**Feminist's ideas resonating in unlikely places http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\_id=1&objectid=11248562**

By [Simon Collins](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/simon-collins/news/headlines.cfm?a_id=135)

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Professor Marilyn Waring is chuffed about a new Canadian book on how much she has influenced others. Photo / Dean Purcell

When Turkish feminists had a chance to speak during a popular uprising in Istanbul last year, they used their time to show a Canadian film about the work of New Zealand feminist Professor Marilyn Waring.

The uprising, sparked by plans to bulldoze a green city park to make way for a shopping mall, seems far removed from Waring's 1988 book that led to the film, *Counting for Nothing*, which exposed the way economic statistics ignored the value of unpaid work and of the environment.

But 25 years later, its ideas still resonated on the other side of the world.

"They wrote Turkish subtitles to the Canadian movie and played it as the feminist contribution," says Waring. "You do it, you put it out there, and 25 years later the most astounding things that you could never have dreamed about happen."

Waring, 61, has never been afraid to go her own way. She was among the few politicians included on the *Weekend Herald*'s much-debated Easter feature on New Zealand's 50 coolest people — both for the way she stood up to Rob Muldoon over nuclear ship visits as a National MP from 1975 to 1984, then later to the male-dominated economics profession.

Now a new book published in her honour in Canada, Counting on Marilyn Waring, says she "regularly ranks on exclusive lists of people who have made a real change to the world". The book's 31 authors from nine countries record many uses of her work that Waring herself did not know about.

"I finished it going, 'Wow!"' she says at her Birkenhead home, where the walls are lined with women's craft work from the Pacific and her own photos of women doing unpaid work around the world.

Waring already knew that Norway counted unpaid housework in its national accounts until it adopted narrower market-based rules to conform to other countries in 1950. But she didn't know about some of the other uses of time-use surveys that have begun to measure unpaid as well as paid work.

"I didn't know about Finland, and I certainly didn't know the Finns went ahead and redesigned their national accounts, and nothing happened!" she says. The book's two Finnish authors said mainstream economists simply ignored the new figures and "pondered the growth of GDP to the accuracy of one-tenth of a percentage point as they did before".

From an academic base first at Massey University's Albany campus and now as professor of public policy at AUT, Waring has spent the past 25 years working for the UN and other agencies to empower women and men to challenge the priorities that mainstream economists imposed on them.

"I have been in situations where we have collected time-use data in villages with pre-literate people and drawn bar graphs of them," she says. "We put the whole village's graphs up. They are gender-divided, and the hui, as it were, that goes on about alternative resource allocation is incredible in its outcomes. So you can look at something and say women are spending four or five hours a day cooking, including gathering food and water — but it's not because they are not working hard, it's because their stoves are so crap.

"So looking at that entire village, if the community wants to provide further time for increased 'economic' production or increased 'work', then the stranglehold we have to clear is new stoves, because that will give us more impact in hours available than any agricultural implement or anything else we can introduce."

She spent five years as a gender and governance adviser with the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, helping to publish a book on women in the islands' politics and public service. She interviewed families caring for people with HIV and Aids in New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Canada as part of a Commonwealth study on the loss of human rights when family members feel forced into "servitude" because no one else is available to care for their loved ones.

Waring has recently finished a 13-part curriculum on gender and economics for the UN Development Programme's Asian and Pacific managers.

A whole academic discipline of "feminist economics" has developed since her 1988 book. Various scholars have counted the value of unpaid work based on devices such as what it would cost to hire paid cooks, cleaners and child carers. An early effort valued unpaid work in Australia in 1992 at $341 billion compared with an official gross domestic product at the time of $395 billion.

At home, Waring has also guided an eclectic bunch of postgraduate students — some drawn from overseas by her international reputation and some, including former National MP George Gair and former Green MP Sue Bradford, drawn to work on local political issues. Bradford, who has just finished a doctorate on the feasibility of an NZ left-wing think-tank, says Waring "provided a kind of former MP counselling service which I think she has provided to a few women".

Waring is encouraged by progress in the real world since she entered Parliament in 1975. Discrimination on grounds of sex, religion or marital status was banned in 1977. Matrimonial property laws since 1976 have ended cases like that of a farm wife who came to see Waring because she had broken her leg and could not get accident compensation because she was not counted in the paid workforce.

"There are wonderful attitudinal changes," Waring says, citing a radio interview this week on the decline of golf clubs in which lawyer Linda Clark said that if her partner thought he could play golf and leave her at home with the kids, "he's got another think coming!"

But some changes are glacially slow. New Zealand's two time-use surveys to date found that fathers in couples with children under 15 increased their average time on childcare from 44 minutes a day in 1998-99 to 59 minutes in 2009-10 — but coupled mothers increased their time on childcare even more, from an hour and 48 minutes to two hours and 20 minutes.

The Turkish uprising - in which the son of Safi Sarisuluk (above) was killed by police - was sparked by plans to bulldoze an Instanbul park to make way for a shopping mall. Photo / AP

Both coupled fathers and mothers spent less time on housework in the latest survey, but mothers still averaged far more (down from 3hrs 16mins to 2hrs58 mins) than fathers (down from 1hr 36 mins to 1hr 25mins).

Fathers still averaged much more time in paid work (up slightly from 6hrs 6mins to 6hrs 10mins) than mothers (down slightly from 2hrs 31mins to 2hrs 17mins). Hours were averaged over all days of the year including weekends and holidays.

Waring's views on what should be done have evolved with time. She no longer believes, as she did in 1988, that we should put dollar values on unpaid work and the environment.

As she explained in a speech in Turkey in 2012: "I realised that commodifying either the unpaid work of women or the environment was a really barren approach — I would be arguing that such estimates had a place in a system that sees war, trade in munitions, drug trafficking and ecological devastation as great for growth. It is a pathological system."

Instead, she has developed a human rights approach that puts women and other vulnerable people at the centre, asking, "What would make women's lives easier, safer and freer, and what would make women more valued, productive, have more life opportunities, have more power?"

At a national level, that means for example surveying violence against women rather than monthly manufacturing data.

More importantly, it means asking people in each community about what matters to them. In her Turkish speech she gave an example of safety concerns.

"Those who have sight or physical impairment have safety issues around access, often just to have freedom and safety of movement along public footpaths," she said. "Gay people and ethnic minorities want to be safe from victimisation and harassment. Women and children want street lighting for early morning and the nights. The elderly want transparent bus shelters so that the odds of being robbed and beaten are lessened.

"But what does the city do? It doesn't collect new indicators to reflect what the specific priorities are. It reaches for national data and suddenly the safety index is about the number of traffic accidents and homicides."

"The rights-based approach is concrete," she says. "It's not airy-fairy, and mostly it is long-haul."

**Marilyn Waring**

• Born Ngaruawahia, 1952.  
• National MP 1975-84; sparked snap election in 1984 by opposing US nuclear ship visits.  
• Wrote *Counting for Nothing: What Men Value* and *What Women are Worth, 1988*.  
• Worked internationally since then for United Nations and other agencies.  
• Tribute book just published in Canada, *Counting on Marilyn Waring*.

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