 1979, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>97</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 62. "Supererogatory morality" means a morality that demands not only women's passivity and self-sacrifice, but also their active, responsible, other-oriented, powerful nurturing. These demands are logically inconsistent and "exceed minimal rationally justified expectation that define obligation."

<sup>98</sup>As with most Christian feminists, Harrison's theology is informed by pre-and post-Christian resources, other religions, and spiritual insights from both contemporary and past mystics. See Harrison, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 160-167.

<sup>99</sup>Harrison, "Statement by Beverly Harrison," in *Theology in the Americas*, ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 367-370.

traditions.”<sup>100</sup> As our forerunner, Jesus prepared the way for us to commit to promoting an inclusive well-being.<sup>101</sup> Harrison writes:

Jesus is no substitute for us; he is our forerunner. He held a place open and sustained a possibility.... He held open a possibility in light of which the manner of our time and place sounds strangely mad. He held open a possibility that we may all be sisters and brothers, together, in a new order of righteousness which is also an order of healing. It is a remote and unfulfilled possibility.<sup>102</sup>

Harrison also cautions that while certain biblical norms are a wellspring of hope and renewal in the struggle for women’s full humanity,<sup>103</sup> critical ethical engagement with women’s contemporary social reality requires that scripture can “at best address analogous but never identical issues.”<sup>104</sup> Particularly within the context of a shrinking, pluralistic and evolving world, moral standards cannot be deduced directly from Christian scripture. That is, moral and ethical standards need to emerge inductively from real-life situations. What Harrison therefore advocates is a critical engagement with our moral past, from which an evolving Christian value system can emerge,<sup>105</sup> one which engages in concrete dialogue with complex, historically situated moral dilemmas of our

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<sup>100</sup>Harrison, “Doing Christian Ethics,” *Justice in the Making*, 36.

<sup>101</sup>Harrison’s Christology does not cohere with an understanding of Jesus as the final revelation of God. Her appropriation of Jesus is that of a life and ministry that stressed not obedience to an established order, but changing the injustices of the world. For Harrison, the good news proclaimed by Jesus was about living out a new consciousness and openness to others. That is, Jesus was our forerunner: He prepared the way for us to commit to creating and propagating well-being. See “Preparing the Way: A Feminist Look at Jesus,” Memorial Church, Stanford University, 28 April 1974, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; “Women and Theology: The Sound of Silence Breaking,” Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>102</sup> See “Preparing the Way.”

<sup>103</sup>See “Justice Redeeming Love,” Sage Chapel Convocation, Cornell University, Sunday, 14 November 1976, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>104</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 65-75.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 67-71.

time.<sup>106</sup> As such, the Bible's authoring past is a corrective and a call to serious immersion in real human suffering and moral accountability for our world, a corrective and a call engaged most fruitfully from the perspectives of marginalized women.<sup>107</sup>

## (ii) emancipatory historiography

Harrison explores Christian history and tradition to discover what is liberating for marginalized women.<sup>108</sup> Her feminist standpoint makes visible the myriad ways in which male-dominated theological ethics has given minimal attention to women's culture and failed to appropriate women as genuine subjects of their lives.<sup>109</sup> For Harrison, a moral re-visioning of Christianity's collective past from the perspectives of disenfranchized women is critical to the integrity of its ethics.<sup>110</sup> Her work in emancipatory historiography is an important contribution to this revisioning: she documents both a history of oppression against women and a history of women's resistance to oppression.<sup>111</sup> Harrison's insights into women's resistance to oppression are essential both historically and contemporaneously. These insights afford women a more realistic

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<sup>106</sup>Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 5-6.

<sup>107</sup>According to Harrison, moral accountability for our world requires addressing the contradictions in women's lives, especially the most vulnerable women. An example of this is addressing the erosion of socio-economic conditions supportive of child-bearing and child-rearing within a prevailing romantic naturalistic myth of women's vocation to motherhood. See "A Conversation with Beverly Harrison: The Politics of Reproduction," *The Witness* (June 1989): 12-15; Harrison, "Feminist Realism," 233- 236.

<sup>108</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation," 259.

<sup>109</sup>For Harrison, feminism's accent on women as subjects of their own lives is a moral good that is yet to be realized in both sacred and secular realms, worldwide. Harrison's image of this moral good is that of "the sound of silence breaking." It is an image inspired by the work of feminist theorist Sheila Rowbotham and feminist theologians Dorothee Soelle and Mary Daly. See "Women and Theology: The Sound of Silence Breaking," and "Christian Feminists Speak," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>110</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 120-122.

<sup>111</sup>Harrison, "When Fruitfulness and Blessing Diverge," 480- 496.



understanding of their collective past; they counteract any internalized ideology of passivity and inspire liberating human agency.<sup>112</sup>

Harrison probes the myriad ways in which women have been socially constructed and defined instrumentally by those in positions of power.<sup>113</sup> She challenges as unjust both this abuse of power and the social amnesia it fosters regarding women's lives. She underscores that throughout time, women have been "the doers of life-sustaining things, the copers...those who have understood that the reception of the gift of life is no inert thing, that to receive this gift is to be engaged in its tending constantly."<sup>114</sup> Her point is that women have been, and remain, empowering architects in the formation of personhood and community--that is, in the actual "doing" of ethics.<sup>115</sup> From the perspectives of marginalized women, Harrison calls the Christian tradition back to liberating praxis. By applying a hermeneutic of liberation to Christian history, she keeps faith with what is most genuine in the Christian tradition.

Harrison's theological praxis is evident in both the challenges she brings to Christianity's history of gender negativity and the contributions she makes towards a more complete and evolving historical interpretation.<sup>116</sup> For example, she advocates a renaissance in moral theology, inclusive of

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<sup>112</sup>Harrison's emancipatory historiography also shapes her theo-ethical critique of the geo-political economy. For example, Harrison notes that official history failed to record the fact that North American societies were shaped by militant, creative resistance to the economic and political monopolies of power. In official history's failure to attend to this past, much is ignored, such as the historical facts of genocidal racism toward African Americans, indigenous people, and immigrants. Harrison is therefore critical of official history because it perpetuates myths of freedom, democracy and financial well-being for those disciplined to work hard enough. In her view, a partial appropriation of our past enables powerful political and economic monopolies to proliferate, while the diminishing well-being and survival of increasing numbers of people is not challenged. See "Feminism and the Spirituality of Late Capitalism," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>113</sup>See "Feminist Panel: Theologies in the Americas," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>114</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 10.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 10-12.

<sup>116</sup>Harrison, "Situating the Dilemma of Abortion Historically," 16.

the concrete struggles of women.<sup>117</sup> She cites women's historical struggles in the challenges related to fertility, pregnancy and child bearing; she claims these challenges are primal, yet neglected, dimensions of both history and moral theology.<sup>118</sup>

Harrison is aware that throughout time, women's lives have been affected profoundly by the interaction between their biological capacity to produce children and the prevailing socio-cultural, historical and religious expectations.<sup>119</sup> She maintains that this interaction continues to function in women's lives:<sup>120</sup> she cites the dramatic effects within the last two centuries resulting from shifting structural dynamics of the modern economy and the implications on the cultural institutions of the family, gender relations, and the increasing social and economic dis-empowerment of women.<sup>121</sup> Inroads into women's heritage provide not only a more holistic reading of our Christian collective past, but also insight into the contemporary oppression of women: two essential aspects of theological emancipatory praxis.

### **(iii) feminist re-envisioning of divine transcendence**

Harrison's feminist re-envisioning of divine transcendence as radical immanence is also significant to theological emancipatory praxis. For Harrison, divine transcendence and immanence

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<sup>117</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 6.

<sup>118</sup>For Harrison, feminist revolutionary praxis needs to learn to hear the pain of women's silence breaking. As women's subordination is witnessed in their silence, resistance begins with their reclaiming their cultural heritage. See "Towards a Feminist Response to the Doing of Christian Theology," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 155-161; Harrison, "When Fruitfulness and Blessing Diverge," 481-485.

<sup>119</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 155. See also Harrison, "Feminist Realism," 233-236; "Human Sexuality: 2<sup>nd</sup> Talk, 5-6," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>120</sup>For a feminist theological contribution to the emerging historical discourse on sexuality, see Harrison and Carter Heyward, "Pain and Pleasure: Avoiding the Confusions of Christian Tradition in Feminist Theory," in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson et al. (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 132-148.

<sup>121</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 158-159. Harrison underlines women's accelerating global poverty; she links their poverty to women's lack of reproductive rights and body integrity. See Harrison, "Situating the Dilemma," 17.

are related dialectically: they involve “a living in relation with and toward all created beings.”<sup>122</sup>

Hence, the Sacred is known in and through our reverence for relationship; we are holy in our concern for the other, in our capacity to nurture reciprocal power-in-relation and in our ability to “cross over from self to other.”<sup>123</sup> Harrison states:

God is not the “wholly other” projected by patriarchal piety; nor is God the “He” who remains unaffected by the world. God is the proceeding one, a representing power present to us as companion, one who supports, encourages, lures us into activity in relation. We encounter God through relationship with all that nurtures and sustains life.<sup>124</sup>

It is important to note that Harrison’s re-visioning of transcendence and immanence as modes of relationship is not a rejection of divine transcendence. It is a rejection of an idolatrous image of a distant, autonomous God whose creative power cannot be experienced in collective justice work. Harrison directs her challenge, therefore, not at divine transcendence, but at an abstract construal of transcendence which deforms human responsibility for the world.<sup>125</sup> Her re-envisioning of God/ess, not as disengaged “Being Itself,” but as “Power-in-Relation,”<sup>126</sup> fosters an epistemological rupture with all spiritual and gender dualism.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life,” in *Justice in the Making*, 111.

<sup>123</sup>Harrison states that ethics is not directly concerned with God-language; ethics is about moral reflection on human agency in light of our relation with God and with each other. However, Harrison does underline the power dynamics that language about God maintains, such as the invisibility of women in singularly male-gender referents. See Harrison, “Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics,” 22-41. See also Harrison, “Pain and Pleasure,” 143.

<sup>124</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 108.

<sup>125</sup>Harrison, “Human Sexuality and Mutuality,” in *Justice in the Making*, 53-65.

<sup>126</sup>“Power-in Relation” as explained by Harrison is shared power that transcends barriers of difference and heals discord, empowering all in the process. See Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life,” 110-111.

<sup>127</sup>Harrison, “The Tasks of Liberatory Feminist Ethics,” 54.

Harrison's re-imagining of transcendence/immanence is a call for a wise ethic that can deconstruct dualistic approaches and analyze the consequences of their evaluative perspectives. What is morally problematic for Harrison is not duality as such, but its oppositional and hierarchical construal, along with its dismissal of the deep interconnections within all of life.<sup>128</sup> Her central concern is that by legitimizing hierarchy and control, dualisms thwart the justice of shared power and mutual relationship. For example, Harrison identifies that the disordered power relations between women and men are rooted in Christian body/spirit and gender dualisms.<sup>129</sup> She maintains that the spiritual dualism of body and soul fostered a pervasive sex negativity and a revulsion against the human body--above all the female body--as a source of evil. It also furthered a socially constructed evaluation of women as inferior to men in an intellectual, spiritual, social and sexual sense. Thus, men were regarded as normatively human, whereas women were condemned as lesser beings.<sup>130</sup>

Harrison underlines that the spiritual and gender dualisms within Christian tradition are not abstract phenomena: they function in the ongoing institutional control of women's procreative abilities and in their often rigidly defined life choices of either self-sacrificing motherhood or virginal asceticism.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, she maintains that inherited dualisms continue to legitimize a male-dominated moral theology which is dismissive both of women as moral agents, and of their lives as significant arenas for ethical deliberation.<sup>132</sup> Consequently, questions of women's concrete

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<sup>128</sup>Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," 22-41.

<sup>129</sup>Harrison's feminist vision of male/female relations is one of co-humanity, full partnership in church, family and society. Turning back from this vision, or spiritual quest, would mean spiritual death. See "Women and Men: Dynamics of Power in Church and Society," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>130</sup>Harrison, "Human Mutuality and Sexuality," 62.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 54-56.

<sup>132</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 1-12.

well-being have been de-coupled from issues of theology and morality. These dismissals of women have produced a moral myopia which fails to integrate concrete historical data concerning the well-being of more than half the human population: what Harrison terms a costly oversight to any constructive sense of polis and community.<sup>133</sup> Harrison emphasizes that women are the “most disadvantaged people within their own communities and social groups.”<sup>134</sup> Her conclusion is that the widely held ethical position that a just society should ensure that all members receive the basic conditions to pursue their life plans<sup>135</sup> does not cohere well with the everyday realities of many of the world’s women.<sup>136</sup>

Harrison’s re-imagining of divine transcendence as radical immanence has ethical implications beyond an appropriation of divine-human relations and a critique of inherited dualisms. For example, a feminist spirituality of radical embodiment emerges from her re-imagining, in which the bodily integrity of those most marginalized is fundamental to communal ethical agency.<sup>137</sup> Again, this embodied feminist spirituality accents that all our knowledge, including our moral insights, is “body-mediated knowledge,” and rooted deeply in human sensuality.<sup>138</sup> What Harrison’s feminist spirituality therefore rejects is not only inherited dualisms, but also the attendant morality that has

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 32-56.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>135</sup>Harrison is referring especially to Roman Catholic moral theology, in which the good society is understood as one that promotes the conditions for the pursuit of one’s own life plans.

<sup>136</sup>For Harrison, the failure to attend to women’s realities and to acknowledge their moral contributions is “not only a historical, logical and theological error, but also a moral failing.” See Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 7, 44; “Feminist Ethics: An Alternative Paradigm?” New York Society for Ethical Culture, broadcast over WQXR 24 May 1987, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>137</sup>Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life,” 105-111.

<sup>138</sup>Harrison, “The Power of Anger,” 12-15.

spiritualized human suffering and muted Christian resistance to the oppression of others.<sup>139</sup>

Essentially, Harrison's embodied spirituality connects the disparagement of our own bodies with the collective indifference to the disparagement and sufferings of the bodies of others. Her words are candid:

If you can't feel your own pain, if you can't feel your own bowels, you may never know when you see someone else weeping that you are hurting too. If you cannot feel deeply in your own body, you will have a hard time noticing that others are suffering.<sup>140</sup>

Hence, Harrison's feminist spirituality mediates positive self-awareness with other-oriented apprehension and response: it is a spirituality animated by a radical communitarian interdependence. As Harrison states, it is a spirituality that highlights the following moral fact: "Our interdependence is not optional. The parameters of our embodiedness are literally, not figuratively, planetary. We will live or we will die together."<sup>141</sup>

In addition, Harrison's re-imagining of divine transcendence as radical immanence reveals the ethical potential of language either as a tool of oppression or as a means by the full humanity of all can be nurtured.<sup>142</sup> She notes that because language functions subconsciously, it is a potent transmitter of social structures of meaning: the marks of domination are deeply embedded within its

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<sup>139</sup>Early dualistic patristic theory regarding spirit and flesh fostered a dualistic asceticism in which pain and deprivation became a normative dimension of Christian spirituality. This led to a spiritualizing and romanticization of deprivation and suffering, and over time a sex-phobic and sex-preoccupied focus within the Christian ethic. See Harrison and Carter Heyward, "Pain and Pleasure," 134-136.

<sup>140</sup>See "Human Sexuality, 2<sup>nd</sup> Talk, 13," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>141</sup>Harrison identifies three levels to our interdependence: first, as discrete personal bodies, our well-being is a condition of everyone else's liberation; second, as communal bodies, our survival is contingent upon the memories of our forebears and the future of our children; third, as embodied creatures, the planet is our cosmic skin. See "Feminism and Spirituality of Late Capitalism," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.* Harrison cautions wariness of any theology that fails to attend to the social meaning of its claims about God.

symbol systems.<sup>143</sup> As such, uncritical language-use can legitimize and reinforce the suffering of others. In its elaboration of our sense of power-in-relation, language can either validate oppression or inspire other-oriented transcendence.<sup>144</sup> Thus, defining divine transcendence in relational terms flows from Harrison's moral assessment of the social, political and ethical implications of language. What is critical for Harrison is the insight that the language of faith is the language of solidarity and praxis, and that all language arises from and supports the ongoing struggle for the wholeness and the integrity of all of life.

**[C] Harrison: Social and Moral Theoretical Emancipatory Praxis**

The commitment to theoretical emancipatory praxis calls for intellectual awareness to multi-disciplinary analyses of the complex realities of the impoverished. Harrison's own intellectual awareness is evident in her integration of theory--that is, moral theories and their philosophical analyses, along with theories of historical Christian communities into her theological social ethics. She also integrates various streams of social theory, including perspectives from the social sciences.<sup>145</sup> Harrison's commitment to theoretical emancipatory praxis is animated by the desire to "live in history in a way that includes a genuine spiritual connection with God and has real intellectual integrity."<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, she signals the relevance of both grassroots activism and global networking as intellectual resources for theological ethics: these sites of knowledge and

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<sup>143</sup>Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," 22-29.

<sup>144</sup>The issues of God language, social power and gender are moral concerns for Harrison. It is not only problematic that our God language is unidimensional; she notes that experientially, female imagery is destabilizing because it carries no context of trans-personal and public power. Critical for Harrison is the insight that God-language functions; it shapes our experience of the Sacred and our sense of power-in-relation. See "Remarks on Language about God and Gender," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>145</sup>Harrison, "Toward a Christian Feminist Liberation Hermeneutic for Demystifying Class Reality in Local Congregations," in *Justice in the Making*, 186.

<sup>146</sup>Harrison, "Working with Protestant Traditions: Feminist Transformations," in *Justice in the Making*, 147.

communities of resistance provide contextual engagement with the concrete survival issues of the disenfranchised.<sup>147</sup> Harrison's mixed theoretical approach to moral reasoning, her understanding that social ethics is a multi-disciplinary art, and her critique of ideology shape her theoretical commitment to emancipatory praxis.

**(i) mixed theoretical approach to moral reasoning**

In her earlier works, Harrison describes herself as a mixed theorist.<sup>148</sup> By this, she means [an ethicist who] "tries on a range of moral reasons in any given case in order to clarify what ethical agency requires."<sup>149</sup> As a mixed theorist, Harrison avoids absolutist positions in her theo-ethical evaluations, positions that can preclude solidarity with the most disenfranchised. She integrates deontological and teleological insights into her liberation methodology and allows each to function as a corrective to the other.<sup>150</sup> Her approach emphasizes that moral meaning must make appeal both to normative principles as "action guides", and also to values that shape, in a visionary sense, the *telos* of a good society.

Harrison's mixed-theoretical approach focusses Christian ethical analysis onto concrete historical evil, such as the denial of basic human needs. It is ethically attentive to situations in which one person, or group, thrives at the expense of another. It illumines both the moral dilemmas of personal choice and the wider social justice issues connected to these dilemmas. In addition, it makes connections between personal and structural levels, that is, between unjust acts and the social structures and institutional patterns of power which deny or compromise the full humanity of all

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<sup>147</sup>Harrison, *Feminist Thea(o)logies at the Millennium*, 121.

<sup>148</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 2.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.



people, particularly the marginalized.<sup>151</sup> As a consequence, Harrison's mixed theoretical approach correlates well with the feminist insight that the *personal is political*.<sup>152</sup>

**(ii) critical dialogue partners**

Harrison views the human-divine relation in and through the nexus of nature, culture, society and history. She concludes that an ethic for our complex, pluralistic, global society cannot be derived solely from theological sources. For Harrison, there is no blueprint for a just, ethical society that can be gleaned solely from external moral authority. Morality is a communal, collective endeavour.<sup>153</sup> Thus, while grounded in her Christian heritage and tradition, she accents the fact that moral living is inescapably rooted in active collective engagement in the identification and resolution of current moral dilemmas.<sup>154</sup> She maintains that the primary, liberatory task for Christian social ethics is the prioritizing of ethical norms that can meet the concrete moral challenges of our contemporary lives.<sup>155</sup>

Incorporating social and moral theoretical sources capable of exposing the dynamics that impede justice, both personally and structurally, is, therefore, fundamental to liberatory work. For Harrison, the simultaneous continuity and disruption of received tradition in light of contemporary insights<sup>156</sup> is necessary to re-define contemporary Christian moral values and to ensure a living, evolving tradition of social ethics. She underscores that Christian social ethics is a morally vacuous

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<sup>151</sup>Harrison defines emancipation as "involving struggle against structures of oppression and toward embodiment of a community free of the internalization of those structures...and unveils the dynamics operating structurally in the social system to hold human beings in bondage." See "Notes from CE208-Liberation Theology and Social Ethics: Some Theses for Discussion," Teaching Files, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>152</sup>Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 15.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>154</sup>Harrison, "Doing Christian Ethics," 33-35.

<sup>155</sup>Harrison, "Making Connections: Becoming a Feminist Ethicist," 13.

<sup>156</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation," 246.

rhetoric without both a critical appropriation of social reality and a skilled integration of social and moral theoretical analyses and social scientific analyses (not in a positivistic sense) with traditional theological insights. Hence, animating Harrison's commitment to theoretical praxis is the goal of ensuring the theoretical integrity of Christian social liberation ethics. As such, intellectual openness to evolving wisdom<sup>157</sup> and its appropriate convergence within moral deliberation is fundamental. In her view, the failure to grasp the theological relevance of this new wisdom fosters narrow biblicism and a misappropriation of social reality.<sup>158</sup> She therefore integrates multiple sources into her theological ethics: sources she discerns as pivotal to grasping the particular historical moment,<sup>159</sup> and clarifying the context for theo-ethical deliberation.<sup>160</sup> Harrison states, "a wise ethic protests the moral myopia of any ethical theory incapable of integrating world historical data into its analysis."<sup>161</sup>

For example, Harrison values the social sciences as relevant dialogue partners. In her view, insights from the social sciences and/or social theories offer descriptive and explanatory approaches to social values, while theo-ethical insights provide an evaluation of the moral significance of social values and attendant acts, policies and institutional structures.<sup>162</sup> That is, historically conscious data furnished by social science dialogue partners can expose the contradictions which have disenfranchised women, both within the Christian tradition and within the wider socio-cultural and

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<sup>157</sup>The innovative work of feminist economics is an example of new contemporary wisdom that correlates well with the needs of a feminist liberation theo-ethical analysis.

<sup>158</sup>Harrison, "Making Connections: Becoming a Feminist Ethicist," 11.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 5-13.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>161</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 48.

<sup>162</sup>For Harrison, theological theories, moral theories of Christian communities and various streams of social theory, including modes of social science, philosophical and scientific perspectives (not in any positivistic sense that uncritically construes social organizations/social reality as natural and inevitable) that hitherto have not been integrated into Christian self-understanding are critical to an adequate practice of Christian ethics. See Harrison, "Toward a Christian Feminist Liberation Hermeneutic," 186, 190-192.

institutional matrix within which Christianity functions. Hence, social scientific data can offer a lens on Christianity's history of insensitivity to women's lives. Moreover, this data grounds a more effective praxis of resistance by illuminating the complex social world, the matrix of our individual and communal identities.

### (iii) critique of ideology

Harrison cautions that "society is in us before we are in society."<sup>163</sup> Her words clarify two ethical points which are pivotal to theoretical emancipatory praxis. The first of these is that we are born into a "web of historical sociability"<sup>164</sup> that conditions and shapes our lives long before we are individuated selves. Due to our diverse experiences either of privilege or disadvantage, liberatory praxis can begin only with an awareness of one's historical privileging and social location, along with critical discernment of one's complicity in any disordered power relations.<sup>165</sup> What Harrison's insights clarify is that moral reasoning is an inherently ambiguous process: no person or theory can claim immunity from ideological bias.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>Harrison, "The Older Person's Worth in the Eyes of Society," in *Making the Connections*, 153.

<sup>164</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 110. See also "Reflections on Feminism and Ministry," Harrison Papers, Box: Articles/Sermons/Lectures, Archives, UTS.

<sup>165</sup>For Harrison, attending to one's social location and historical privileging is epistemologically and methodologically necessary for insight into the politics of difference. By this, she does not mean that only those in positions of "pure subjugation" are conscious of injustice. Rather, she appreciates that those who work for justice are often complexly and multiply situated. Her point is that our social contradictions require acknowledgement. It is noteworthy that Harrison is named by non-white feminists as one who is supportive of their theoretical articulation of their experiences of difference. For examples, see Joan M. Martin, "The Notion of Difference for Emerging Womanist Ethics," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 39- 51; Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Defining Our Proyecto Histórico: Mujerista Strategies for Liberation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no. 1-2 (Spring/Fall 1993): 17-27; Katie G. Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures: The Intrusive Markers of Social Class," *USQR* 53, no. 3-4 (1999): 53-64.

<sup>166</sup>Harrison, "Toward a Christian Feminist Liberation Hermeneutic for Demystifying Class Reality in Local Congregations," in *Beyond Clericalism: Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education*, ed. Joseph Hough and Barbara Wheeler (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 143.

The second ethical point relevant to theoretical emancipatory praxis is that most people do not have genuine insight into the personal and structural suffering of others, other than those who endure the greatest oppression.<sup>167</sup> That is, for Harrison, privilege limits moral awareness.<sup>168</sup> Due to the inherent ambiguity of the process of moral reasoning, the standpoint of the oppressed must be privileged. It is from the standpoint of the oppressed that unjust structures shaping individuals and communities can be unmasked and challenged most effectively. Hence, it is from this standpoint that Harrison welcomes any resource capable of advancing historical perspective on the dynamics of oppression.<sup>169</sup>

Harrison considers liberation theological ethics to be a multi-disciplinary art.<sup>170</sup> The clarity that other disciplines bring to understanding the complex reality of the poor is, therefore, central to effective liberatory praxis. Nonetheless, while affirming its multi-disciplinary orientation,<sup>171</sup> she also warns that this theoretical openness requires ideological literacy.<sup>172</sup> Her caveat is that what we accept as truth, including our normative assumptions about our social world and our theological insights, often is linked to operative ideologies supporting the status quo.<sup>173</sup> Harrison also underlines

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<sup>167</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose* 5-13.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>169</sup>See Elizabeth M. Bounds and Marilyn J. Legge, "Working with Protestant Traditions: Theological Liberalism and Feminist Transformations," in *Justice in the Making*, 75-77.

<sup>170</sup>Harrison emphasizes that liberation theology's praxis of resistance cannot be done in isolation: it is a collaborative praxis that requires communities of resistance guided by theoretical insights from various disciplines of human understanding. See Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory in Religious Social Ethics," 54-82; Harrison, "Toward a Christian Feminist Hermeneutic for Demystifying Class Reality," 137-144.

<sup>171</sup> Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory in Religious Social Ethics," 54-58.

<sup>172</sup>*Ibid.*, 54-56. Harrison considers ideology the political horizon that shapes human attitudes about the world, and shapes all methodological approaches. See "Situating the Dilemma of Abortion Historically," 16.

<sup>173</sup>This is a recurring theme throughout all of Harrison's work. See Harrison's archival notes on sociology of religion; see Harrison, "Education for Justice: Pedagogical Principles," *Rethinking Social Ministry*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (New York: United Presbyterian Program Agency, 1980), 78-80.

that ideology is most fully operative in situations of oppression.<sup>174</sup> Thus, as ideology escapes no theoretical discipline, the subtext of assumptions within all disciplines requires critical analysis. For example, Harrison identifies a contemporary form of ideology operating with respect to the current global economy: an ideology that obfuscates an escalating crisis and the necessary social, economic and moral responses. The crisis that is obfuscated is that at a time when the triumph and efficiency of the global capitalist market mechanism is uncontested, the survival of an unprecedented number of vulnerable people and the beleaguered planet on which they live are at risk.<sup>175</sup>

Harrison's insights into ideology underscore a key task of liberation theologians: to ensure the critical integrity of their discipline, particularly when integrating religious vision with other disciplines of human understanding.<sup>176</sup> She highlights the importance of ideologically-explicit dialogue partners: by not claiming to be objective or theoretically neutral, these dialogue partners demonstrate an appreciation of the dynamics of ideology. Harrison's central point is that if theological ethics is to engage in emancipatory theoretical praxis, it must be aware of its own ideological blindness, as well as that of any resource it utilizes to interpret social reality.<sup>177</sup>

Harrison's critique of ideology is grounded in the insights of both liberation theology and the intellectual traditions of critical theory.<sup>178</sup> All claims to truth, including theological truth, require

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<sup>174</sup>Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 18.

<sup>175</sup>See Harrison, "Dorothee Soelle as a Pioneering Postmodernist," 137-140.

<sup>176</sup>For Harrison, theology shares the attributes of any other socially constructed perspective: it functions in life-giving or life-denying ways to mask or reveal power dynamics. See Harrison, "Towards a Christian Feminist Liberation Hermeneutic," 187.

<sup>177</sup>Harrison advocates a strong hermeneutic of suspicion regarding all theory incorporated in ethical work; she maintains that critical scrutiny is required to discern whether the subtext of truth claims distorts proposed actions and policies and misinterprets human agency. See "Making Connections: Becoming a Feminist Ethicist," Interview by Traci C. West, *Justice in the Making*, 5-13.

<sup>178</sup>Harrison, "Working with Protestant Traditions," 145-151. Harrison notes her indebtedness to European political radicalism, particularly with respect to its critical historical sensibilities. Her social philosophy is "closer to the European left than libertarian convictions of [her] co-patriots, including some

appropriation within a hermeneutic of suspicion oriented to the well-being of the oppressed. That is, all claims and counterclaims must be demystified by discerning whose self-interest is served, or whose voice is heard. Again, what is critical for Harrison is the liberation insight that theory is but a moment in praxis, and that all theological and social scientific theory converges in an evolving justice hermeneutic that is tested and transformed by a community of believers accountable to the most vulnerable.<sup>179</sup> Harrison therefore links the personal struggles of economically marginalized women with operative social, political and cultural structures.<sup>180</sup> She has been called an “ethical archeologist,”<sup>181</sup> because she digs deep to uncover not only the “hydra-headed”<sup>182</sup> legacy of misogyny in Christian tradition, but also the multiplicative ways<sup>183</sup> in which the complexities of race, class, ethnicity, imperialism and socio-economic status, operating within the geo-political economy, interact with one another to subvert personal, communal and cosmic well-being.<sup>184</sup>

### 3.2.3 Harrison’s Emancipatory Praxis: Summary of Key Points

Harrison’s feminist liberation theology is grounded in emancipatory praxis: a praxis that is animated by pastoral, theological and theoretical commitments.

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US feminists.” See “Feminism and the Spirituality of Late Capitalism,” Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>179</sup>Harrison, “Toward a Christian Feminist Liberation Hermeneutic,” 187.

<sup>180</sup>A central aim of a feminist ethical method is to demystify all power relations in which a particular historical issue or conflict is embedded. See Harrison, “Situating the Dilemma,” 16.

<sup>181</sup>See Cannon, “Unearthing Ethical Treasures,” 53-64.

<sup>182</sup>The term “hydra-headed” originates in the work of the theologian Mary Daly, quoted by Harrison in “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love,” 5.

<sup>183</sup>For a discussion of the interactive effects of discrimination, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Traffic at the Crossroads: Multiple Oppressions,” in *Sisterhood is Forever*, 43-57.

<sup>184</sup>Harrison, “Situating the Dilemma,” 16-17.

Pastorally, it is enfolded in a commitment to embodied social radicalism. This commitment calls all people of faith to right relation and moral accountability for the conditions of our world; it emphasizes the indivisibility of faith and justice-making. Harrison's pastoral commitment brings reflective thought and active resistance to all modes of historical suffering. It rejects reformist strategies supportive of the status quo and demystifies chronic patterns of institutional violence and unaccountable abuses of social power. Harrison's pastoral commitment is animated by the theological insight that the circle of divine blessedness is an inclusive, collective birthright. In light of the pan-cultural, gender-biased policies of exclusion that de-humanize many of the world's women, her pastoral commitment is accountable primarily to poor women within individual, social and cosmic parameters.

Theologically, Harrison's commitment to emancipatory praxis is actualized in a critical appropriation of Christian scripture and tradition in light of the concrete challenges of poor women's lives. Women's full humanity, as revelatory of the Divine, is the operative feminist hermeneutic. The Jesus tradition and the prophetic-messianic stance against injustice are biblical norms central to contemporary justice work: these norms require appropriation within the context of the concrete moral challenges of our world, particularly the myriad oppressions endured by women. In Harrison's emancipatory historiography, the retrieval of women's history contributes to a more holistic understanding of our collective past, and also to a future in which gender-based relations of domination and subordination are transformed. Harrison's re-imagining of divine transcendence as radical immanence allows insight into an experience of the Sacred: it rejects inherited dualisms that thwart Christian solidarity and liberatory agency.

Theoretically, Harrison's emancipatory praxis is realized in her mixed theoretical approach. This approach affords insights into the history of women's oppression and its ongoing dynamics: it ritualizes and celebrates all sources of hope, while prioritizing strategies for an effective praxis of

resistance. Harrison's theoretical commitment also underlines the theo-ethical relevance of attending critically to concrete, evolving historical dynamics. As morality is a communal, collective endeavour, the skilled integration of insights furnished by critical dialogue partners is central to the epistemological integrity of Christian liberation ethics. Harrison's theoretical commitment to emancipatory praxis discerns the pervasiveness of ideological bias: it calls for ideological literacy in the integration of other theoretical resources for moral reflection.

### **3.3 Making the Connections: Towards A Theo-ethical Response to Maternal Mortality**

To reiterate, my purpose in categorizing Harrison's theological corpus within the framework of emancipatory praxis was, first, to illumine maternal mortality as a theo-ethical issue and, second, to shape an effective praxis of resistance. In the following section, I demonstrate the ways in which my interpretation of Harrison's pastoral, theological and theoretical commitments to emancipatory praxis fulfills this two-fold purpose and thereby correlates well with the needs of a feminist liberation social ethical analysis of maternal mortality. However, I must raise the following caveat: Harrison, herself, may not agree with my interpretation and synthesis of her work, nor with my particular methodological focus on emancipatory praxis. Nonetheless, I submit that by making the theme of emancipatory praxis explicit in Harrison's work, I am in a position to clarify, judge and respond to maternal mortality as a theo-ethical issue of injustice experienced by economically marginalized pregnant women.

#### **3.3.1 Pastoral Emancipatory Praxis: Towards a Theo-ethical Analysis of Maternal Mortality (i) embodied social radicalism**

The commitment to pastoral emancipatory praxis, enfolded in embodied social radicalism, identifies collective justice work as an experience of the Sacred. By the same token, it condemns abdication from justice-making as a denial of the Sacred. Insight into embodied social radicalism therefore illumines maternal mortality as an instance of practical atheism. The daily sufferings and deaths of more than 1,600 pregnant women and girls, and the underestimated millions who are



chronically disabled in pregnancy, constitute a denial of God's living presence among us. These largely preventable maternal deaths and disabilities are symptomatic of a global failure of right relation and a pervasive inability to co-create a world of moral relations; they are evidence of our collective incapacity to act one another into well-being.

Embodied social radicalism clarifies that maternal mortality is an unethical consequence of our failure to actualize the inseparability of faith and justice-making: it is a failure to make the moral connections between responsible social commitment and the forging of a genuinely inclusive common good. In addition, the recalcitrant nature of maternal mortality raises serious questions regarding our human capacity to be authentically other-oriented--that is, to be moral agents capable of generating mutually enhancing patterns of interpersonal and social living. For in the tragic maternal deaths that occur every minute of every day throughout our global community, we see the erosion of our common humanity. This is because many of those who embody social radicalism in their nurturing of the dependent and the vulnerable of our world are suffering and dying prematurely.

**(ii) rejection of reformist strategies not linked to radical social transformation**

Pastoral emancipatory praxis clarifies that reformist economic strategies support the status quo, and do little to reduce maternal death and disability. Reformist economic strategies are, therefore, morally untenable responses to the complex interrelated problems of women's poverty and maternal mortality. The global data is conclusive: maternal mortality remains the health indicator that has been least altered by global health initiatives. The toll of pregnancy-related death and disability persists despite international awareness of its largely preventable etiology; the number of maternal deaths appear to be "frozen in time" and in many impoverished areas, is increasing. The past failures to reduce maternal mortality, such as the 2000 Nairobi goals, are mirrored in the current failures to meet targets set by the Millennium Development Goals.

Reformist economic strategies are also morally problematic because they most often are not endorsed by the impoverished but by the powerful elites, while the resulting climate of economic determinism engendered obfuscates the deleterious impacts for poor women. Clearly, these strategies are endorsed within the context of accelerating social and economic power differentials: between the global elite on the one hand, and poor women who wield the least “official” power to effect change on their own behalf. This elitist process constitutes an ethically unsound exploitation of those who are the most socially, politically and economically vulnerable in our world.

The persistence of maternal mortality is symptomatic of a global community whose moral praxis does little to counter the chronic patterns of institutional violence that sustain the suffering and death of marginalized women in pregnancy. It reveals a global community that is not only complacent in unaccountable social power. It is also morally negligent by failing to make the following logical connection: reformist strategies that do little to counter women’s poverty will also do little to counter maternal mortality. The continued pursuit of reformist economic strategies exposes a global community that places the greatest burden for altering the jeopardies and “traffic” of women’s lives on the shoulders of economically marginalized women.

The need to reject reformist strategies highlights that to understand maternal mortality, a radical social and economic analysis is required. What is morally required is an economic critique that can appropriate, in a holistic way, the geo-political economy in which the problems of maternal mortality, maternal morbidity and women’s poverty are deeply embedded and historically perpetuated. In addition, critical to the viability of this radical analysis is the creative will and ethical imagination to re-vision an economic structure that is economically and ethically accountable to marginalized women. The success of some impoverished nations in reducing maternal deaths, despite their significant monetary constraints, is proof that such constructive economic re-visioning and ethical accountability is both possible and socio-economically viable. However, while this

marginal reduction in maternal deaths is a hopeful sign, it is also indicative of a widespread spiritual malaise. This is because the political, moral and spiritual will to create an economy where greater democratic access to the wealth produced by society is possible, and where the most vulnerable are assured of their basic human needs, continues to elude many within the structures of power and privilege of civil society, governments and the international community. This spiritual malaise is unlikely to foster the co-relational respect for poor women that is fundamental to their well-being and survival in pregnancy.

**(iii) communities of accountability**

Pastoral emancipatory praxis demonstrates that economically marginalized pregnant women are the generative source of a commitment to embodied social radicalism. Hence, the starting point and *telos* of liberatory theo-ethical reflection can be found in their everyday struggles for survival. Economically marginalized pregnant women are also epistemologically privileged: their voices and their stories are the central moral and intellectual resources from which theological ethics has much to learn. Theo-ethical deliberation on their concrete everyday realities inspires and shapes a praxis of creative resistance and collective passion directed against the forces that render them vulnerable in pregnancy; it affirms their collective birthright within the circle of divine blessedness.

The pastoral commitment therefore judges the thin margins of survival that economically marginalized pregnant women endure, as well as the dismal circumstances in which they conceive, bear and nurture life, as sinful situations. Equally sinful are the harmful effects of rigid socio-cultural and religious sexual mores that constrain the procreative abilities of poor women in ways that ultimately deny them their reproductive health and general well-being. Thus, this pastoral commitment illumines that the pledge of solidarity with poor women lacks authenticity if their reproductive well-being is constrained by narrow, life-denying religious procreative functionalism. To be authentic, solidarity must be animated by the fundamental insight that women's life-enhancing

human agency is complexly contingent upon the integrity of their reproductive health and upon their procreative autonomy. Essentially, authentic solidarity is born of moral wisdom that recognizes and honours women's reproductive well-being and procreative autonomy as maternal lifelines crying out for the justice of adequate food, clean water, basic shelter, environmental stability, primary education, adequate health care, political voice, fair representation, gender equity and freedom from personal and structural violence. Authentic solidarity also demands religious social policies and practices which flow from critical, compassionate and holistic insights into the synergistic, deleterious consequences that occur when poor women are denied reproductive health and autonomy.

The pastoral commitment to economically marginalized women clarifies that women's reproductive well-being, their procreative autonomy and maternal mortality are all inextricably linked moral problems. It elucidates that a morally sound praxis of resistance against maternal mortality requires insight into the real-life struggles of poor women and the patterns of systemic and personal injustice which are visited upon them in their everyday lives. It underscores that key to the eradication of maternal mortality is transformative praxis against all the personal and structural dynamics that dehumanize women. It is therefore morally imperative for theological liberation ethics to participate fully and explicitly in a multi-faceted program of global justice-making whose goal is to empower the poorest women. Furthermore, this moral imperative validates the theo-ethical legitimacy of the trans-national project of feminism and its goal to advance the full and unequivocal humanity of all women and girls. That is, pastoral emancipatory praxis calls upon Christian theological ethics to embrace the profoundly relational and religious quest of feminism. As much contemporary ethical discourse has yet to accomplish this moral task, it is ineffectual in countering the oppression and exploitation of poor women: by moral default, it is also implicated in the problems of pregnancy-related death and disability.

### **3.3.2 Theological Emancipatory Praxis: Towards a Theo-ethical Response to Maternal Mortality**

#### **(i) sources for moral norms**

Theological emancipatory praxis illuminates the radical requirements of the church's stance of a preferential option for the poor. In view of the pan-cultural poverty of women and their marginal status worldwide, this commitment clarifies that an option for the poor primarily must be an option for poor women. Justice requires that this option is animated by a hermeneutic of suspicion oriented to the full humanity of all women and girls.

A preferential option for poor women must make theologically explicit the ways in which the construal of women in Christian scripture and tradition has de-politicized, naturalized and undervalued their reproductive and productive work. It must name and condemn as theologically unjust the oppressive realities of many women's lives, including their disproportionate numbers among the illiterate, the malnourished, the violated, the silenced, the overworked, the underpaid, and the culturally and socially disadvantaged of our world. Essentially, the church's option for poor women must make theologically explicit the dehumanizing links between being born female and a legacy of social, cultural, economic, gender and religious inequity--one that continues to bequeath to poor women the injustice of maternal mortality.

The church's stance of a preferential option for poor women must make the world of economically marginalized pregnant women numinous: it must re-image hope and resistance within the concrete contexts of their painful sufferings and untimely deaths. This re-imaging requires consistency with the Jesus tradition and the prophetic-messianic critique of oppressive economic and political systems. As such, biblical norms must honor the full humanity of all pregnant women: they must foster an evolving Christian value system that can respond in life-giving ways to the sui-generis experiences of pregnancy and child bearing. That is, biblical norms that demand unquestionable obedience to established doctrine are morally obsolete; only those that cultivate collective

immersion in justice-making, oriented to the integrity and well-being of poor pregnant women, are morally legitimate.

The preferential option for poor pregnant women further reinforces the need for more serious Christian deliberation, dialogue and moral re-evaluation concerning the profoundly religious issues related to women's reproductive well-being. The insufficient moral deliberation to date on the often unsurmountable challenges which poor women face in procuring skilled obstetrical care before, during and after child birth, their lack of reproductive health services related to family planning,<sup>185</sup> and their urgent needs for reproductive autonomy in relation to the emerging female pandemic of HIV/AIDS are enigmatic in their ethical failing of marginalized women. They represent an ethical failing of the most fundamental importance.

The dearth of moral deliberation about the connections between illegal, unsafe abortion and death and disability among the most socially, politically, economically and religiously vulnerable pregnant girls and women of our world, discredits still further the church's preferential option for poor women. For example, the evidence linking abortion with intimate partner abuse demonstrates that, for many women, termination of pregnancy is a desperate resort in the face of dysfunctional, violent familial circumstances which preclude safe parenting. This evidence also underscores the ethical fact that abortion is not simply a woman's issue of sexual liberty: it indicates complex factors lead women to seek abortion, including the injustice of relational violence and communal irresponsibility for the safety and well-being of pregnant women.

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<sup>185</sup>I acknowledge the 40 year history of international population control efforts that were often coercive, and led to further exploitation, violence and abuse of the poorest women. This analysis is beyond the scope of my dissertation; see Betsy Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs* (Boston: South End, 1990). What Harrison's insights into women's reproductive needs highlight are the facts that women are often denied any position or role in deciding how they will actualize their procreative abilities, and little attention is given to their life situations in any moral discussion concerning the sanctity of life. Thus, by family planning, I refer to women's capacities to both understand their reproductive health needs and to have the basic health services to ensure their needs can be met. See Morny Joy, "Feminist Scholarship: The Challenge to Ethics," in *Life Ethics in World Religions*, ed. Dawne C. McCance (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998), 140-143.

Theological emancipatory praxis within a preferential option for poor women is therefore an inescapable corrective and a summons to radical immersion in the concrete and complex everyday sufferings and injustices endured by many pregnant women. It also underlines that the venue for this urgent Christian moral re-imaging process cannot be the sterile sanctity of elite conference halls: it must be the concrete contexts of poor women's lives. That is, the voices of poor women are pivotal to the Christian community's ability to comprehend what conventional wisdom has failed to see. For to continue to dismiss the presence and voices of poor women in moral deliberations concerning their reproductive well-being is to reinforce a praxis of Christian traditionalism and empty futile rhetoric disengaged from one of the most complex theo-ethical dilemmas of our time. To continue to dismiss the presence and voices of poor women is to forfeit the moral compass for the justice work that is pivotal to eradicating maternal mortality.

**(ii) emancipatory historiography**

Informed by the insights of emancipatory historiography, theo-ethical integrity requires that the concrete challenges of women's fertility, pregnancy, child bearing, child rearing, and the plight of girl children of our world, are placed at the centre of Christian moral deliberation. This response is morally necessary, because both historically and contemporaneously, theological ethics has dismissed critical deliberation on life-and-death issues affecting more than half the human race. In so doing, it has denied women the Christian promise of solidarity in shaping a world which is less ravaged by economic, social, religious and gender inequity.

Emancipatory historiography is, therefore, a call to reject as morally unacceptable the ahistorical interpretation of maternal mortality as an unfortunate, but unavoidable, eventuality in the lives of poor women of reproductive age. It calls upon us to acknowledge that maternal mortality is a preventable injustice. It also invites us to challenge the immorality of a central contradiction which sustains our current geo-political economy: the fact that women persist in their vital work to sustain

the cultures, countries, economies and religions that ultimately deny them and their dependants the basic essentials of life. Essentially, emancipatory historiography is a call to reject the moral myopia that has failed to see and validate women as the world's vital workers--that is, the world's farmers, the global food processors, the feeders of families and communities, the environmentalists, the educators, the volunteers, and the lifelines for the vulnerable.

Emancipatory historiography also exposes a religious double standard that theological ethics must acknowledge and reject as morally untenable. This double standard functions in Christianity's ahistorical construal of women and consequent dismissal of their lives as arenas for moral deliberation--a concrete example of which is Christianity's failure to attend adequately to women's global poverty and their attendant deaths and disabilities in pregnancy. Thus, what emancipatory historiography makes explicit is the following: while women fulfill their moral obligations as central ethical architects of human personhood and builders of sustainable families, communities, nations and religions, theological ethics continues to perceive them ahistorically and to overlook their life-enhancing human agency. Clearly, emancipatory historiography summons theological ethics to a radical revisioning of its gender-biased moral methodology.

### **(iii) feminist re-visioning of divine transcendence**

The feminist re-visioning of divine transcendence as radical immanence emphasizes the moral significance of embodiment. Its ethical insight is that a disembodied Christian spirituality has bequeathed a legacy of religious irresponsibility and ambiguity regarding the fact that the bodily integrity of all persons is sacred. In particular, its sexist and negative construal of female bodies has engendered a profound moral myopia concerning women's needs for bodily integrity. Consequently, theological ethics has done little to challenge the myriad dynamics which are implicated in the concrete suffering of women, including their deaths and disabilities in pregnancy. The theological lacuna with respect to issues of women's bodily integrity has misshaped moral accountability to



women, and especially to poor women, whose physical existence is an unending struggle to secure the basic essentials of life. The theological dismissal of the moral import of women's bodily integrity is a fundamental contradiction to the liberation axiom that views spiritual and material well-being as ethically indivisible.

The failure of theological ethics to counter women's lack of bodily integrity betrays a spirituality of radical communitarian interdependence that is essential to just and mutually enhancing human relations. It is symptomatic of a discipline ill-equipped to counter the immorality of women's lack of bodily integrity: a reality which finds expression every day in 1,600 maternal deaths and which encapsulates succinctly the UN's statement regarding the major causes of their deaths: "too young, too old, too many, too close." Hence, the failure of theological ethics to further women's needs for bodily integrity reveals a discipline ill-equipped to counter the following unethical facts of poor women's lives:

- *women's lack of bodily integrity engendered by an economic system that denies them material self-sufficiency*
- *women's lack of bodily integrity produced by an ideology of patriarchy that normalizes male commercial access to their bodies*
- *women's lack of bodily integrity generated by an illicit sex trade that reduces them to lucrative commodities, bought and sold in a global market*
- *women's lack of bodily integrity caused by a pandemic of sexist male abuse and violence that if not lethal, damages them physically, psychically, spiritually, economically and socially*
- *women's lack of bodily integrity legitimized by gender-specific cultural norms that mutilate their bodies for the enhancement of male sexual pleasure*

Re-imagining divine transcendence as radical immanence therefore fosters greater moral responsibility for furthering the bodily integrity of all women. This moral responsibility affirms the right of the most vulnerable, poorest women to survive pregnancy and to live their reproductive lives

in good health, well-being, freedom and security. This moral responsibility also judges the following conditions of women's lives to be unethical violations of their bodily integrity:

*-whenever women do not have the freedom to negotiate their sexual liaisons, their bodily integrity is denied*

*-whenever women cannot decide if, and when, they bear children, their bodily integrity is denied*

*-whenever women cannot space their pregnancies and are denied information and services related to their reproductive health, their bodily integrity is denied*

*-whenever women are denied skilled care in pregnancy and in childbirth, their bodily integrity is denied*

*-whenever women are unable to rest and recover from the rigours of pregnancy and childbirth before resuming their roles as the world's main workers, their bodily integrity is denied.*

Re-imagining divine transcendence as radical immanence also questions the ethical integrity of conventional language about maternal mortality. For example, it questions whether the term "maternal mortality" is morally adequate in its capacity to clarify the profound imbalances of power that limit the lives of disenfranchised women, the ones most likely to die in pregnancy. Sensitivity to the ethical potential of language also begs the moral question as to whether "maternal mortality" adequately inspires the necessary accountability to poor women and the collective praxis of resistance that is known to be effective in countering their deaths. It also questions whether the term "maternal mortality" is morally reductionist in its encapsulation of an injustice that, in reality, radically transcends the maternal domain. That is, is not "maternal mortality" a morally myopic term in its insensitivity to the profound survival crises that are thrust upon at least two million vulnerable children every year who are suddenly orphaned because their mothers have died in pregnancy? Finally, does the term "maternal mortality" signal in any ethically lucid way the lethal consequences of the broken promises of more than 180 nations of our world who have failed to honor their monetary commitments to reproductive health--commitments that would do much to end this plague endured by poor women?

### 3.3.3 Social and Moral Theoretical Emancipatory Praxis: Towards a Theo-ethical Response to Maternal Mortality

#### (i) mixed theoretical approach to moral reasoning

Theoretical emancipatory praxis, clarified in a mixed theoretical approach, rejects as morally untenable any situation in which one group thrives at the expense of another. It therefore illumines and judges as immoral the systemic discrimination against women evidenced in the multiple jeopardy and the “traffic” of their everyday lives--discrimination that renders them vulnerable to pregnancy-related death and disability. It also exposes the immorality inherent in the fact that selective discrimination often begins long before women reach reproductive age: it is a discrimination coterminous with being born female. Theoretical emancipatory praxis therefore exposes the immorality of a global community where one million girls die every year from causes they would not have experienced had they been born boys. It reinforces the following ominous claim made by human rights activists regarding the collective plight of females in our contemporary world: women and girls are an “endangered species.”<sup>186</sup>

In light of these dismal global facts, social and moral theoretical emancipatory praxis raises more critical questions regarding the epistemological and spiritual integrity of liberation theology’s commitment of solidarity with poor women. It rejects as theoretically and theologically insufficient liberation theology’s gender blindness to the qualitatively different poverty and the myriad injustices which are endured by women and girls. That is, it underlines that, theoretically, the dearth of data on the qualitatively different poverty experienced by women and girls is a profound failure to consider all the relevant data. Furthermore, it underlines that this lack of data is a spiritually unsound policy of exclusion that obfuscates how systems of belief support the political, social and religious control of women. Theoretical emancipatory praxis therefore clarifies why the life and death experiences of

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<sup>186</sup>Lewis, *Race Against Time*, 154.

economically marginalized pregnant women are essential data for reconstructive strategies in Christian social ethics.

**(ii) critical dialogue partners**

The theoretical commitment of emancipatory praxis affirms the relevance of critical dialogue partners for an adequate understanding of the multi-faceted reality of the impoverished. In particular, due to the dearth of insights into the qualitatively different poverty of women, gender-sensitive discourses are vital to the moral and intellectual integrity of liberation theological ethics. That is, deepening the grasp of the unfolding historical dynamics of poor women's lives is spiritually and morally pivotal to the potential of theological ethics to shape a more just and gender-equitable world. Thus, any discourse that can identify and analyze the root causes and ongoing dynamics of women's poverty and reveal the ideologies that sustain their multiple oppressions is fundamental to the work of liberation.

Therefore, for the following six reasons, theoretical emancipatory praxis validates feminist economics as a theo-ethically relevant discourse for a feminist liberationist analysis of maternal mortality.

One, the historically conscious methodology of feminist economics probes the roots and ongoing causal dynamics of women's poverty. Its method is, therefore, theoretically and morally consistent with the intellectual and spiritual needs of a liberation analysis of women's economic issues, such as the inextricably linked problems of their poverty and their pregnancy-related death and disability.

Two, it is theo-ethically significant that a central concern of feminist economics is the advancement of orthodox economic methods in ways that further global economic reform. As such, feminist economics is of profound liberatory import in its pragmatic contributions to a world less

**(iii) critique of ideology**

Insight into ideology and the ambiguous process of moral reasoning reveals how ideological blindness functions within both the liberation paradigm and the larger socio-political reality. It also reveals that the ideological blindness that has constrained the effectiveness of liberation efforts, particularly *vis-à-vis* women, is not an insular dynamic: it is reinforced and sustained by powerful external ideological forces, such as those animating the current geo-political economic system. That is, from the perspectives of economically marginalized women, a formidable ideological dynamic that masks their gendered exploitation and erodes moral and public accountability to them is the neo-liberal economic agenda. The mantra of this ideology of advanced capitalism is that the neo-liberal economic agenda is the only sustainable economic framework for our global community. Consequently, any ethical or intellectual uncertainty regarding its absolute economic triumph and efficiency, or its capacity to preserve the greatest good, is rejected as economically, intellectually, socially and morally unsound. Essentially, the ideology animating the geo-political economic system ensures the unequivocal global capitulation to neo-liberalism.

Ideological literacy therefore presents liberation theological ethics with a clear directive in its pursuit of a justice agenda that can be accountable to economically marginalized women. This directive is the following: to continue to capitulate to the historical direction of the current geo-political system is to eschew accountability and solidarity with poor women and to forfeit an effective theo-praxis of resistance that can transform the injustice of maternal mortality. That is, maternal mortality will not be eradicated without critical theo-ethical engagement with the current geo-political economic system regarding the immorality of its exploitative tendencies toward the poorest women. Methodologically privileging the standpoints of economically marginalized pregnant women is critical not only to the demands of solidarity, but also to unmasking the

economic ideologies that sustain women's ubiquitous poverty and perpetuate the tragedy of maternal mortality.

Insights into ideology further reinforce the relevance of feminist economics as a critical discourse in theological liberatory work. Again, in its explicit commitment to poor women, feminist economics eschews the theoretical value neutrality at the root of the ideological blindness of the current geo-political economic system. In so doing, feminist economics rejects as both economically and morally untenable a global system whose exploitation of women is an internal feature of its alienating, unjust dynamic.

### **3.4 Conclusions from Chapter 3**

I have categorized Harrison's eclectic work in Christian feminist liberation social ethics using the framework of emancipatory praxis and its pastoral, theological and theoretical elements. I have demonstrated how these commitments illumine maternal mortality through the eyes of faith. In making the theme of emancipatory praxis explicit in Harrison's work, I have shaped a theo-ethical judgement and response to maternal mortality.

I have demonstrated that a pastoral commitment to emancipatory praxis illumines maternal mortality as both an instance of practical atheism and a concrete denial of God's living presence among us. I have shown how a pastoral commitment clarifies why reformist economic strategies are morally untenable responses to the complex injustice of maternal mortality; I have indicated that these ineffective economic responses reveal a global community complacent in unaccountable social power. I also have shown that a pastoral commitment calls for a radical social and economic analysis that can appropriate the ways in which the current geo-political economy perpetuates the inextricably linked moral problems of women's poverty and maternal mortality. I have detailed that what is ethically required is the creative will and ethical imagination to revision an economic structure that is morally accountable to marginalized women. I have indicated why a pastoral

commitment rejects as morally untenable the reductionism of subsuming women's reproductive well-being and procreative powers within narrow socio-cultural sexual ethics. Informed by a commitment to pastoral emancipatory praxis, I have identified maternal mortality as a complex inter-structural injustice that exists because of the recurring, myriad injustices visited upon women in their everyday lives: an injustice that validates the religious quest of feminism for the full humanity of all women and girls.

From the perspective of theological emancipatory praxis, I have shown that this commitment re-directs the Church's stance of preferential option for the poor into a preferential option for poor women--an option that requires a radical hermeneutic of suspicion oriented to women's full humanity. This option must make theologically explicit the connections between the realities of many women's lives and a legacy of social, cultural, economic and gender inequity that continues to condemn the poorest women to pregnancy-related death and disability. I have also shown how this theological commitment requires more profound Christian moral deliberation on the sui-generis challenges of women's fertility, pregnancy, and child bearing, and on the plight of the girl child. Therefore, what is morally required is a clear rejection of the notion of maternal mortality as an unfortunate eventuality in the lives of poor women. What is morally required is the recognition of the life-giving agency of women as the world's main workers, the "doers of ethics," the central architects of human personhood and the builders of sustainable communities. I have demonstrated that a theological commitment also elucidates the ways in which a disembodied Christian spirituality has distorted our collective moral responsibility to ensure the bodily integrity of all persons, particularly that of women. This failure negates the fundamental liberation axiom that spiritual and material well-being are ethically indivisible; it clarifies the profound moral crises wherein women's bodily integrity is denied.

From the perspective of social and moral theoretical emancipatory praxis, I have shown that this commitment illumines as morally untenable any situation in which one group thrives at the expense of another. Hence, the selective, systemic poverty of women, the many jeopardies that shape their lives, the precarious plight of the girl child, and the recalcitrant nature of pregnancy-related death and disability are evidence of global gendercide: they summon theological liberation ethics to address the theoretical and theological lacunae of marginalized women's lives. I have identified that this theoretical commitment reaffirms the discourse of feminist economics as theologically and methodologically relevant to a feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality. Finally, I have demonstrated that this theoretical commitment reveals liberation theology's ideological bias in its failure to appropriate adequately the qualitatively different poverty of women. I have indicated that it also reinforces the fact that ideological blindness is not an insular phenomenon: it is sustained by powerful ideological forces, such as that which is operative in the current geo-political economic system. A theoretical commitment therefore calls theological ethics to greater moral accountability to poor women. What is morally required is a more critical, ideologically literate analysis of the current geo-political economic system and its exploitive dynamics--dynamics that are lethal for poor women in pregnancy.



## CHAPTER 4

### Deepening the “Judge-Act” Dimension: Harrison’s Concept of Justice and Social Theory

Christian moral theology must be answerable to what women [and other marginalized peoples] have learned by struggling to lay hold the gift of life. We must learn what we are to know of love from immersion in the struggle for justice.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4 Introduction

In the “judge-act” dimension of Chapter 3, I made explicit Harrison’s commitments to emancipatory praxis. I synthesized categories that clarified her pastoral, theological and theoretical commitments to emancipatory praxis. I then drew upon these categories to illumine maternal mortality as a theo-ethical issue of injustice, and to initiate a praxis of resistance in solidarity with economically marginalized pregnant women. I also maintained that understanding Harrison’s emancipatory praxis was a prerequisite for appropriating her concept of justice and her social theory--two resources that further illumine maternal mortality theo-ethically.

In this chapter, I deepen the “judge-act” dimension of my analysis of maternal mortality; I focus on Harrison’s concept of justice and her social theory. My goals are twofold: one, to demonstrate how these resources further clarify maternal mortality as an injustice experienced by economically marginalized women; two, to signal their pivotal roles in shaping a praxis of solidarity and resistance.

#### 4.1 The Centrality of Justice in Harrison’s Feminist Liberation Social Ethics

Yearning for justice is the hermeneutical principle animating all liberation approaches. Consistent with this principle, Harrison names justice as the “central theological image...which shapes the *telos* of a good community and serves as an animating passion of the moral life.”<sup>2</sup> For Harrison, justice is the *fruit of emancipatory praxis*; it is the “teleological impulse” that morally

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, “The Dream of a Common Language,” 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

orients individuals and communities around the pursuit of the common good.<sup>3</sup> All moral claims of human dignity, both individually and communally, are bound to a radical concept of justice. When justice is not lived and loved in a radical way, we lose contact with each other and with God.

These insights signal the centrality of justice in Harrison's feminist liberation social ethics. However, there is a need to make more explicit her concept of justice and, in light of this, to determine what justice requires in a feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality. To accomplish this, I first situate Harrison's concept of justice in relation to other contemporary approaches, and I show how she enriches an understanding of justice in ways significant to analyzing maternal mortality. I then explore Harrison's justice through her framework of right relation: a framework that links justice to embodiment, to social structures of meaning, to social power, and to a metaphor of transformation. Following this, I introduce Harrison's social theory, which I submit is a logical extension of her concept of justice and a tool for demystifying the current geo-political economy from the perspectives of poor women.

#### **4.1.1 Harrison's Concept of Justice**

While Harrison's concept of justice has features in common with contemporary approaches, it can also be distinguished in the following five ways:

One, consistent with a liberation methodology, Harrison's concept of justice is rooted in scripture and is committed to the struggle to transform structures of oppression. Justice is not an abstract commitment gleaned from scriptural action guides. It is a prophetic praxis that images, announces and shapes rightly-ordered communities that reveal the presence of God.<sup>4</sup> Justice

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>4</sup>Critical for Harrison is the wisdom of the prophetic tradition that underlines that the face of God is non-discernable whenever justice fails to be done--that is, where inclusive communities as the praxis of faith do not come into being. See "Justice Redeeming Love," Sage Chapel Convention, Cornell University, Sunday, 14 November 1976, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

demands radical equality, mutuality and a revolutionary solidarity in which the needs of the most marginalized are given priority.<sup>5</sup> Justice is the embodied metaphor of a God “who calls us to life and to the struggle against all that thwarts life.”<sup>6</sup> At the core of Harrison’s concept of justice is a vision of a liberating God who embodies deep compassion for those who suffer and who summons all to a praxis of solidarity. Critical for Harrison is the moral insight that the religious task of the people of God is a corporate one: it is a collective task that transcends individualistic piety and is concretized in justice initiatives that foster life in abundance.<sup>7</sup> Harrison states:

The Word of God, the covenant of God comes to us as something we must do, as a call for justice. Biblically, justice means right relation, it means inclusiveness, openness to one another, receiving each other as grounded in the gift of life from God. Doing justice means granting each other recognition of our full dignity, granted in God. In the prophetic tradition, the presence of the love of God is measured by the quality of justice in the community.... Ours is a world of deep conflict, the more so because it is a world of deep injustice. If we do not recover this prophetic connection between justice and love, we will have no strong Word to speak in the real world.<sup>8</sup>

Harrison’s biblical/liberationist appropriation of justice is animated by a radical re-interpretation of scripture as a spiritual/political expression of the divine intolerance for injustice.<sup>9</sup> What is biblically authoritative and revelatory of the Divine is the prophetic concern for the well-

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<sup>5</sup>See “Liberation Theology and Social Ethics: Some Theses for Discussion,” Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>6</sup>See “Banff Women’s Conference: Presentation II,” Box: Articles/Sermons/Lectures, Harrison’s Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>7</sup>See “The Bible and Social Justice: Some Biographical Notes,” Box: Conferences, Harrison’s Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; “Theologies in the Americas #1,” Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; “Matthew Simpson Lecture,” Simpson College, 6 November 1988, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>8</sup>See “Sermon in Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Elders in the UPUSA,” 23 September 1980, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>9</sup>See “The Bible and Social Justice: Some Bibliographical Notes,” Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

being of the non-persons in society and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> These biblical themes honour the divine concern for the oppressed and the ancient communitarian ethos of just, inclusive communities.<sup>11</sup>

Harrison also critically analyzes power relations within the biblical texts. While respectful of the integrity of original faith communities and the meaning the texts may have had for them, Harrison attends to the social construction of biblical relations of power. She employs a hermeneutic of suspicion to deconstruct the power imbalances that thwart justice, both institutionally and interpersonally.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as her primary communities of accountability are marginalized women, she employs hermeneutics of remembrance and of recovery: hermeneutics that mourn the loss of women's stories and hear their voices in the misogynist silences of the biblical texts.<sup>13</sup> Harrison also employs a hermeneutic of liberation that announces and celebrates the biblical message of radical mutuality and equality.

Within the context of maternal mortality, Harrison's concept of justice clarifies that the biblical demands of equality, mutuality and solidarity are to be given concrete expression in the everyday realities of economically marginalized pregnant women. It underlines that the justice animating the "Word of God" is not reducible to abstract meditation on divine concern for the well-being of pregnant women. Justice is hearing the divine summons to secure full dignity and humanity to all pregnant women, granted in God; justice is embodying the divine intolerance for the injustice

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<sup>10</sup>See "On Doing the Word," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>11</sup>See "Methodology Seminar: Liberation Theology and Social Ethics, Some Theses for Discussion," Box: UTS Teaching Files, Methods # 4, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; Harrison, "Feminist Ethics: A New Paradigm?"

<sup>12</sup>See "Four Categories of Approaches to Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics," Box: UTS Teaching Files, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>13</sup>See Harrison, "Challenging the Western Paradigm: 'The Theology in the Americas' Conference," *Christianity and Crisis* (27 October 1975): 251-254.

of maternal mortality through transformative human agency. Consistent with the ancient communitarian ethos of just, inclusive communities, the “Word of God” is a divine summons to ensure that the poorest women--those who are at greatest risk of maternal death--experience community as genuinely inclusive of them and in solidarity with their survival struggles. Justice therefore requires all communities to unite in eradicating maternal mortality. Clearly, Harrison’s appropriation of justice within the history of biblical emancipation enriches the horizon of revelation: it deepens our collective responsibility to co-create communities in which all women survive their pregnancies and flourish in ways befitting their life-giving agency.<sup>14</sup>

Two, Harrison’s approach to justice is in dialogue with the political and theological tradition of liberalism.<sup>15</sup> Her stance with respect to the secular, political liberal tradition has been indicated previously. To reiterate, Harrison affirms the contributions made by liberal procedural fairness to an understanding of justice and to a revision of the common good; she applauds the progressive measures in the shape of compensatory efforts and social clauses to care for the least advantaged.<sup>16</sup> However, she maintains that the liberal approach to justice overlooks the inequity of deeply embedded, systemic historical injustice, and that its abstract, individualistic anthropology cannot

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<sup>14</sup>See “Symposium on In Memory of Her: Horizons and the AAR,” Box: Sermons/Articles/Lectures, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>15</sup>Harrison’s critique of liberalism was influenced by the work of Zillah Eisenstein, whose book *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York: Longman, 1981), underlined why liberal feminism’s analysis required an integration of a more radical political and cultural-moral vision. See Harrison, “Feminist Ethics: An Alternative Paradigm?” Harrison describes herself as an ‘unapologetic post-liberal liberal’ who is committed to what she sees as the best in political and Christian liberal traditions. See Harrison, “Working with Protestant Traditions: Liberalism and Beyond: Interview with Elizabeth M. Bounds,” 79-84.

<sup>16</sup>Harrison, “The Dream of a Common Language,” 4- 5. Harrison affirms John Rawls’ theory of justice as an improvement from earlier liberal approaches. However, it is insufficient for liberation ethics; liberal procedural approaches require the addition of a substantive element. See Harrison, “The Politics of Energy Policy,” 177.

sustain the liberationist demands of conversion to neighbour, mutuality and solidarity.<sup>17</sup> For example, Harrison notes that in the liberal validation of the geo-political economic system, the existence of basic human needs is taken for granted: a presupposition she rejects in light of her ethical sensibility to the material realities of marginalized persons.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, she underscores that the economic structures of modern capitalist societies, to which liberal approaches appeal for justice, do not empower the state sufficiently to achieve the proposed compensatory ends, nor do they lend themselves to a genuine fair exchange from the perspectives of the poor.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to liberal approaches, Harrison's concept of justice is grounded in a vision of basic human needs for all.<sup>20</sup> She insists that justice requires that the material needs of those from the underside of history be viewed as moral problems.<sup>21</sup> In particular, Harrison is attentive to the impoverished circumstances of poor women's lives--circumstances that compromise their capacities to survive pregnancy and child-bearing. Her rejection of liberalism's individualistic anthropology therefore derives from her judgement that the poorest women are overlooked by liberal approaches to justice.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, she discerns that at the root of this individualistic anthropology is an elite,

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<sup>17</sup>"Theological Reflection in Liberation Perspective," Box: UTS Teaching Files, Folder: Liberation Theology, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>18</sup>In particular, Harrison is concerned with the moral problem of economic power; she considers the production and control of wealth the generative source of most contemporary unchecked social power. See Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory," 58-59.

<sup>19</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Ethics: An Alternative Paradigm?"

<sup>20</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection," 254-259; Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 13.

<sup>21</sup>Harrison, "Misogyny and Homophobia," 149.

<sup>22</sup>Harrison, "Sexuality and Social Policy," 96; see also "Liberation Theology and Social Ethics: Some Theses for Discussion," Box: UTS Teaching Files, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

white, Western male social location: an ideological location that is morally blind to the injustice of women's poverty and their attendant maternal deaths.<sup>23</sup>

With respect to theological liberalism, Harrison's approach to justice was shaped by the profound legacy of her professor and mentor, Reinhold Niebuhr,<sup>24</sup> the main voice of the Protestant movement of Christian realism in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup> Niebuhr's Christian realism, the alternative to Christian liberalism, emphasized the recalcitrance of sin and the fallen nature of humanity. In particular, Niebuhr was critical of what he felt were "myopic" and "superficial" secular liberal presumptions regarding both the inevitability of progress within history and the ongoing perfectibility of human beings.<sup>26</sup> He maintained that justice had to presume the power of self-interest as a given in human society; justice was a compromised norm, capable of generating the best possible--but not the best imaginable--harmony. In his view, Christian love was deeper than justice, because it transcended and exceeded the demands of justice; justice approximated love through the norms of equality and freedom.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>See Elizabeth M. Bounds and Marilyn J. Legge, "Working with Protestant Traditions: Theological Liberalism and Feminist Transformations," in *Justice in the Making*, 75-77.

<sup>24</sup> In commenting on Niebuhr's contribution to Christian ethics, Harrison once said that attempting to speak of Niebuhr's legacy was like "attempting to give a clear answer to what makes a spinning prism whirling in a noon day sun mesmerizing...he was complex, gifted, dynamic, provocative, and different things to different communities of people." See "Lecture on Reinhold Niebuhr, 1991," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS. Harrison also described Niebuhr as multi-faceted and politically active, and as a passionate, modest man with a sense of humour. See Harrison, "Working with Protestant Traditions: Interview with Elizabeth M. Bounds," *Justice in the Making*, 79-84.

<sup>25</sup> See Harrison, "Niebuhr: Locating the Limits," *Christianity and Crisis* 46, no. 2 (17 February 1986): 35-39. I recognize that Reinhold Niebuhr often was cited as a critic of theological liberalism. However, his presumption of the discontinuity between power imbalances at the (public) social institutional and (private) inter-personal levels is a typical presupposition of theological liberalism.

<sup>26</sup>"Niebuhr's Critique of Liberalism and its Implications for his Theological Agenda: Lectures by Beverly Wildung Harrison," Box: Articles/Sermons/Lectures, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

The complexity of Niebuhr's theological legacy is beyond the scope of my dissertation. However, I will note two important differences between Niebuhr's and Harrison's appropriation of justice. The first important difference is that, unlike Niebuhr, Harrison's concept of justice accents the ethical relevance of the interconnections between the personal and the political realms.<sup>28</sup> Whereas Niebuhr disavowed any continuity between power relations at the personal, familial level and the social, institutional levels, Harrison insists that in order to comprehend the injustices of women's lives, insight into these relationships is necessary.<sup>29</sup> Harrison's point is that structural injustice is both an extension of, and is re-enacted in, the interpersonal realm. She provides a concrete example of this interconnection: she signals how the gender-biased injustices implicit in a capitalist mode of political and economic organization cohere well with the socially constructed subordination of women in personal and domestic realms.<sup>30</sup> She therefore underlines that Christian moral theology needs to address the ways in which the injustices of individual lives, and in particular those of women's lives, are structurally conditioned. The second important difference is that Harrison disagreed with Niebuhr's contention that sacrificial love and self-abnegation were the necessary moral requirements in response to humanity's fallen nature and its inevitable quest for power. In particular, she rejects the moral legitimacy of the virtue of self-abnegation. This is because for Harrison, justice is born not in the surrender of self-integrity, but in the flourishing of intact personal and communal identities, freed to actualize a just and dynamic sense of what Christian love requires.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>See Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," in *Making the Connections*, 27-28.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>31</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Ethics: A New Paradigm?"



Harrison's responses to Niebuhr's insights are relevant to the problem of maternal mortality. For example, her focus on the links between power dynamics at the social-structural levels, and her interpretation of personal pains as public matters, clarify the self-perpetuating dynamics between systemic jeopardies and the "traffic" of poor women's lives: causal dynamics that are inextricably linked to maternal mortality. Furthermore, her critique of the "virtue" of self-abnegation is also ethically relevant in light of the constraints that limit the life options of disenfranchized women. That is, from the perspectives of those most likely to be the casualties of pregnancy, Harrison's refusal to accept self-abnegation as a virtue is ethically astute. Harrison fosters the awareness that the intact self-integrity of poor women is not a vice to be tempered, but a virtue to be celebrated as critical to both their survival and that of their vulnerable dependants.

Three, Harrison's approach to justice has significant affinities with the justice tradition of Roman Catholic Social Teaching. In particular, Catholic thought concerning the social nature and inviolable dignity of all persons, its understanding that the common good is embodied in just, inclusive and participatory communities, and its principle that social institutions exist primarily for the well-being and full participation of all people correlate well with Harrison's concept of justice.<sup>32</sup> The Catholic preferential option for the poor, its accent on the right of everyone to be ensured their basic human needs, its teaching that the poor are the litmus test for justice, and that economic policies must primarily be at the service of the poor are also consistent with Harrison's concept.<sup>33</sup> Essentially, the Catholic tradition of commutative justice, in terms of adequate wage and working conditions, its tradition of social justice, in terms of joint participation in the formation of the

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<sup>32</sup>See Karen Lebacqz, *Six Theories of Justice: Perspectives from Philosophical and Theological Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 66-82.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

common good, and its tradition of distributive justice, in terms of an equitable allocation of social goods, all correlate well with Harrison's social vision of justice.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these important affinities, Harrison maintains that Catholic social teaching is limited by its failure to provide an adequate structural analysis and critique of the global economic system.<sup>35</sup> In particular, Harrison underlines a fundamental inconsistency: while the Catholic tradition advocates important justice-oriented reforms such as pay equity, affirmative action and full employment, it fails to challenge adequately the systemic dimensions of racism, sexism and cultural imperialism deeply embedded within the structure of the capitalist political economy.<sup>36</sup> For Harrison, this lack of structural critique precludes the implementation of much of the progressive Catholic reforms, since what is proposed in practice is refuted by neo-classical theory.

Harrison's understanding of the economic justice needs of women also is radically different to that of Catholic social thought. For example, Harrison identifies how the Catholic appropriation of women's nature within rigid, natural law categories has functioned to deny women their moral agency and, thus, their full humanity. She considers the Catholic construal of women's "rightful feminine vocation" as primarily domestically oriented to be an instance of moral pedestalism: it is a social construction that perpetuates unethical relations of domination and subordination between men and women.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in its advocacy of women's "natural moral essence" as most fully developed in motherhood, Catholic teaching has obfuscated the fact that motherhood is a historically

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<sup>34</sup>Pamela K. Brubaker, *Women Don't Count: The Challenge of Women's Poverty to Christian Ethics* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1994), 56-109.

<sup>35</sup> "A Personal and Methodological Note on the Importance of Racism and Other Structures of Oppression for Clarifying the Task of Religious Ethics," Harrison Papers (unprocessed files), Archives, UTS.

<sup>36</sup>Harrison, "Social Justice and Economic Orthodoxy," *Christianity and Crisis* 44 (21 January 1985): 513-515.

<sup>37</sup>See Harrison, "Feminist Ethics: An Alternative Paradigm?"

evolving, social institution.<sup>38</sup> Harrison is also critical of the Catholic construal of gender relations, in which women are deemed to be those who naturally nurture and mediate morality in the domestic realm. She notes that this construal of women functions to constrain their economic self-sufficiency, to dismiss their double and often triple duty *workdays*, and, therefore, to structure their poverty.<sup>39</sup>

Within the context of maternal mortality, Harrison's critique of Catholic social thought highlights that women's poverty, a crucial jeopardy in maternal mortality, is addressed inadequately. That is, by failing to demonstrate the qualitatively different poverty of women and the reality of their overburdened lives, Catholic social thought obfuscates the roots of women's ubiquitous economic marginalization. In eschewing their real-life oppressions and sufferings, Catholic social thought's reflection on women's nature is an example of gender bias that counters effective theo-praxis in response to maternal mortality.

Four, Harrison's concept of justice makes explicit the marginalization of many of the world's women.<sup>40</sup> That is, Harrison highlights marginalized women's appeals to justice, which she identifies as resources for a "needed renaissance in Western intellectual thought,"<sup>41</sup> particularly theological thought. Harrison also clarifies the ramifications of women's appeals to justice: if honoured, these appeals would challenge the status quo, the prevailing moral theory and destabilize the present inequitable socio-cultural and economic arrangements. However, while accenting marginalized women's appeals to justice, Harrison's understanding of justice is non-essentialist.

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<sup>38</sup>Harrison, "Feminist Realism," in *Justice in the Making*, 41.

<sup>39</sup>Harrison, "Toward a Just Social Order," *Journal of Current Social Issues* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 63-70; Harrison, "Human Sexuality and Mutuality," 54-57.

<sup>40</sup>Harrison, "The Politics of Energy Policy," 176.

<sup>41</sup>Harrison, "Human Sexuality and Mutuality," 57-58; Carol S. Robb, "Introduction," in *Making the Connections*, xx-xxii.

That is, she does not appropriate justice in a gender-specific way.<sup>42</sup> While recognizing the diversity and uniqueness of all human beings, Harrison's position is clear: we are more alike than different, and there are no significant differences between the moral reasoning of women and men. For her, theories of biological, social or gender dimorphism are suffused with claims of exclusive superiority (usually white, Euro-centric, and male): they are therefore destructive of human wholeness.<sup>43</sup> As such, Harrison rejects what she discerns to be moral reductionism in a "rights" construal of a notion of justice to male moral reasoning, and a "care" construal to female moral reasoning. For her, the social construction of rigid gender dichotomies in relation to justice is ethically unsound: it is a means by which sexist stereotypes, gender-exclusive oppressions, and dysfunctional power differentials between women and men are perpetuated. The failure to affirm our common humanity erodes a vision of radical moral equality and legitimizes systemic gender-based differences in social and economic status, such as the ubiquitous poverty of women. Her central ethical insight is that the denial of women's social and economic equality is a denial of justice, the legacy of which is often lethal for economically marginalized pregnant women.

Five, while Harrison identifies justice as the core theological image for Christian moral living, she acknowledges that her concept of justice as right relation does not yield a distinctive theory. That is, her concept of justice does not provide a theoretical agenda for achieving rightly-ordered relations and communities that can settle conflicts between the individual and the common good.<sup>44</sup> However, what her concept of justice does demonstrate is that morality is the "work of our

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<sup>42</sup>There are essentialist themes in some feminist writings, such as those of Carol Gilligan, who postulated that the caring mode of reasoning is linked more often to females, while appeals to justice in terms of rights are more often linked to men. Essentialist themes also animate the work of the feminist Sara Ruddick. See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> See Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," 28.

<sup>44</sup>Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 4-5.

common life,” and that in the engaged collective struggle to forge new and concrete bonds of community, in solidarity with the oppressed, the conditions and characteristics of the “good society” unfold.<sup>45</sup> Harrison’s insights into justice therefore re-affirm the moral principle that traditional claims bequeathed to us require testing and reformulating in response to the full complexity of our contemporary, lived-world situations.<sup>46</sup>

The immediate challenge to which Harrison’s justice is a response is the condition of our lives together: a challenge that cannot be met by a prescriptive set of norms or a specific theory of justice.<sup>47</sup> What theological ethics does provide to public discourse is a critical discursive space in which moral reasoning can take place: without denying the autonomy of moral reasoning, it shapes and conditions our moral choices.<sup>48</sup> For example, Harrison highlights the moral good animating contemporary global justice initiatives regarding basic human needs for all.<sup>49</sup> Harrison’s insights into justice underline that ensuring that pregnant women survive pregnancy is a global justice initiative that must be at the heart of collective deliberations on the morality of our common life.

#### **4.2 Justice as Right Relation: Harrison’s Framework for Justice**

Having situated Harrison’s concept of justice and identified the contributions her insights bring to a theo-ethical analysis of maternal mortality, I now identify four themes that are fundamental to what she terms “justice as right relation.” My main purpose in identifying these themes is to demonstrate their continuity with the social theory Harrison proposes as adequate for dialoguing with the current geo-political system from the perspectives of the poor. In demonstrating

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 4, 8-9.

<sup>46</sup>Harrison, “Feminist Realism,” in *Justice in the Making*, 39.

<sup>47</sup>Harrison, “Making Connections: Becoming a Feminist Ethicist,” 12.

<sup>48</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 26.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 13.

this continuity, I submit that Harrison's social theory correlates well with the requirements of justice as right relation. It is also a gender-sensitive tool for analyzing the economic injustice of women's lives and their inextricably linked maternal death and disability. Harrison's social theory is, therefore, an important contribution to Christian moral deliberation in areas of economic ethics; it is a resource for shaping a more nuanced understanding of the qualitatively different poverty of women.

#### 4.2.1 Justice as Right Relation

Key to Harrison's concept of justice is relationality. Justice is right relation, where "right" implies relations that are equal, mutually empowering, and affirming of human dignity.<sup>50</sup> Right relation implies conditions of genuine reciprocity, "without which we are thwarted broken beings who seek to avoid vulnerability."<sup>51</sup> Right relation is animated by shared vulnerabilities and insights, and by our ethical response to others, particularly the marginalized. In addition, right relation transcends the interpersonal realm: it requires sensitivity to the ways in which oppressive power dynamics thwart the development of responsible, self-directed personhood.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, right relation is both personal and communal;<sup>53</sup> the justice of right relation is witnessed in the dialectic of self-determination and participatory, inclusive communal living.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 14.

<sup>51</sup>Harrison, "Human Sexuality and Mutuality," 59.

<sup>52</sup>Harrison et al., *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 165; Harrison, "Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics," 39.

<sup>53</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection," 249. Harrison credits James Nelson for signalling the sources of sex negativity in the Christian tradition in his book *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979). See also Harrison, "Christianity's Indecent Decency: Why a Holistic Vision of Justice Eludes Us," in *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love*, ed. Marvin M. Ellison and Sylvia Thorson-Smith (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 25-44.

<sup>54</sup>Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 16.

To probe Harrison's insights further, I now explore the following four themes in justice as right relation: justice and embodiment, justice and social structures of meaning, justice and social power, and justice as a metaphor of transformation. I submit that each theme illuminates a distinct aspect of right relation that is relevant to understanding the demands of justice within the context of maternal mortality.

**Theme I: Justice as Right Relation, The Moral Significance of Embodiment**

All our relations to others--to God, to neighbour, to cosmos--are mediated through our bodies, which are the locus of our perceptions and knowledge of the world. Our senses--all our senses, including touch--mediate the manifold world to us. We are not split compounds of mind and spirit. Our emotions mediate our basic interactions with the world. Our minds are an integrated aspect of our body systems, shaped by the matrix of our sensuous being in the world.<sup>55</sup>

Harrison's words signal the moral significance of embodiment for right relation. They clarify that our bodies are the foundations of moral reasoning and ethical agency.<sup>56</sup> That is, our bodies are critical resources for moral living;<sup>57</sup> they are meant to mediate spirituality directly.<sup>58</sup> However, Harrison cautions that as moral resources, our bodies are Janus-faced: they are the historical sources and sites of either unjust acts and oppressive social structures, or, alternatively, are vehicles for liberating change.<sup>59</sup> With this caveat, Harrison maintains that moral reflection on embodiment is an empowering impetus for justice work, because it underscores both the personal and collective responsibility we bear for the world we inhabit. Her ethical insight is that if the past is seen to result from human agency, it is possible to envision a more just, relational future in which

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<sup>55</sup>Harrison, "The Tasks of Liberatory Feminist Ethics," 58.

<sup>56</sup>Harrison, "Misogyny and Homophobia," 148.

<sup>57</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 39.

<sup>58</sup>Harrison, "Misogyny and Homophobia," 135.

<sup>59</sup>Harrison, "Theological Reflection in the Struggle for Liberation," 249.

the bodily integrity of all is honoured. Harrison therefore inspires the moral courage to acknowledge that in the struggle for right relation, we are called upon to be visionaries, to “find new patterns of relationship, fresh ways of being with and for each other.”<sup>60</sup>

Harrison’s emphasis on embodiment also accents that the basic material necessities of life, materials that allow for bodily integrity, are the conditions of possibility for right relation.<sup>61</sup> In her ethical analysis of embodiment, Harrison privileges rights over the non-relational concept of liberties. This is because rights are not reducible to individual liberties: rights must be understood within a broader context of moral responsibility for reciprocal relations that ensure the basic life conditions for all.<sup>62</sup> Thus, Harrison’s understanding of rights is not attenuated;<sup>63</sup> rights are not zones of individual freedom, but are of fundamental moral substance.<sup>64</sup> Rights demand collective accountability for equal shares in the basic necessities of life; rights are the non-negotiable conditions for social justice.<sup>65</sup> What Harrison clarifies is that the moral right to one’s own bodily integrity illumines the corresponding imperative to ensure the bodily integrity of others.<sup>66</sup> In so doing, Harrison opens up common ethical ground from which reciprocal accountabilities can emerge in collective struggles for justice.<sup>67</sup> Her insight is that community is an embodied reality, constituted

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<sup>60</sup>Harrison, “Misogyny and Homophobia,” 149.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 145; Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 33, 196.

<sup>62</sup>For example, Harrison critiques liberal traditions for their failure to consider the right of bodily integrity as a moral good for all societies. See Harrison, “Situating the Dilemma,” 19-20.

<sup>63</sup>This is in contrast to the liberal approach to rights, which Harrison would consider non-substantive.

<sup>64</sup>Harrison, “Situating the Dilemma of Abortion Historically,” *Conscience* (March/April 1990): 19.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>66</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 196.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.



by social practices that implicate all members in the goal of deepening connectedness. Harrison writes:

All of us, then, literally call forth each other in relationship, and our power of being and capacity to act emerges through our sensuous interaction in relation. If our modes of relation are not grounded in bodily integrity, and if our ways of being with each other preclude mutuality--which is the power simultaneously to affect and be affected by another--we cannot and will not have either personal well-being or community, which is to say, relations of mutuality, shared empowerment and common respect.<sup>68</sup>

It is significant that Harrison's approach to embodiment transcends the human community. Influenced by the ecotheologian Larry Rasmussen, with his understanding of the ozone layer as our collective skin, Harrison stresses that in a feminist theological ethic, embodiment is inclusive of the cosmic environment.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the interconnections among the personal, interpersonal, cultural, political-economic, ecological and cosmic levels of embodiment are all morally significant. Harrison discerns in the survival struggles of so many in our world, particularly those of economically marginalized women, a pervasive failure to realize these moral interconnections.<sup>70</sup>

Harrison's emphasis on embodiment in right relation also honours our Christian covenantal relationship with the Divine.<sup>71</sup> This is because right relation with one another is the condition of possibility for right relation with God.<sup>72</sup> As such, the justice of right relation can never be divorced from the well-being and integrity of the most vulnerable members of our human and natural

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<sup>68</sup>Harrison, "Humn Sexuality and Mutuality," 59.

<sup>69</sup>Harrison, "Challenging Sexual Ethics and Social Order," 70.

<sup>70</sup>For Harrison, the basic conditions of well-being are the concrete needs for human dignity, food, shelter, health, bodily integrity, non-alienating labour and cultural creativity. The source for learning the content of basic human needs is experience in the struggles for justice. See Harrison, "Theological Reflection," 254.

<sup>71</sup>Harrison, "The Politics of Energy Policy," 177-178.

<sup>72</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 192.

communities. Justice therefore requires us all to identify the concrete inequities of our world, as well as to critically scrutinize and actively protest against institutional arrangements that perpetuate and deepen these inequities.”<sup>73</sup> Harrison’s concept of justice as right relation is clearly substantive: only a substantive concept can honour the biblical imperative to ensure that all have a fair share in the basic conditions of well-being.<sup>74</sup> Thus, central to right relation is the insight that the dignity, bodily integrity and well-being of all are fundamental to religious promise.

To Harrison, embodiment is of particular moral significance to right relation. The global data on women’s lives, to which she is theologically attentive, provides evidence of a pervasive lack of right relation: women’s bodies are controlled, battered, mutilated, violated and perceived as dispensable.<sup>75</sup> In light of this grim reality, Harrison’s accent on embodiment in right relation challenges Christian tradition to analyze and to eradicate any patriarchal relations of domination, violence and control that shape a world injurious to women.<sup>76</sup> She also underscores the immorality inherent in the inequitable social and cultural location of many women, and the implications these inequities have on their well-being and bodily integrity. Harrison calls for collective activism in fostering a more equitable world.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Harrison, “The Politics of Energy Policy,” 177.

<sup>74</sup>For Harrison, “moral” means that which “makes for the self-respect and well-being of human beings and the environment”; a “right” is fundamentally a relational term--a right illumines the “mutually obligatory character of our social relations.” See Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 34, 126, 190-192. See also Harrison, “Misogyny and Homophobia,” 149.

<sup>75</sup>For Harrison, the moral significance of bodily integrity is a pivotal theme in feminist ethics; feminism has pioneered a deep revisionment in our understanding of ourselves as embodied sexual beings. Bodily integrity is foundational to moral sensitivity, as our bodies are the locus of our connection to all of life. See Harrison, “Feminist Ethics: An Alternative Paradigm?”

<sup>76</sup>Harrison, “Human Sexuality and Mutuality,” 54-57.

<sup>77</sup>Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life,” 106-108.

For example, Harrison's accent on embodiment clarifies why critical reflection on the concrete consequences of contemporary economic policies and practices for poor women is theologically necessary. Her insight is that current global economic policies are morally problematic because they exploit women in ways that deny their bodily integrity. Moreover, she underlines that these economic policies are neither adequately recognized nor addressed as theological and ethical problems.<sup>78</sup> That is, theological ethics is morally blind to these problems. Consequently, women's poverty and the inextricably linked problem of maternal mortality are not regarded as an injustice and a denial of right relation.<sup>79</sup>

### **Theme II: Justice as Right Relation, Critique and Analysis of Social Structures**

Justice as right relation requires more than reciprocal, interpersonal accountabilities aimed at ensuring that all receive the basic material conditions of life. Right relation also requires collective commitment to social equality resulting from inclusive policies and social structures of meaning, which give everyone an equal share in the basic conditions of well-being.<sup>80</sup> It is significant that Harrison does not presuppose the validity of current social structures of meaning: she sees the lack of right relation in the pervasive structural sins of sexism, compulsory heterosexism, classism, racism, ethnocentrism, economic imperialism, and colonialism.<sup>81</sup> Harrison's insight is that distorted interpersonal social relations are the seeds of distorted social structures of meaning.<sup>82</sup> Her concept of

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<sup>78</sup>Harrison, "The Effect of Industrialization on the Role of Women in Society," in *Making the Connections*, 42.

<sup>79</sup>Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 198-200.

<sup>80</sup>Harrison, *Our Right To Choose*, 33; Harrison, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 165.

<sup>81</sup>Harrison, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 165.

<sup>82</sup>Harrison, "Older Person's Worth," 154-156.

right relation therefore connects inequalities in the personal realm with the structural-relational dimensions of social reality.<sup>83</sup>

In right relation, the personal is not divorced from the structural: private pains are public issues. That is, the capacity for moral agency is contingent upon the presence of social structures that ensure such fundamental issues as safety, food security, education, health care and civic freedom. The possibility of justice within intimate, interpersonal experiences is, therefore, contingent upon the presence of just and rightly-related social structures of meaning.<sup>84</sup> In light of these complex interconnections, Harrison underlines that moral reflection on our interpersonal lives needs to be situated within critical analyses of structural patterns of oppression that have shaped us as individuals and communities, both locally and globally.

In theologically reflecting on economically marginalized women's lack of right relation, Harrison's insights clarify that the vision of women's social, cultural, religious and economic equity presupposes their liberation from personal and structural realities formed in the interest of patriarchy and other systems of exploitation. Her point is that social structures are the matrix in which both individuals and communities are shaped.<sup>85</sup> In light of this, a critique and analysis of exploitive social structures is a theo-ethical prerequisite for generating the justice of right relation. Furthermore, due to the intimate links between personal and structural justice,<sup>86</sup> the historical conditions under which social institutions and principles have been formed must be examined so that a "critical paradigm for social engagement"<sup>87</sup> can emerge. Harrison's understanding of justice as right relation requires an

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<sup>83</sup>See Harrison, *Making the Connections*, endnote no. 21, 300.

<sup>84</sup>Harrison, "Human Sexuality and Mutuality," 53-65.

<sup>85</sup>Harrison, "The Dream of a Common Language," 15.

<sup>86</sup>Harrison, "Agenda for a New Theological Ethic," 89-91.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

explicit commitment to analyze and counter the origins and ongoing dynamics of domination and exploitation.

### **Theme III: Justice as Right Relation, Re-visioning Social Power**

In addition to the moral significance of human embodiment and the links between personal and social structural realms, Harrison maintains that right relation also requires a re-visioning of social power from an abstract, ahistorical force into a positive co-creative potential.<sup>88</sup> Harrison emphasizes the historical nature of social power: a power she discerns can either be transmuted positively into a co-creative force that advances justice, or function as an alienating dynamic. Again, in contrast to the liberal interpretation of power as “an inexorable given in society, to be balanced and checked,” Harrison maintains that power has a “history,” a “human face”: power is “something we collectively or individually generate.”<sup>89</sup> In particular, Harrison honours the “formidable power”<sup>90</sup> women possess because of their capacities to bear life at a biological level and to nurture the bonds of community. Harrison poses the following question concerning social power: “what are the conditions and patterns of the social relations in which we now exist that thwart right relation, and how may we alter them to enable common effort for common well-being?”<sup>91</sup>

Harrison’s insights into social power as co-creative power shed light on her dialectical appropriation of the moral norms of justice and love. For her, justice is needed where love does not exist; love is inextricably bound with the active “doing” of justice. Like justice, love is not passive: love is a praxis, a mode of action, the basis of personhood and community and the “depth of our

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<sup>88</sup>Harrison’s vision of power as co-creative breaks with traditional approaches, such as political realism, in which power is an ahistorical given in society. Instead, Harrison emphasises the human generated and historical nature of power; she maintains that if power is alienated from its human sources, unjust social relations result.

<sup>89</sup>Harrison, “The Dream of a Common Language,” 24-25.

<sup>90</sup>Harrison, “The Power of Anger,” 11, 8-12.

<sup>91</sup>Harrison, “The Dream of a Common Language,” 17.

power to act each other into well-being.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Harrison maintains that to be genuinely Christian is to be engaged in a sustained way with concrete struggles for justice: struggles in which the interconnected nature of love and justice, and the commitment to foster life in abundance for all, are learned.<sup>93</sup> That is, Harrison claims that our capacities for interpersonal love and struggles for justice are intimately connected:<sup>94</sup> the justice of interpersonal and social well-being are inter-structured possibilities.<sup>95</sup> Harrison's words speak to the praxis of justice and love in shaping responses to serious moral dilemmas of our time, such as maternal mortality. She states:

Like Jesus, we are called to a radical activity of love, to a way of being in the world that deepens relation, embodies and extends community, passes on the gift of life. Like Jesus, we must live out this calling in a place and time where the distortions of loveless power stand in conflict with the power of love. We are called to confront, as Jesus did, that which thwarts the power of human, personal and communal becoming, that which twists relationship, which denies human well-being, community and human solidarity to so many in our world.<sup>96</sup>

Harrison therefore holds Christian tradition accountable for compromising both our capacities to make connections between love and justice, and for failing to link these moral norms with our co-creative power to engage collectively in justice initiatives.<sup>97</sup> In this failure to forge these linkages, Harrison discerns the source of the distorted power relations that shape contemporary

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<sup>92</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 11; Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 115.

<sup>93</sup>See "On Doing the Word," sermon given for the Hudson River Presbytery, 23 September 1980, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>94</sup>Harrison, "Sexuality and Social Policy," 83.

<sup>95</sup>Harrison, "Human Sexuality and Mutuality," 55-65.

<sup>96</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 18-19.

<sup>97</sup>Harrison, Human Sexuality and mutuality," 54.

social reality<sup>98</sup> in ways that deny the triadic structure of love of God in neighbour.<sup>99</sup> Again, disbelief in God is not a lack of faith. It is a failure to recognize Holy Power as reciprocal power;<sup>100</sup> it is a separation of bodily, material integrity from spiritual blessedness;<sup>101</sup> and it is acquiescing to despair and hopelessness when confronted by injustice.<sup>102</sup> For Harrison, the fundamental task of feminist liberation social ethics is therefore “re-imagining justice in relation to collective and personal agency.”<sup>103</sup>

Harrison’s accent on co-creative power underscores that right relation requires correcting power inequities in both society and in the Church. Furthermore, her re-visioning of social power in co-creative terms affirms women’s collective power to “identify, name and characterize [the] world.”<sup>104</sup> She insists that theological ethics needs to celebrate and incorporate into its moral and intellectual horizons the formidable co-creative power of women.<sup>105</sup> The lives and suffering of economically marginalized pregnant women are therefore fundamental resources for appropriating the dialectical relationship of justice and love in right relation.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>For Harrison, societies qualified by radically unequal relations of power in which some members struggle to survive, while others have their needs met in abundance, are intrinsically unjust because, in time, social inequality becomes institutionalized in social structures and, thereby, reinforces great disparities of power. See Harrison, “Older Person’s Worth,” 154-156.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>100</sup>See “Modern World Needs Revolution in Service of Justice,” Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>101</sup>Harrison, “Keeping Faith in a Sexist Church,” 229.

<sup>102</sup>See Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 93; Harrison, “Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics,” 39.

<sup>103</sup>Harrison, “Making Connections: Becoming a Feminist Ethicist,” in *Justice in the Making*, 12.

<sup>104</sup>Harrison, “The Power of Anger,” 6-7.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>106</sup>Harrison, “New Consciousness of Women,” 446-447.

#### **Theme IV: Justice as Right Relation, A Metaphor of Transformation**

Harrison underlines that justice as right relation is not a static, intellectual concept; it is a powerful metaphor of transformation.<sup>107</sup> Powerful metaphors are cognitively destabilizing, because they provide both a shock and a shock of recognition.<sup>108</sup> That is to say, the shock of the metaphor of justice as right relation is experienced in confronting our failure to respect the demands of radical relationality; the shock of recognition is experienced in our reverencing right relation as Holy.<sup>109</sup> Harrison, among many theologians, has noted that the language of theology is the metaphorical image.<sup>110</sup> Her metaphorical appropriation of justice as right relation therefore nurtures the aesthetic dimension of moral theory and empowers transformative change.<sup>111</sup> In the two dimensions of shock / shock of recognition of Harrison's justice as right relation is the possibility of recovering a holistic and healing relation with all of creation.

Justice as right relation is a metaphor that “puts us in touch with life through vision”<sup>112</sup> and allows us to recover the experience of the Holy in what is “alive, moving, growing and changing, and in chaos (which is filled with potential) rather than stasis and order.”<sup>113</sup> Essentially, Harrison's metaphor of justice as right relation destabilizes and transforms conventional, abstract approaches to justice into a vocational praxis that shapes human relations in the collective pursuit of a good genuinely common to all. Her metaphorical appropriation of right relation is not simply an

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<sup>107</sup>Harrison, “The Tasks of Liberatory Feminist Ethics,” 2.

<sup>108</sup>For an excellent exploration of metaphorical theology see, Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 29-58.

<sup>109</sup>See Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life,” 109.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>111</sup> Harrison, “Sexism and the Language of Christian Ethics,” 39; Harrison, *Our Right to Choose*, 99.

<sup>112</sup>Harrison, “Restoring the Tapestry of Life,” 107.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*



imaginative act: it calls upon us to make a public and political commitment to radical relationality in ways that deepen and extend all of life. As a metaphor of transformation, justice of right relation requires a holistic analysis: one that joins the personal realm to the structural realities of political and economic systems.<sup>114</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Making the Connections: Summary of Justice as Right Relation / Links to Maternal Mortality**

Justice as right relation illumines maternal mortality as a theo-ethical issue of injustice. It inspires effective theo-praxis in solidarity with economically marginalized women; I offer five examples.

One, the centrality of embodiment in right relation clarifies maternal mortality as a profound moral problem. In so doing, embodiment signals that the largely preventable maternal deaths and disabilities of marginalized women are an empowering impetus for justice work. Moral reflection on this global gendercide therefore evokes a radically relational, embodied response: one that *sees* the injustice of poor women's lives, *hears* their cries for liberation, *feels* compassion for their suffering, and *acts* in solidarity with their resilient efforts to ensure their survival and that of their dependants. Within the context of maternal mortality, embodiment in right relation beckons a deeply sensuous spiritual conversion to the other.

Two, embodiment in right relation also underlines that our physical bodies are resources for moral living: they are meant to mediate spirituality directly. In so doing, embodiment makes explicit a profound moral contradiction: the capacity of our bodies to mediate spirituality is compromised severely in a world where women's pregnant bodies bleed to death, or are otherwise violated, maimed and abused, either by the bodies of intimate partners, or by the failure of collective bodies to challenge the causal dynamics implicated in their sufferings and deaths. Embodiment in right

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<sup>114</sup>Harrison, "The Power of Anger," 16.

relation therefore highlights the moral responsibility we collectively bear to foster more equitable patterns of interpersonal and social living, in which the well-being and bodily integrity of all pregnant women is secured. In particular, embodiment in right relation accents the moral import of giving practical support to pregnant women whose life conditions preclude their safety and well-being--an urgent moral response in light of the "silent epidemic" of violence and homicide in pregnancy. Furthermore, embodiment in right relation reinforces the moral insight that the injustice of maternal mortality--an injustice that is repeated every minute of every day--prevents right relation not only with one another, but also with God. Within the context of maternal mortality, embodiment in right relation is a spiritual summons to honour our covenantal relations by embodying effective transformative agency.

Three, justice as right relation rejects as morally insufficient a passive, intellectual identification with economically marginalized pregnant women. It accents our mutual accountabilities for ensuring the basic human needs of all pregnant women, such as nutrition, safety, shelter, education, health care, and reproductive rights. The recalcitrant nature of maternal death and disability is overwhelming evidence of the failure of moral accountability to pregnant women. Therefore, no social or economic policy or initiative should be designed without an ethical awareness of their implications for pregnant women. That is, policies and initiatives must be held accountable to the reality that the private pains of disabled or dying pregnant women are not personal matters: they are the ramifications of unethical economic decisions that oppress women in the service of such systemic evils as patriarchy, racism, economic profit, neo-liberal dogma, religious ideology and cultural idealism.

Right relation signals that the justice for which economically marginalized pregnant women yearn can be guaranteed only by inclusive policies and social structures of meaning that are equitable and sustainable, both personally and structurally. The justice for which economically

marginalized women yearn will come about when policies become rightly ordered through attention to these inextricably linked moral realms. The negative impacts of funding failures for reproductive health and the gender-blind initiatives of PRSPs are the products of a morally flawed economic system. By denying women their well-being, bodily integrity, health needs, responsible self-direction and material self-sufficiency, these economic policies and initiatives are unjust and unaccountable to those whose impoverishment they structure.

Four, right relation revisions social power as positive co-creative potential. In the context of women's lives, and in particular within the context of maternal mortality, right relation honours the life-giving powers of women as an embodiment of the co-creative praxis of justice and love. It honours both women's biological nurturing of life and their tending the bonds of relationships and communities on multiple levels. Right relation therefore identifies the fruit of women's co-creative praxis as both the evolving personhood of others and the bringing forth of community. It clarifies how women's co-creative praxis is pivotal to both morality and justice. It also makes explicit the lack of right relation evident in the following fact of women's lives: while women nurture the personhood of others and bring forth community, their own personhood is compromised frequently. The untimely and preventable deaths of at least 1,600 pregnant women each day are concrete examples of this unethical compromise. Right relation's revisioning of social power in the context of maternal mortality brings a serious moral challenge to Christian tradition and to the wider socio-economic reality to counter all that thwarts the full personhood, dignity and well-being of women.

Five, as a transformative metaphor, justice as right relation fosters a moral vision of relationality that is paradoxically revitalizing in the context of maternal death and disability. In providing both a shock and shock of recognition, it engenders the following insights. The shock is the moral insight that the legacy of our failure to mediate the justice of radical relationality is death to marginalized pregnant women; the shock of recognition is that the life-giving agency and

potential of all women is a moral good that must be honoured. Justice as right relation therefore inspires public and political commitment to halt the preventable tragedy of maternal death and disability. Moreover, from an economic perspective, the metaphor of justice as right relation is also a powerful challenge to the classic economic metaphor, *Homo Economicus*. That is, in contrast to *Homo Economicus*' ideals of self-reliance, disengaged autonomy, utility-maximization and objectivity, justice as right relation affords moral clarity to the ways in which our dynamic life processes are complexly interconnected and interdependent throughout all our lives.

#### **4.3 Making the Connections: Justice as Right Relation / Links to an Adequate Social Theory**

In the previous section, I identified four themes animating Harrison's concept of justice as right relation. To reiterate, these themes connect justice to embodiment, social structures of meaning, social power, and to a metaphor of transformation. It is my argument that these themes generate the following four requirements for Christian moral deliberation on the multi-faceted realities of the poor: *one*, a substantive account of the lived realities of those most vulnerable in our world; *two*, a critical historical analysis of existing social structures of meaning, particularly a socio-economic analysis that evaluates the global economic system within the framework of right relation; *three*, an empowering re-envisionment of the capacity for human agency to co-create justice in our relations with God, with one another, and in the wider social reality; *four*, a holistic analysis that links personal and structural justice. Furthermore, I submit that these four requirements are consistent with the four criteria of what Harrison terms an "adequate" social theory. I therefore claim that Harrison's social theory is a logical extension of her concept of justice as right relation. To substantiate my claim, I first clarify this continuity and then indicate why Harrison's social theory is important to a feminist liberation ethical analysis of maternal mortality.

#### 4.3.1 Justice as Right Relation: Harrison's Social Theory

A brief history is required for an appreciation of why Harrison advocates for an adequate social theory in theological economic-ethics. Years ago, Harrison's doctoral mentor, John C. Bennett, made an appeal to Christian social ethicists to re-focus moral deliberation around issues of economic justice.<sup>115</sup> Bennett's appeal was a response to his perception that economic reality often remained on the margins of theological and ethical work. In a world of increasing inequalities, Bennett voiced his moral concern about both "the survival of a large part of humanity, and the humanity of those who survive because they live in privileged and protected countries."<sup>116</sup> Bennett's prophetic words made a deep impression on Harrison. A critical, evolving dialogue with economics, as well as a vision of greater economic democracy, became central to her feminist liberation social ethics and her understanding of justice as right relation.

#### 4.3.2 Harrison's Theo-ethical Evaluation of Contemporary Economic Reality

At the outset, it is important to note that as a liberation theologian, Harrison considers socio-economic justice intrinsic to, but not exhaustive of, the in-breaking of God's kingdom.<sup>117</sup> That is, theological liberation requires more than a socio-economic solution: liberation is a dialectic of theological-religious, socio-cultural and political-economic realities. Nonetheless, a fundamental concern she raises is the relative invisibility of economic-ethics in Christian moral deliberation. She highlights the need for Christian ethicists to develop more critical sensibilities and analyses in

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<sup>115</sup>See Bennett, *The Radical Imperative*, 124, 142-164. It is also important to note that Harrison was indebted to the work of Harry Ward (1873-1966), who was a former professor at Union Theological Seminary. Harrison felt Ward to be a sophisticated artisan of Christian economic and political thinking in modern American Christianity. See Harrison, "On Harry Ward," in *Justice in the Making*, 92-97.

<sup>116</sup>Bennett, *The Radical Imperative*, 164.

<sup>117</sup>See "Justice File," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

relation to the political and economic system of global capitalism.<sup>118</sup> Harrison maintains that the theo-ethical lacuna with respect to the global economy partly results from a methodological bias<sup>119</sup> that fostered a conceptual rigidity compromising the interdisciplinary task of Christian ethics.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, the cross-fertilization of ideas between significant dialogue partners at the nexus of theology, ethics and economics has not occurred, and the pervasive reality of economic injustice obfuscated.<sup>121</sup>

Harrison also questions the adequacy of contemporary ethical discourse about the economy when radical social theory,<sup>122</sup> affording critical insight into the capitalist political economy, is

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<sup>118</sup>Harrison frequently acknowledges the significant insights of Catholic bishops and Catholic Social Teaching around the geo-political economy. However, she disagrees with the US bishops' analysis and dismissal of socialism (which Harrison maintains means "democracy inclusive of economic life"), their assumption that the United States is a "mixed economy," and their failure to address the unaccountable power of corporations. See Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory," 55-57; Harrison, "Feminism and the Spirituality of Late Capitalism"; Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS; Harrison, "Social Justice and Economic Orthodoxy," *Christianity and Crisis* (21 January 1985): 513-515.

<sup>119</sup>According to Harrison, at the root of this methodological bias is a negative evaluation of Marxian social theory by most Christian ethicists. In particular, Harrison identifies the influence of her former teacher, Reinhold Niebuhr, who dismissed Marx's insights into the historical dynamics of capitalism. Harrison maintains that Niebuhr relied on political realism to furnish the conceptual tools for analyzing social change. In contrast to Niebuhr, Harrison affirms Marxian social theory as a tool for a critical interpretation of how historical processes sow the seeds of future antagonistic social relations. She contends that serious questions about economic justice have not been raised by a generation of ethicists swayed by Niebuhr's anti-radical legacy, with the exception of John Bennett's, *The Radical Imperative: From Theology to Social Ethics*. See Harrison, "Reflecting on the Relationship Between Politics and Economics," in *Justice in the Making*, 157-161.

<sup>120</sup>Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory," 56.

<sup>121</sup>See Harrison, "Dorothee Soelle as Pioneering Postmodernist," 141.

<sup>122</sup> Harrison, "Reflection on the Relationship," 157-161; See also Harrison, "Social Justice and Economic Orthodoxy," 169. Harrison maintains that what Marx wanted was a critical evaluation of capitalism, a task she feels is still needed. She maintains that what Marx underscored was the need to ensure political restraint for directing and amassing wealth, without which democracy was not possible. Harrison concurs with Marx on this issue; she sees the failure of democracy evident in the fact that most of the wealth in the world is controlled by a small group of mostly white, mostly male Europeans and North Americans. See also Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory in Religious Social Ethics," 58-63.

largely dismissed by Christian ethicists.<sup>123</sup> She maintains that an anti-radical legacy and a privileging of the ahistorical approach of political realism in traditional Protestant ethical discourse,<sup>124</sup> combined with the hegemony of neo-classical analysis in economic discourse, has mystified the global economy and limited moral evaluations of its dynamics.<sup>125</sup> In Harrison's view, the effect of these factors on Christian moral deliberation around issues of economic justice is clear: a rhetoric of economic growth and unlimited progress has been largely unchallenged, and theological ethics has had minimal impact upon a global economy that is detached from, and indifferent to, the social, cultural and ecological consequences of its profit-oriented policies.

In an effort to refocus moral attention around issues of economic justice, Harrison emphasizes that Christian ethicists need to be more economically literate, particularly when appropriating the global dynamics of economic life and its myriad effects on human and environmental well-being.<sup>126</sup> For her, the failure of Christian ethicists to develop economic literacy and a more nuanced awareness of political-economic discourses yields a "deeply misguided ethical analysis."<sup>127</sup> Harrison admits that within the context of our complex, evolving, global economy,

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<sup>123</sup>Harrison, "The Role of Social Theory," 57; Harrison, "Agendas for a New Theological Ethic," 92-97.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. Harrison's indebtedness to Marxian social theory is a challenge to Reinhold Niebuhr's negative evaluation of Marx. Moreover, Harrison maintains that Niebuhr's dismissal of Marx's insights has compromised any hermeneutic of suspicion regarding the American political economy; such a hermeneutic would allow for a more profound and holistic evaluation of the economy from a justice perspective. According to Harrison, Marx stressed the importance of critical knowledge of the political economy so as to elucidate and allow historical processes to be impacted by human agency. See Harrison, "Agendas for a New Theological Ethic," 93-97; Harrison, "The 'Fate' of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism," 57-60; Harrison, "Christian Ethical Praxis and Political Economy," in *Justice in the Making*, 153-155.

<sup>125</sup>Harrison, "The 'Fate' of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism, 53-55, 58-67; "Theology, Economics and the Church," Kellogg Lecture, 1986, Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>126</sup>Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," in *Justice in the Making*, 172-174.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 179.

understanding economics is a considerable challenge. Apart from the technicalities of economics,<sup>128</sup> this challenge is complicated further by political commitments, myths of “divinely sanctioned economic prosperity,” varied cultural and socio-historical contexts, assumptions about the “historically untranscendable character of capitalism,” and the “death of socialism,” as well as the ideological control of public discourse.<sup>129</sup>

While cognizant of these obfuscating factors, Harrison’s understanding of the economy is unequivocal: the current global capitalist economic system perpetuates widespread injustice and inequality; the economy needs to be de-mystified, challenged and transformed to allow for the justice of right relation.<sup>130</sup> What Harrison envisions is a global economic system qualified by greater economic democracy, a system in which production needs are shaped in a more participatory manner by those directly affected by market-system dynamics.<sup>131</sup> Her economic vision is socialist—however, not as conventionally defined in terms of “undemocratic state-centered interference in spontaneous economic activity,” or “free markets in which economic liberty is constrained by political decisions.”<sup>132</sup> Harrison’s socialist vision of economic democracy opposes neither private property nor the use of markets. Rather, she proposes greater socialization of the means of production and the subordination of wealth to the democratically determined preferences of people when setting

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<sup>128</sup>I do not suggest that as liberation theologians we must understand the technicalities of economics as trained economists. I suggest that a level of economic literacy is critical for understanding the links between liberation and economics, and for living in a sustainable, just way with one another and with the natural world.

<sup>129</sup>Harrison, “Socialism-Capitalism,” in *Justice in the Making*, 163-164.

<sup>130</sup>Harrison, “Critical Ethical Praxis and Political Economy,” in *Justice in the Making*, 153-154.

<sup>131</sup>Harrison, “Reflecting on the Relationship between Politics and Economics,” in *Justice in the Making*, 159.

<sup>132</sup>Harrison, “Socialism-Capitalism,” 162-163.



economic priorities.<sup>133</sup> For Harrison, a more just and equitable economic system is one that combines market coordination and political planning within particular historical contexts.<sup>134</sup> Harrison therefore underlines the economic priority of meeting basic human needs; what she envisions is an economic system in which genuine participatory political democracy--enjoyed by all members of society, not merely the rich and powerful--is the forum in which economic priorities are set.<sup>135</sup>

For example, under conditions of economic scarcity, when basic needs fail to be met, Harrison maintains that production needs to be stimulated as effectively as possible by communal participatory political forces.<sup>136</sup> In her view, productive sectors under greater public communal control, more along the lines of a mixed economy, would promote a more effective democracy and greater justice.<sup>137</sup> For Harrison, an economic system that fails to meet people's basic needs is undemocratic.<sup>138</sup> The fact that nations are deemed democratic because of their electoral policies and

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<sup>133</sup>Harrison maintains that in the present North American reactionary context, those who ask critical questions about the prevailing cultural ideology of capitalism are suspect, and are considered irrational and naively idealistic. She maintains that there is a paralysis in the terms of public debate, that correlates with an ideological climate that favours pro-capitalist convictions. Her concern is that theological ethics fails to acknowledge and challenge the ongoing crises of advanced monopoly capitalism. Harrison claims that socialism historically meant the effort to extend democracy to include economic practices and to make economic rights a dimension of political rights. Her point is that morally concerned, justice-centred Christians can no longer remain silent in the face of widespread human and natural world exploitation. See "Feminism and the Spirituality of Late Capitalism," Harrison Papers, Archives, UTS; Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," 175; Harrison, "The 'Fate' of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism," 63-69; "To the Jubilee Group," Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>134</sup>Harrison, "Christian Ethical Praxis and Political Economy," 157-161.

<sup>135</sup>Harrison, "Socialism-Capitalism," 162-163.

<sup>136</sup>Harrison, "Christian Ethical Praxis and Political Economy," 153.

<sup>137</sup>Harrison's remarks are animated by insight into the power and roles of corporations *vis-à-vis* the nation state. She is concerned about the justice of our contemporary situation, where the state is more an instrument of corporate, rather than public, will. See Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," 178-179.

<sup>138</sup>Harrison, "Reflecting on the Relationship," 159.

constitutional arrangements, yet fail to feed, clothe and house their people, or grant them genuine participatory status in shaping social policies, is morally and ethically bankrupt.<sup>139</sup>

Harrison maintains that “ours is a time of unparalleled metaphysical control, albeit a control by neo-classical economic theory.”<sup>140</sup> As a concrete illustration, she cites the dismissal of large sections of economic activity, such as the unpaid or low-paid work of women, as an unjust dismissal because women’s essential work does not fit the criteria of a preconceived, largely mathematical model of the economy. This dismissal ignores the complexity and interconnections animating the global economic system. It relegates the concrete needs of the poorest people to the margins of ethics-economic discourse; it is also ecologically unsustainable, since the natural world is not counted in the market calculus.<sup>141</sup> Thus, Harrison underlines the need for the economy to produce what she terms “real goods and services to meet human needs” instead of creating wealth “for the sake of more wealth” in ways that are environmentally rapacious.<sup>142</sup> Her point is that the global economy’s overwhelming focus on the market mechanism translates into public policy decisions that are prescribed by a capitalist canon and are reinforced by an uncritical social theory that legitimizes and reproduces the same inherent bias.

#### **4.3.3 Right Relation: The Criteria of Harrison’s Social Theory**

In view of these self-perpetuating, unethical features of the geo-political economy, Harrison calls for a social theory that can more adequately assess the strengths and weaknesses of the global

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<sup>139</sup>Here, Harrison may well be alluding to her own country, where it is reported that 30 million Americans are hungry.

<sup>140</sup>See Harrison, “Feminist Thea(o)logies at the Millennium,” 122-126. Here Harrison is critical of the neo-liberal approach that considers unfettered market capitalism the best and most efficient way to achieve solutions to social and economic problems. In her theo-ethical work, Harrison contrasts the myth of automatic market progress and wealth with concrete indicators of human and environmental suffering.

<sup>141</sup>Harrison, “The ‘Fate’ of the Middle Class,” 58.

<sup>142</sup>Harrison, “Living in Resistance,” 217-218.

economic system, and provide a moral heuristic for assessing the implications of its near-universal policies.<sup>143</sup> For her, an adequate social theory is a tool for justice: it evaluates normative economic assumptions with respect to their contributions to social and environmental progress and decline, particularly in relation to the well-being of the poor. As a discipline of human self-understanding, an adequate social theory counters ideological captivity: its criteria help to clarify and to evaluate the moral dilemmas generated by the economic system--dilemmas that thwart the justice of right relation.<sup>144</sup> That is, such a social theory elucidates the full meaning of economic policies, acts and initiatives; it is morally and theologically effective, because it provides ethical insight into the way private pains are structured into the social world.

Harrison identifies the following four criteria as essential to an adequate social theory.<sup>145</sup>

One, an adequate social theory attends to actual conflict and suffering: it concretely illumines the economic consequences of human and environmental exploitation and reveals any resulting social inequity.<sup>146</sup> Attention to the concrete economic oppressions of women is central to this criterion.<sup>147</sup>

Two, an adequate social theory interprets the geo-political economy as a socio-historical reality. The geo-political economy is not an ahistorical phenomenon: it is a human construct, and its "iron laws" are amenable to positive transformation and evolutionary change. This criterion is significant to emancipatory praxis because it is sensitive to shifts in the organization of production;

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<sup>143</sup>Harrison's point here is that a social theory needs to be a critical science, one that enables human agents to act so as to improve social relations. See Harrison, "The 'Fate' of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism," 58.

<sup>144</sup>Harrison, "Christian Ethical Praxis and Political Economy," 154.

<sup>145</sup>The Role of Social Theory," 70-78.

<sup>146</sup>Harrison, "The 'Fate' of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism," 55-57.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 60-61; Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," 172-184.

it also challenges social amnesia regarding the past. It therefore clarifies how present economic suffering is a direct consequence of historical, personal and structural dynamics.<sup>148</sup> This criterion also demystifies relations of domination by providing insight into the ways in which the past is embedded in current societal relations.<sup>149</sup>

Three, as the geo-political economy is understood not as an inexorable force resistant to change, but as an evolving structure responsive to choice and intervention, an adequate social theory emphasizes human agency as a socio-political response to economic injustice. This criterion is an important challenge to economic determinism. Moreover, from the perspectives of poor women, it challenges the presumption that women are passive victims; it affirms them as full participants in initiating justice-oriented change.<sup>150</sup> In evoking collective agency and concern for future well-being, this criterion is also an empowering dimension of faith praxis because it encourages collective and communal participation in the shaping of social policy.<sup>151</sup>

Four, an adequate social theory underlines the complex interconnections within economic reality. It reveals the geo-political economy in a holistic way that includes, yet also transcends, the market mechanism. In envisioning the economy as one integrated whole, a better comprehension of the complex matrix of our social and economic lives is made possible. Moreover, by emphasizing the deep interconnections between social and structural realities, this criterion breaks open the experiences of those disenfranchized by the economic system and stimulates accountability to their claims for justice.

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<sup>148</sup> Harrison, "Theology, Economics and the Church," 183; Harrison, "Towards a Christian Feminist Liberation Hermeneutic, 185-199.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 185-199.

<sup>150</sup>Harrison, "Social Justice and Economic Orthodoxy: Structural Evils Neglected," in *Justice in the Making*, 166-171.

<sup>151</sup>Harrison, "Christian Praxis and Political Economy," 154.

#### 4.3.4 Making the Connections: Summary, Justice / Right Relation / Social Theory

An adequate social theory is therefore a logical extension to justice as right relation. I make this claim because the criteria of an adequate social theory correlate well with the four theo-ethical requirements I identified in justice as right relation. That is, the moral significance of embodiment for right relation correlates well with the first criterion and its attention to concrete conflict and suffering. The focus on the historicity of social structures of meaning in right relation is consistent with the second criterion and its appropriation of the geo-political system as a historical, human construct. The accent on human agency as a means by which right relation is established is reinforced by the third criterion and its focus on transformative praxis. The connection between personal and structural justice in right relation is reinforced by the fourth criterion and its emphasis on a holistic, inter-connected analysis of the geo-political economy.

Hence, an adequate social theory is a tool for justice as right relation for several reasons. It provides criteria by means of which a critical engagement with economics can be made from the perspectives of the poor, and, in particular, from the dismissed perspectives of poor women. As such, an adequate social theory is a means by which the concrete historical dynamics of women's oppressions are discernable as issues of injustice in which economics play a key role. It clarifies the fact that *ethical* economic solutions are fundamental to an effective praxis of resistance and solidarity with all who are marginalized.

In making discernable the links between concrete sufferings and economic realities, such as those germane to poor women, an adequate social theory is a tool for consciousness-raising and for empowering human agency in justice coalitions. It therefore inspires the participatory action necessary to justice initiatives: it allows people to envision themselves as full participants in formulating prescriptions for change that will meet their basic needs and enable their human flourishing.

An adequate social theory is also a tool for justice, because it challenges the unthinking economic dogma that legitimizes the current status quo. Moreover, it identifies that the theoretical challenge to economic ideology is one of the fundamental moral dilemmas of our contemporary global society, and that demystifying economics is a prerequisite to justice initiatives. Hence, in its capacity to unmask ideology, an adequate social theory highlights a serious moral problem that Harrison summarized succinctly in the following statement: “We have lost the conceptual categories to name our growing powerlessness.”<sup>152</sup> What an adequate social theory reveals, therefore, is the collective alienation endemic to our world: an alienation that critical theorists in the past identified as the inability to grasp the nature of the social and economic order because of being subordinate to its demands.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, this collective alienation merges with another moral problem that an adequate social theory makes explicit: the fact that the theory and practice of contemporary economics has forgotten that its original ethos was the shaping of more just, harmonious societies for the benefit of all.<sup>154</sup>

The collective alienation and the structural injustice that an adequate social theory illumines correlates well with the insights of those from the Majority World who have indicated that the neo-colonial environment of global capitalism is even more decimating than the initial colonial phase.<sup>155</sup> This is because the control exerted by the trans-national capitalist system is so misguided that the economies of poorer countries are shaped to meet the ever-increasing consumption needs of wealthier countries in the Minority World. I have given a concrete example of such unbalanced global economic relations by signalling that affluent nations actually donate less money than the re-

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<sup>152</sup>Harrison, “The ‘Fate’ of the Middle Class in Late Capitalism,” 204.

<sup>153</sup>See “Justice File Box #4,” Harrison Papers (unprocessed collection), Archives, UTS.

<sup>154</sup>Harrison, “Theology, Economics and the Church,” 176.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 172-184.

payments of capital and interest they receive from the poorer nations they allegedly support.<sup>156</sup> I concur with Harrison that such misguided economic arrangements are incontrovertible moral problems; as she states, “the best food that hungry people produce comes to us!”<sup>157</sup>

Finally, an adequate social theory is a tool for justice in its capacity to attend to the realities of those in the Majority World who struggle to navigate the deleterious constraints of economic policies and initiatives, such as the PRSPs and limited reproductive funding. We ignore these voices, says Harrison at our peril.<sup>158</sup> This is because the political, social and cultural subordination and suffering endured by those in poorer nations are not isolated phenomena: the same adverse effects are now occurring in richer nations.<sup>159</sup> In light of Harrison’s insights into the interconnections in all of life, it should be no surprise that within a finite, interconnected global economy, exploitive and oppressive economic relations eventually prove destructive to all. Perhaps, there is even a form of retributive justice operative in the neo-colonial economic legacy that is currently distorting economies in the Minority World. It is, however, a justice that falls morally short of Harrison’s justice as right relation, and its vision of collective, collaborative initiatives that foster an inclusive life in abundance and reveal God’s presence among us.

#### **4.4 Making the Connections: Conclusion and Links with Maternal Mortality**

In this chapter, I have explored Harrison’s concept of justice and made explicit its logical extension in the social theory she proposes as adequate for a theological contribution to ethics-economics discourse. I now underline why Harrison’s adequate social theory is relevant to my feminist liberation analysis and response to maternal mortality.

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<sup>156</sup>See Chapter 2, 100.

<sup>157</sup>Harrison, “Theology, Economics and the Church,” 180.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid, 180-181.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

One, in its critical attention to concrete conflict and suffering, an adequate social theory makes visible the qualitatively different poverty endured by poor women in pregnancy. In so doing, it reveals the immorality of a global economic system that gives no value to the most fundamental yet most dangerous labour in the world: the nurturing and the birthing of new life.

Two, in its sensitivity to shifting historical dynamics, an adequate social theory highlights that economic policies are not neutral. Within the context of pregnancy, and from within the concrete constraints of economically marginalized women, gender-blind economic policies prove lethal. The global statistics on maternal mortality are a grim reminder of the human costs of economic policies that are unaccountable to marginalized women.

Three, in its critical awareness of the history and dynamic evolution of social structures, an adequate social theory uncovers the injustice inherent in an economic system that, on the one hand, is dependant on the free work of women, and on the other hand, disenfranchizes them with economic policies they are the least politically powerful to alter. It identifies a morally untenable global paradox: women perform most of the world's work, yet remain the poorest of the poor. An adequate social theory therefore illumines the personal pain of women who suffer maternal death and disability as public moral problems; it calls for a radical re-visioning of the geo-political economy in light of its deleterious implications for poor women.

Four, in its focus on human agency, an adequate social theory highlights that the solidarity required for right relation demands nothing less than collective recognition of global responsibility for the causes and the solutions of pregnancy-related death and disability. It affirms women as fully human moral agents and legitimizes their moral right to reciprocal accountabilities for their survival in pregnancy and throughout their lives. It also insists that social and economic change will not benefit women unless they are given central place and central voice in the re-shaping of social and economic reality.



Five, in its holistic appraisal of the economic system, an adequate social theory appropriates women's health and well-being as more than a justice priority: it is also a prerequisite for social and economic stability worldwide. It clarifies that because of the critical interpersonal, social, cultural, historical and religious bonds forged by women throughout the world, their health and well-being makes ethical, cultural and economic sense.

Six, an adequate social theory makes clear the connections between the personal pain of maternal death and the public policies of a geo-political economic system in which we all are participants. It underscores the fact that as moral agents engaged in the personal and communal shaping of right relation, we are all called upon to participate in the formation of social policies that ensure the basic material needs of all pregnant women in our global community.

In conclusion, an adequate social theory is a tool for justice because it highlights the fact that economic priorities cannot compromise morality, which is the praxis of our common life. It underscores that at the very least, and in the interim, economic policies must meet the basic human needs of those whose economic vulnerability it has structured. By insisting on a holistic appropriation of the economy, an adequate social theory unmask the self-destructive social and economic dynamics inherent in a global economic system that fails to curb its exploitive tendencies. It names the increasing economic poverty of women, and its inextricable links to maternal death and disability, as a breeding ground for human rights abuse, socio-cultural chaos and disintegration, and economic disaster. It challenges the legitimacy of our geo-political economy, which dismisses those most adversely affected by its economic policies. It also refutes a set of economic assumptions that severs personal from social and ecological well-being. In its holistic appropriation of the geo-political economy, a social theory underscores that nothing can be good for our global society that also negates the well-being of any person, group or nation. An adequate social theory, therefore, embodies in the most complete sense the foundational feminist insight that the personal is the

political. That is, from a feminist theo-ethical perspective and cognizant of our inextricably linked complex world, an adequate social theory elucidates the moral fact that the personal is the global.

## CONCLUSION

### 5 Maternal Mortality: Towards A “Justice Imaginable”

In Asia, the face of God can be discovered in many images, even in the image of a slum woman who holds her newborn baby in her arms and stares with brave eyes into an empty future with a determination that she and her child will live.<sup>1</sup>

I return to the image of God that has been my spiritual anchor throughout my feminist liberation analysis of maternal mortality. The power of this image flows from its capacity to destabilize our traditional interpretations of the Divine. It fosters an imaginative leap that beckons us to think theologically for our time, and, in particular, to reflect upon the injustices of poor women’s lives.

While evoking deep compassion for the limited life options of this slum woman, this image of God also honours her hope, courage, resilience and determination to survive. In so doing, it inspires a “justice imaginable” in the shaping of a rightly-related world that would be accountable to her: a world animated by the solidarity and collective praxis that would ensure her survival and that of her newborn. This image of God is therefore pivotal to amending the injustices perpetrated against economically marginalized pregnant women. It binds us all to greater moral responsibility for the world in which we are co-creators with God. It sows the seeds of hope for the possibility of a more equitable world in which poor women survive pregnancy and flourish in the fullness of their humanity granted in God. It celebrates the possibility of encountering the Divine in collective praxis of justice.

This image of God, however, is two sided. It also reveals the harsh reality of the qualitatively different suffering endured by those who are female, poor and pregnant. It signals the moral indifference of a global community that fails to prevent the ongoing tragedy of maternal death and disability. It identifies a global community that does little to challenge an economic way of

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<sup>1</sup>Gnanadason, “Women’s Oppressions,” 74.

thinking that defines poor women and their life-giving agency as exogenous to the economic system. It identifies a global community that is de-sacralized in its acquiescence to despair, hopelessness and inactivity in the face of a life-denying injustice. This image of God exposes a socially, economically and spiritually unsustainable global community: a community that excludes poor women from the circle of divine blessedness and denies God's living presence among us.

This image of God, therefore, presents both crisis and opportunity. The crisis it presents is that the injustices of the preventable deaths of 1,600 women every day and the countless millions of other women who are chronically disabled in pregnancy will continue to rob poor women of their dignity, well-being, and often, their lives. It portends a crisis that will erode our common humanity and contribute to a world ravaged by gross disparities of income, wealth, power, health and possibility. Alternatively, the opportunity inspired by this image is a framework for action, the *telos* of which is a more just and equitable world in which pregnancy does not mean death and disability for poor women. It is to the opportunity aspect of this image of God and its justice-oriented *telos* that I now attend.

### **5.1 Maternal Mortality: A Challenge to the Integrity of Liberation Theological Ethics**

In my dissertation, I have explored the myriad ways in which pregnancy is a hazardous reality for many economically marginalized women: it is often a time of fear, profound suffering and untimely death. In analyzing the structured injustices and everyday "traffic" of women's lives, I have identified the causal dynamics that are the precursors to maternal death and disability. In so doing, I substantiated my claim that maternal mortality is closely linked to the injustices of women's structured economic, political and socio-cultural marginalization. Moreover, I have made explicit the fact that poor women have little choice regarding their marginalization: they have little choice regarding the dire circumstances in which they conceive, give birth and nurture new life into the world. I have also emphasized that despite the marginalized contexts of many poor women's lives,

their contributions to the well-being of families and communities, and the work they perform to ensure the social and economic stability of nations, are far from marginal.

My main thesis is that the economic, political and social inequities germane to the lives of many of the world's poorest women are largely invisible, both economically and theologically. The inequities that I have demonstrated to be co-terminous with being born female and which eventually prove lethal in pregnancy are not recognized as economic and religious problems. Maternal mortality and its links to women's poverty are not judged to be a scandalous and sinful reality that ought to be rejected as contrary to the will of a just and loving God.

Maternal mortality is not only a litmus test for the general status and well-being of women and a resource for learning what sustains the complex inequities suffered by the poorest persons within our global community. Maternal mortality presents a concrete situation of chronic suffering and premature death from which liberation theological ethics has much to learn. Maternal mortality is a profound *locus theologicus* in which a God of life needs to be proclaimed and embodied in ways life-giving to poor women. What the deaths of pregnant women and many of their vulnerable dependants make explicit is that all structures of power and privilege within society and the church, that hitherto have functioned in the silencing and suffering of women, must be challenged and transformed. Maternal mortality requires a profound theological response and resolution in which authentic solidarity and effective theo-praxis with poor women must be embodied. It demands the collective embodiment of the human passion for love and justice. Maternal mortality is a summons to right relation with poor women: it beckons a deeply sensuous spiritual conversion to the other.

Recognizing the fundamental theo-ethical crisis presented by maternal mortality is, therefore, critical to the intellectual and spiritual integrity of liberation theology, and the authenticity of its commitment to solidarity with the oppressed. To attend critically to the everyday lives of poor women and to work to transform the myriad injustices of their lives is a theological imperative. For

how is it possible for liberation theological ethics to speak with integrity of a God of life if the qualitatively different poverty endured by poor women remains obscure? How is this possible if the poorest of the poor remain invisible in a liberation discourse that purports to speak of their lives? How is it possible for liberation theology to speak of a God of life when every minute of every day a pregnant woman dies from largely preventable causes? Finally, how is it possible to encounter God's redeeming love in our contemporary world if the rich and powerful ignore God's summons to right wrong relation: a divine summons enfolded in the lives of economically marginalized pregnant women?

## **5.2 Emancipatory Praxis: Urgent Theo-ethical Responses to Maternal Mortality**

The requirements and challenges that maternal mortality bring to a praxis of solidarity with economically marginalized pregnant women have been elaborated in my pastoral, theological and theoretical commitments to emancipatory praxis. These commitments are all pivotal to the eradication of pregnancy-related death and disability: all are critical sites of resistance to which theological ethics must devote further reflection, dialogue and committed action. There are, however, four specific commitments to emancipatory praxis that I wish to emphasize and to which I encourage future liberation ethical research.

One, the economics of women's lives presents liberation theological ethics with a fundamental challenge to gain greater economic literacy in general, and more specifically, in relation to the economic realities of women's lives. Responding to this challenge is critical. This is because most operative structures of oppression, particularly those that are tenacious dynamics in the oppression of women, are not discernable without an adequate economic analysis. Maternal mortality is but one example of the qualitatively different poverty endured by women in which an economic analysis is pivotal to an adequate theological analysis. There is an urgent need for liberation theological ethics to counter the lacuna in which economic policies and practices are

neither adequately recognized nor addressed as theo-ethical problems. In particular, feminist theology and feminist liberation theology need to expand and develop their analyses by probing the links between women's economic marginalization and the myriad oppressions of their lives. The deleterious implications for poor women that I have made explicit in my analysis of the economics of global funding for reproductive health and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers provide clear reasons why economic literacy is necessary to any liberation theological analysis.

Two, the economic literacy to which all liberation theologians are called to gain must be critically informed by both traditional economic approaches, and also by radical approaches that can appropriate the geo-political economy in holistic ways. I have clarified why the wisdom of feminist economists is essential for comprehending the complex ways in which women's poverty and maternal mortality are deeply embedded and historically perpetuated. I have shown also that reformist economic strategies are ideologically blind and do little to counter the interconnected problems of women's economic marginalization and their pregnancy-related death and disability. Liberation theologians need to counter the ideological limitations of conventional economic thought and practice by being better informed by radical and non-reformist economic perspectives. Further research into economic analyses that satisfy the requirements of an adequate social theory, such as in the work of Beverly Wildung Harrison, is theologically necessary for genuine solidarity and effective emancipatory theo-praxis.

Three, it is critical for liberation theological ethics to address in more explicit, practical and humane ways the complex reality of women's reproductive health needs. In light of the multiple jeopardy and the "traffic" of poor women's lives, this issue can no longer be dismissed or discussed in idealized terms which obscure the fact that poor women's life-giving agency is complexly contingent upon the integrity of their reproductive health and their procreative autonomy. The voices and stories of poor women, in relation to the often inhumane, life-denying circumstances of their

reproductive lives have not been heard in any just or adequate way. There is a profound ethical autism within the church, society and the global community that fails to attend to the voices and the stories of poor women and to work to formulate policies and practices that would further their well-being. This ethical autism cannot challenge the economic policies and the religious and socio-cultural practices that continue to deny poor women their basic human needs. More dialogue and committed collective action is needed of the elite and powerful of our world (i.e., those with the power to influence the realities of poor women); what is required is the compassion, humility, insight and courage to commit to transforming the constraints of poor women's lives.

Four, the issue of violence against women demands greater theological and ethical address. My research on maternal mortality has explored the "hidden epidemic" of pregnancy-related death and disability that are consequences of violent abuse. The global data on male violence against women is evidence of a deeply-rooted moral malaise within the human community; it is a profound violation of right relation to which theological ethics must challenge more holistically. Open and candid awareness must be matched by concrete commitment. Moreover, theological insight into the fact that violence against women is not only inter-personal but structural is required. The disproportionate numbers of girls and women among the illiterate, the malnourished, the silenced, the overworked, the underpaid and the culturally and socially disadvantaged of our world are profound theological problems.

Clearly, to discover the face of God in this image of a slum woman is to hear the divine summons to right relation. It is to "see" the myriad injustices of her life, to "judge" her empty future as contrary to the will of a just and loving God and to "act" in ways that foster her dignity and well-being, granted in God. It is to be moved to moral accountability for the conditions of our world. It is to comprehend that the justice praxis of all people of faith is pivotal to eradicating maternal mortality and to progress toward a more just and sustainable world. It is to embody a spirituality of



worldly engagement animated by the fundamental insight that faith in God and justice making are inseparable.

In conclusion, it is my hope that my feminist liberation ethical analysis of maternal mortality will stimulate further theo-ethical research, dialogue and commitment to the well-being of all pregnant women and to the children they birth and nurture into the fullness of humanity. It has been my deepest honour to provide this theological reflection on the lives of poor women in pregnancy.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN DISSERTATION

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers' Association
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMAJ	Canadian Medical Association Journal
CRIAW	Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
DAWN	Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era
DFID	Department for International Development
ECPTAT	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IAFE	International Association of Feminist Economists
ICDDR, B	Centre for Health and Population Research
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IGTN	International Gender and Trade Network
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INFO	Information and Knowledge for Optimal Health
IPHC	International People's Health Council
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation

JAMA	Journal of American Medical Association
MDG	United Nations' Millennium Development Goals
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
NGO	Non Government Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDHRE	The People's Movement for Human Rights Education
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
REACH	Rescue African Children (Uganda)
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policies
STI	Sexually Transmitted Illness
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, based in Geneva, Switzerland
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UN-ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UNSNA	United Nations System of National Accounts
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USQR	Union Seminary Quarterly Review
UTS	Union Theological Seminary
WICEJ	Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice

WIDE	Network Women in Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WSF	World Social Forum

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