

Book Review

Cash and Counting: A review of *Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics* (eds. by **Margunn Bjørnholt & Ailsa McKay**, Demeter Press, 2014)

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Basic income refers to a social policy system that guarantees a certain amount of income on a regular basis to all citizens without requiring any condition such as age, sex, marital status, occupation or property. It has been argued that it should be regarded as a fundamental human right such as suffrage. This means that in order to verify the right to basic income, it should not be necessary for anyone to tell others how much and what kind of work s/he usually takes up and how important and valuable that work is.

Nevertheless, when we talk about work and re/distribution – since basic income is often discussed in that regard – it is still necessary to bring about the issue of what kind of work is done, how much and by whom. There is a perception that if people receive basic income, they are not going to work any longer. In fact, there are many people working endlessly without receiving any remuneration for their labor. It is important for feminists to bring a light on how much work is done by women outside the labor market and how invisible or uncounted that work is in current societies. Most of that work is so essential for societies that they could not exist or sustain without it.

In this regard, basic income advocates should read this book, *Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics* (ed. by Margunn Bjørnholt & Ailsa McKay, Demeter Press, 2014). The book is composed of various articles contributed by feminist scholars who seem significantly influenced by feminist economist Marilyn Waring. It deals with various important issues such as ecology, unpaid work, care work, accounting, infant mortality, child sexual abuse costs, motherhood, HIV and AIDS, women in rural areas, mother's milk and breast feeding, vagina, and even methods of supervising graduate students. At first glance, all the topics look not quite well related to each other. But reading through the book, one can learn without much difficulty that the word 'counting', as shown on the title, is the key word threading all the issues tight through. The authors pay careful attention to those works done mostly by women which are

essential to society but yet invisible to and thus uncounted by mainstream economics and national accounting systems.

A human is born and die after all. Between birth and death, there is a life in which we make a living. From giving birth to making a living (if we define ‘make a living’ not as an act to bring money home but as an actual act to make people survive throughout everyday) women, in most cases, do the necessary and compulsory work in and outside of house. It is the kind of work that is not highly valued nor counted in the GDP. However, we all know that the human world cannot exist unless this work is kept done by someone because it is the basic foundation of all other work and production. It is a big irony then that most of this work is done without proper remuneration and often for free. We may call this situation as a private welfare system or neo-liberal welfare system. It refers to the system in which basic and compulsory work for human well-being in a capitalist society is mostly done in households without remuneration.

For this reason, the authors of the book in general and the first two chapters in particular, argue that economists must have a holistic approach to capture the real world in which the total production is made not only by paid labor, but also by all people in society together with nature (p. 57). According to the book, this is the economy that works not for the economic system itself but for human, as which Margunn Bjørnholt and Ailsa McKay claim “economics for humans”. Economics for humans may imply “building and maintaining adequate institutions for raising and allocating necessary resources” (p. 18).

Even though the authors of the book do not explicitly argue for or against basic income, one may wonder, after reading it, how household care workers such as full time house wives can attain income security. This was, according to Iulie Aslaksen and Charlotte Koren, the authors of chapter 4, also discussed earlier by others including Marilyn Waring (p. 64) whom the book is dedicated to. Meanwhile, the importance of income security is also shown in chapter 6 by Monica J. Casper and William Paul Simmons. Discussing on the positive relation between decrement of infant mortality rate and increment of women’s financial remittance, the authors of the chapter conclude that ‘financial remittance can enhance women’s empowerment’ which results in decrement of infant mortality in this case (p. 98).

If, as I understand, the authors of the book argue that household work including care work should be firstly recognized, secondly reduced, and thirdly and most importantly redistributed, there should be a system that enforces the start-up and sustains it. Here basic income could function as a core solution, even though it is not presented so in the book.