

## Enfleshing the Work of Social Production: Gender, Race, and Agency

Kristin E. Heyer

**B**YOND ITS TOLL IN LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS LOST, the global coronavirus pandemic has highlighted deep cultural and structural flaws impacting well-being: deficiencies in health care systems and detention practices, the impact of entrenched racism, the folly of national exceptionalism, impoverished notions of freedom, as well as disparities in the work of social production.<sup>1</sup> While those with few resources, little job flexibility, and crowded living conditions experienced its impact more acutely, the pandemic exacerbated the gendered nature of the work of social production for women across classes and cultures. Throughout the world, gender inequalities were aggravated by the pandemic, as women enjoy less economic security, head most single-parent households, and shoulder more of the caring labor within the home.<sup>2</sup> With many children out of school and health systems overwhelmed, childcare and eldercare work in the home increased exponentially; these responsibilities have historically been carried out by women. Worldwide, women average between two and ten times more unpaid domestic labor than their male counterparts, the global value of which is estimated at \$10 trillion.<sup>3</sup> Whereas caring labor remains essential to individual and communal survival and well-being and a valuable expression of love and identity,<sup>4</sup> its disproportionate performance underpins the exploitation of women in the commodified care industry, wider wage inequality, and structural biases in recruitment and promotion. The caring labor reconfigured in the pandemic—whether due to new risks paid laborers underwent or parents' addition

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Sara Bernard-Hoverstad for her research assistance on this project and the blind reviewers for their suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Francesca Donner, "How Women are Getting Squeezed by the Pandemic," *New York Times*, May 20, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/us/women-economy-jobs-coronavirus-gender.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/us/women-economy-jobs-coronavirus-gender.html).

<sup>3</sup> Kate Manne, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women* (New York: Crown, 2020), 121–122.

<sup>4</sup> Christine Firer Hinze, "Women, Families, and the Legacy of *Laborem Exercens*: An Unfinished Agenda," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 6, no. 1 (2009): 65, footnote 1.

of care to other full-time work—has made visible how unpaid or low-paid labor strains women as it makes the formal economy possible.<sup>5</sup>

While the pandemic demonstrated how essential domestic workers are to our societies and economies, they continue to be underrepresented in official economic data, reinforcing their marginalization and exclusion from relief. An estimated 67 million labor as domestic workers worldwide, 80 percent of whom are women and 20 percent migrants.<sup>6</sup> 90 percent of Spanish-speaking domestic workers in the United States reported a rapid and sustained loss of jobs resulting in housing and food insecurity, most serving as main breadwinner and mothering young children.<sup>7</sup> The vast majority did not apply for unemployment insurance, assuming they did not qualify, and less than a third received the CARES Act stimulus.<sup>8</sup> The pandemic also put migrant care workers at a higher risk of COVID transmission, lacking resources for reducing transmission, and regulatory protections.<sup>9</sup> Even under non-pandemic circumstances, the nature of care work leaves workers highly vulnerable to abuse.<sup>10</sup> Such labor is not new, but pressures of increased immigration enforcement and pandemic circumstances have intensified its insecurity.

Caring labor (or care work, caregiving work) involves directly attending to other persons' physical and emotional care, maintaining their immediate physical surroundings, and fostering their social connections.<sup>11</sup> Such work sustains public waged labor, yet remains largely invisible and undervalued. Sometimes referred to as "reproductive labor," it captures the care of elders, adults, and youth; socialization of children; maintenance of social ties and household

---

<sup>5</sup> Donner, "How Women are Getting Squeezed by the Pandemic."

<sup>6</sup> International Labor Organization, *Who are Domestic Workers?*, [www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/who/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/who/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>7</sup> National Domestic Workers Alliance, "6 Months in Crisis: The Impact of COVID-19 on Domestic Workers," October 2020, [www.domesticworkers.org/6-months-crisis-impact-covid-19-domestic-workers](http://www.domesticworkers.org/6-months-crisis-impact-covid-19-domestic-workers).

<sup>8</sup> Given the impact of Covid-19, the ILO has pressed for the extension of social and unemployment benefits to out-of-work domestic workers, and the responsibility for employers to make available personal protective equipment to domestic workers (International Labor Organization, "Beyond Contagion or Starvation: Giving Domestic Workers Another Way Forward," May 2020, [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms\\_743542.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_743542.pdf)).

<sup>9</sup> Theresa A. Allison, "Extreme Vulnerability of Home Care Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic—A Call to Action," *JAMA Internal Medicine* 180, no. 11 (August 4, 2020): 1459–1460.

<sup>10</sup> Joan C. Tronto, "The 'Nanny' Question in Feminism," *Hypatia* 17, no. 2 (2002): 39.

<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 5.

work needed to sustain the productive labor force.<sup>12</sup> Its balance of paid and unpaid, private and public forms vary, reflecting a society's economic structure and prevailing cultural practices.<sup>13</sup> Care work is necessary, meaningful, and not inherently exploitative.<sup>14</sup> In many cultures, caring is a status obligation for women, whether in their roles as wives, mothers, aunts, daughters, or sisters.<sup>15</sup> The social organization of care in the United States has been marked by "reliance on the private household, feminization and racialization of care, devaluation of care work and care workers, and abnegation of community and state responsibility for caring."<sup>16</sup> The nation's history of using enslaved African women as its first domestic workers has shaped how it has treated this workforce: when labor laws were put in place in the 1930's, farm and domestic workers were excluded (both mostly African-American, at the time), and most of those exclusions remain in place.<sup>17</sup> Audre Lorde's evocative verses bring these intersectional and complex dynamics into focus: "Sitting in Nedicks/ the women rally before they march/ discussing the problematic girls they hire to make them free ... But I who am bound by my mirror/ as well as my bed/ see causes in color/ as well as sex."<sup>18</sup> Food insecurity tripled among households with children during the pandemic, with Black and Latinx families twice as likely to struggle with food insecurity as white families, while "the wealth of America's billionaires has soared."<sup>19</sup>

Whereas the pandemic has magnified existing inequalities, privileged women also experienced a reversal of some of their

---

<sup>12</sup> Rhacel Salzar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 61.

<sup>13</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Manne, *Entitled*, 129.

<sup>15</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 excluded farm and domestic workers from right to earn minimum wage and overtime pay "as a concession to Southern lawmakers, whose constituents were highly invested in paying low wages to personal servants and farm laborers" (Alexia Fernández Campbell, "Home Health Aides Care for the Elderly: Who Will Care for Them?," *Vox*, August 21, 2019, [www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/8/21/20694768/home-health-aides-elder-care](http://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/8/21/20694768/home-health-aides-elder-care)). In 2010 New York enacted the first Domestic Workers Bill of Rights in US history; since then, they have been joined by eight additional states and the cities of Seattle and Philadelphia (Ai-jen Poo, "This is Our [Caring] Revolution," *On Being with Krista Tippett*, April 2, 2020, [onbeing.org/programs/ai-jen-poo-this-is-our-caring-revolution/?fbclid=IwAR3-hhsjXdVb1lWSWqUvqdxCsVq-e-ZYUv59wZrrRbmyQydDpGEO2QVENyc](http://onbeing.org/programs/ai-jen-poo-this-is-our-caring-revolution/?fbclid=IwAR3-hhsjXdVb1lWSWqUvqdxCsVq-e-ZYUv59wZrrRbmyQydDpGEO2QVENyc)).

<sup>18</sup> Audre Lorde, "Who Said It Was Simple" (1973), in *Collected Poems* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 92.

<sup>19</sup> Caitlyn Collins, "The Free Market Has Failed US Working Parents," *Harvard Business Review*, November 11, 2020, [hbr.org/2020/11/the-free-market-has-failed-u-s-working-parents](http://hbr.org/2020/11/the-free-market-has-failed-u-s-working-parents).

professional and related gains. As school closures moved the work of child care from the paid to the unpaid economy, the coronavirus upended the arrangement many dual-earner couples have made in the developed world: both can work outside the home only because someone else is caring for the children.<sup>20</sup> Beyond social norms alone, a persistent wage gap (resulting, in part, from gendered caring labor) means women have been the ones to return home when emergencies like these require unpaid childcare or eldercare; single parents enjoy no such luxury.<sup>21</sup> Even privileged women experienced the collision of deeply held US cultural beliefs about “the ideal worker” and “the good mother.” The incompatibility of around-the-clock availability for one’s job with the complete devotion to family life comes to the fore when sheltering is in place. As a result, one in three mothers in the United States considered downshifting their careers, moving to a less demanding role, or leaving the work force altogether.<sup>22</sup> The nation’s first “female recession” disproportionately impacted women of color.<sup>23</sup> Hence despite the mass entry of women into the workforce and gains in women’s civil and political rights during the last century, “the older gendered rules of the game, rules that economically devalue care-related work and then assign it to women, changed only minimally.”<sup>24</sup>

It is important to resist conflating concerns about “having it all” with daily survival, particularly when for many women such pursuits are directly interconnected. In fact some portrayals of “quarantine feminism,” centering white, middle-class women crafting face coverings or posting other trophies of performative domesticity on social media, for example, served to mask the losses and abuse

---

<sup>20</sup> Helen Lewis, “The Coronavirus is a Disaster for Feminism,” *The Atlantic*, March 19, 2020, [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/).

<sup>21</sup> See Emily Bobrown, “‘Some Days I Feel Like I’m Melting’: How Single Mothers in New York City are Coping in Quarantine,” *New Yorker*, April 21, 2020, [www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/some-days-i-feel-like-im-melting-how-single-mothers-in-new-york-city-are-coping-with-quarantine?fbclid=IwAR1e1Bzgh2EQkJ6iRjfrS0Yc-CpYrpG6dxsSFDEPU0JIOzbjgknHwrbGTY](http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/some-days-i-feel-like-im-melting-how-single-mothers-in-new-york-city-are-coping-with-quarantine?fbclid=IwAR1e1Bzgh2EQkJ6iRjfrS0Yc-CpYrpG6dxsSFDEPU0JIOzbjgknHwrbGTY), for the pandemic’s disproportionate toll taken on single mothers.

<sup>22</sup> Marianne Cooper, “Mothers’ Careers Are at Extraordinary Risk Right Now,” *The Atlantic*, October 1, 2020, [www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/10/pandemic-amplifying-bias-against-working-mothers/616565/](http://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/10/pandemic-amplifying-bias-against-working-mothers/616565/). The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that four times as many women as men are leaving the workforce. See [19thnews.org/2020/10/women-job-losses-2020-recession/](http://19thnews.org/2020/10/women-job-losses-2020-recession/) as cited in Collins, “The Free Market Has Failed US Working Parents.”

<sup>23</sup> Diane Coyle, “Working Women of Color Were Making Progress. Then the Coronavirus Hit,” *New York Times*, January 14, 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2021/01/14/opinion/minority-women-unemployment-covid.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/14/opinion/minority-women-unemployment-covid.html).

<sup>24</sup> Christine Firer Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors: Women, Work, and the Global Economy* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2015), 76.

Bangladeshi garment workers have suffered in global supply chains.<sup>25</sup> Yet it is revealing how “[wo]men in vastly different cultures, locations, and socioeconomic situations—from highly privileged to modest to precarious to poverty-stricken—especially women with children or ill, frail, or aging family members at home, share some striking similarities in the way they perceive and participate in home economies.”<sup>26</sup> Even as their cultural, racial-ethnic, and class differences significantly impact concrete experiences of constraint, women across the board “report tensions between their domestic and wage-earning responsibilities.”<sup>27</sup> The fragmentation of domestic labor via the tech revolution-driven gig economy renders certain domestic laborers further vulnerable and invisible.<sup>28</sup>

Some of the blame lies with economic policies that fail to address the interdependence of household and waged economies and the ways “social differences, including gender, underwrite systematic inequities in the conditions and rewards of work.”<sup>29</sup> Whereas some Western industrialized countries implement social policies to help citizenry reconcile work and family demands, emphasis on free markets and personal responsibility in the United States has obstructed coherent work-family policies to support caregiving, such as universal healthcare, childcare, basic income, paid parental or illness leave.<sup>30</sup> Yet enduring patriarchal attitudes also account for the persistence of asymmetrical burdens and the elusiveness of equality.<sup>31</sup> A 2020 Gallup survey found younger different-sex couples no more likely to divide household work equitably than older couples, indicating that whereas attitudes about gender roles (pronouns, politics, sports, professional opportunities) have changed considerably in the last 50 years, attitudes about domestic labor have not.<sup>32</sup>

Hence beyond contributing factors like economic uncertainty, intensive parenting and a lack of public policies alleviating the work-family balance, prescriptive beliefs about gender and the work of social

---

<sup>25</sup> See Minh-Ha T. Pham, “How to Make a Mask: Quarantine Feminism and Global Supply Chains,” *Feminist Studies* 46, no. 2 (2020): 316–326. I am grateful to Emma McDonald for bringing this article to my attention. On performative or superfluous domesticity see Jessa Crispin, “Feminism in Lockdown,” *Boston Review*, December 16, 2020, [bostonreview.net/gender-sexuality/jessa-crispin-feminism-lockdown](https://bostonreview.net/gender-sexuality/jessa-crispin-feminism-lockdown).

<sup>26</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 5–6.

<sup>27</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 5–6.

<sup>28</sup> Crispin, “Feminism in Lockdown.”

<sup>29</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Collins, “The Free Market Has Failed US Working Parents.” We return below to the impact of capitalism on the unjust dynamics of the work of social production.

<sup>31</sup> Manne, *Entitled*, 121–122.

<sup>32</sup> Claire Cain Miller, “Young Men Embrace Gender Equality, but They Still Don’t Vacuum,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/upshot/gender-roles-housework.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/11/upshot/gender-roles-housework.html); Gallup poll results summarized at [news.gallup.com/poll/283979/women-handle-main-household-tasks.aspx](https://news.gallup.com/poll/283979/women-handle-main-household-tasks.aspx).

production remain a primary obstacle to social change. Among young people surveyed nationally about their future family care arrangements, the largest share of respondents reported the “most desirable arrangement was men working full time and women staying home,” with those who attend religious services weekly less open to women working full time of those surveyed.<sup>33</sup> Whereas fathers’ participation in child-care duties in the United States increased from 1980 to 2000 (with women’s increased labor force participation), it has subsequently stagnated. Labor statistics in 2000 indicated US working women in different-sex households undertook about two-thirds of at-home childcare responsibilities, holding steady over the past two decades.<sup>34</sup> Whereas same-sex couples tend toward more egalitarian practices,<sup>35</sup> unpaid care labor becomes a way that adherence to gender conformity maintains power inequalities in many such contexts as well.<sup>36</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild’s “second shift,” coined in the late 1980’s to signal the “extra month of ‘home’ work that women perform annually,” has not budged in decades.<sup>37</sup> Similar patterns have been traced among same-sex couples as well, with a higher proportion of caring labor assigned to the spouse whose gender expression is more “feminine.”<sup>38</sup>

Whereas some factors, such as involuntary ignorance, may play a role—a 2015 sociological study showed a significant divergence between fathers’ perception of their work at home after having children and actual indications in time diaries<sup>39</sup>—studies indicating that men who earn less than their wives are less likely to share housework suggest avoiding the work of social production remains a “tangible means by which they can still maintain their place in the patriarchal order.”<sup>40</sup> The one circumstance in which men’s and women’s household work will tend to approach parity is when she works full-time and he is unemployed; even then, women still perform a bit more.<sup>41</sup> Due to this persistent assumption that women’s caring labor is

---

<sup>33</sup> “Monitoring the Future,” published in *Sociological Science* as cited in Miller.

<sup>34</sup> Manne, *Entitled*, 121.

<sup>35</sup> Reina Gattuso, “Why LGBTQ Couples Split Household Tasks More Equally,” *Equality Matters*, March 10, 2021, [www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210309-why-lgbtq-couples-split-household-tasks-more-equally](http://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210309-why-lgbtq-couples-split-household-tasks-more-equally).

<sup>36</sup> Amanda Jm. Pollitt, Brandon A. Robinson, and Debra Umberson, “Gender Conformity, Perceptions of Shared Power, and Marital Quality in Same- and Different-Sex Marriages,” *Gender and Society* 32, no. 1 (2018): 111.

<sup>37</sup> Manne, *Entitled*, 120.

<sup>38</sup> American Association for the Advancement of Science, “Sex and Gender More Important than Income in Determining Views on Division of Chores,” *EurekaAlert*, August 21, 2016, [www.eurekaalert.org/pub\\_releases/2016-08/asa-sag081616.php](http://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2016-08/asa-sag081616.php). I am grateful to Sara Bernard-Hoverstad for this reference.

<sup>39</sup> 30 to 10 hours for men, 30 to 20 for women. Manne, *Entitled*, 123–126.

<sup>40</sup> Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 71.

<sup>41</sup> Manne, *Entitled*, 121–122.

considered obligatory and men's participation optional, women continue to face a "motherhood penalty" (vs. men's "fatherhood premium") made more visible and unequal in a time of pandemic.<sup>42</sup> Given women's internalization of these putative obligations to care for others at their expense or class-privileged social pressures to do everything all the time, a domestic labor workforce composed of mostly women of color and more marginalized status have borne the brunt of the asymmetrical work of social production.<sup>43</sup> Hence privileged straight men's negligence of such responsibilities negatively impacts not only their wives but, by extension, "more vulnerable women, who may end up being exploited to do the work these comparatively privileged women should not have to cope with single-handedly."<sup>44</sup> These enduring patterns raise a deeper concern that the "idealization of hetero-patriarchal families has been used to marginalize all women."<sup>45</sup>

Caring labor is moreover not confined to childcare. Given a growing aging population, the US economy is expected to create about 1.2 million new positions for home care workers in the next decade (an increase of 41 percent), following a 150 percent increase in the last.<sup>46</sup> Whereas the nation has witnessed a surge in the need for in-home elder care, given people are living longer with chronic diseases and an increased preference for "aging in place" due to both cultural values of independence and cost savings, such caregiving positions remain among the lowest-paid and most personally demanding in the country.<sup>47</sup> Like in-home childcare workers, home care workers remain vulnerable to exploitation in private settings. Given the job's roots in enslaved labor and exclusion from US labor laws, care workers are not entitled to minimum wage, overtime pay, safe workplaces or any other labor protections under federal law, yielding one of the nation's highest turnover rates.<sup>48</sup> Home care workers are predominantly

---

<sup>42</sup> Cooper, "Mothers' Careers Are at Extraordinary Risk Right Now."

<sup>43</sup> Poo, "This is Our (Caring) Revolution."

<sup>44</sup> Manne, *Entitled*, 127.

<sup>45</sup> Amanda Moras, "'This Should Be My Responsibility: Gender, Guilt, Privilege, and Paid Domestic Work,'" *Gender Issues* 34 (2017): 64.

<sup>46</sup> Campbell, "Home Health Aides Care for the Elderly"; Andy Newman, "On the Job, 24 Hours a Day, 27 Days a Month," *New York Times*, September 2, 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/09/02/nyregion/home-health-aide.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/02/nyregion/home-health-aide.html).

<sup>47</sup> Campbell, "Home Health Aides Care for the Elderly." Whereas care by home health aides is covered by Medicaid, "State Medicaid programs reimburse home care companies so poorly that they typically cannot pay decent wages" (Newman, "On the Job").

<sup>48</sup> "Lawmakers amended the FLSA in the 1970's to cover most domestic workers, but not live-in housekeepers, nannies, and home health aides who provide 'companionship services' [most caregivers]." Even the Civil Rights Act of 1964 excludes protections for workers whose employers have fewer than 15 employees, so it remains legal "under federal law for employers to sexually harass their nannies and

women (87 percent), persons of color (60 percent), about one-third are immigrants, and about half who work full time are on public assistance.<sup>49</sup> With childcare and eldercare combined, the caring labor workforce will soon be the largest single occupation in the US.<sup>50</sup> Despite its high demand and the opportunity for human connection and helping others, such jobs require skills valued less on the labor market, and the caregiving industry suffers low profit margins.

The hidden dynamics of reproductive labor, then, are shaped by historical institutions like slavery as well as enduring racial and gender politics of nation states and, increasingly, international networks.<sup>51</sup> They raise troubling moral questions related to labor exploitation, gender inequality, and complicity in complex structures of injustice with far-reaching consequences, such as the cumulative costs commodified care exacts when “outsourced” to migrant labor.<sup>52</sup> At the level of moral formation, they raise concerns about the transmission of expectations and values, if children grow up in households in which one adult is subordinate to others, whether mothers to fathers or care workers to parental employers. Or, as Joan Tronto cautions, “Children may well come to expect that other people, regardless of their connection to them, will always be available to meet their needs,” risking habituation to treating people as mere means.<sup>53</sup>

In the twentieth century intersectionality emerged as a way of understanding the interconnectedness of social problems caused by colonialism, patriarchy, racism, neoliberal capitalism, and nationalism.<sup>54</sup> The excerpt from Lorde’s poem above signals the need for such a method with respect to the work of social production in

---

housekeepers, or discriminate them based on race, religion, gender, or national origin.” In 1970 the Occupational Safety and Health Act did not extend right to safe and health work environment to domestic workers or farmworkers. In 2015 the Obama administration closed some FLSA loopholes, determining caregivers “who spend most of their shift helping clients dress, bathe, eat, or clean are not excluded from federal labor laws as ‘mere companions.’” Since they cannot unionize they began organizing without a union at the national level in 2007 (National Domestic Workers Alliance) (Campbell, “Home Health Aides Care for the Elderly”).

<sup>49</sup> Andy Newman, “On the Job”; Campbell, “Home Health Aides Care for the Elderly.”

<sup>50</sup> Poo, “This is Our (Caring) Revolution.”

<sup>51</sup> Rachel Silvey, Elizabeth A. Olson, and Yaffa Truelove, “Transnationalism and (Im)mobility: The Politics of Border Crossings,” in Kevin R. Cox, Murray Low, and Jennifer Robinson, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Political Geography* (London: Sage, 2008), 487.

<sup>52</sup> Eva Feder Kittay, Bruce Jennings, and Angela A. Wasunna, “Dependency, Difference, and the Global Ethic of Longterm Care,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13, no. 4 (2005): 443.

<sup>53</sup> Tronto, “The ‘Nanny’ Question,” 40.

<sup>54</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 1, 5.



particular, and the interrelated dynamics abetting injustice highlighted herein underscore its value for theological ethics more broadly. Kimberlé Crenshaw's groundbreaking work illuminates how individual and group experiences reflect structural intersections of power related to race, ethnicity, sex/gender, socioeconomic class, and citizenship status.<sup>55</sup> She characterizes intersectionality as a lens for perceiving how "various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other."<sup>56</sup> An intersectional approach helps detect how beliefs and practices around sex and gender encode oppressive economic relations<sup>57</sup> and how domestic workers' race, gender, and citizenship status compound their experiences of exploitation. Even as the pandemic has exacerbated intersectional inequalities, it offers an opportunity to examine the factors contributing to these entrenched patterns and consider how societies can return to a "new normal" in its aftermath. An intersectional heuristic not only helps diagnose the multiple, reinforcing forms of oppression at play, but also helps facilitate rethinking social institutions.<sup>58</sup> Toward that end, this article analyzes the structures and ideologies contributing to these patterns in order to frame them in terms of social injustice rather than isolated choices made by virtuous or vicious mothers alone. Next it considers how Catholic teaching both contributes to exploitation and offers resources for reform. A "new normal" will require significant changes in structures, incentives, ideologies, and formation, given the intersectional operations of power at play and their reinforcement by cultural and religious narratives alike.

### CARING LABOR: ENTRENCHED IDEOLOGIES AND STRUCTURES OF INJUSTICE

Caring work has historically been carried out under conditions of dependency and constraint. Given the longstanding separation of *polis* from *oikos* and understandings of citizens as ones "free of caring labor by virtue of having dependent wives and slaves to perform this labor," those who perform care work have historically been denied full citizenship, and "those who *already* lacked full citizenship rights, namely, slaves, indentured workers, colonial subjects, immigrants,

---

<sup>55</sup> See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, Article 8 (1989): 139–167, [chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8](http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8).

<sup>56</sup> Katy Steinmetz, "She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What It Means to Her Today," *Time*, February 20, 2020, [time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/](https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/).

<sup>57</sup> Christine Firer Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency: Work, Livelihood, and a US Catholic Economic Ethic* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021), 89.

<sup>58</sup> Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Theory*, 35.

and women, have been relegated the tasks of caring.”<sup>59</sup> Whereas the groups assigned to types of caring labor and structures of enforcement have varied, overall conditions of coercion and disenfranchisement have persisted. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn puts it, “The connection between caring labor and inequality has remained deeply embedded in political-economic systems and the myths and ideologies that justify them.”<sup>60</sup> Alongside histories of understanding a married woman’s labor as belonging to her husband and excluding white women from citizenship on the basis of their caring responsibilities there have ensued histories of “*extracting* caring labor from women of color as part of a larger system of coerced labor, including chattel slavery, indentured servitude, and colonial labor regimes.”<sup>61</sup> In the US context, from Black women in the South, Mexican women in the Southwest, to Japanese women in Hawaii, women of color have long been tracked into domestic service, even as children.<sup>62</sup> Today a disproportionate share of caring labor in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe is performed by unpaid female family members, women of color, and workers lacking citizenship rights.<sup>63</sup>

Despite increased reliance on paid caregivers, such labor has continued to be treated as part of the private family realm rather than as part of the market, as reflected in labor and immigration law alike. Given its context in the home, construed in terms of altruism and status obligations (and the exclusionary legislative histories outlined above), paid domestic workers remain excluded from rights and benefits other paid workers receive. This exclusion from basic labor protections and safety standards contributes to the poverty and exploitation of home-care workers.<sup>64</sup> Given their classification as unskilled workers,

---

<sup>59</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” in Sharon Harley, ed., *Women’s Labor in the Global Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2007), 48–50 (emphasis in original).

<sup>60</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 48–50.

<sup>61</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 52 (emphasis in original).

<sup>62</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 53.

<sup>63</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 56. Migrant laborers’ extended parental absences resemble the migration of young African American adults, “induced by rabid racism and poverty in the American South, to leave their children to the care of kin as they set off North to earn money to send back home” (Eva Feder Kittay, “The Global Heart Transplant and Caring across National Boundaries,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 [2008]: 146).

<sup>64</sup> In the United States, the New Deal’s National Labor Relations Board and Fair Labor Standards Act modernized labor relations, yet excluded domestic work (Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 134–137). Its Social Security Act excluded domestic workers and agricultural laborers, “jobs that were most essential to Black women and Black men, respectively” (David Segal, “Housekeepers Face a Disaster Generations in the Making,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/09/18/business/housekeepers-covid.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/18/business/housekeepers-covid.html)).

“domestic workers fall into the lowest preference category of those eligible for entry with green cards,” and thus have a very slim chance of entering the country as legal immigrants.<sup>65</sup> Out of these coercive contexts, we can identify several interlocking structural and ideological dimensions that continue to shape caring labor and the dominant economic paradigm that benefits from it today: neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and individualism. If the pandemic has made more visible the unequal work of social production, these intersectional “viruses” serve to maintain its exploitative patterns.

Christine Firer Hinze has highlighted the impact of a series of related divides in her work on the subject from the perspective of Catholic economic ethics: divides between embodied and abstracted economic and social dynamics, between “feminine-keyed private/household and masculine-keyed public/waged economies,” between desires for sufficiency and security and endless consumerist desires, and between those whom “globalized markets massively reward and the many whom it under-remunerates, marginalizes, or excludes.”<sup>66</sup> These tensions well highlight the interests and paradigms that trap many between “dirt floors and glass ceilings.” Given that economic markets are “complex sets of relationships created and sustained by specific actions and decisions for which people and communities are responsible”—rather than mechanisms operating beyond our control—it is worth first considering how the operations of postindustrial capitalism impact caring labor.<sup>67</sup> For it is not simply the inequity, invisibility, or ripe conditions for exploitation about many forms of care work that should concern us ethically, but also the operations driving and profiting from its misuse.

Whereas debates ensue about the compatibility of economic and caring motives or the relationship of gender equality in the labor market to household labor,<sup>68</sup> at a basic level nonwaged or low-waged care work remains essential to the functioning of market productivity.<sup>69</sup> The embeddedness and function of caring labor in the larger political economy has been obscured by its conceptualization as a private family matter, love, and natural to women. As Glenn puts it,

Characterizing work in these ways serves the interests of capital by defining this form of labor as separate from and outside the political and economic system. By denying that caring serves to maintain the labor force and therefore the productive processes, these conceptions help corporations and their investors evade responsibility for paying the costs of sustaining workers and families. ... It also serves the

---

<sup>65</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 147.

<sup>66</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 196–197, 201.

<sup>69</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 9.

interest of men as a class by defining caring work by women as part of a natural order and therefore immutable.<sup>70</sup>

She argues that global capital benefits by eliminating the costs of “reproduction” to maximize profits, but so do men as a class, “who on average carry less of the burden and enjoy more of the benefits of caring work.”<sup>71</sup> Whereas the global economy in its present form would stop functioning without nonmarket caring labor, the ways in which the work of social reproduction ensues perpetuate harmful structural inequalities.<sup>72</sup> Women’s entrance into the workforce has advanced without any reduction in the average workweek for workers to meet caring responsibilities; US workers work longer hours than their counterparts in all other industrialized nations, experiencing a “time bind” as they attempt to meet career and caring demands without public child care or paid leave, a bind familiar to working class families.<sup>73</sup> As Hochschild laments, “In the end, both First and Third World women are small players in a larger economic game whose rules they have not written.”<sup>74</sup> The employment of migrant women as a cheap labor source serves the ends of capitalism particularly efficiently, given that “neither capital nor citizens pay for *their* reproduction, maintenance, or education.”<sup>75</sup> Hence employers lack incentive to question this “ideal-worker setup.”<sup>76</sup>

Women’s entrance into the professional workforce also “coincided with the international deregulation of markets and crumbling job protections.”<sup>77</sup> Dominant cultural strains of individualism and meritocracy reinforce this form of capitalism concerned with maximizing output and profit while minimizing or eliminating labor costs. Their influence helps eclipse structural injustices from view, framing struggles for survival or the “time bind” in terms of luck or

---

<sup>70</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 48.

<sup>71</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 58.

<sup>72</sup> Sakiko Fudaka-Parr, James Heintz, and Stephanie Seguino, “Critical Perspectives on Financial and Economic Crises: Heterodox Macroeconomics Meets Feminist Economics,” *Feminist Economics* 19, no. 3 (2013): 25, as cited in Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 47.

<sup>74</sup> Arlie Russell Hochschild, “Love and Gold,” in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie R. Hochschild, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Holt, 2002), 20.

<sup>75</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” at 47 (emphasis in original).

<sup>76</sup> Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, 99. As Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar points out, the exclusion of unpaid care in our primary measures of the economy also “fundamentally distorts economists’ accounts of economic activity and growth” (“Valuing Family Care: Love and Labor,” in Jason King and Julie Hanlon Rubio, eds., *Sex, Love, and Families: Catholic Perspectives* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020], 153–154).

<sup>77</sup> Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, 93.

personal choices alone. Regardless of position or gender, in today's globalized economy the ideal worker is conceived of as *homo economicus* "unconstrained either by dependency or requirements concerning job security, schedule, levels of pay, or free time."<sup>78</sup> Hinze characterizes this ideal as a "mythic, masculinized creature whose performance on the public economic stage depends on the decidedly non-mythic, material toil, and care work of a cadre of backstage supporters in the familial household and beyond." To sustain the myth, this care infrastructure is moreover "systematically obscured in daily workplaces, excluded or underreported in most measures of economic productivity, and rarely adequately rewarded."<sup>79</sup> In US context, this invisible infrastructure also helps sustain the related myth of meritocracy, which further undermines the cultivation of solidarity.<sup>80</sup>

Hence the individualism shaping the ideal worker also impacts (lagging) social responses to care needs. Cultures that tout individual responsibility tolerate gendered and racialized inequalities with respect to care labor due to dominant assumptions about the provisions of a free market: "The state is not mandated to respond to those inequalities, nor does it have to establish mechanisms to ensure more equitable distributions of either social goods or responsibilities."<sup>81</sup> The agency of those who benefit from domestic labor is bolstered and the myth of meritocracy sustained. Individualism inhibits government responses to the commodification of care labor in such cultures as it drives the need for workers to mask the "backstage support" that makes possible their public contributions. Individualism also characterizes dominant notions of parenting in the West (among Euro-American families in particular). If children were viewed more as a collective good and their care a public responsibility, such societies could reimagine not only care infrastructures, but also the damaging ways individual accounts of responsibility for children's success inure us "to the social structures that contribute to the growing gaps among the advantaged and less advantaged children."<sup>82</sup> Given cultures that describe us as workers, parents, and working parents

---

<sup>78</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 74.

<sup>79</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 89–90.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Sandel notes how "focusing on helping the talented clamber up the ladder of success can keep us from noticing that the rungs on the ladder are growing further and further apart." Apropos of employing transnational caring labor, he laments how "those who reaped the bounty of outsourcing, free-trade agreements, new technologies, and the deregulation of finance came to believe that they had done it all on their own, that their winnings were therefore their due" ("Are We All in This Together?" *New York Times*, April 13, 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/opinion/sunday/covid-workers-healthcare-fairness.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/opinion/sunday/covid-workers-healthcare-fairness.html)).

<sup>81</sup> Martha Albertson Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject and the Responsive State," *Emory Law Journal* 60, no. 2 (2010): 251–252.

<sup>82</sup> Tronto, "The 'Nanny' Question," 48.

individualistically, it can be difficult to resist the encouragement to live individualistically or recognize how structural forces shape our actions.<sup>83</sup>

Against a backdrop of individualistic and neoliberal capitalistic culture, the intersectional operations of gender, race, and citizenship oppression similarly serve to entrench an exploitative caring infrastructure. They are, of course, also interconnected: a dual-spheres division of labor is not only a patriarchal structure that subordinates women, but also a social strategy that has deployed status obligations and affective motivators to ensure the provision of caring labor for the market.<sup>84</sup> Dependency care expectations continue to be imbued with culturally potent meanings, playing on status obligations, stigma, guilt, as well as vocation. Kate Manne's recent work frames gendered care labor in terms of "an illegitimate sense of male entitlement," rooted in the social expectation that women "give traditional feminine goods (such as sex, care, nurturing, and reproductive labor) to designated, often more privileged men, and refrain from taking traditionally masculine goods (such as power, authority, and claims to knowledge) away from them."<sup>85</sup> Correlations of precarious and poorly paid work to female workers "undergirded by the influential ('cheap, docile, dexterous') myth of 'productive femininity,'" further exemplify this deep-seated "relationship between difference and capital in modern market economies."<sup>86</sup>

In US context, assumptions about women's labor have often reflected the experiences of heterosexual, middle to upper-class white women, such as those portrayed in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>87</sup> As bell hooks points out, Friedan addressed neither who would manage the work of social production if more women gained access to professional work, nor the needs of women without men, children, means, and race privilege.<sup>88</sup> Given US historical practices of racialized servitude, "Courts, as well as customs and mores, continued to protect the property interests of employers in the labor of racialized workers despite the banning of formal indenture and chattel slavery" through the mid-twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> As Glenn notes, "Racist ideology justified coercion by negating the personhood of people of color, thus

---

<sup>83</sup> Daniel K. Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy: How Buying Here Causes Injustice There* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 16.

<sup>84</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Manne, *Entitled*, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 79 (drawing upon Jennifer Baird).

<sup>87</sup> Amanda Moras, "'This Should Be My Responsibility,'" 46–47, citing bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End, 1981), 1–2.

<sup>88</sup> Moras, "'This Should Be My Responsibility,'" 46–47, citing hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 1–2.

<sup>89</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 129.

rendering them and their labor 'at the disposal' of whites and employers. These assumptions have lingered in the treatment of household domestic and care employees as 'hired property.'"<sup>90</sup> Delores Williams's work on social role surrogacy details the antebellum and postbellum forms this structure of domination has taken.<sup>91</sup> Both coerced surrogacy, "legally supported in the ownership rights by which slave masters controlled their property, for example, black women," and voluntary surrogacy, "the social pressures that influenced black women to continue to fill some surrogacy roles" after emancipation, have served to perpetuate exploitation.<sup>92</sup>

Coerced surrogacy (in areas of nursing, childrearing, sexual gratification) in slavery bound Black women "to a system that had respect for neither their bodies, their dignity, their labor, nor their motherhood except as it was put to the service of securing the well-being of the ruling class white families."<sup>93</sup> Williams recounts the establishment of the Black Mammy Memorial Institute in Athens, Georgia, for example, to underscore how white citizens worked to "perpetuate the mammy roles so that the comfort of the white family could be assured by a type of black female servant who (after slavery) was properly trained in the skills of nurturing, supporting, and caring about the well-being of white children ... and [ensure] that the black family had to become more patriarchal in its structure and values in order to resemble the slave owners' households."<sup>94</sup> This history impacts the exclusion from labor law protections that leaves domestic workers "vulnerable to conditions of de facto servitude."<sup>95</sup> The purchase of low-wage caring labor from women of color by white class-privileged women in the United States has sustained a "racial division of reproductive labor," a two-tier hierarchy among women.<sup>96</sup> As this has become a transnational affair in recent decades, the employment of migrant women does not enable affluent women to

---

<sup>90</sup> She concludes that the state "has treated relations between employers and domestic employees as a combination of traditional status relations and property relations" in contrast to relations governed by contractual provisions and public regulation (Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 129).

<sup>91</sup> See Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), chapter 3. I am grateful to Sara Bernard-Hoverstad for this suggestion.

<sup>92</sup> Delores S. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, ed. Paula M. Coe, William R. Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 2.

<sup>93</sup> Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience," 5.

<sup>94</sup> Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience," 7.

<sup>95</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 129.

<sup>96</sup> Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 61–62.

enter the workforce, Barbara Ehrenreich and Hochschild insist, “it enables affluent men to avoid doing the second shift.”<sup>97</sup>

Hence ideological barriers to equality and the practice of motherhood itself now entail transnational dimensions. For the “globalization of the market economy has extended the politics of reproductive labor into an international level.”<sup>98</sup> The “care drain” parallels colonial natural resource extraction with the commodity transferred to the “embodied presence and affection of the caregiver.”<sup>99</sup> Even as some women gain empowerment from being liberated from traditional roles and earning remittances abroad, migration typically entails “movement from one distinct patriarchal system to another, bound by race and class, in transnational capitalism.”<sup>100</sup> The international transfer of such labor preserves the inequalities of the global market economy. For example, even as migrant domestic workers increase production in the receiving nation, the economic growth of the sending economy is limited and remains dependent upon the foreign currency provided by remittances of low wages.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, as women transfer their reproductive labor to less privileged women, “the traditional division of labor in the patriarchal nuclear household has not been significantly renegotiated in various countries of the world,” and there remains a demand for transnational domestic workers in over one hundred countries today.<sup>102</sup> For example, “A Filipina maid in Rome or a home health aide in Los Angeles can afford to pay an even poorer Filipina to care for her own family back home.”<sup>103</sup> Hence global capitalism and patriarchy are macrostructural forces that shape the contemporary work of social production. An intersectional approach illuminates how ideas about masculinity,<sup>104</sup> race, meritocracy, and individualism reinforce the gendered reproductive labor sustaining the pace and profits of the market economy.

Moreover, in theological contexts an intersectional approach can alert us to how for most of Christian history the dominance of theological discourse by men has meant it has too often remained

---

<sup>97</sup> Ehrenreich and Hochschild, introduction to *Global Woman*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 62.

<sup>99</sup> Sullivan-Dunbar, “Valuing Family Care,” 157, drawing upon Hochschild, “Love and Gold,” 15–30.

<sup>100</sup> Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 78.

<sup>101</sup> Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 74.

<sup>102</sup> Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 79.

<sup>103</sup> Glenn, “Caring and Inequality,” 58.

<sup>104</sup> Masculinity is tied not only to earning more income but avoiding things like domestic labor considered to be feminine—studies have shown men perform less housework if their wives earn more income than they do “to compensate” (Miller, “Young Men Embrace Gender Equality”).



partial and lacked reflection on biases conferred and masked by social power.<sup>105</sup> Taking seriously the experiences of women, women of color, and those without citizenship status brings these operations of power in the work of social production into focus. Christian ethicists' recent engagement with critical social theory helps highlight how "social structures generate both restrictions and opportunities" as well as "alter perceptions, cognitions, and preferences."<sup>106</sup> The constitutive power of the forces of capitalism, gender ideology, and racism traced herein indicate their impact on the dynamics and work of caring labor, with intergenerational and global consequences. We turn now to ways in which these forces impact moral agency, and then to how Catholic teachings serve to further sanctify such norms and patterns, and how they might be leveraged toward approximating more just social and economic relations. For an intersectional approach serves to counter power relations that produce and normalize social inequalities.<sup>107</sup>

#### RELATIONALITY, DEPENDENCY, AND THE MYTH OF INDIVIDUAL AGENCY

According to these meritocratic scripts that mask "backstage support," public success demands people aspire to be independent to pursue self-interest and compete, sequestering caring needs to the private sphere.<sup>108</sup> The realities of human dependency and power inequalities challenge dominant accounts elevating autonomy without addressing basic need fulfillment in light of caregiving labor, however. Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar's work shows how the exclusion of such work "from the scope of 'economic' during the development of classical and neoclassical economics" and of care and dependency from Enlightenment and contemporary political theory has served to distort agency.<sup>109</sup> She argues that "the Enlightenment desire to highlight equality and autonomy instead of dependency demanded a radical simplification and separation of these elements" and traces resulting patterns of bifurcation in political theory, economics, and some contemporary forms of theology.<sup>110</sup> Caring labor can help reveal

---

<sup>105</sup> See Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 2, as highlighted in Emily Reimer-Barry, "An Intersectional View of Love in Marriage," in King and Rubio, *Sex, Love, and Families*, 122–123.

<sup>106</sup> Finn, *Consumer Ethics in a Global Economy*, 88.

<sup>107</sup> Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Theory*, 46.

<sup>108</sup> Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 184.

<sup>109</sup> Sandra Sullivan-Dunbar, *Human Dependency and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Though focused on accounts of Christian love her analysis has implications that can be extended to moral agency.

<sup>110</sup> This tendency, in turn, undergirds the myth of the autonomous agent and the fact that her choices, "which involve a complex interplay of our dependence and autonomy, have come to be perceived as more purely autonomous as society has become more complex, while the conceptual realm of 'dependency' has altered and

the ways these bifurcations oversimplify complex human relationships, overlook the inability of everyone to simply “choose” the good well (or self-direct rationally), and can help evoke “an autonomy that exists in and throughout our dependency.”<sup>111</sup> It illuminates Western captivity to “the myth of the independent, unembodied subject—not born, developing, ill, or disabled and never growing old—that dominates our thinking about matters of justice and questions of policy.”<sup>112</sup> The bifurcation can also result in the projection of qualities like vulnerability or dependency onto subordinated social groups, reinforcing the belief that their members are “uniquely capable of and uniquely obligated to do the socially necessary work associated with them.”<sup>113</sup> Williams’s work on coerced surrogacy roles indicates how they “rob African-American women of self-consciousness, self-care, and self-esteem, and put them in the service of other people’s desires, tasks, and goals.”<sup>114</sup> An intersectional lens helps bring these complex racialized and gendered dynamics to light.

Such insights help “re-tether Western ideals of freedom and personhood to their roots in humans’ vulnerability, dependence, and undulating needs for and responsibilities to provide care.”<sup>115</sup> A feminist care ethic, for example, incorporates relationships, including dependency relations, into the construction of one’s very identity<sup>116</sup> and elevates the “values embedded in caring labor,” such as empathetic concern and responsibility for others’ well-being, on par with “justice-based moral conceptions such as rights, impartiality, and autonomy, grounded in reason.”<sup>117</sup> Yet these sets of values are not opposed in a zero-sum manner: feminists simply foreground how values of self-reliance, independence, and freedom can be enacted only in social contexts arranged to address human needs and dependencies often obscured on models of unencumbered autonomy.<sup>118</sup> Such emphasis on interdependency and mutual assistance is more inclusive of those who cannot be self-reliant or productive in the ways conventionally valued in Western capitalistic

---

become stigmatized” (Sullivan-Dunbar, *Human Dependency and Christian Ethics*, 14, 28).

<sup>111</sup> Sullivan-Dunbar, *Human Dependency and Christian Ethics*, 41, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna, “Dependency, Difference, and the Global Ethic of Longterm Care,” 445.

<sup>113</sup> Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, 91.

<sup>114</sup> Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience,” 8.

<sup>115</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 43.

<sup>116</sup> Kittay, “The Global Heart Transplant,” 157.

<sup>117</sup> Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna, “Dependency, Difference, and the Global Ethic of Longterm Care,” 453.

<sup>118</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 45.

cultures.<sup>119</sup> Care ethics is also sensitive to power differentials between caregivers and care receivers, which is critical due to differences not only with respect to gender, race, and citizenship status, but also with respect to ability.<sup>120</sup> Disability ethics and philosophical work in burdened virtues analogously illuminate impoverished understandings of autonomy; womanist theologians have long indicated ways sinful forces harm the character of those they oppress and how constrained agents work collaboratively to make a way.

Catholic moral anthropology is likewise profoundly relational—in fact intrinsic sociality lies at the heart of *Fratelli Tutti*, most recently—yet a longstanding magisterial commitment to gender essentialism undercuts any anthropological critique of *homo economicus* as it relates to the work of social production. Whereas Catholic tradition emphasizes social dimensions of rights and responsibilities, assumptions about the complementarity of the sexes bolster uneven burdens for the work of social reproduction with ontological status.<sup>121</sup> Pope Francis continues recent papal emphases on women’s “feminine genius,” which he notes finds a particular, even if not exclusive, expression in motherhood. As reflected above, a feminine theology of domesticity “doubly victimizes poor women and triply victimizes poorer women of color.”<sup>122</sup> The language Francis uses suggests a “deeper theology of women” need not meaningfully contest the “equal but different” status that hinders women’s flourishing. Catherine Osborne has argued that a magisterial bifurcation of public and private ethics “creates a structural lacuna which makes it almost impossible to envision a truly just situation for migrant domestic careworkers within the [tradition’s] current horizon.”<sup>123</sup>

Even as Pope Francis softens rigidity on gender norms in *Amoris Laetitia*, concerns about the dangers of gender ideology have persisted.<sup>124</sup> Whereas he has signaled some promising developments,

---

<sup>119</sup> Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna, “Dependency, Difference, and the Global Ethic of Longterm Care,” 456.

<sup>120</sup> Kittay, Jennings, and Wasunna, “Dependency, Difference, and the Global Ethic of Longterm Care,” 453.

<sup>121</sup> I have argued elsewhere that a Christian family ethic offers significant resources for reorienting exploitative migration and economic practices while reinforcing idealized notions of family and women that hinder flourishing. See Kristin E. Heyer, *Kinship across Borders: An Ethic of Immigration* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

<sup>122</sup> Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Gendering the Quest for Global Economic Justice: The Challenges of Women Labor Migration to Christian Theological Reflections,” *Voices from the Third World* 27, no. 1 (2005): 142.

<sup>123</sup> Catherine R. Osborne, “Migrant Domestic Careworkers: Between the Public and the Private in Catholic Social Teaching,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 40, no. 1 (2012): 1.

<sup>124</sup> See Congregation for Catholic Education, “Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education,” June

supporting a role for men in family life and some forms of feminism, there remains anxiety about the weakening of sexual differences, maternal presence, and mothers' self-sacrificial responsibilities (*Amoris Laetitia*, nos. 54–56, 173–174, 177). This separate spheres ideology helps sustain not only inequities in the church and workplace, but also the lack of mutual accountability in shared household and parenting responsibilities traced herein.<sup>125</sup> Whereas *Fratelli Tutti* recognizes that “in practice, human rights are not equal for all” and laments that societal organization fails to reflect women's equal dignity (nos. 22–23), it perpetuates this marginalization with its language, (all-male) sources, and silence on ecclesial structures. These essentialist assumptions about women's nature help sanctify and reinforce the social norms traced above that obscure the contributions and conditions of women's labor and the relationship of the work of production to that of reproduction.<sup>126</sup> They burden women with pluriform caregiving duties rather than calling forth intergenerational solidarity marked by shared responsibility and adequate compensation. Idealized gender and family norms not only miss significant realities and voices, they serve to reinforce oppression. As Lisa Sowle Cahill rightly laments, “Historically, the so-called Christian family has often been coopted by existing social structures, especially those that reproduce economic and gender inequities.”<sup>127</sup> Moving forward, “redescribing child-rearing traits as parental rather than feminine” in line with findings from neuroscience, as Cristina Traina has suggested, would help redress unjust patterns.<sup>128</sup>

Hence whereas Catholic social teaching has long championed workers' rights and condemned threats facing migrants, gender essentialism and complicity in systemic racism hinder Catholic critiques of domestic labor exploitation.<sup>129</sup> An intersectional

---

10, 2019, [www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19\\_0997\\_INGLESE.pdf](http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf). Whereas space here does not permit discussion of or wider (cross)cultural and intra-Catholic disagreements about gender-coded roles and gender theory, more just strategies should include “persons across the whole, nondualist spectrum of sexual and gender diversity” and focus on ways to “equalize the cost of care” (Hinze, *Dirt Floors and Glass Ceilings*, 109).

<sup>125</sup> See, e.g., Christine Firer Hinze, “US Catholic Social Thought, Gender, and Economic Livelihood,” *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 568–591.

<sup>126</sup> Barbara Hogan, “Feminism and Catholic Social Thought,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 397–398.

<sup>127</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 83.

<sup>128</sup> Cristina L. H. Traina, “How Gendered is Marriage?,” in King and Rubio, *Sex, Love, and Families*, 85.

<sup>129</sup> Hinze traces US Catholic complicity in racialized elements of economic injustice and the church's tepid responses to racism (*Radical Sufficiency*, chapter 4).

understanding of how societal organization of the work of social production disadvantages women of color and women with precarious citizenship status would help the Church fully reflect its commitments to solidarity and labor justice. Even as official Catholic social teaching has come to support women's participation in public sectors, it has failed to address the interdependence of the waged and household economies and the often exploitative undervaluation of the latter outlined herein.<sup>130</sup> The tradition's "anemic power analysis" further diminishes its ability to perceive and counter the harmful ideologies and structures that facilitate the exploitation of racial, gender, and citizenship differences "for the benefit of elites"<sup>131</sup> at the expense of caregiver agency: many domestic workers find that their labor deprives them of the ability to claim rights or even "their very sense of rights."<sup>132</sup> Its own practice of consigning women religious to unpaid domestic labor at the service of bishops, priests, and seminarians in some instances further undermines its prophetic voice for labor rights and dignity.<sup>133</sup> For its vision of work as linked to participation, personal development, and the common good is "neither inherently patriarchal nor necessarily gendered."<sup>134</sup> Hence as Hinze's recent book suggests, we need to "radicalize" John Ryan's legacy in light of these intersectional realities.<sup>135</sup>

Domestic labor conditions also illuminate the limitations of notions of agency that assume unconstrained autonomy. The nature of inequalities examined herein requires an understanding of moral agency that better accounts for the roles oppression, precarity, and

---

<sup>130</sup> Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, 108–109.

<sup>131</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 98; Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, 108–109.

<sup>132</sup> Parvati Raghuram, "Migration and Feminist Care Ethics," in Alex Sager, ed., *The Ethics and Politics of Immigration: Core Issues and Emerging Trends* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 191.

<sup>133</sup> See, for example, Nicole Winfield, "Vatican Magazine: Nuns Are Often Treated Like Servants by Cardinals and Bishops," *America*, March 1, 2018, [www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/03/01/vatican-magazine-nuns-are-often-treated-servants-cardinals-and-bishops](http://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/03/01/vatican-magazine-nuns-are-often-treated-servants-cardinals-and-bishops); Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Carol Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Pope Francis has distinguished "service" and "servitude" in addressing the role of women religious in this regard, indicating they are not to be servants to clerics or called to be domestic servants, unless "they [a]re doing so in the homes of the sick or disabled as a vocation, like a religious order in Rome is doing" (Gerard O'Connell, "Pope Francis Tells Women Religious Church Cannot Alter Revelation on Women's Diaconate," *America*, May 10, 2019, [www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/05/10/pope-francis-tells-women-religious-church-cannot-alter-revelation-womens-diaconate](http://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/05/10/pope-francis-tells-women-religious-church-cannot-alter-revelation-womens-diaconate)).

<sup>134</sup> Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, 110.

<sup>135</sup> Hinze, *Radical Sufficiency*, chapter 2.

scotosis play in constraining freedom. New applications of critical realist social theory help resist methodological individualisms that downplay the social positioning of individuals and their agency and better account for relationships between structures, culture, and agency.<sup>136</sup> For example, cultural values of profit maximization and individualism exert enticive power, and a devaluation of caring labor and lack of subsidized child care exert constrictive power on families and workers; centuries-old separate spheres ideologies as well as racialized exclusion from structural protections like labor laws reinforce a status quo with which most families hustle or women suffer in order to go along. This works quite well for those “who have staked out the center” and less so for those “stuck at the margins” as a result.<sup>137</sup> Domestic labor draws attention not only to scenarios of extreme constraint, where a worker’s passport may be confiscated by an employer, but also to the more diffuse, pervasive influences that destabilize agents or obscure power dynamics (e.g., the distorting effects of internalized gender norms or finance-dominated capitalism).

The global care chain moreover problematizes standard notions of freedom, for when many women “choose” to migrate for domestic work, severe economic inequalities, migration policies and gender ideologies play coercive roles.<sup>138</sup> Whereas freedom remains a constitutive dimension of agency, it has suffered from individualistic conceptualization, where emphases on negative immunities from constraint or narrow notions of autonomy have overshadowed the significance of context, sociality, and the costs of freedom. The freedom to pursue one’s agenda may only be made possible by forced labor, (uncompensated) gendered labor, undercompensated labor, and displacement of others. Hence given the impact of economic, racialized, and citizenship constraints, the freedom of the privileged often directly depends upon the exploitation of others; these costs sustain myths of absolute autonomy as they compromise others’ well-being. In line with growing scholarship addressing the fragility of virtue and the impact of culture and structure on agency, intersectional analyses can help traditionally optimistic and acontextual accounts of

---

<sup>136</sup> See, e.g., Daniel K. Finn, ed., *Moral Agency within Social Structures and Culture: A Primer on Critical Realism for Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020).

<sup>137</sup> Cristina L. H. Traina, “Facing Forward: Feminist Analysis of Care and Agency on a Global Scale,” in Daniel K. Finn, ed., *Distant Markets, Distant Harms; Economic Complicity, and Christian Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 178.

<sup>138</sup> Cristina Traina has shown how moral luck, burdened agency, and feminist care ethics can better account for agency within large systems and attend to “particularity, relationship, and the intense nurture that all small children need to become the rational, autonomous adults that liberal theories of justice take for granted,” rather than focusing exclusively on impartiality and rights (“Facing Forward,” 178–179).

freedom, autonomy, and reason attend better to constraints, distortions, and cooptation.<sup>139</sup>

Hence COVID has exposed how reproductive labor impacts the agency of women who are underpaid or unpaid caregivers, children formed by these inequalities, and agents benefitting from these arrangements both at home and in society at large. Unpaid care work dictates laborers' capacities to direct time and energy to paid work, reducing their decision-making power and ability to accumulate savings.<sup>140</sup> Beyond such constraints, the invisibility of backstage support for women and men working outside the home dangerously perpetuates "cost-free" capitalism and "do-it-all" white/class-privileged feminism. An understanding of agency taking seriously "invisible" constraints or boosts and rooted in a social vision of the person and realities of human dependency and intersubjectivity can counter the lie of meritocratic individualism and the harms gender essentialism exacts. The impressive feats and devastating penalties of the pandemic betray not idealized individuals but moral subjects who are "both socially constructed and given, both constrained and autonomous, both compelled and responsible, both embodied and transcendent."<sup>141</sup> An intersectional approach suggests "how political marginalities might engender new subjectivities and agency,"<sup>142</sup> given that "everyone is vulnerable, needy, and dependent in their bodies, and that the work and caring attached to that fact are the right and the responsibility of all."<sup>143</sup>

### RETURNING TO A "NEW NORMAL"

In light of the differential burdens and benefits of care work, intersectionally inflected insights from Catholic social thought can offer a way forward on the pandemic's other side. Solutions will need to address both structural and ideological factors to redress the exploitative patterns traced herein. Conceptual and policy shifts that more justly distribute caring labor and provide access to high-quality care are crucial, such as living wages, paid family/medical leave, government-funded quality childcare and eldercare, "family allowances" for families with young children,<sup>144</sup> and Social Security credits for unpaid caregivers.<sup>145</sup> Pope Francis has recently advocated

---

<sup>139</sup> See Christina McRorie, "Moral Reasoning in the World," *Theological Studies*, forthcoming.

<sup>140</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 88–91.

<sup>141</sup> Traina, "Facing Forward," 184.

<sup>142</sup> Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Theory*, 26.

<sup>143</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 114.

<sup>144</sup> Sullivan-Dunbar, "Valuing Family Care," 152, 157.

<sup>145</sup> Pooja Lakshmin, "How Society Has Turned its Back on Mothers," *New York Times*, February 4, 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/parenting/working-mom-burnout-coronavirus.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/parenting/working-mom-burnout-coronavirus.html).

for a universal basic wage in the service of “dignified work for all,” especially for women and others who work informally (specifically naming caregivers).<sup>146</sup> The National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights introduced in 2019 by then-Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA) and Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) would offer a good start for concrete protections.<sup>147</sup> Whereas subsidies are insufficient to “deliver equality,”<sup>148</sup> practices incentivizing paternity leave may help raising the social value of care by involving more fathers in it. Shifting tax structures so they hold corporations accountable for their “extraction” and exploitation of human resources would be a fitting source for funding such subsidies. Given the function of global care chains, immigration policies that prioritize family unification, worker protections, cross-border leaves, citizenship eligibility along with global redistributive economic policies (rather than opportunistic ones) would address push factors and undocumented exploitation alike. President Joseph Biden’s 2021 infrastructure plan committed \$400 billion to care work that would create over 1 million such jobs with a living wage, basic benefits, and the right to unionize, “a testament to decades of organizing by the women of color who perform the bulk of this country’s care work.”<sup>149</sup> Provisions of the US Citizenship Act he sent to Congress would also ameliorate the precarity undocumented domestic workers face.

Building solidarity between women doing the work of social production and women employing them offers another concrete way to redress economic and moral concerns raised herein. Ai-jen Poo of the National Domestic Workers Alliance notes that such collaboration at its marches reflects a realization “that the only way we break out of this dynamic of shaming and blaming and having these completely inhumane expectations of one another is together.”<sup>150</sup> Erin Brigham has proposed shifting the tradition’s rhetoric and praxis from “home as

---

<sup>146</sup> Pope Francis, “Letter to the Popular Movements,” April 12, 2020, [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200412\\_lettera-movimentipopolari.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200412_lettera-movimentipopolari.html).

<sup>147</sup> State “domestic worker bills of rights” are used to amend existing state laws that had excluded domestic workers, i.e., minimum wage laws, overtime pay, vacation time, and protections against abuse from employers, protections against garnished wages for room and board (National Domestic Workers Alliance press release, July 15, 2019, [www.domesticworkers.org/release/senator-kamala-harris-d-ca-and-congresswoman-pramila-jayapal-wa-07-introduce-national](http://www.domesticworkers.org/release/senator-kamala-harris-d-ca-and-congresswoman-pramila-jayapal-wa-07-introduce-national)). This bill was reintroduced in 2021 by Jayapal, Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and Ben Ray Lujan (D-NV).

<sup>148</sup> Gina Schouten, *Liberalism, Neutrality, and the Gendered Division of Labor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2019, as cited in Crispin, “Feminism in Lockdown.”

<sup>149</sup> April Verrett and Ai-jen Poo, “Biden’s Proposed Investment in Care Work is Historic and Necessary,” *Newsweek*, April 12, 2021, [www.newsweek.com/bidens-proposed-investment-care-work-historic-necessary-opinion-1582522](http://www.newsweek.com/bidens-proposed-investment-care-work-historic-necessary-opinion-1582522).

<sup>150</sup> Ai-jen Poo, “This is Our (Caring) Revolution.”



sanctuary” to “sanctuary homes,” taking the lead from domestic worker-led movements for justice and an initiative by Hand in Hand, a network of domestic employers. “Sanctuary homes” invites solidarity between employers and employed domestic workers (organizing to oppose deportation) and draws upon the subversive and radically inclusive elements of the sanctuary tradition, emphasizing that “living our politics begins at home.”<sup>151</sup> This shows promise for not only countering exploitation and dynamics that pit women against each another, but also helping religious traditions foster cross-racial solidarity.

In terms of the dominant ideologies that help sustain unjust structures, several shifts are also in order. Embodying resistance to individualism, gender essentialism, and workaholism can help interrupt harmful labor patterns. Leveraging pandemic visibility of caring labor can enable broader social understanding of such work as an integral part of the political economy. Counteracting double standards in care work not only for women and men but for white women “outsourcing care” while pursuing careers and women of color adopting a village approach to child rearing can also disrupt harmful hegemonies. Unmasking particular construals of “having it all” as status markers and expressions of upper-middle-class white identity can challenge families to make visible their support rather than further deceptive “feminist” narratives.<sup>152</sup> Resisting “ordinary vices of domination”<sup>153</sup> and related morally burdened choices that ensnare employers and time-bind coping mechanisms that entangle working parents in structurally unjust practices<sup>154</sup> will demand revolutionary rethinking rather than work-life balance webinars.<sup>155</sup> Domestic worker justice is directly tied to making market labor far more sustainable and humane.

---

<sup>151</sup> Erin M. Brigham, “Domestic Church as Sanctuary: Catholic Social Thought, Gender, and Domestic Worker-Employer Solidarity,” in Erin Brigham and Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, eds., *Solidarity toward the Common Good: Women Engaging the Catholic Social Tradition* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2023), chapter 2.


<sup>152</sup> Amy Coney Barrett was born into economic privilege; while at Notre Dame Law her family earned “more than 10 times the median household income” and had the “free assistance of her husband’s unmarried aunt. These are not advantages that most working mothers enjoy” (Rebecca Bratten Weiss, “Amy Coney Barrett is Not a Feminist Icon — She Is Not a Feminist at All,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 14, 2020, [www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/amy-coney-barrett-not-feminist-icon-she-not-feminist-all](http://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/amy-coney-barrett-not-feminist-icon-she-not-feminist-all), and Abby Palko, “My Experience at Notre Dame Was Much Different from Amy Coney Barrett’s,” *Slate*, October 22, 2020, [slate.com/human-interest/2020/10/motherhood-at-notre-dame-catholicism.html](http://slate.com/human-interest/2020/10/motherhood-at-notre-dame-catholicism.html)).

<sup>153</sup> Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapter three.

<sup>154</sup> Hinze, *Glass Ceilings and Dirt Floors*, 119.

<sup>155</sup> Hinze’s *Radical Sufficiency* outlines virtues, practices, and policy changes to counter consumeristic and exploitative tendencies in this vein.

An intersectional analysis of the work of social production demands that the Catholic tradition of workers' rights better counter structural and ideological currents that abet exploitation. Counteracting exploitative caring labor will require reforming Church teaching on gender essentialism and the work of social production; significantly increasing attentiveness to the sins of racism and xenophobia beyond their more "extreme" manifestations (e.g., trafficking); expanding narrow construals of "women's issues" and its pro-life agenda; and promoting understandings of sin and responsibility that better reflect moral agency amid constraint and complicities in structural injustice. The tradition's commitments to solidarity and the common good can counter individualistic anthropologies, meritocratic idols, and the privatization of caring labor. Pope Francis's reflections on the pandemic have emphasized more inclusive economies as well as politics that give those made vulnerable "a say in the decisions that affect their lives."<sup>156</sup>

These moral, cultural, and policy shifts can help us approach a "new normal" that re-values and justly distributes caring labor, access to high-quality care, and opportunities for labor that do not force "choices" between viable livelihoods and family unification. An intersectional analysis of domestic labor illuminates how dependency constitutes agency and how pervasive, individualistic myths—of meritocracy, the individual agent, and unfettered freedom—can further undermine sensitivity to structural injustice. Such an approach also underscores the contingent character of standard expectations of autonomy, as well as how agency is also, in fact, accomplished under constraint. Antidotes of resistance and solidarity can enhance our commitment to responsibility for the shared work of social production. 

**Kristin E. Heyer** is Professor of Theological Ethics at Boston College. She serves as co-chair of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church and President-Elect of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Her research interests include migration ethics, Catholic social thought, and moral agency. She received her PhD from Boston College.

---

<sup>156</sup> Pope Francis, "A Crisis Reveals What Is in Our Hearts," *New York Times*, November 25, 2020, adapted from his new book *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, with Austen Ivereigh, [www.nytimes.com/2020/11/26/opinion/pope-francis-covid.html?fbclid=IwAR3-QL3L6bP4iDqk\\_PjzicQLSrcFaODEoqEfuYWwj37T8F9xvEisXYfToY](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/26/opinion/pope-francis-covid.html?fbclid=IwAR3-QL3L6bP4iDqk_PjzicQLSrcFaODEoqEfuYWwj37T8F9xvEisXYfToY). In a 2015 speech to the United Nations, he similarly linked integral human development to allowing persons "to be dignified agents of their own destiny" ("Address of the Holy Father to the Meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization," September 25, 2015, [www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150925\\_onu-visita.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html)).