

TRUE CURRENCY ● ● ABOUT FEMINIST ECONOMICS THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS RUTH BEALE AMY FENECK

True Currency: About Feminist Economics

**EPISODE 6: The Economy is Still Happening
TRANSCRIPT (English)**

Ruth Beale:

So we're in a very strange time at the moment. It's March 2020, we're about to go into lockdown, we've got social isolation already, and it feels like a suspension of time. And there's two things, I suppose. One is that it's highlighting to me issues about time and care and work. People are going to have their children at home when they're trying to work, and how is that even going to work? And then, also, we're going to be experiencing time in a different way.

Lisa Baraitser:

Yeah, absolutely. So I'm part of a team at the moment, funded by the Wellcome Trust to work together on questions of waiting in relation to health care. We're working on questions of care and time, trying to, in some ways, sort of re-valorise these forms of enduring, persisting, staying, repeating and returning, and so on, in relation to the chronic and the urgent in the health service at the moment. And, of course, we are suddenly in this situation where, certainly UK government policy seems to have these extraordinary temporal frames to them. So we've been in a process called containment and now, supposedly, we're in something called delay. We're going to live this time differentially and it will have very, very differential results. That is, if you're in a small flat with no garden, with your three children, and trying to work, you're in a very, very different situation from someone who's much more comfortable. We absolutely know that this is going to be a very striated experience that's going to lead to very striated outcomes, too. But, nevertheless, we're interested in something shared in this moment and what that sharedness might mean, and whether waiting with ... in terms of sharing time as opposed to space. We're all now not able to meet in person but we are sharing time, and I think that is something that might allow something we could call thinking to unfold. Where it takes us, I don't know yet but it seems to me that the struggle right now is to try to think in real time.

Amy Feneck:

That's Lisa Baraitser, professor of psychosocial studies who we met in Episode 4. As we just heard, we spoke to her in March just before lockdown. And it feels really strange now, listening back to the interview, months later, after so much has happened and after so many people have died, and how she predicted so much of what we've experienced. Coronavirus has highlighted stark inequalities in society. But it's given us all a new perspective, as well.

Ruth Beale:

Yes, suddenly, conversations that we have been having about time and care and work are in the spotlight and have become part of a national conversation. So, partway through editing this series, whilst we were in full lockdown but just as the government started setting out a plan for easing it in England, we got in touch with some of the other people we've spoken to in the podcast.

Amy Feneck:

This is True Currency produced through the Alternative School of Economics at Gasworks. I'm Amy Feneck.

Ruth Beale:

And I'm Ruth Beale. And we're artists whose practice is all about finding ways of learning creatively and collectively. Over this series, we have been meeting a network of extraordinary women who have been teaching us about feminist economics through their experience and ideas.

Amy Feneck:

In this episode, we're going to hear again from Claire Summers, Shiri Shalmy, and Marion Sharples about their perspective on the pandemic and how they've been experiencing this unprecedented moment. But first, let's hear more from our conversation with Lisa Baraitser just as full lockdown was announced.

Ruth Beale:

And being told to stay at home, there's an emphasis on our own maintenance as individuals and just living that part of our life, and not sort of living the capitalist work of our life. And for a lot of people, they won't be able to work. That is obviously a terrifying thought as well. I suppose I feel like the impossibility of these two kinds of ... time and work is, suddenly, in the relief.

Lisa Baraitser:

It's very interesting that, isn't it? So, someone in our project, an artist researcher called Martin O'Brien, who lives with cystic fibrosis, he's just been talking to us about how, in a funny way, the whole world has suddenly got cystic fibrosis. We're all in the situation that he has lived for his entire life: to struggle for breath, to not be able to meet other cystic fibrosis sufferers in the same space for fear of contamination, to have a six-foot distance, whatever, a meter distance between other people, and so on. So, in a way, what you're alluding to is ... are we all going to live women's time in this time? That is this really difficult struggle, if you like, between what has become assigned as work time outside of the home, and what still, traditionally, occupies the space of the home, that is this kind of reproductive labour we've been talking about, that are now in a new, you could say, radical conjunction where we all now live women's time although it's going to be lived very painfully, because it's so full of affect. The kinds of affects that are associated with motherhood, which are about terror and profound anxiety and a feeling of intense insecurity and uncertainty about the future. We're in one of those moments that is not so far away from the kinds of moments that many of us have lived, whether it's through chronic illness, through poverty, through maternal experience.

Ruth Beale:

Lisa mentioned women's time there but I think she was also talking about 'crip time', this idea of time being experienced differently through disability and long term illness. Alison Kafer says in her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, "Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires re-imagining our notions of what can and should happen in time, or recognising how expectations of 'how long things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies. Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds."

Amy Feneck:

I find what Lisa says about anxiety insecurity and intensity really incisive, and I can definitely relate to some of that in my experiences of motherhood. And I mean especially over the last few months in lockdown, both my children have been at home constantly, that intensity has been really full on and relationships have definitely been strained because of it. It also makes me re-

flect back on the conversations that we had with Claire in Episode Four where she talked a lot about her personal experience of motherhood.

Ruth Beale:

Yeah, so it felt important to catch up with Claire. She's a community nurse and a mother and, somewhat appropriately, you can hear her son, Ashley, in the background of this call.

Ruth Beale:

I might keep muting myself when you're talking because there's going to be bedtime going on behind me, shortly, and probably loads of screaming.

Claire Summers:

Oh okay, no worries! And I've got my older one, who's sitting on the toilet ... so I might have to go in a few seconds when he calls me, is that all right?

Amy Feneck:

Yeah, yeah, that's totally fine.

Claire Summers:

This is like... completely multi-tasking. Is the baby a bit of an issue? Is it ...

Amy Feneck & Ruth Beale:

No.

Claire Summers:

Are you sure?

Ruth Beale:

Yeah.

Claire Summers:

There's many things on the go right now.

Amy Feneck:

OK Claire, you've very recently gone back to work for the NHS after a year of maternity leave. Could you tell us what your job is and describe the work that you're doing?

Claire Summers:

Yeah, I'm a community nurse. So, we visit patients in their homes. It's not as acute as the hospital but, of course, it's still very essential to their care. So medication, wounds, people that have been recently discharged from hospital.

Ruth Beale:

What's it like doing that job during this pandemic? How has it changed the job?

Claire Summers:

Well, we've always been busy so... we are busy. We are used to working like that. The difference is now, I feel like because we have to sort of distance ourselves from our colleagues, I feel a bit isolated from them. And it's also worrying, because we see people with the coronavirus, and it is worrying to us and our safety. So when I first started back at work, when we went to see a patient with a positive test, we would put gowns and masks and it's more like when you're going into surgery, and then the face masks, the surgical masks. So we're wearing those. So we're supposed to wear those masks for every patient now with an apron, a plastic apron on and gloves. We are given PPE but I feel like we don't know the correct guidelines to follow, as I felt like they've changed the rules to suit the situation. There is enough but it is restricted.

Ruth Beale:

So who's looking after your children when you're at work now, and how has your family adjusted to you being back to work?

Claire Summers:

It's really weird because, at the beginning of this pandemic or the tail end of my maternity leave, I was at home and then my partner was working. And I was at home with the children, I'd pick them up from school, drop them off, no worries. If they're ill, I'm at home anyway. And then, within a week, literally, it just completely flipped, turned around. And my partner was at home because he was actually laid off, so it's...

Ruth Beale:

Was your partner laid off because of COVID?

Claire Summers:

Yeah, yeah. So he wasn't bringing any money home and then I went back to work. So I went back to work, I think two weeks early? To help out because, well, they were busy and because there were nurses off, so now we're relying on just my wages which is a bit tight.

Ruth Beale:

You had COVID yourself, didn't you?

Claire Summers:

The week that I went back, I developed it. So I may have caught it from going back to work.

Amy Feneck:

So how's the family adjusted to this flip of who's looking after the kids?

Claire Summers:

We found it a bit more difficult than the children. I think my partner found it all really quite difficult. So he was at home with Leo all day, every day, so when I got home from work, I could see his face. I think he looked hopeless! And then, when I walked through the door, they all ran up to me. I said, "Wait a minute, I need to take my uniform off at least!" I think yeah, I think he found it quite hard. I mean, I did too! Because I actually, I wanted to be at home with the children while they were at home. I felt like you're torn between two, a little bit.

We try to stay out the office as much as we can, so we see our patients and then we can go home to do our admin work. The challenges with that is that, as soon as I get home, the children want my attention. And I see loads of things that I think, "Oh god, I've got to do that!" You know, "The kids are getting hungry." So I'm trying to sit down and concentrate and write my notes, find the doctors, find pharmacies, whatever I'm trying to do, and I've got the children running around! I find it really quite difficult to prioritise my attention between working at home and then thinking about the patient and what they need mean. So, that's really hard for me. And I've not had to do that before because, obviously, when I was at work, I was at work, and I used to go back to the office and deal with that admin at the office, and then come home. And then I could feel like I could switch off a little bit and leave that at work. And so, I feel, a little bit, like I'm always at work. And then I've got the children as well. And my partner. You feel like you need a hundred hands just to balance it all.

It's really hard being with children 24 hours a day. Mentally, it's draining because my older one keeps asking questions, or he wants to do things that he's not supposed to do, and they get bored and then they get irritable and I get irritable. And especially as we live in a flat with no garden, up very high. Especially at the beginning, because we weren't really allowed out, only once a day for about an hour. And my son Leo got just crazy with, like claustrophobic almost I think.

Amy Feneck:

So you're a keyworker that's working for the NHS. I wondered what your thoughts on the way keyworkers are being valued by society at this kind of particular time and whether you think this has changed because of the pandemic?

Claire Summers:

I think the general public really do value us. I think they always have but it's really come to light now. Yeah, I do feel really proud of my profession and what I do, being a nurse, working for the NHS. I wouldn't want to do anything else and I absolutely love my job. And you know the clapping on Thursday? I think I was ill the first time I heard it, I was ill with coronavirus. And I heard

this clapping and I was like, "What's that?" And then I realised, I said, "Oh, it's the clapping at eight o'clock!" and I started crying. I thought, "Oh, it's so nice!" Yeah, I feel very, very, very valued for what I do. And some businesses and hotels that do catering, drop off food for us in our office. It is so touching! It's amazing. It just helps our day so much. However, I don't know if the government will follow this through with the appreciation of us. It's not confirmed anything. There's supposed to be a pay freeze for the next two years and I thought, "Oh my god!" I think it was in the nursing standard I read it. We'll see what happens in the long term. But a pay freeze will not be welcomed!

Amy Feneck:

Do you think that the value that people are putting on NHS workers, do you think that that's going to follow through to people kind of valuing all carers or seeing all carers in this new light?

Claire Summers:

I hope that it will help recognise other areas of care, yes I do. But, in reality, I don't think that they will recognise the care that is not paid for. You know, in the care homes as well, because I think they were a little bit forgotten about. It's maybe coming to a surface a little bit more now because they're carrying out tests, but this is six, seven weeks in. This is ridiculous. It should have been recognised a lot earlier. But I still think the care that mothers give, the care that people give their parents, as carers, I don't think it'll be recognised.

Ruth Beale:

You know how, so, at the moment, now your childminders and your nannies are allowed to come to your house, but grandparents of the children can't come and look after the children. I just thought that tells you so much about the way the government understand the way the world works and the way that you need to rely on grandparents.

Claire Summers:

Definitely. Exactly, that is not recognised, is it?

Amy Feneck:

It's like showing that they understand care to be only recognised when you put a value, monetary value on it.

Claire Summers:

Pay for it. Exactly, yes! Exactly, that's the nail on the head. They don't see it when it's a family or ... a mother or a parent.

Amy Feneck:

Is there anything we can learn from this pandemic, thinking about the future?

Claire Summers:

Yeah, I think we can prepare more and I think that we need to test. Test, test, test. That is the only way that you're going to learn who's got this and who hasn't.

Amy Feneck:

We're now going to hear from Shiri Shalmy who organises with the Sex Worker's Union and the Women's Strike, and in 2019 she co-founded Cooperation Kentish Town.

Shiri Shalmy:

So my co-op now is distributing food to hundreds of people every week for free. We don't ask them for any kind of organising contribution or monetary contribution, obviously, and they are the people who are already on low or no income. That is our only criteria. We don't know them, they don't have to be ill or furloughed or whatever. They have to be on low or no income. It's mums who are doing this work. For weeks and weeks, we were just a bunch of mums and grandmothers packing food for hundreds of people every week and distributing them, and sending them off to people with, like, a small army of mutual aiders, because we don't want to call them volunteers, and the majority of them would be women. And I'll be speaking to the people

at social services, the people at the disability organisations, organisers in other estates and in other community centers, and they're all mums. The work is done by women. There's women who have been holding whole communities on their shoulders for years already. They don't get a job title for it and they don't get any kind of credit, and they're just holding whole communities. I mean, I think a lot of this work is done by the same people who were doing it before. And motherhood is a form of labour, and kind of all these relationships that we had, all the reproductive labour, it's never recognised because, you know, this is just what women do. And even now, there's this language of like, "Oh you know, they're so caring and they're so brave," and, "we should appreciate them," and all this kind of emotive language about like, "Oh, isn't that nice," that women do all this kind of stuff, "it suits them so well!" So I think that's the language that kind of meant that we were never considered to be working, already. We know that women die because women do the jobs that kill them. Now, the nurses and the carers and so on. And we know that they're not just any women, we know that they're black and brown women and they're migrant women.

Ruth Beale:

There's this idea, well, people say about returning to normal, don't they? A lot of people are horrified about the idea of returning to normal. And then maybe people say, "Oh, it will be a new normal."

Shiri Shalmy:

I actually think the world's going to be much shittier after this because of all that violence that's been inflicted on us. I mean, people will be evicted from their flats. That's 100%. But I think that's why it's also important to kind of insist that the crisis did not start on the 23rd of March. The people who now suffer, suffered already, suffered 10 years of austerity. People were dying in their flats, with no food and electricity. Disabled people have been dying for 10 years, and children lived in poverty for 10 years, and obviously before. But those 10 years of austerity have already been murdering us. So, COVID just... I read today, Jonathan Safran Foer, the writer, said something about COVID has just been like a lightning bolt, kind of quickly shedding light on all this kind of completely unsustainable structure on all the injustices that were there the whole time. It was not fine before and it will be much worse after. And that's, I think, the whole conversation around the mutual aid groups and like, "Oh, is it building a new consciousness in people? That actually we're all in this together," and all that kind of stuff. We're not all in it together. The people that are hungry know that they're hungry, in the same way that the workers that are exploited already know that. So, it's about creating the spaces, creating the confidence, creating... maybe sometimes the language, the infrastructure for sure, to be able to organise.

Ruth Beale:

We know there's been an uptake in union membership at this time. We've also seen that there's some efforts to help marginalised people, help pay their union fees. Do you think it's suddenly become really clear to people what unions can do for them because of this situation?

Shiri Shalmy:

It's great that loads of people join unions. There is obviously a difference between like joining when you have a problem and hoping that it will be fixed, you know, maybe not kind of becoming part of a union or organising with a union. And again, we've had 10 years of anti-union, well, we've had 50 years of anti-union sentiment, and 40 years of actively breaking down the union. So, it's not a magic fix. It's great that unions will maybe be a bit stronger because their memberships, organisations - the more people sign up, the more capacity they have. And the capacity is pretty stretched.

Ruth Beale:

How are the sex workers doing? Could you talk about how the Sex Worker's Union has responded to the crisis and how sex workers are coping? Are many are out of work? Working must be very risky?

Shiri Shalmy:

Officially, everyone is out of work. So that was obviously a sector that was pretty shut down. I mean, it depends on interpersonal relationship when it comes to stripping or to full-service sex work. Officially, you can't do a full-service sex work under COVID. Of course, people are doing it

because people need to survive. So yeah, it's just like in other professions and other sectors, the people who are already the poorest and the most marginalised still have to go to work. I spoke to a member a few days into lockdown, and she told me she's working, she's seeing clients. And I said, "You know, this is dangerous!" I was just trying to be like, I don't know, sympathetic. Because, obviously, I can advise her on what to do, like from a trade union perspective. And she was like, "It's always dangerous. Every time I go to work, I could be murdered. COVID is the least of my worries." So that just kind of contextualises it a bit. Clubs are obviously closed, there are underground unofficial clubs, so people still work. And then a lot of people work online. But, obviously, if you remove one form of labour there's much more competition in another form of labour.

Ruth Beale:

I was thinking about how I've heard, I've read that, say, women academics are submitting less papers but male academics are submitting more papers. So this idea of more productivity during lockdown, or less productivity, as a woman. But of course, there's other work being done. There's the work of care and mothering and mutual aid, and all those other things. But it also maybe questions "what is productivity anyway?" and this idea of going to work every day.

Shiri Shalmy:

The school example is really relevant. I mean, my kid is 15. He's just before GCSEs. Turns out he doesn't need to do more than two hours of schooling a day, that's what the school said. And also, obviously, schools canceled GCSEs. So, it turns out they don't need exams, either. So I've been kind of trying to encourage my kid to kind of maybe reflect on that.

Ruth Beale:

From an economic position, I'm worried about what's going to happen after this. You know, is austerity going to get another go? Because we're going to be in loads of debt. And so there's going to be deeper and deeper cuts, again, to all sorts of things.

Shiri Shalmy:

Yeah! I mean, then they'll have to find a new kind of language to justify it, because, like you say, they found the magic money tree so they can't say that anymore. Turns out that the state can nationalise your salary. You know, what is the future? I mean, we can make demands and making demands kind of requires legitimising the people that you're making demands of. It is legitimising them, right? Or we can say, "We want nothing from you. I don't want anything to do with you. I want to build my own infrastructure. I want to build dual power because, one day, I want to see you gone all together. I want to build my own care system, and my own food distribution system, and ideally our own housing system." We can self organise to meet our own needs.

Ruth Beale:

This idea of reorganising society is something we wanted to speak to Marion Sharples about, as well. Remember, she's working on a Commission on a Gender Equal Economy that's due to be released in September. We wanted to know how she, the Women's Budget Group, and the commission, have been affected.

Marion Sharples:

Yeah, I got ill myself. I was ill for three weeks, totally not working, and then I did one week kind of staggered return to work. The main thing I had was just really severe fatigue, and lack of energy, and inability to concentrate. And in terms of us, more generally, obviously now everybody's working from home, and we've had a couple of new colleagues join and we're only meeting them remotely, which is kind of strange!

Amy Feneck:

And the commission, is that still on course for being released in September?

Marion Sharples:

Yeah, exactly. We had another meeting of the Commission, and that was, of course, online as well. But yeah, we're very much still on course for September and I think it really seems like this has kind of accelerated the need or kind of brought more into the mainstream, I guess, the need

for fundamental economic reforms. So, that's been a big shift for us in terms of the framing of the commission and the world into which it's going to land.

Amy Feneck:

Yeah, let's talk a bit about how women have been affected by this crisis. For example, you talking about working from home, we know that women do way more housework and childcare whilst also possibly potentially going out to work. So now, they're just sort of doing all of that at home, with the closure of schools and nurseries. So, this kind of unpaid labour has become almost like a crisis in itself.

Marion Sharples:

Completely. And I think there's been some really interesting studies coming out about who's taking on that burden. There was a study done by Cambridge, Oxford, and Surrey universities, showing that mothers in the UK provide at least 50% more childcare as well as spending around 10 to 30% more time than fathers homeschooling their children, which I think is pretty striking! And, actually, we saw some figures this morning from the IFS coming out, which was that women are more likely to be juggling two things at a time, they're juggling work or childcare or elder-care. And, also, women are less likely to have uninterrupted work time when working from home than men are. In the same study, it showed that women are still doing almost the same amount of housework as men even when men are not working if they've been furloughed. You'd expect that men would really kind of be doing the lion's share of the housework and the unpaid care work, but it seems that's actually not the case, which is shocking, I think, really.

Amy Feneck:

So those roles are so sort of stuck that, even in the situation that we're finding ourselves in, women are still doing most of the domestic work and most of the childcare?

Marion Sharples:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Ruth Beale:

Even when men are furloughed, so essentially not working?

Marion Sharples:

Yeah.

Ruth Beale:

What about women in paid work? We know that, statistically, there's more women in precarious work and then there's other details like the self-employed scheme not accounting for maternity leave, and there's already an earnings gap. There's perhaps more women in frontline positions or women losing their jobs. Could you tell us a bit about that?

Marion Sharples:

77% of high-risk roles are carried out by women. And of the lowest paid ones of those, kind of the poverty wages, high-risk jobs, 98% of those jobs are done by women, which is a really crazy statistic, I think. If you're dividing up society and you're looking at who are the highest risk people, who are the people going out risking their lives every day, and who are getting very poorly remunerated for that, and it's almost exclusively women, 98%, which I think is really a very powerful statistic and really makes us think about who's putting themselves, who's making personal sacrifices at this time.

Amy Feneck:

We've seen change in sort of the way society, as a whole, is actively sort of appreciating paid care workers, frontline workers in the NHS in particular. What do you think of that recognition?

Marion Sharples:

I think there has been a really interesting shift in kind of public awareness. Not so much around the NHS, which I think has always been very much respected and lauded in British society, but I

think the recognition of not only the sacrifices that care workers make but also the fact that there's such little financial reward for the jobs that they do. I think that really has been brought into the public consciousness which I think is really positive. And I think the challenge now is to convert that energy, convert that awareness and that support into kind of real change. Yesterday, actually, the Fawcett Society did some really interesting polling, which came out, which said that 65% of respondents supported an increase in income tax to fund a pay rise for care workers, which is really interesting and this is kind of contrasted with the current scenario where one in four care workers are on zero-hours contract, 70% of them earn less than £10 an hour. It's a low bar to be making improvements from, but I think that's really interesting to see that public support for better remuneration for care workers. So, hopefully that will maintain a momentum.

Ruth Beale:

I just wanted to go to COVID-19 disproportionately affecting Black and minority ethnic people. So, firstly, that's in terms of work and who's doing those frontline jobs. And then there's the fact that it's Black and minority ethnic people are more likely to die from it. What are the underlying health and wealth inequalities there, that are causing that?

Marion Sharples:

There's something about the sectors that people are employed in. I think there's also a really important issue around housing and overcrowding, which our colleagues at the Runnymede Trust have flagged as well, and about who is more likely to be living in overcrowded or sub-standard housing where social distancing is really very, very difficult. And I saw an interesting statistic, as well, about partners' employment rates. So, the extent to which you can kind of buffer incomes within the household. So, a Pakistani, Bangladeshi women have a much lower employment rate than in the general population. So, as a result, 29% of Bangladeshi working-age men, both work in a shutdown sector and have a partner who is not in paid work. And that is in comparison to only 1% of white British men, which is a really strong, stark statistic as well. And then to go back to the point about the sectors, for example, 20% of black African women of working-age are employed in health and social care roles, which is also a huge contrast to the wider population.

Amy Feneck:

How has this pandemic thrown light onto the inadequacies of the current systems and structures that we're living in and organised by?

Marion Sharples:

I think it's shown kind of all sorts of different areas. I think one is when public services have been stripped away as much as they have done over the last 10 years, it really impacts on their readiness to bear such a crisis. And I think if you compare it with other countries which have invested more in their health and care systems in recent years, for example, Germany, we see that the crisis has been weathered a lot better. There were far, far lower death rate. I think another kind of element that this has really thrown light on has been the social security system, how inadequate it is. I think, particularly, one of those things has been looking at statutory sick pay and how people have been really shocked. Suddenly, everybody knows how much statutory sick pay is and suddenly people are asking the question, "Well, how am I supposed to survive on £95 a week? That's not possible. How can I do that?" And then, people who've been trying to survive on the social security system for years are saying, "I know!" The social security system, in general, is part of this broader ecosystem. If somebody can't live on statutory sick pay, they're going to carry on going to work while they're ill. And this crisis is showing that that is a huge problem in itself, not just for that one person but also for the wider population as a whole. So, I think it's kind of shown the interconnectedness of the social security system within the broader economy and within the broader population, and our connectedness, I suppose, as humans working alongside each other. The third main point, well, apart from the issue around paid and unpaid care and the kind of imbalances between that and how we see that played out in this crisis in a different way, where suddenly children have been brought out of school and grandparents are no longer able to support with childcare, paid for childcare, it's all been closed down. All of that. The kind of impacts that we've seen there, which kind of underpins all of this, really. And I think one of the long standing critiques of how the economy is conceived of conventionally by feminist economists is that everything happens in the paid economy, out there in the real world. And, actually, a lot of

what people have been saying, over these last few weeks, is actually that the economy is still happening! Those kids are still being fed, they're still being educated, they're still being, you know what I mean? They're still being taken care of. All of that work, all of that labour is still happening.

Another kind of element has been the double standards, I suppose, about the rhetoric around migration and about who is welcomed here, who contributes here, whose contributions are valued, and this idea about unskilled and low-skilled work. Chronologically, that's been quite shocking, really. I think how in kind of towards the beginning of the February/March period of time, I think it was, where the government was rolling out a new proposed system about unskilled and skilled work, and who will be able to move here for work. And then, suddenly, a month later, six weeks later, you've got people out on the doorstep, clapping health and social care workers, many of whom are from migrant backgrounds. And that how can you be a keyworker, how can you be valued, how can you be keeping society running but, at the same time, be deemed unskilled? And I think that contradiction, I suppose, has become really, really clear during this pandemic.

Amy Feneck:

I wanted to ask a question about mutual aid. Another sort of thing that's been happening in response to COVID, across the world, is this idea of mutual aid, of social solidarity and commitment to others. And I wondered, in terms of, perhaps also thinking about the commission, how this idea of mutual aid fits into building an economic system.

Marion Sharples:

There has definitely been a really kind of positive and uplifting development from this time, seeing how people are supporting one another in their neighborhood, in their community, reaching out, making sure that people are able to manage and to get by, and to navigate this really difficult situation. One kind of word of caution that we always say is that the kind of future that we want to see, we want to see it full of collaboration and cooperation among people, but we don't want women to be adding to their unpaid burden and to be sacrificing their own well-being and their own safety for the broader community. Because that is a trend that we tend to see. And, I guess, it's also kind of a broader question about well-being and often how well-being, you know, if we're talking about kind of local well-being and local priorities and kind of grassroots mobilisation there, there's a really important question about whose priorities and whose voices are represented there and whose are taken seriously and who is part of that process. And, often, we find that women are not always present, not always heard, not always listened to in those spaces. So, we would just caution to make sure that collaboration is truly collaborative and truly inclusive of all voices of the community, and don't lead to a kind of disproportionate burden, I suppose, on those who often are relied on for emotional labour or for unpaid care work within the home.

Ruth Beale:

Are there other positives that we can take from this? I remember right at the beginning, when Wuhan closed down, reading a thing that said "this is the biggest homeworking experiment the world's ever had."

Marion Sharples:

It is. It has been this huge working-from-home experiment. Yeah, it has shown, I guess, a lot of companies who are reluctant to do that kind of flexible working, a few days a week from home and that kind of thing, it's really showed that, actually, it does work and it can work. And particularly given the fact that, in a global pandemic, it's hard to be as productive as you might be under normal circumstances. But, even taking that into account, the fact that companies in particular have managed to continue successfully their work from home, I think that really shows that it's a really positive development, I think, for flexible work in general and I really hope that that will be maintained going forward. But I think it's very likely because it's hard to prove otherwise. This has been deemed a success.

And in the UK, actually, The Independent did some polling around whether the government should kind of have a job guarantee scheme, making sure that everybody who can work has a job, and that found that 72% of the public supported such a guarantee and just 6% were against that. So, I think it really has thrown up a lot of reasons for hope and for change and for doing things differently, which is, of course, what the commission itself is all about. There was a Fi-

nancial Times editorial a few weeks ago, which a lot of people have been commenting on, which basically said that it's time for radical reforms, we need to change the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades. If we're seeing that across the political spectrum, if we've got newspapers like the Financial Times recognising that it's the time for radical reform, then I think, if ever there was a time, this is it.

Amy Feneck:

Okay. Thank you.

Ruth Beale:

Thank you for joining us.

Amy Feneck:

In a way, it's a really exciting moment that feminist economics can be at the fore. We've seen how these ideas have become part of mainstream conversation. Even the difference in the way that women world leaders have dealt with the pandemic in their countries, from Scotland to New Zealand.

Ruth Beale:

Yes, obviously there's a lot of reasons for that. But I feel really strongly that care has not been considered in government interventions here. There's been furlough schemes and grants, but no acknowledgement of all this extra unpaid care. We've both been massively affected as parents, we've had our children at home whilst trying to keep work going. It's going to be nearly six months in the end. But, at the same time, we have privilege. We've both been in decent housing, with incomes, we have partners who can share some of the childcare. My husband was given some compassionate leave in recognition that the children are off. He's still working but less time. And that's the kind of thing that I think could have been rolled out. It recognises that the economy is more than money.

Amy Feneck:

Now I feel like we have some of the tools to articulate this as feminist economics, and we can see how different models are possible. Exploring feminist economics in this series has shown me how feminism can be a way into the fight for system change. You know, like Ailie Rutherford, who's from The People's Bank of Govanhill project in Glasgow. She said, right at the beginning of the first episode, feminist economics is not just about women's economy or even women's equality, it's about the many injustices that capitalism and capitalist power creates. And, also, I think feminist economics provides solutions that are relatively easy to understand, this idea of interconnectedness, of being interdependent, and how this relates to how the economy should be structured. But, also, how we relate to and understand each other and the world in which we live.

Ruth Beale:

So we've got to the end of the series. This is the last episode of six. If you had six more, Amy, what would you do?

Amy Feneck:

I think I would want to explore the histories of feminist groups and movements that expand on what it means to be feminist. So, for example, groups in black feminist history that address multiple oppressions such as race, sex, and class. Reading, Lola Olufemi's book *Feminism, Interrupted* - we did a bit of her book in our feminist economics reading group - and she talks about feminist work as justice work, and I think this has been a really good start to my thinking more about that. How about you, Ruth?

Ruth Beale:

I think I'd want to look at the trans and queer experience and theory around that, in relation to what Lisa Baraitser was talking about in Episode Four. So, maybe how queer women are affected, say, around the earnings gap, but also what other perspectives it could give us. I'd also want to talk to Sisters Uncut, and it'd be great to interview them about the direct action they've done about cuts and austerity and how that's affected domestic violence services. This is something

Shiri mentioned, that we've been in crisis for 10 years. Increases in domestic violence have been one of the tragedies of lockdown. I mean there's more and I could go on, but I think that's what's exciting, is that this has given me a new perspective. And, like all self education, it will carry on.

Amy Feneck:

Yeah, this is going to really influence our practice. And one of the things I'm looking forward to is continuing the reading group. And we've also got loads of extra resources, a reading list of texts and links which expand on some of the topics talked about across the whole series. And this is available at www.gasworks.org.uk.

Ruth Beale:

Thank you everyone for listening and for joining us on this journey.

Amy Feneck:

This whole project has only been possible by the generosity and experience and knowledge of the people that we've met and spoken to about these ideas, and we want to thank everyone who has contributed to making it happen.

Amy Feneck:

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Amy Feneck:

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