

## Feminist Economics Summer School (FESS)

23 – 28 January 2022

**Theme:** *Care and Economic Crisis: History, Theory, and Methodology in Feminist Economics*

### Concept Note

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#### Background and context

Feminist economics as a theoretical and methodological approach remains marginal within mainstream economics teaching, discourse and policy making in Africa. South Africa. For instance, there are currently no degrees dedicated to feminist economics in universities, with only a relatively small number of economists doing important gendered economic analysis. Feminist or gendered economic discourse, therefore, occurs predominately as either a sub-theme within development economics programmes or within Development Studies or Political Studies. Similarly, within the development of economic policy, the challenge to the basic assumptions underlying the practice of economics, provided by feminist economics, remains limited. Policy questions are often not tackled through a gendered lens or a gender variable is simply appended to mainstream approaches. Civil society enjoys a strong feminist presence, including those concerned with feminist transformations of the economy where the underpinning analysis draws on feminist political economy, sociology and gender studies. Feminist economics as an analytical approach, however, remains largely fragmented and insufficiently present in economic analysis.

The Institute for Economic Justice's Feminist Economics Summer School (FESS) responds to this gap in the use of feminist approaches to the study and practice of economics in a number of ways. First, it draws on historical and contemporary debates in both feminist economics and feminist political economy to challenge orthodoxy in economic thinking that is narrowly focused on the market economy, growth and accumulation as its primary goals. Second, by focusing on the provisioning of human needs and human wellbeing, and bringing feminist pedagogical and analytical tools into the deconstruction and reframing of basic neoliberal assumptions, the school broadens the discussion on progressive development of society. Third, key topics in both micro and macro feminist economics are covered with the aim of intervening into ongoing theoretical and methodological innovations in the field, and with contextual relevance to the global south.

The Summer School curriculum links methodological difference to policy difference and in this way aims to generate critical discussions and collaboration between academia, research and policy practitioners. Lastly, the School emphasises the study of society through analyses

of social relations as they relate to the economic system of production and importantly, of reproduction.

Our primary aim is to equip scholars, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with theoretical, practical and methodological tools for feminist understandings of the political economy and analysis of economic policy. A related aim is to build a critical mass of scholars and practitioners versed in the method of feminist economics.

IEJ hosted the inaugural FESS in January 2020 in a highly successful 10-day event held in Johannesburg, that brought together 20 participants from academia, civil society and government, with lectures facilitated by leading feminist economists and specialists in the field. The forthcoming Summer School will again take place in-person in Johannesburg from **23 - 28 January 2022**, under strict observance of COVID-19 safety protocol, and shall broaden the scope of participation to include interested applicants from the region.

### **Strategic objectives of the FESS**

The Summer School project is part of a longer-term process to see the inculcation of feminist economics within the teaching of economics, research, policy making and public discourse in South Africa, in synergy with similar projects across Africa. The School's five major strategic objectives are therefore: educational; policy influence; alumni networks of influence; publications and broad outreach; and collaborative research.

### **2022 Theme:** *Care and Economic Crises: History, Theory and Methodology of Feminist Economics*

The theme for the second installation of the FESS derives from a concern with the extent and ways in which feminist economics and feminist political economy has been able to respond to economic transitions over the course of the past four decades of structural adjustment in Africa, with some focus on the economic crises precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Feminist scholars have been attentive to the ways in which economic crises have become a technique of global governance, showing for instance, how responses to economic crises often suppress calls for the overhaul of neoliberal governance and tend to retrench its influence in the global political economy, with disastrously gendered impacts. Furthermore, feminist economics has long sustained its demand for a new development paradigm that is not based on economic growth, and whose primary indicator is not the average Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which tends to conceal the non-monetary but essential activities which take place outside of markets but are essential for the economy as a whole.

This question of care and social reproduction has taken on particular significance in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, prompting numerous responses from state and non-state actors, feminist scholars, activists, donors, and even corporate entities. While many initiatives during this period seem to acknowledge the reproductive crisis that accompanies economic crises, feminist economists are just beginning to grapple with the nature of these responses – including their political, historical and economic implications and antecedents. The

forthcoming FESS takes a more focused thematic scope – on the relationship between the care economy and economic crisis – as a basis for exploring broader questions in the history, theory and method of feminist economics.

The history of capitalist development is a gendered history, where feminists writing the economy have explored gender and the family over the course of primitive accumulation of capital.<sup>1</sup> They have also shown that what were in the West called “welfare wars” were largely wars about / against women: that is, because women comprise the overwhelming majority of social-welfare program recipients and employees, women and women’s needs would be the principal stakes in the battles over social spending likely to dominate national politics.<sup>2</sup> Ongoing debates in South Africa and other African countries regarding the expansion and/or implementation of social grants and other relief measures to households in distress attest to the gendered nature of economies and the propensity for reproductive crisis that is entrenched within the capitalist mode of production.

This reproductive crisis which is contained within each cycle of capitalist accumulation has in turn to be understood concretely in relation to the prevailing social, political and economic conditions. Likewise, what we understand under financialised capitalism as a ‘crisis of reproduction’ has to be subjected to analyses that situate the problem within the trajectories of development/underdevelopment which differ greatly between the global north and global south. For instance, no country of the global south has successfully implemented the welfare state model, although early post-independence developmentalist endeavours in Africa developed models of social policy (e.g. *Ujamaa* in Tanzania) that seemed to respond to the question of social reproduction through interventions in food production, communal labour, and state subsidies. Other examples may be cited across the global south.

Where the state is, or is expected to take a major role in social reproduction, a major question which the care economy raises is the question of financing. Predominant concerns expressed by economists in relation to state financing of a care economy largely point to a potential fiscal crisis. But as feminist economists show, “the fiscal crisis of the welfare state coincides everywhere with a second long-term, structural tendency: the feminization of poverty.”<sup>3</sup> Both of these are relevant discussions in relation to the neoliberal state, the modes of production within it, the gendered labour on which it relies for cheap wage labour, and the ever increasing surplus population which still need to be reproduced.

The forthcoming FESS shall explore these concerns in detail. Participants shall gain a strong understanding of the nature and form that social reproduction takes in different crisis contexts. They will also be exposed to debates regarding: various models of care; historical trajectories of welfarist policies and the care economy with specific focus on its nature in the global south; the financing of care; empirical illustrations; and methodological interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Silvia Federici (2004), *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Fraser (1987), “Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation,” *Hypatia*, 2(1): 103-121.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

**Sub-themes:**

- Economic crises in historical context and the question of care
- Theoretical interventions into the debate on care
- Structural approaches to care
- Financing a care economy
- Empirical approaches and critiques

**Applications for FESS 2022:**

We invite applications from academics, researchers and economic policy practitioners. The application should include a 500-word abstract outlining a potential long-term research or advocacy project (which may be an essay, journal article, policy proposal, popular material, advocacy strategy, book chapter, and educational material) on the relationship between care and the economy, which the applicant will begin to develop within the school. The abstract should reflect area of work and/or research interest, and should have a place-specific focus on a country/region. We aim to ensure participation of non-academics and early-stage researchers and shall provide various kinds of support to shortlisted candidates, including technical support in developing the abstract, and financial assistance to cover costs of attending the School.

Applicants should also submit a CV, brief bio and a letter of recommendation by midnight on **29 October 2021** via this link <https://forms.gle/NU8xPSfwmEcYpvS3A>. Queries can be sent to [applications@iej.org.za](mailto:applications@iej.org.za), but no applications will be accepted, nor replied to, via email.

**Eligibility criteria:**

Eligible candidates will hold a Masters' degree in economics; or be an economist and/or feminist economics practitioner (do research work in, or specialisation in feminist economics). Applications are welcomed from candidates based in any African country. We particularly encourage applications from women from underrepresented communities (including ethnic, racial, sexual orientation, disability, origin, religion, employment status etc.).

**About the IEJ**

The Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) is an activist economic policy think tank in South Africa. It provides policy makers and progressive social forces in South Africa and Africa with access to rigorous economic analysis, and policy options, as a basis for concrete interventions. These interventions aim to advance social justice and reduce inequality, promote equitable economic development that realises socioeconomic rights, and foster a thriving, democratic, environmentally sustainable, and inclusive economy that places the needs of the majority at the centre. In doing so, it recognises the need to change the landscape of economic knowledge production, challenge economic orthodoxies, and position excluded voices at the heart of economic decision making.