



Twenty-Five Years of Counting for Nothing: Waring's Critique of National Accounts

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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF *COUNTING FOR NOTHING*: WARING'S CRITIQUE OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

Caroline Saunders and Paul Dalziel

ABSTRACT

Marilyn Waring's *If Women Counted* (1988) shows how national income accounting became infused with the patriarchal values dominant during its post-World War II development. This article revisits Waring's analysis in the light of continued support of gross domestic product as a useful statistic. It explains the historical and personal context for her analysis, emphasizing postwar patriarchal values as well as Waring's experience as a Member of the New Zealand Parliament (1975–84) and her active engagement with women in developed and developing countries. It illustrates the support *If Women Counted* gives to reformers and recognizes that change has occurred, including provision for satellite accounts in the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA). Nevertheless, the paper concludes that Waring's profound challenge to the central framework of UNSNA will continue as long as the system excludes unpaid household work and impacts on the natural environment from its core statistics.

KEYWORDS

Feminist economics, household work, national income accounting, patriarchy

JEL codes: B54, E01, P44

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA) is a human-made tool, invented at a particular moment in history and modified from time to time (United Nations 1953, 1968, 1993, 2009). These accounts are universally used to evaluate the success of a country's economic policies, even by economists who acknowledge serious shortcomings. The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, for example, proclaimed that "the time is ripe for our measurement system to shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being," but accepted that gross domestic product (GDP) will "continue to provide answers to many important questions such as monitoring economic activity" (Joseph E.

Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi 2009: 12). More recently, Diane Coyle's *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* acknowledges "several reasonable critiques of GDP and the role it has come to play in guiding economic policy," but nevertheless supports the statistic – albeit not acting on its own – as "an important measure of the freedom and human capability created by the capitalist market economy" (Coyle 2014: 5).

In contrast, an influential publication by Marilyn Waring in 1988 condemned the UNSNA and its core GDP statistic. That publication argued that the UNSNA was infused with patriarchal values dominant among economists of the day, constructing reality in a particular way by deciding which facts would be relevant and what parts of human experience were to be made invisible to economic policymakers (Marilyn Waring 1988: 17). The result excluded large amounts of unpaid work within households, predominantly performed by women, and ignored substantial damage that recognized economic activities can have on local and global natural environments. Waring summarized the UNSNA as "applied patriarchy" and the subtitle of her book's international edition announced *A New Feminist Economics* (Waring 1988: 17).¹

Time had not stood still between Waring's feminist denouncement of GDP in 1988 and Coyle's affectionate history twenty-five years later. Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb Jr's *For the Common Good* (1989) initiated a substantial research program that has produced a range of alternative measures of sustainable progress. Following the Beijing Platform for Action agreed at the United Nations Fourth World Women's Conference in 1995, the Accounting for Women's Work project has succeeded in making unremunerated work within households visible for national accounts (Lourdes Benería 1992, 2003; Valeria Esquivel 2011; see also essays in Rania Antonopoulos and Indira Hirway [2010]). Two major revisions of the UNSNA have included provision for optional satellite accounts to measure environmental impacts and unpaid household production (United Nations 1993, 2009). Satellite accounts prepared in several countries have confirmed the significant size of unremunerated work within households (Nadim Ahmad and Seung-Hee Koh 2011; Benjamin Bridgman, Andrew Dugan, Mikhael Lal, Matthew Osborne, and Shaunda Villones 2012; Eeva Hamunen, Johanna Varjonen, and Katri Soinne 2012; Valerie Fender, Rosemary Foster, Atif Khan, Sue Punt, and Gerard Carolan 2013).

Despite these developments, this article argues that Waring's description of the UNSNA as "applied patriarchy" continues to have force.

THE IDEOLOGY OF POSTWAR PATRIARCHY

Neither the United Nations System of National Accounts in 1953 nor Marilyn Waring's critique in 1988 emerged from social vacuums. A context

for both can be usefully approached through Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), widely considered to have launched second-wave feminism in North America. Friedan analyzed the postwar emergence of a highly constraining propaganda that confined women's work to domesticity within family households and gave rise to the title of her book:

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. . . . The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.

But the new image this mystique gives to American women is the old image: "Occupation: housewife." Beneath the sophisticated trappings, it simply makes certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence – as it was lived by women whose lives were confined, by necessity, to cooking, cleaning, washing, bearing children – into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity. (38)

Discussing the origins of this ideology, Friedan drew attention to the impact of the end of World War II: "After the loneliness of war and the unspeakableness of the bomb, against the frightening uncertainty, the cold immensity of the changing world, women as well as men sought the comforting reality of home and children" (Friedan [1963] 1965: 160). Returning armed-service members were given jobs that had been filled by women during the war, while anti-feminine prejudices, reinforced by a "polite but impenetrable curtain of hostility" as well as wage differentials sanctioned by legislation, "sent many women scurrying for the cover of marriage and home" (Friedan 1963: 162–3). Accepting confinement to the home meant sacrificing opportunities to be creative participants in wider society, which denied every person's need to grow and realize her or his full potential:

Self-esteem in woman, as well as in man, can only be based on real capacity, competence, and achievement; on deserved respect from others rather than unwarranted adulation. Despite the glorification of "Occupation: housewife," if that occupation does not demand, or permit, realization of woman's full abilities, it cannot provide adequate self-esteem, much less pave the way to a higher level of self-realization. (273)

Nancy Folbre and Heidi Hartmann published an important essay in the same year as Waring, demonstrating that the same ideological

separation between women's work and men's work was firmly embedded in mainstream economics. Their analysis of founding documents in neoclassical and Marxian economics exposed an idealized view of the family in which women were defined as relatively noneconomic based on "a set of basic assumptions that have divided the economist's world into two parts, variously designated public and private, market and household, economic and noneconomic, self-interested and altruistic, male and female" (Nancy Folbre and Heidi Hartmann 1988: 185; Sheila C. Dow [1990], Paula England [1993], and Nancy Folbre and Julie A. Nelson [2000] have also analyzed dualist approaches permeating the economics literature). Folbre and Hartmann described this separation as ideological because it served the interests of men, who dominated the economics profession.

This does not mean that this ideological separation was uncontested by all economists. As early as 1934, Margaret Reid led the way with her *Economics of Household Production*, which is now recognized "as a major contribution to economic theory and widely cited in a growing field of applied research" (Nancy Folbre 1996: xi; see also the review by Yun-Ae Yi [1996] in the same special issue of *Feminist Economics*). In 1970, Ester Boserup published *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, which Lourdes Benería and Gita Sen (1981: 279) describe as "a comprehensive and pioneering effort to provide an overview of women's role in the development process" despite some identified weaknesses. Well before Waring's 1988 book, Benería had established a strong research program on economics and the gendered divisions of labor (see, for example, Benería [1979], [1981], [1982]) that has now entered its fifth decade (Benería 1992, 2003, 2012).

Nevertheless, national income accounting and its codification in the rules of the UNSNA emerged during the first half of the period when the feminine mystique took hold. It was constructed by economists, who generally accepted without question that the world was divided between economic and noneconomic spheres. It would have been extraordinary, therefore, if the UNSNA did not reflect the patriarchal values of the day. Indeed, just as Friedan emphasized the importance of wartime experience in perpetuating the ideology of female domesticity, so Waring (1988: 54–8) would also emphasize the impetus to national income accounting given by the need to finance the war efforts of the United Kingdom and the United States (John Maynard Keynes 1940; Milton Gilbert 1942). Before discussing that analysis further, it is useful to know something of Waring's own context that gave rise to *If Women Counted*.

THE ORIGINS OF *IF WOMEN COUNTED*

Marilyn Waring was born in New Zealand in 1952 and so grew up in what Rosemary Du Plessis (1993) has aptly described as a male breadwinners' welfare state. At least until the early 1970s, full employment was maintained

for men as a cornerstone of macroeconomic policy but married women were marginal to the labor force and women's wage rates were typically well below those of men (Prue Hyman 1981; Peter Brosnan and Moira Wilson 1989: 21–34). Some policy recognition was given to the value of caring work in the form of a universal benefit paid to primary caregivers of children under age 16 (almost always the mother), but single, divorced, or separated mothers struggled financially (Maureen Baker 2012). Indeed, Du Plessis (1993: 214) observes that “assumptions about the ideal family often led to punitive action against women who did not conform to traditional expectations.”

As that system began to break down in the early 1970s, Marilyn Waring was completing an honors degree in political science and international politics at Victoria University of Wellington. In October 1974 she accepted a position as a researcher for the New Zealand National Party and won selection to represent the party in a vacant electorate at the following year's general election (Janet McCallum 1993). Consequently, Waring was elected to the New Zealand House of Representatives in November 1975 at a time of great social change. Responding to widespread agitation by women for equality, the previous Labour government had appointed a Select Committee to investigate the extent of discrimination against women with particular attention to: education and training; earnings and employment opportunities; legal and commercial transactions; family and social welfare; and all areas of public life. Launched at the Second United Women's Convention held as part of the United Nations' International Women's Year in 1975, the committee's report was founded on the following diagnosis:

The inequalities that remain characteristic of our society arise mainly from traditional acceptance of the assumption that men and women have essentially different roles, and the reflection of this view on the division of rights and responsibilities in employment, public life, education, and the home. In conforming with their traditional role not only have women had fewer opportunities than men to participate in activities outside the home, but also their position within these roles has by custom been of a lower status. (Select Committee on Women's Rights 1975: 103)

The report made fifty-three recommendations for far-reaching change, but the newly elected government was strongly resistant. There were fifty-three men and only two women in its Caucus, one of whom was Waring; and after the 1978 election, Waring was the sole woman on the government's side until Ruth Richardson (later Minister of Finance) was elected in 1981. Consequently, Waring experienced the burden of putting the case for women to a Cabinet of exclusively male Ministers in a setting that was

overtly hostile to feminist issues (Hugh Templeton 1995). Reflecting on that experience more than a decade later, Waring commented:

Your colleagues would try and break you however they could. There was no quarter given. If they thought that, spiritually and emotionally, they could crack you in Caucus or on the floor of the House, that your credibility would be broken, they'd try. But within those confines I could cross the floor [to vote with the Opposition]. If I could stand it and I could make it across there was nothing to stop me. (cited in Arthur Baysting, Dyan Campbell, and Margaret Dagg 1993: 75)

Waring was not a Minister during her nine years in government, but her talent was acknowledged with an appointment as chairperson of the important Public Expenditure Select Committee at the end of 1978. This occurred just as New Zealand's National Income and Expenditure Accounts were being revised using UNSNA international standards. Waring describes her encounter with these standards as a "rude awakening":

I learned that in the UNSNA, the things that I valued about life in my country – its pollution-free environment; its mountain streams with safe drinking water; the accessibility of national parks, walkways, beaches, lakes, kauri and beech forests; the absence of nuclear power and nuclear energy – all counted for nothing. . . . Since the environment effectively counted for nothing, there could be no "value" on policy measures that would ensure its preservation.

Hand in hand with the dismissal of the environment, came evidence of the severe invisibility of women and women's work. For example, as a politician, I found it virtually impossible to prove – given the production framework with which we were faced – that child care facilities were needed. "Non-producers" (housewives, mothers) who are "inactive" and "unoccupied" cannot, apparently, be in need. (1988: 1–2)

In the language of national income accounting, Waring discovered that the UNSNA asset-boundary rules exclude many environmental assets and the production-boundary rules exclude many unpaid household services. Traveling on behalf of the government, Waring met peers on similar committees in other jurisdictions and found the same rules leading everywhere to the same exclusions. Wherever she visited, Waring sought to arrange time with at least one woman her age to learn about her host's working day. In developed and in developing countries, Waring found women commonly engaged in 16 to 18 hours of daily work that were unrecorded in national accounts and overlooked in economic policy. This

confirmed her judgment that women's interests were not being served by the UNSNA, which instead reflected the same patriarchal assumptions and values she was fighting in the New Zealand Parliament.

Waring retired from Parliament on her own terms in 1984, after which she spent two months at Rutgers University hosted by the Institute for Research on Women and by the Eagleton Institute of Politics. Her purpose was to study the UNSNA source material in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library at the United Nations. There she read in the founding manual that households classified as primary producers could have production for their own consumption included in the national accounts but "no other imputations of this kind are made *since primary production and the consumption of their own produce by non-primary producers is of little or no importance*" (United Nations 1953: 5; emphasis added by Waring 1988: 78). Waring acknowledged this rule had been broadened in the 1968 revision, but she had personally met many women in developing countries who spent hours of work every day transporting water, gathering firewood, tending small crops or looking after food-producing animals. Rather than being "of little or no importance," such work is essential for the subsistence survival of millions of people. Waring therefore denounced this dismissal in the strongest terms:

Over the years I have read and reread the last sentence of the above quote. It still makes me gasp for breath. It embodies every aspect of the blindness of patriarchy, its arrogance, its lack of perception – and it enshrines the invisibility and enslavement of women in the economic process as "of little or no importance." (1988: 78)

Waring discussed her research findings with a number of feminists, social scientists, and economists, including John Kenneth Galbraith who urged her to publish. She did so in 1988.

IF WOMEN COUNTED: A NEW FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Waring recognized that previous researchers had addressed the invisibility of women's work in policy. After citing Boserup (1970), Kathleen Newland (1979), Lourdes Benería (1979, 1982), and Barbara Rogers (1981), the prologue explained that her own book would focus on demystifying the UNSNA's role as an essential tool of the male economic system (Waring 1988: 7). The book's first half introduced the main themes of this judgment. After an overview of the UNSNA in the opening chapter, chapter 2 explained how national income accounting was developed to answer questions about financing World War II. Chapters 3 and 4 analyzed how the UNSNA rules make women's work within households invisible, which carries over into the way voluntary work is recorded

in Census questionnaires around the world (discussed in chapter 5). Chapter 6 acknowledged that economists were aware of three difficulties in the UNSNA – how to measure the hidden economy, how to integrate environmental pollution costs, and how to value leisure time – but pointed out that efforts by the profession to address these difficulties simply reinforced the contrast to the way in which “women’s work continues to be ignored” (Waring 1988: 164).

The book’s second half moved into more detailed analyses of these themes. Chapters 7 and 8 compared the UNSNA’s exclusion of reproductive activities with its inclusion of war-orientated activities. Chapter 9 focused on the exclusion of household production for own consumption: “The conceptual models are limited to the world that the economist knows or observes, and housework is most certainly not part of that world” (Waring 1988: 225). Chapter 10 focused on the exclusion of environmental values and the invisibility in the UNSNA of the threat of ecological devastation. Chapters 11 and 12 reported Waring’s search for alternatives, finishing with a brief exploration of how unpaid work and the natural environment might be incorporated into more comprehensive understandings of a national economy, using models developed by Hazel Henderson (1981) and by Hilkka Pietilä (1987) to argue for different conceptual approaches.

The book was well received on publication. It was reviewed in academic journals by Hazel Henderson (1990) and Harry H. Postner (1992) and for a wider readership by Mary Huff Stevenson (1989) and Brenda Hancock (1989). It was cited in Marianne A. Ferber and Julie A. Nelson’s (1993) introduction to the foundational volume *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics* (and also by Julie A. Nelson 1995). It became the subject of a 1995 documentary of the National Film Board of Canada, *Who’s Counting? Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies and Global Economics*. French, Japanese, Norwegian, and Spanish translations of her book followed, and the University of Toronto Press published an extended second edition in 1999 (Marilyn Waring 1999).

The Thomson Reuters Web of Science database (accessed February 17, 2014) records that the book was cited 335 times between 1988 and 2014. Consistent with observations by Diana Strassmann (1993), Prue Hyman (1994: chapter 1), Frances Woolley (2005), and Frederic Lee (2008), there are fewer citations of this feminist contribution in the highest-ranking economics journals, which have preferred to cite a contemporaneous article by Robert Eisner (1988). Nevertheless, a feature of Waring’s book is the breadth of its academic reach, with large citation counts in the diverse research areas of business economics (89 citations), women’s studies (68), sociology or social sciences other topics (65), public administration (36), government or law (36), environmental sciences or ecology (24), and other research areas (84). These statistics, however, do not capture the full

character of the publication's influence; for Waring herself, the intention was to move beyond an academic audience to encourage empowered women to pursue social and ecological justice, as memorably expressed in her final paragraph:

We women are visible and valuable to each other, and we must, now in our billions, proclaim that visibility and that worth. Our anger must be creatively directed for change. We must remember that true freedom is a world without fear. And if there is still confusion about who will achieve that, then we must each of us walk to a clear pool of water. Look at the water. It has value. Now look into the water. The woman we see there counts for something. She can help to change the world. (Waring 1988: 326)

Recent publications have documented the book's inspiration for change. In the forward to Margunn Bjørnholt and Ailsa McKay's recent tribute volume, Julie Nelson records how she could count on one hand the number of people she had found who had put together "feminist" and "economics" in the same sentence "when Marilyn Waring's groundbreaking book came out" (2014: ix). On the other side of the world, Debbie Budlender in South Africa describes how the book is one of a small number that has changed her worldview and how it played a part in her country's first national time-use survey (Shirin Rai, Debbie Budlender, and Ulla Grapard 2015: 525–7). In the diverse nation states of the Pacific Ocean, Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop (2014: 121) explains how Waring's critical perspective "was hugely welcomed by Pacific women" and how her book was "a source of inspiration in a decade of pivotal action (1990–2000)." That inspiration has been fueled by Waring's supervision of many postgraduate students from the Pacific and other parts of the world (Karen Webster 2014).

In her home country of New Zealand, Waring's research coincided with the creation in 1985 of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The then Director of Policy, Mary-Jane Rivers, has recalled how Waring's research provided important foundations for the Ministry's program that included the first studies of women in the national economy (Anne Horsfield 1988; Anne Horsfield and Miriama Evans 1988); further, Waring's research led directly to the Ministry's decision to initiate the first time-use survey in New Zealand in 1990 (Paul Dalziel and Caroline Saunders 2014a). For one of the authors of this article, Waring's book made a lifelong impression when read as a young academic in 1988, and for both authors Waring's conceptual insights have provided essential tools for well-being economics (Paul Dalziel and Caroline Saunders 2014b). Marty Grace and Lyn Craig similarly explain the impact in Australia of this conceptual work (2014: 213):

We characterise Waring's work as creating conceptual tools for change because her timely and meaningful ideas became shared concepts

in the minds and conversations of the people influenced by her work. These shared understandings became incorporated into the Australian social policy discourse. Many academics, policymakers, politicians and ordinary Australians read and understood Waring's work, and used her concepts in talking to each other and developing understandings and proposals that have eventually led to change.

Waring's book has been very important in Canada. Mara Fridell and Lorna Turnbull (2014) tell how forty-five women in 1995 traveled from Manitoba in the center of Canada to attend the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Inspired by that experience and by Marilyn Waring's book, they founded the United Nations Platform for Action Committee (UNPAC) six months later. The Committee's first conference was the "Marilyn Waring Counting Women's Work" conference, and their account concludes: "Across geographies, across social divides, and across liberation's surges and retrenchments, organizations like UNPAC magnify Waring's work, advancing the visibility, claiming the value, and promoting the fearlessness of women" (Fridell and Turnbull 2014: 260). Waring continues to be a member of the Advisory Board that supervises the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (2012).

The above narratives are illustrations of how *If Women Counted* has supported women and men around the globe to work for change through its articulation of shared concepts and its encouragement of personal empowerment. Change has occurred over the last two decades, and so it is timely to revisit the criticism that the UNSNA acts as applied patriarchy.

THE UNSNA AND THE IDEOLOGY OF PATRIARCHY

Those responsible for the UNSNA have not been impervious to criticisms of its asset and production boundaries. The strategy has been to maintain a "central framework" where the exclusions generally remain in place (although small changes have been made; the 1993 revision, for example, expanded the production boundary to include household services of firewood collection and water supply) and then to provide for linked satellite accounts where the excluded items can be measured. Thus, in terms of the central framework, the rules continue to state that "natural resources that are not capable of bringing economic benefits to their owners are outside the scope of assets in the SNA" (United Nations 2009: 19; the atmosphere and the high seas are given as examples on page 7), and the following six services produced by household members for consumption within the same household are specifically listed as outside

the production boundary:

- a. The cleaning, decoration and maintenance of the dwelling occupied by the household, including small repairs of a kind usually carried out by tenants as well as owners;
- b. The cleaning, servicing and repair of household durables or other goods, including vehicles used for household purposes;
- c. The preparation and serving of meals;
- d. The care, training and instruction of children;
- e. The care of sick, infirm or old people;
- f. The transportation of members of the household or their goods. (98)

The manual recognizes that these activities not only involve a considerable amount of labor, but also make an important contribution to economic welfare; yet it nevertheless argues that “national accounts serve a variety of analytical and policy purposes and are not compiled simply, or even primarily, to produce indicators of welfare” (98; the phrase “or even primarily” is an addition to the 1993 text). Instead, the manual’s overview explains that “the central framework describes the essential phenomena which constitute economic behaviour: production, consumption, accumulation and the associated concepts of income and wealth” (15).

This explanation is at the heart of Waring’s critique. Recall Waring’s argument that the economic theory underlying national income accounting *constructs* reality in a particular way, by deciding what facts are relevant to an analysis and what parts of human experiences are kept economically invisible. Updating that argument, the UNSNA does not simply *describe* essential phenomena constituting economic behavior; its rules of inclusion and exclusion *define* those essential phenomena, particularly for policy purposes, and moreover they do so in a narrow way that removes the six activities listed above from economic behavior and ignores the impacts of human activity on non-owned natural resources.

Consequently, we argue that the conceptual tools provided in *If Women Counted* continue to offer a profound challenge to the UNSNA central framework. Waring insists that activities to care for sick, infirm, or old people (to take one example from the above list) are essential economic phenomena, whether they take place within a hospice or within a household. Waring insists that the impacts of economic activities on the natural environment are essential economic phenomena, whether the affected resources are owned for economic benefit or are part of humanity’s common heritage. Waring insists, following an argument she drew from Joan Robinson (1955), that if the UNSNA is unable to include recognition of *all* economic activity then the system is exposed as an

ideology functioning to legitimize the invalid propaganda of patriarchy (Waring 1988: 44).

These observations are not intended to trivialize the changes that have occurred in the UNSNA, nor to downplay the achievements of international programs such as the Accounting for Women's Work project. The practice to allow satellite accounts that are linked to the central framework (United Nations 2009: chapter 29) represents progress of a kind. Four examples highlighted in the 2008 revision are: (1) tourism satellite accounts; (2) environmental accounting; (3) health satellite accounts; and (4) unpaid household activity. Among these examples, however, standards for measuring unpaid household activity remain hopelessly underdeveloped, as the manual explains: "This has been an area of interest for very many years but the difficulties in determining how to measure unpaid activities has so far been a stumbling block in reaching international agreement on how to proceed" (531). Even Coyle's affectionate history of GDP is moved to comment that it is really not difficult to measure unpaid housework through surveys, "but generally official statistics agencies have never bothered – perhaps because it has been carried out mainly by women" (2014: 108).

Thus, although satellite accounts may be a step in the right direction, they are not sufficient to counter the normative power that the UNSNA central framework exercises for defining core concepts and so framing economic policies in particular ways. The opening paragraph of the current manual expresses this well:

The System of National Accounts (SNA) is the internationally agreed standard set of recommendations on how to compile measures of economic activity ... expressed in terms of a set of concepts, definitions, classifications and accounting rules that comprise the internationally agreed standard for measuring such items as gross domestic product (GDP), the most frequently quoted indicator of *economic performance*. (United Nations 2009: 1, emphasis added)

While economic performance is so strongly linked to GDP, and while GDP is so narrowly defined to exclude unpaid household work and impacts on the natural environment, the UNSNA cannot help but reflect the patriarchal values of its origins in the first half of the twentieth century.

It is being increasingly recognized that it is not sensible to treat the so-called "economic system" in isolation from social and environmental goals. A good example is the urgent problem of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concludes, for example, that "human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic

emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history” (IPCC 2014: 2). It continues: “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, and sea level has risen.” Nevertheless, the UNSNA deliberately excludes the atmosphere and the deep seas from the definition of “the most frequently quoted indicator of economic performance” (IPCC 2014: 2). As Waring (1988) entitled her Chapter 10 on economics and the exploitation of the planet, “your economic theory makes no sense.”

Similarly, there is a growing literature recognizing that work that is classified within the UNSNA production boundary and work that is classified outside the boundary have strong connections that should not be ignored by policymakers. This was emphasized by Rania Antonopoulos in her 2008 background paper for the International Labour Organization, who analyzed the essential nature of the daily social reproduction of all members of society achieved through unpaid care work. The connections work both ways – market activities are effectively subsidized by this unpaid care work, but the care work is made easier or more difficult by access to market-provided resources and infrastructure. Detailed knowledge about unpaid care work is therefore critical for successful macroeconomic and microeconomic policies.

Considerations such as these have encouraged statistical agencies to begin thinking more broadly about how to measure wellbeing beyond the national accounts, leading to country-specific initiatives such as the United Kingdom’s national well-being program (Abigail Self, Jennifer Thomas, and Chris Randall 2012), and the creation of integrated sets of broad statistical indicators such as the World Bank’s World Development Indicators database (data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Better Life Initiative (OECD 2011), and the European Union’s Sustainable Development Strategy (Eurostat 2011). These projects have their own weaknesses (see, for example, the critique of the UK program by Karen Scott [2015]), but they aim to track a full range of changes that affect human well-being so that policymakers are not restricted to a narrow understanding of what counts as good economic performance.

CONCLUSION

This article has revisited Waring’s analysis in 1988 of the United Nations System of National Accounts as “applied patriarchy.” This is timely in the light of recent publications that recognize shortcomings in the UNSNA but have nevertheless continued to support gross domestic product as a useful statistic. The article has explained the historical and personal context

for the book's analysis, emphasizing postwar patriarchal values as well as Waring's experiences as a Member of the New Zealand Parliament (1975–84) and her active engagement with women in developed and developing countries around the world. It has illustrated the support given by *If Women Counted* to women and men around the globe working for change; and it has recognized that change has occurred over the last two decades, including provision for satellite accounts in the UNSNA that can include environmental accounting and unpaid household activity. Nevertheless, we conclude that Waring's book remains a profound challenge to the UNSNA central framework and will continue to do so while the system excludes unpaid household work and impacts on the natural environment from its core statistics.

It need not be this way. This article has commented at several points on how wartime experiences influenced social norms and structures in wider society and also influenced the design of the first sets of national accounts by economists. Another social movement that emerged from those experiences was a commitment to fundamental human rights. The United Nations emerged from World War II, for example, and its Charter begins by expressing the determination “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” (see www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/preamble/index.html). This is followed by determinations “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small” and “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” This vision should be a spur for creating a better national accounting system that covers all economic activity and includes all the anthropogenic impacts on social and natural environments (see, for example, Jane Gleeson-White 2015).

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NOTE

- ¹ The book appeared under two titles – *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women Are Worth* in the author’s home country of New Zealand, and *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* elsewhere. This article’s title refers to the New Zealand one, but all citations are from *If Women Counted*.

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