In 1988, brilliant New Zealand feminist economist and former politician Marilyn Waring told a story of market dependency on women. In her groundbreaking book, *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and Women are Worth*, Waring posited that economic systems touch all lives, yet women’s labour does not appear in records of a country’s productive activity. By way of fieldwork, Waring counted women’s unpaid work internationally. She found that every government failed to accurately measure gross domestic product. Waring’s methodical and compelling research revealed what feminists have always known: government and business could not afford to pay for what women produce. The book illuminated that gender inequality — and other forms of structural oppression — is fortified in labour, capital and the means of production.

With critical acclaim from Gloria Steinem and David Suzuki, Waring’s influence on economics is prodigious but so is her less well-known political contribution throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Her process of ‘becoming woman’ took place on the political stage. As the only woman in New Zealand parliament, she crossed the floor on the defining issues of the day, including abortion, South African apartheid and voluntary unionism. Waring’s unremitting rise through the ”House of domestic violence” while pursuing the morally just offers an invitation to see our houses of parliament in a new way: as more than places where only white, heterosexual male experiences are welcomed.

Along with excerpts from a rare interview with Waring, her contemporaries in Australia – Eva Cox AO, Dr Margaret Power and Professor Rhonda Sharp – reflect on the legacy of the front-runner of feminist economics. ‘Being counted’ is vital in shaping how policies are modelled, costed, and the spoils divided. Being counted means being included in how a society sees itself. This story must be told again to pose a contemporary alternative.
Introduction

This is a story of an Antipodean farmer who debunked one of our most integral myths about the location of the engine room of the economy. In the Brechtian sense, it is a story with a political message. It is a lehrstück; a radical piece intended to be told and re-told outside of the orthodox places. It is Brechtian because its author holds the belief that the economy, and vis-a-vis women’s and men’s lives, can be different.

In 1898, American feminist sociologist and first-wave suffragette Charlotte Perkins Gilman told the story of women’s economic dependence on men. *Women and Economics* catapulted her into fame as a foremost theorist of the U.S. women’s liberation movement. Her personal life informed efforts to transform traditional notions of masculinity, femininity, domesticity, work and society (Marso 2016). In 1988, New Zealand feminist economist and former politician Marilyn Waring told the story of market dependency on women. Without women’s work, Waring
argued, the market could not exist. Both stories reveal an abiding discomfort with the cultural tendency to conflate unpaid activity with femininity and, thus, attach little or no value to this work.

Professor Waring is best known as a courageous actor in New Zealand politics during the 1970s and 1980s and for her ground-breaking 1988 book, *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value and What Women are Worth*. The book offered a feminist critique of traditional methods for counting economic growth, arguing that mainstream economics fails women and girls because it relies on patriarchal and androcentric methodologies. That is, men control the dials and men’s interests are primarily served.

Waring’s (1999) central thesis was that economic systems touch all lives, yet women’s labour does not appear in records of a country’s productive activity. The empirical and theoretical exchange within the economy is labour for money, yet only market labour is included. Work that is usually unpaid has value when paid for but is invisible when done by women in the household. Yet, market economics depends on women to do this unremunerated work so that paid workers can continue to participate in the market (Ferber & Nelson 2003; Marcal 2015).

By way of fieldwork, Waring had observed and counted women’s work spent cleaning, caring, cooking and preparing in nearly every continent. She found that every government failed to focus on the right measures of gross domestic product (GDP) and factor this into their calculation of economic performance. GDP measures commodities that are traded, like minerals, or skills that can be procured, like plumbing. Despite a thorough search for any acknowledgement of women as active contributors to economic performance, there was no trace of unpaid labour alongside produced assets in records of productive capital. Waring had identified a global phenomenon.

This is a story about Waring’s life and work as a pioneering economist, politician and scholar, as told to me, and retold here. Part One describes *Counting for Nothing* in more detail, and places it in context. Part Two explores the early influences that shaped Waring’s worldview, her life in politics, the timing of her political career with the second wave of the women’s liberation movement, her stance on defining issues of the day and her resignation from politics.

Part Three appraises Waring’s influence in Australia. It begins with Waring’s reflection on her most enduring contribution, and explores her
resonance with contemporaries in Australia: Eva Cox AO from the University of New South Wales; Dr Margaret Power, former convener of the University of Sydney’s Political Economy of Women course; and Professor Rhonda Sharp from the University of South Australia. All three were feminist economics scholars and policy advisors at the time *Counting for Nothing* was published. This leads to a final section on the unfinished work and key directions from here.

**Counting for Nothing and persisting invisibility**

The watershed text *Counting for Nothing* was published at a time when Australia was shifting from a post-war Keynesian framework to a neoliberal economy under the double act of Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Treasurer Paul Keating. At the time, Keating was known to declare that “if you get the dials and settings right, the economy works”. A tsunami of deregulation followed.

Waring told the story of non-market work. Her feminist intervention emphasised its invisibility and by focusing on quantitative measurements, she made it harder for economists to ignore the distorted picture these measurements produced. Like the French feminist philosopher and writer De Beauvoir, Waring took an approach of *l'écriture*, or, “We will use their language”. By imputing a monetary value to non-market labour, lay people could understand Waring’s cogent thesis. It was an important to thing to do. For women who found refuge in Waring’s authoritative writing, there was profound relief in having their lived experiences recognised.

Waring’s epistemology and ontology had been a great guide. As an elected representative of a rural community in New Zealand, she knew that an entire agricultural eco-system would grind to a halt without women’s work. Having chaired the Public Expenditure Committee whilst in parliament, she was no stranger to national systems of accounts. After carrying the flag for women in politics, she was no stranger to sexism. However, it was rare at the time to have feminism and economics in the same sentence, let alone an entire book devoted to it.

*Counting for Nothing* became a classic text; its arguments were so methodical, authorative, well-constructed and persuasive that the book prompted the United Nations to reconsider measures of GDP. Waring’s intervention established feminist economics as both a discipline to be studied within universities and as an activist movement globally. Over the pursuant decades, she educated people around the world about how
government budgets work, wrote books, consulted internationally and continued researching.

Four years after the publication of *Counting for Nothing*, the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) was established. That year, time-use scholar Duncan Ironmonger (1996) used Waring’s ideas to value Australian women’s unpaid work at $341 billion, compared with a GDP of $395 billion. In 2009, Waring delivered an opening keynote at the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations in New York. She used the international platform to reiterate the difficulty of developing and implementing strategic policy if workers in social capital and reproductive services do not count.

In 2014, a tribute book called *Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics* was published. To produce this book, the editors invited 31 contributors globally to describe how Waring’s ideas had influenced scholarly pursuits, activism, and public policy in their countries. The authors reiterated the many aspects of feminist economics that Waring had highlighted, including the critique of male bias and measurements and the benefits of unpaid work to the economy and community. Her ideas, the authors say, brought on a feminist rethink of heterodox economics.

With *Counting for Nothing*, the authors argue, Waring re-framed the economy as a discursive construct that could drive social transformation. Common themes include the call for a gender-sensitive approach to economics to alleviate entrenched poverty and social vulnerability. Waring’s belief that patriarchal bias, and little else, gets in the way of reshaping the economy towards more equitable ends had found an audience. Market-focused economic theory and patriarchal social systems needed to evolve, with notions of women as caregivers, reinforced by government and the market, debunked.

Yet, despite a decades-long feminist project to undo male interlockers shaping the process of ‘becoming women’, women’s second-class status, as described by De Beauvoir, persists (1997). Since the 1980s, feminist economists have argued that austerity measures that reduce public spending have worsened inequity for women (Elson 2002; Ferber & Nelson 2003). Globally, women are over-represented as users of publicly funded services and among the working poor, and still carry the burden of unpaid work (Rai, Budlender & Gapard 2014).
Despite being a trail-blazing political leader and world-leading economist, Waring’s own invisibility is noteworthy. In July 2014, economist Joseph Stiglitz was welcomed by Sydney’s Lord Mayor Clover Moore for a lecture in Sydney Town Hall and addressed 2,000 people. Nine months later, at the Pamela Denoon Lecture, Waring addressed 200 people in a lecture theatre in Canberra while a student band played rock songs at the pub next door.

**Early influences, and a young life in politics**

Professor Marilyn Waring was born in Taupiri, a farming village on the banks of the Waikato River in New Zealand. Her early influences were farming life, and her birthplace’s distinction as the burial grounds for the Tainui iwi. Although non-Indigenous, Waring says she cannot describe where she is from without speaking Te Reo — Maori words.

Waring: I think those two things played enormous roles. When lots of people in your family are farming, there’s so much that goes on between neighbours. You barter: I’ll help you with that cow if you help me with whatever. That’s part of life ... and without the Treaty [of Waitangi], we would be like anywhere else, I think. For me, this is a very special part of who I am, and what makes this place different. I would never have been conscious of it at the beginning, only that now I’m at uni I know all the big words for it. I grew up with a lived alternative ontology and lived alternative epistemology. What that teaches you is that there isn’t one way to see the world.

Waring’s childhood was idyllic, with days spent playing on the beach and farm. Audrey, the late Bill Waring, and her grandmothers Louie and Mary Olive raised her. Waring’s feminism arose from observing the unpaid work done by women in her family and tensions between her parents about her mother doing paid work.

Waring: All of the women in my family were fabulous housekeepers, beautiful gardeners; they just made gardens wherever they went. These women worked really hard and didn’t get a cent but it didn’t enter my mind to think they weren’t working. By the time I was in my twenties, I was able to put this together with United Nations Systems of Accounts and realise what it meant. It was a source of real anger for
me. Outrage, really. I didn’t even know it was called economics, you know.

In 1975, at the age of 23, Waring entered politics as the Member for Raglan, a constituency that included the small farming community where she had grown up. At the time, she was recently employed as parliamentary researcher for the National Party (a rural, right of centre party) Opposition Member, George Gair. In Waring’s words, Gair was a “compassionate humanitarian” who would become Deputy Prime Minister and her life-long mentor.

When Waring was elected, the National Party had not had a woman in parliament for their whole opposition term. Gair discovered that Waring lived in the Raglan constituency, which was considered to be a safe National seat, and made her a beguiling offer: to run for the seat for the Nationals. According to Waring, the party was under pressure and getting desperate; the three New Zealand parties (Social Credit, National, and Labour) claimed that no women were nominating as candidates. Waring and a group of young women thought, “We can’t win, but at least we can take that excuse from them. So it was kind of an activist effort”. She was elected.

Beavis: Where were you when you received the news?

Waring: I was on stage at one o’clock in the morning of Ngaruawahai High School Hall. […]

Beavis: Do you remember what you were thinking?

Waring: I thought, oh my god! There’s been a dreadful mistake. What have I done? But you know, it’s like, oh shit. I’m stuck with this now. [Laughs] Hmm.

It was the International Women’s Year. Waring was a member of the Women’s Electoral Lobby, and spent her wage at the local bookstore on books like *Sisterhood is Powerful*. She still admires Elizabeth Reid AO, Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s advisor on women at the time, and calls her a close personal friend. She describes radical Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi; Ghanaian poet, playwright and academic Ama Ata Aidoo; Executive Director of Greenpeace Canada Joanna Kerr; and Professor Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop as “breathtaking” and “amazing”.


[At the time], I would have consciously called myself a feminist. I... didn’t have strong links into the international feminist movement until at least 1980 but knew New Zealanders who had gone to the [1974 World] Population Conference [in Bucharest], and to [the World Conference of the International Women’s Year in] Mexico City. Australia was a lead at both of those. I heard New Zealand women who held positions in international NGOs talk when they came back from Vienna and the Commission on the Status of Women.

Not least because she was a 23-year-old woman, Waring was different to those who had represented the Raglan constituency previously. Waring says that she “was everywhere” and did not purport to be the expert.

Wherever I was, I was asking questions. I wasn’t the font of all knowledge, I wasn’t pontificating. Maraea Te Kawa, who was the chair of the Maori Women’s Welfare League, said “Marilyn came to us; we didn’t have to go to her”. Every year, I’d invite the press gang to the constituency because they’d never heard those voices. Of course, my constituents thought it was hilarious. They’d be really having a crack at them. They participated and they felt as if there was a real... you know, that they were listened to. I think that made a huge difference.

Over almost a decade in politics, Waring was both profoundly supported by, and frequently in conflict with, her country constituents and National Party parliamentary colleagues. She was progressive on issues such as abortion, rape in marriage, Apartheid sport, and voluntary unionism. Despite taking a different view to her National Party colleagues on many of the defining issues of the day, Waring was influential inside the party room. She was a surprise to her parliamentary colleagues, who saw feminism, environmentalism, and anti-nuclear and anti-Apartheid positions as left-wing pursuits. In truth, she says, “I’m very mixed-market”.

In the 1970s and ’80s, we were still suffocating from protectionist barriers that had been imposed after the Second World War. I wasn’t happy with the amount of control that Muldoon as Minister of Finance had. He feared deregulation and privatisation of some things. [There were] mileage restrictions on how far a truck could carry a load and huge customs protections tariffs for entry of basic stuff. This was mad — it was like, hello! It’s the late 1970s. And so,
inside the caucus, I was pushing to get rid of this suffocating nightmare that was hugely inefficient. If they really wanted to up the production in their GDP, they had to get rid of it.

Soon after joining the Public Expenditure Committee, Waring was appointed its chair. It was extraordinary for someone so young and new to politics, and a woman, to chair the most influential parliamentary committee in New Zealand. She was also outing by a tabloid newspaper called *The Truth* during her first year in politics.

![Marilyn Waring in 1984, the year the young National MP crossed the floor and defied Prime Minister Rob Muldoon.](image)

Waring says the “most extraordinary thing about it was that I survived” the experience. She only knew one other lesbian woman in politics, Elaine Noble, who was in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in the United States. One can scarcely appreciate how gruelling the experience of being a trailblazer on all of these fronts must have been.

Waring: Everybody knew it [her being outing] was coming … to be published on the Tuesday morning. The entire party was shut down on Monday. Not a soul was permitted to say a
word. Muldoon called me in and said, “the only way this story has legs is if you respond. You are not to respond. I don’t care how hurt you feel. As far as I can tell, the story is true. You have no defence. Go to ground”. And, I did. And, they kept running it — bits of it.

But yeah, I survived. I had only one speaking date cancelled. It made me very vulnerable, and — you can never prove these things — when they redrew the electoral boundaries in 1977, the only seat that entirely disappeared from the map was Raglan. It was split in three. And again, the Prime Minister said to the caucus, “I don’t want anybody there interfering. Marilyn wins this...”.

Four men, who were all standing because they were upright family men, challenged me. I won by one vote on the first ballot because by then I knew exactly what I had to do [to win].

The women in Raglan rallied and were furious that I was being challenged. They were amazing. They just kind of took over the electorate. I can remember going to one meeting out in the middle of Wharepuhunga on the lawn. There must have been about forty or fifty people there. They’d put the chairs out on the lawn and sat all the men in the front with the women standing behind with their arms folded like, “if any of you guys get out of line, we’re really going to get you” [Laughs].

By 1980, Waring was the only woman in New Zealand parliament. In 1981, she joined protests across New Zealand against the proposed tour of the South African rugby union team, the Springboks. The only Member of Parliament who marched, she was assaulted whilst doing so. The Labour Party closed their offices; meanwhile, Waring provided an affidavit in a Wellington court in an attempt to stop future rugby meets with South Africa. Then, in 1983, the National Party put forward a bill on voluntary unionism.

Waring: People in the National Party had been pushing for voluntary unionism for many, many years. It was their favourite big thing. As I forecast, what voluntary unionism does is screw women because they’re the ones who are sitting on the minimum wage and not getting travel time, and still not
getting equal pay ... They’re more isolated. You could see what was going to happen, and exactly that has happened. So, yes, we were at great odds on that one.

Voluntary unionism, she says, was one of the last big fights within her own party.

I was very, very tired when that one was going through, and it meant that in the committee stages, I was going to have to cross the floor about 80 times. [Laughs]. So that was a toughie, a real toughie, and one of the last ones ...

I got these most amazing letters afterwards. Not from the unionists, from people like the head of the meat exporters, or the dairy section chairman of the federated farmers saying, “why can’t other people see what’s going to happen? Why are you the only one who can see this?” It was perfectly obvious. You can have voluntary unionism but nothing is going to change in the freezing works, you know...

Time and again, Waring fought for women’s human rights and environmental justice from a male-dominated frontbench. For her, personal stories were the most persuasive form of evidence to inform economic and social policy development.

The database for women was pretty non-existent. It was births and maternal mortality. We had a bit on equal pay — sort of. We had labour data but that didn’t tell you about the mass of the work that women did. Representing a rural constituency, the farms would come to a standstill if women stopped working on farms. But learning how to represent women? Their stories. No question. That was the most important thing.

In 1984, Waring’s political career ended over a difference of view with National Party leader Prime Minister Rob Muldoon on the issue of nuclear disarmament. Muldoon strongly opposed the Labour Party’s proposal for a nuclear-free New Zealand, but failed to win Waring’s support. Muldoon famously said that he could not work with Waring because of her feminist and anti-nuclear views and called a general election. However, community sentiment was on Waring’s side; the National Party lost government and the Labour Party was elected. Subsequently, New Zealand became known internationally for its anti-nuclear stance and incoming Labour Prime
Minister David Lange won a Nobel Peace Prize for his anti-nuclear leadership.

After almost a decade in public life, Waring became an Angora goat farmer. She moved to a farm on a hill north of Auckland, wrote a book about goat farming, and then a Ph.D.

Beavis: Why make that change?

Waring: On something like homosexual law reform, having survived *Truth*, I would never have introduced a bill on it. Parliament is a house of domestic violence, really. When you read the descriptors of domestic violence in the New Zealand legislation, there are a whole pile that are acted out every afternoon in parliament. You know, the belittling, the constant put-downs ... It is an awful, awful place.

And I really got sick of being the last woman standing. I’m looking around thinking, “OK, who’s going to do it? Who’s going to do it? Oh Christ, here we go again. Nobody else is going to. Somebody has to. Oh, all right then”. I hated it. Hated being there, but I had to until some more women came along. I wasn’t going on their terms; I was going on my mine.

I knew that I needed to recover, and that meant rural. Driving around all those beautiful spaces and places in my constituency, I yearned to be on a farm. And I yearned to be somewhere where, from hour to hour and day to day, you didn’t know exactly what was going to happen. [Laughs]. I wanted to be in a situation where I didn’t have to talk to people.

Political institutions, according to Waring, remain patriarchal and androcentric.

The nature of our system is still very male. It will take a lot more women. It takes a huge amount of energy each day just trying not to become like them, because the system works for them. Every constant thing is a battle, unless you become like them. Then it’s not a battle, but you’re full of self-contempt.

I don’t think Mixed Member Proportional is a really good system to deliver that. MMP gives parties phenomenal power — far more
power than they had with First Past the Post and a lot more power than they have [with Single Transferable Vote] … Here, an independent can’t win under MMP. I think that’s a shame. I wish New Zealanders could understand, and then we could have STV.

And with the exception of the Greens, you’d be hard-pressed to find any Labour or National women who call themselves feminists. Helen Clark never called herself a feminist. It’s funny — she hardly ever spoke the word woman while she was in parliament in New Zealand but of course now she’s the head of the United Nations Development Programme she has to say it all the time because you can’t get development happening in the world without women. She’s a good mate of mine, so it’s all right. I’m not decrying, it’s just a statement of fact. We’ve had governors general who were feminists. Cath Tizard and Silvia Cartwright weren’t afraid of the word at all.

These days, she says,

I’m only thinking about New Zealand at this point, [but] there is always a trickle of the very best leaving parliament. They are tending to go in their mid-forties when they can have another really good career. You can see — whether they are from the left or right — it’s now just getting too uncomfortable with the idiots who are leading them and the really ridiculous policy positions they’re adopting. You can’t stand it anymore and get out. It’s males and females and tends to be the younger, brighter.

Waring’s resonance in an Australian context

In an Australian context, Waring’s proposition that people’s labour has value and benefits the community is an enduring one and has influenced social policy discourse since the 1980s (Craig & Bittman 2008; Magarey 2014). Largely unacknowledged structural inequality between women and men was given attention in the formulation of paid maternity leave provision during the 1980s and wages for people working in the care industries (Baird, Brennan & Cutcher 2002). Time-use surveys were introduced to measure remunerated, as well as non-remunerated activity, in the early 1990s (Bittman 1992, 1999; Folbre & Bittman 2004; Ironmonger 1996) but stopped in 2013. Waring thought she was writing a “cathartic little book for Australasia” but Professor Rhonda Sharp, Eva Cox AO and Dr Margaret Power say she changed the way economists engaged
with gross domestic product. All three worked in political economy during the 1970s and 1980s and say Waring’s work influenced scholarly literature and debate.

**Changing what was meant by “the economy” and running against the tide**

In 1988, Cox wrote a policy discussion paper for the Australian Council for Social Services (ACOSS) on childcare, highlighting the contribution it made to working families. The Women’s Electoral Lobby, where Cox was a long-time member and would later be chair, supported the submission. She remembers “a fuss and publicity” about *Counting for Nothing* which was “a really important book” by “a very careful and thorough researcher”.

Cox: I can remember thinking we need a thorough feminist critique and that most feminists are economically illiterate. It became part of a critique of neo-liberalism, of economics ... the early days of running against the tide.

It was a really well written summary of a lot of ideas that I had bits of but hadn’t put together. For me, the virtue of it was that she’d put together so carefully, and did so much research. So, one knew about the UN, the flaws in GDP, and the things that weren’t counted. It was really powerful as a tool to be used. I still say gross domestic product is gross and not domestic. And you know, these are the things that it counts. So I’m relying on her work, and it’s part of my general vocabulary in pointing out how inefficient mainstream economics is at measuring the stuff that is important to feminism.

By ’87, we were already selling our souls to the devil ... Economics is a social science and it’s just as fallible as all the other social sciences. Neo-liberalism works on the false principal that human beings are (a) individuals, (b) rational, and (c) selfish. And we’re not. We can be those things but we are certainly not individuals. It comes back to the social view. Economics by its very nature fails to deal with the social because it’s not traded. Social is about informal links as much as anything else. [Waring] did a very nice critique of the fact that GDP leaves out all of that stuff.
In 1988, South Australian economics academic Professor Rhonda Sharp was invited to peer-review *Counting for Nothing*. Sharp had just co-authored *Short Changed* with Ray Broomhill, which analysed the impact of economic policies on Australian women. She echoes Cox’s sentiments and says *Counting for Nothing* caused “a stir”. Until then, women’s liberation movements had raised the issue of unpaid work in childcare and paid parental leave policy arenas, but had not tackled economic debates.

Sharp: When *Counting for Nothing* exploded on the scene, we had debates about … women in a new way … I remember at the time thinking — this is amazing! — A whole book dealing with the issue of unpaid work. It gave us a way — as Hazel Henderson’s work did — to challenge what we meant by the economy.

Hers was a very strong critique of the measurement basis of the national accounts … It engaged with the statistics for the UN gross domestic product. This was important to economists because it provided measurement. We haven’t got good satellite accounts and haven’t won that battle by a long shot but measurement is only one thing. I’ve never been a mainstream economist, a modeller, big on measurement … but with time-use data, we can do an approximation of the contribution of unpaid work to the economy.

[In 1988], there were lots of women with economics degrees but they’d gone into social policy and other areas. They weren’t seen as economists. So … those discussions weren’t taking place among economists but at the policy level.

By 1988, Dr Margaret Power had established the Political Economy of Women unit at the University of Sydney with a small group of young women. Power’s research area was women and paid work. The numbers of women in the paid workforce were unprecedented, and the federal government had provided employees with paid maternity leave since 1973. Power’s ground-breaking research, “The Wages of Sex”, showed for the first time different incomes between Australian men and women over a 60-year period. This work laid the foundations for measuring the gender pay gap.
Power: I was very grateful that someone was systematising women’s unpaid work. Although my research had been to do with paid work, I was teaching in a feminist course ... and the whole issue of unpaid work was very important. There weren’t many people writing [about it]. I mean, we had a general idea. Everyone knew that women’s work wasn’t counted and that it was a huge proportion of the GDP if we did count it but the point was that the unrecognised work flowed over into the paid workforce. Women were of less value and did menial types of jobs, everyone accepted that, and their pay was much, much less. So that was where I came in ... her findings lead to the whole wider economy not valuing women. So it was very good to have something authoritative written.

Superannuation policy and caring

Waring’s unpaid work story was emerging strongly in Australian policy debates about childcare and superannuation, as well as debates about paid parental leave. Her ideas became part of the conceptualisation of women’s workforce experience, and its interaction with the care economy and parental entitlements. Unpaid work profoundly influences women’s retirement income and, in 2015, the superannuation gender gap at retirement was 46.6 per cent (Terms of Reference — Parliament of Australia 2016). Older women are the fastest growing demographic among homeless people in Australia due to years spent out of paid work raising children, the pay gap, and over-representation in poorly remunerated industries.

Sharp: Within feminist economics, we are attempting to theorise unpaid work and we’ve made the most progress around what we call the care economy. This is both paid and unpaid, with the unpaid aspect as a very big part. You name it; it’s all around us. [Laughs].

The interesting work to come from Counting for Nothing is how behaviours are affected by unpaid work. So all the work on childcare, for example, that Michael Bittman and Lynne Craig have done in the Australian context shows the impact of the presence of children on our behaviours. A whole lot of variables affecting people’s behaviour are important for nuanced policy and Marilyn set the scene for
that. It took us in directions that we wouldn’t have anticipated in the late ‘80s. There have been those sorts of surprises.

In 2014, Sharp conducted research for the Public Service Association on the impact of the state budget on women in South Australia. She triangulated analysis with a limited number of interviews with three vulnerable groups: sole parents, aged people, and households with children that were working on a low income. Her research found that women absorb intensive unpaid care work to a degree that they underwrite a bill that state and federal governments could not afford.

Sharp: The unpaid work story unsurprisingly came out there [with working families]. I found the story of this sole parent who had a Down syndrome child and two other children quite moving. We deliberately chose interviewees who weren’t in the bottom end of the income distribution, they had some cushioning ... She was very clear that it was impossible for her to work while she was caring for a disabled child. The child was there while we were doing the interview and her constant demands were incredible. It was an avenue in to raise the issue of the contribution of unpaid work, because if the state had to pay much more directly for that child, whether it is an institutionalised arrangement or another arrangement, they just couldn’t do it. These people are subsidising the budget, in effect. The key theme with gender budgeting around unpaid work has been: one, to recognise it, which is what Marilyn put on the agenda very clearly, and then, to redistribute it.

Waring’s work also made visible the domestic economy within superannuation debates. From a time-limited role in the South Australian Women’s Policy Unit during the 1980s, Sharp authored a policy submission to the South Australian government on women and superannuation. Subsequently, the premier appointed her to a government taskforce on reforming public sector superannuation. At the time, the Women in Trade Unions Network were also taking up these ideas.

Sharp: In 1988, when we were writing Short Changed, although we didn’t have a chapter on unpaid work, it was certainly there in our policy discussions ... In that decade, [it] was around
women and superannuation and how basing a retirement’s income on paid work alone was going to be detrimental for women. And it’s still true. I was very interested in what it meant for retirement incomes policy. A lot of the work by feminists was on gender and employment and it sharpened our thinking about the barriers to women’s employment. If you’re spending a huge amount of time doing unpaid work, then you’ve got less time to do paid work. We knew that but were able to argue that this was also making the world of paid work impossible ... we could put some values on it.

The enduring legacy

Internationally, Scottish and Norwegian economists have used feminist economics arguments to lobby for women’s economic equity with some success. In Scotland, Dr Ailsa McKay is credited with persuading the government to provide universal free childcare. She co-edited *Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics*, and called for economics to have social responsibility as a starting point in order to achieve positive social outcomes (Bjornholt & McKay 2013).

In Australia, one of the enduring Waring legacies has been the development of national time-use surveys. Professors Michael Bittman and Duncan Ironmonger developed time-use surveys in the early 1990s. During this period, Australia was leading in the development of the best methodology to capture detailed information on the daily use of time by Australians, and changes over time.

Sharp: The first one was in the early ‘90s, and there was a second one five or six years later in the late 1990s. The methodology, as I understand it, in Australia was very advanced, and regarded as a Rolls-Royce version for the world. And it’s certainly been quoted as that in the academic literature. So those time-use surveys were very much a powerful development that came, not just out of Marilyn’s work, but she had been a catalyst for it.

Subsequently, Bittman and Professor Lynne Craig created a methodology to capture the time cost of having children. It mapped how childcare and other unpaid work is distributed between parents and, for the first time, demonstrated how time is used in households with children as compared with those without children. The time-use tool allowed for modelling of
household production and linkages with the macro economy. It assisted in making demonstrable that hours of work done in the household economy are the same as those absorbed in the market economy. Internationally, time-use surveys have found that unpaid work is the largest sector within a nation’s economy, and where most hours are worked. Yet, many countries, including Australia since 2013, do not use this statistical tool. Under the Abbott Government, this key Waring legacy was dismantled.

Feminist economists, particularly those in the United Kingdom, have strongly condemned austerity policy, and gender budgeting literature shows that when governments claim efficiencies, cost-shifting occurs. This, Sharp says, is a Waring legacy. Sharp also attributes the establishment of feminist economics and the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) to Waring. Sharp was a founding IAFFE member at the time that US Emeritus Professor Jean Shackelford became its first president. Later, Dr Ailsa McKay, co-editor of Counting on Marilyn: New Advances in Feminist Economics, chaired the European IAFFE chapter until her untimely death in 2014.

Unfinished work and key directions from here

Overwhelmingly, everywhere, women still do the unpaid caring work. The unpaid work story persists as part of daily life. But by the early 2000s, Waring had shifted her central thesis. She had problematised Beauvoir’s second class well, but to solve the fallibility of the economy, the imputation of a market price to unpaid work was erroneous. When she wrote the book, she says she was influenced by her time spent chairing the Public Expenditure Committee. Markets, and mainstream economics, have not catered for gender (and other forms of) difference and the “double burden” of paid and unpaid work. Everything in the market needed a monetary value to be “counted”, but “counting in”, and subordination of women within the dominant patriarchal order of capitalism, raises an uncomfortable tension.

Australia, as with other economies around the world, needed new approaches to development that transform social transactions and the daily performance of gender. At a household level, a mixed model of production can provide labour or capital to the market. And, a range of household members are qualified to perform unpaid household roles. Internationally, the transformation of gender roles and theory and policy that redistributes workloads has been a way forward (Elson 2002). Elson’s “3 Rs” framework creates a methodology for redistribution of the burden
of unpaid work by making it visible in public policy and transferring it from family to the state.

Scandinavian countries are leading in encouraging paternal relationships with children, including the provision of financial incentives for men to take time out from the paid workforce. In the United States, a small but growing cohort of men is taking up primary care roles (Campbell, Gillespie, McKay & Meikle 2009). In a longitudinal study of fathering in Norway, men’s increased participation in non-market labour has been shown to have little or no negative consequence for men (Bjornholt 2011, 2014).

Power: At the time of Waring, the ‘60s, ’70s, women were at home, so we’ve made progress. Around [inner-city Sydney suburb of] Newtown, there are a lot more men pushing prams but if we went out to the country or the suburbs we’d probably find that women are still doing the unpaid work. You’ve still got to have a breadwinner but we need good quality childcare, enough of it. ... I think we’ve got a long way to go. We need men taking their fair share and expecting to.

Cox argues that Counting for Nothing made a splash but neo-liberalism has corrupted the economy and the feminist project. Highly individualised, “having it all” projects have taken hold, necessitating a shift to different values. She advocates for a political economy that supports things of social value like care, reciprocity and community: happy and worthwhile lives are possible because of relationships with friends and family, and the economy needs to be organised around that.

Cox: What Marilyn contributed with the original book was terrific, but where is the movement and the politicking since? My view on feminism is that it’s lost its way. It individuates stuff and it’s not about collectives. What we were trying to do in the 1970s was change society to put stuff that was seen as female and soft on the agenda and give it the same kind of value as all the blokey stuff. It wasn’t about moving women into the men’s arena.

The Marilyn stuff really needs to be said and used but updated, recreated. I think we need to resurrect a lot of it and point out that economics is a limited discipline ... Women are still associated with relationships, emotions, feelings, unpaid obligations, nurture, and care and none of
those things fit in an economic model. The reason that the paradigm is now under threat is because of the inequities that have been created between and within nations. What we’ve got to do is set up a different set of values ... If you look at social capital, my view is that it’s a measure of the relationships between people and it’s built on trust. We need to find ways of describing good societies and the things that really count for people: identity, being wanted, feeling useful, being able to contribute, being taken care of, being respected, being recognised. None of that turns up anywhere in economics. We’ve got to put trust, relationships back on the political agenda using a feminist lens.

Conclusion

This is a story about a New Zealand politician, economist, goat farmer, author, academic and activist. It is a story about how gender inequality — and other forms of structural oppression — is fortified in labour, capital and the means of production.

In 1988, Professor Waring provided a feminist intervention that offered hope that the economy, particularly vis-a-vis women’s lives, could be different. Using empirical measurements and a replacement-cost estimate for unpaid labour, Waring demonstrated that the market is dependent on women. She resituated households as sites of production as well as consumption, and of trust, reciprocity, and the welfare of others. Waring’s data revealed what feminists have always known: government and business could not afford to pay for what women produce. Market labour is only possible with household production, and macro economies rely on this relationship.

Time-use studies, which grew from Counting for Nothing, offered a way of examining and understanding the time devoted to care-giving. Among other things, they raised a discursive question of who does the care-giving. Imputing the value of unpaid work could, for example, yield greater investment in childcare, enabling women to participate in the market workforce. Like De Beauvoir, Waring took an approach of l’écriture: “We will use their language”. This strategy formed the basis of her feminist resistance during the 1970s and 1980s and has been taken in new directions since. Imputing a monetary value to women’s household labour was an important to thing to do, because lay people could
understand it. Economists were convinced by it once, and need to be told this story again, re-imagined for a contemporary alternative.

Waring’s influence on economics and feminism is prodigious but so is her possibly less well-known political contribution. On the critical issues of the day, Waring was decisively progressive, even though she was a member of the National Party. Consistent and unperturbed whilst working in an exceptionally gruelling workplace, she remained loyal to a worldview that privileged social and ecological justice. Barely into her twenties, she shaped national discourse and led the electorate. Always learning, her process of ‘becoming woman’ took place on a political stage and this, combined with her rural childhood, laid the groundwork for her scholarly contributions. Waring’s unremitting rise through the “House of domestic violence” to engage in conflict and pursue that which was morally just offers an invitation to see our houses of parliament in a new way: as more than places where only white male middle-class experiences are welcomed. She had staying power and set an unswerving example for others. For this leadership within Australasia, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the primary subject of this research effort. Professor Waring: we owe an enormous debt of gratitude for your seismic contributions to women’s lives and never forgetting what women are worth.

There are still very few senior economists in Australia who are women and I was pleased to interview some of them for the purposes of this study. Thank you for your intellectual labour and persistence Eva Cox AO, Dr Margaret Power and Professor Rhonda Sharp.

Associate Professor Stuart Rosewarne at the Political Economy Department of the University of Sydney supervised this research. Dr Richard Denniss, Chief Economist at the Australia Institute and former Chief of Staff to former Democrats Leader Natasha Stott Despoja, was the second supervisor.

For these reasons, and more, this was an incredibly special project. I hope I’ve done justice to one of our big antipodean brains.
References


Folbre, Nancy, and Michael Bittman. 2004. *Family Time: The Social*
of Toronto Press.

**Author biography**

Kara Beavis (MA, Grad Cert, BA) is a gender and violence against women specialist based in Sydney. Kara has worked in women’s policy management roles in Sydney, Brisbane, London and Johannesburg. She most recently worked for Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) in Sydney and currently works as a Research Affiliate with Monash University’s Gender and Family Violence Focus Research Program and the Department of General Practice, University of Sydney. She is a sessional lecturer in gender analysis of public policy at Flinders University and proud Australian Women and Gender Studies Association (AWGSA) member.

Email: karabeavis@yahoo.com.au

*Figure 3 (L-R): Louise Denoon, Professor Marilyn Waring and Kara Beavis, March 2015 at the annual (late) Pamela Denoon Lecture for IWD. Photo credit: Rose Crane. Copyright: Kara Beavis.*