**Transcript**

**Roundtable Discussion, Policy & Power; Critical Conversations**

**23rd February 2022, Virtual**

**Key Speakers:** Fiona Williams, Rachael Dobson, Shona Hunter

**Rachael Dobson** 00:00

Thank you so much, Fiona. Yes, people are applauding. I think there's a way that we can do that. But I'm sure if we were all there in person or here in person, then which we are obviously, then we will be doing the same. Thank you so much. So what we're going to do now is it Shona and I are going to just bring up rang reflections and engagements with with the book. And I think that throughout, I hope that throughout the conversation that we're going to be having the connections that we share. And you know, interestingly, if we only started off by talking about our leads connection, for example, I wonder if those connections might come out and be productive for thinking about various things. He wants to go first shoma, do you want to go first? Or should I go first?

**Shona Hunter** 00:49

Up to you, you're in charge.

**Rachael Dobson** 00:52

Okay, I'll go first. I'm so so yeah, I suppose I had a couple of initial reflections. And I wonder actually, if they're related, so sort of prising them apart. And then I thought, well, actually, I might just voice them together, and just see where it goes from there. So I suppose my first thought was something around how the book is a is a big book, you know, in terms of its intervention, the intervention that it seeks to make its explicit, I think about the intervention that it seeks to make. And I reflect them back, you know, if I think about your body of work more broadly, and of course, it's a really expansive and big body of work. But for me, actually, I'm thinking about the works that you have already articulated the political social policy 1987 article, the 1989 book, I want to add to that, actually, there's a really fantastic article that I use all the time for social politics 1995 article, which I find very, very productive for sort of bringing together various things that we can talk about, hopefully. And I just find that interesting, the way that that consistently over time, you are bringing these interventions. So in relation to that. I'm also curious, what is it perhaps about social policy, as a field of study or discipline? Or how wants to think about it, that seems to require these interventions, right. So that's that, I guess, is a starting point. For me, these interventions, which are empirically led, they're conceptually led, they're theoretically led. And yet at the same time, my reflection also on this book is that the the feel of it is slightly different. It feels like there is a much more explicitly hopeful orientation to it, there are much more explicit calls around transformation. So whereas I kind of look back and kind of see you having a conversation with the discipline in one way, I see you having a conversation in a slightly different way here. To me, there are connections, but there are also differences. And I just wonder if from that kind of like starting point, perhaps if you have any reflections on those shifts, but also those consistencies.

**Fiona Williams** 03:25

Yeah. Yeah. So So shall I? Shall I answer? Yes, yeah, that's okay. Well, yes. Um, so what is this about social policy? Well, I suppose when, when you say that I kind of, although I've been in the area of social policy, ever since I did my undergraduate degree. I still feel I've sort of, you know, I was parachuted in. You know, and that's what I've had to deal with, you know, I found myself sort of researching and teaching in social policy. And therefore, that's what I had to deal with. And, and, you know, perhaps I would have preferred to have been a cultural commentator on fashion design actually. Without it happened, this is where I landed, you know, this is where my train stopped. So, so it's partly the time there. And I think wherever I might have been, I might have been the same sort of difficult person. But also, but also not to, you know, social policy is an interesting discipline, in a way. It's very eclectic, and therefore, it allows somebody like me, it allows me to say what I want, you know, even if, over time, it may be preoccupied by other things. See, no, it doesn't allow that in a way, which if I were in economics, that would be much harder. So that's, that's one important thing. It's like an eclectic discipline. By the 1990s, for example, there were more women professors in social policy than in most of the other disciplines. And there was some degree a selective, I think, but some degree of acceptance of, of a particular sort of feminism, agenda, class feminism, within the discipline. So its boundaries are fairly permeable, you know, and that, I think, has enabled people like me, people like yourselves, people like John Clark, to kind of get in there and, and shuffled around a bit, you know, because the, the borders aren't so tight as they are in those older disciplines. I also think that, you know, one of the things I mentioned, I think, was that the kind of the paradox is that this is a discipline, which has always been committed to kind of, quote, improvement, even though of course, what we've we've analysed is that those notions, severely limited and severely, you know, blinded by, you know, established thinking, but it still is like that, it's committed to that in the way that sosiale sociology se, has had has had more recently to say, yes, we have to be public sociologists, you know, whereas social policy is not always done. Now, the downside is that is that it has a close connection to, to government, right. And therefore, and that's one of the things I've always found myself arguing against, therefore, it tends to be overwhelmed by the research agendas of government. But also, I think that I think what happened actually, in the 1990s, when, you know, I mean, my book became a sort of my 1989 book became a book that was on most social policy, reading lists, and everything is, it was that takeover by welfare regime analysis, which was the big, big thing that allowed. I mean, not to be too binary about these things, but it allowed the big boys to continue on in the way that they'd always been talking. Right. And, and, and wild feminists fought their way into that they had to fight their way into an agenda, which was already set. And under, and that agenda, just completely ignored things like race and disability and everything. And I think I'm still fighting against against that, actually, because that welfare regime analysis has an even though this, you know, historical institutionalism, which is a bit more nuanced, and everything, you know, and is, is useful, but, but they take their kind of that they they are debating with the big boys of welfare regime analysis. And, you know, there's been some changes, but that was, I think that was one of the things. But as I also argue, these things aren't just about the academy. They aren't just about the discipline, they're also about the academy and about what's going on in the outside world. And, you know, in the article I've written with Coretta Phillips, you know, we called it sleepwalking into the post racial and, and that's what what I feel that that social policy Association report. That's what that was about, really, you know, that, that there wasn't an awareness of what was going on, you know?

**Rachael Dobson** 09:03

No, thank you. Thank you.

**Fiona Williams** 09:09

Did you want me to talk about hope as well,

**Rachael Dobson** 09:11

you said it was I was mindful of taking up too much space. Yes, actually. Yes, though, that was something that I was really keen to hear more from you about? Because I suppose my reflection is that this book has a much more explicitly hopeful orientation to the way that you discuss care and care ethics, the way that you discuss eco Commons prefigurative politics, the way that you take up these sorts of concepts, these sorts of concepts. And I guess I am curious about what that's about for you. And I think that to a large extent, you've you've discussed what that connects into, perhaps in terms of The way that debates kind of flow in the orientations that they take on and what that's about. But I yeah, I am, I am curious to hear more on your

**Fiona Williams** 10:10

thoughts. I mean, I think I think it is the reality of, of the fact that there has been, you know, going through from from the 90s. And, and what you saw as a kind of, you know, that, that attempt to really throttle social movements, and yet there was still stuff going on. And then, you know, after 2008, the social movements beginning to reassert themselves. I mean, for me, you know, that was such a relief, in a way. And, and it does inspire sort of hope, I think. But also, I think the other thing is that in my work, which, much of which has been quite academic, you know, I'd always had this question of social movements. In the back of my mind, it's always been the thing which frames my thinking. But I'd never been as explicit as I was hearing, I wanted to be extra set, I wanted to say, actually, these are the things that you need to be looking at. And I'm so heartened by this new development of scholar activists, you know, who who have, who have kind of identified themselves as such, and many of us were, but we didn't exactly identify ourselves as such. And I just want to give hope to those people and say, Yes, go on, gone. No.

**Rachael Dobson** 11:41

Absolutely. Thank you so much. Thank you for thinking on that. Shona.

**Shona Hunter** 11:49

Do you want? What do you want me to do? Do you want me to do some question and answers? Or do you want me to do like a little reflection, instruct me, tell me on time.

**Rachael Dobson** 11:59

Time, I would say we've got another 10 minutes? At least. It's up to you. What it depends on what your reflections are. And it depends on what your questions are. So I

**Shona Hunter** 12:12

think I think what I was gonna do was I had a number of kind of questions, really. So if it's not too unfair, what I'll do and I won't expect you to answer them all now or think through them. Now, Fiona, but maybe we can kind of place them on the table. And some of them actually relate to some of the stuff that you've been talking about already. And surprisingly, given the responding to your book. Yeah. Cool. So just let me know, right? If I'm going on too much. Yeah, I mean, I don't know where to go. Now, actually, because you've raised a whole nother set of related thoughts for me, just in the conversation there, Fiona. But I think, I think firstly, I did want to say something about that positioning in relation to social policy, really, you know, it's interesting hearing you talk there about, I don't know quite how you put it, but you know, ending up there in a way. Um, and I mean, my relationship to social policy has always been kind of really unreal as a discipline, and an academic discipline, and also as a practice, and, you know, thinking about the last issue that you raised there about the relationship to government, which actually, I think I'd started to not forget about that. But because I'm so closely located to practice now. And I kind of work through the idea of institutions and institutionality. I think sometimes I even kind of, maybe it's that the stuff that feels as though it's going on at that central level is just so removed in terms of practice, rather than the narrative, right. So I think there's, I think I would make those distinction. So, but you just reminded me about the relationship of the discipline to government and kind of big government if we put it like that. But, um, so So I find that interesting, I think, one of the things that I that that again, this book, and that your work, you know, over the whole period that I've been engaging with it right, back from those kind of late 80s articles, through the 90s and through the car for work, you know, that programme was so important was so important to my thinking. And actually, I see Carver you know, in this book in a big way, you know, your work in Carver, and so to hear you speak about the social movements and kind of like this hasn't been written, well, really, for me your work was so important in in bringing these issues around. the lived experience of policy, practice and engagement with policy as a user as a means to really recreate worlds, you know, world making in a different way. I mean, you're you know, I'm just reminded, again, listening that this, I think one of the things I really love about your work and I love about this book is it's such an amazing gateway, for me anyway, into thinking about all sorts of languages, ideas, practices, you know, disciplinary context, if we want to talk about them in that way, that students of social policy, or political science, or you know, all of the places that we think about government and mainstream locations, right, that people just wouldn't get access to these sorts of ideas, unless they were really digging out themselves or less. They happen to be being taught by somebody who was, you know, placed in a weird way in relation to this stuff. And usually, they might be bringing up your work anyway, to kind of do that pushing. And I know that that's very much. I mean, obviously, there's a couple of my students here a couple of my PhD students who don't get introduced to this stuff if they're not, you know, learning at an earlier stage. Yeah, so So I think this is really important work in that way as a gateway. And I'm thinking about the other thing that we maybe haven't talked much about, and that I would like to think about more maybe over the next while is the relationship to black feminist theorising. So for me this book again, and of course, then based work around Niekro politics is not saying they base a black feminist from in a lot of ways, but but but it's a new sorts of literature, right that the students, practitioners may not be engaged with in the English context anyway, or in the UK context, such as it is at the moment, or British context, indeed, depending on how we're thinking about it. So I think on my, I want to maybe ask you to think about and then maybe open the conversation about what really is the relationship of black feminist theorising to your work because for me, it really is the place that I when I first read that not the your 1989 book, literally I was in a you know, I was in Birmingham, much as I love Birmingham, everyone knows this in all sorts of ways. But their social policy department was a really like straightforward social admin department. But of course, we had cultural studies, that was downstairs. So I was kind of like in these multiple worlds, actually, with all sorts of other bits of the of the undergraduate degree I did, but but I think there was something just really informed me about having access to cultural studies in the context of social policy, which for me, is what that first book does, and it's what all of your writing does. And it's also what this book does very powerfully. So. But I think there is something complicated about engagements, you know, look looking at us as three white women also, you know, also actually, it's not even also that is the thing in a way, isn't it? I think that is important to kind of think about to give them what you were saying about the relationship or the you know, the the female professor will react, right. I mean, I remember arriving at Leeds thinking, My God, what's going on here? I mean, I'd worked with Sara Ahmed and Elaine Swan who I think Elaine's right, so I'd had a brilliant time before I got to Leeds, with these amazing women who are opening me up to all sorts of other ways of thinking about black feminist theorising and stuff like that. Then I got to Leeds and I was kind of like, wow, there's a serious female professoriat out here. But it was largely white, if not entirely white at the time, I'm thinking across the university there. I mean, I don't know you'll remember better than me. But also, there is something about how this word gets used, and what and what that means. So there's a lot there. But I'm also thinking about and I don't know whether I need to stop, Rachael have to let me know. Okay. But the other thing is that introduction to Gail Lewis's work, you know, maybe I would never have had that if I hadn't have, you know, come across your work. And then seeing what what for me is a deep conversation actually, between works that that have then developed in different sorts of ways. And actually, I'm thinking about that the latest started or not the latest, but one of the latest pieces that Gail Lewis did in Christ, Come on, help me out. Feminist Review. Yeah, in the feminist review, around the use of black feminist theory, and theorising and again, actually, it reminds me, a girl's not always hopeful, but it does remind me it's quite hopefully engagement, actually. critical engagement with how that gets but hopeful also. So I think those were some of the things that I definitely wanted to come on the table. I mean, I suppose there's some questions for me also around relationality. No surprises there. But I, you know, I am says more about me than about you, I'm sure. But I have all these conversations with these people whose work I love. And I'm always engaged within my head, you know. And I always think of the conversation I'm having with you as around relationality. And where we start and our starting points. And I think my starting point is always the middle. It's from practice out. So relationality, for me, happens through that engagement with things that are in the world. And the notion of things and objects actually, I'm thinking about my in the head conversations with Sara Ahmed there. That's kind of helped me to think about that, I think, but I, but so where do we start from in our relational theorising would be the like the the reductive question, I suppose. But the simple way of asking that, because I think that's important for me. And I'm thinking also, again, looking at some of the names of some of those students that my PhD students I know we've had they probably sick to death of me talking about that. Where do we start, we start from the practice, we start from the object or the counter, and we we move out. And I always feel like there's a tension in the is it attention, I'm interested in what you think about that. Because for me, that matters. And I think that's something I learned from your work, actually, you know, the stuff about practice and experience and gain, then thinking about getting to Gail, and all of that sort of stuff. So there's that. And then I think the final thing, because I know I'm throwing a lot in, okay, now there's two things, but they kind of relate, one does come on to the hopefulness thing. But I'm now thinking about, Do I need to ask that, you know? Well, I suppose there's a question. I'm trying to think about the simple the kind of way that isn't overlaid with all my own thoughts. I suppose there's a question about what is hope, in the sort of context that we find ourselves in and that you are kind of laying out in terms of the constitutive nature of these crises. And I mean, I would totally see them as constitutive I mean, I, again, I wonder whether this is something that I have these conversations with in my head, with, like, with you, or with the books or with the work is. For me, you know, crisis is, is it crisis is constitutive of capitalism. I think crisis is the mode through which capitalism works. And I'm not sure if that's quite the same as what you're saying. But I think that becomes really important, then when we think about hope. I think there's something about as being in constant crisis mode, whose crises and when and I think those are interesting questions as well, thinking about what has been visibalized in the pandemic, and what of course, now, I don't know how everyone else is feeling, but it's just kind of gone again. I mean, it hasn't gone because it was always there. But we're, we're not seeing those things, hearing about some of the struggles that you're talking about around, I don't really know, immigration struggles, I really don't know whether those are seen in any visible ized in any sort of real sense in the public imagination, actually. Because I think that will be so horrifying for most people to think about the realities that that so many people are experiencing in the context of basically being imprisoned at the point of moving into kind of our context with the English context or the British context and what that means and what happens to people when they are removed after living here for a long time and also imprisoned within this context. And I mean lit talking about literal imprisonment now, as well as the the aspects of those. So I think there's something there around what does hope mean? And, okay, maybe this is the very end, what does it mean to be cheerful? Because I feel more cheerful when engaged, but I know, I'm one of those people with a smiley face, but with like a deathly negative analysis of a lot of stuff. And I, I know we, that comes up a lot or that feels like it comes up a lot for me in in conversations between us. I know I remember you maybe won't remember this. But when you read some of my early work when you bet. You were like, Oh, my God, this is relentless. You know, by the time you'd got to the end of it, but I don't know that. I mean, yeah, it was really, the people that were talking to me kind of felt Their lives were relentless sort of struggle no matter how, no matter how near to institutional power, they were positioned, but but I also, I don't feel like I have no hope. Not today anyway. So I don't know. So say what did those things mean? And then finally, the thing that you reminded me about again today, and I was actually reading about it, just before we started again, was this thing about I'm gonna mangle it, I'm sure, but about the floor reverse. Because it just dream where where do you write it? p. 186? Yeah, so do you mind if I read your book, isn't it so it's good? It's all good. It's good. So you've got Yeah, the pluriverse. "*Pluriversality means making the possibility for deep dialogue across existing groups, cultures and Cosmo visions, the aim is less to arrive at a consensus than to foster a solidarity and commonality based upon respect and understanding the position of others. Because multiple groups cultures and communities are threatened by political coloniality. Their central value is for creating a world in which solidarity across many worlds fit or a made possible*". And then it was this bit and I just thought this is it right? For me. Anyway, this is so important. In this sense, it does not promoting anything goes relativism, because that was very important for me always about critical social policy, but in particular, about your work in that context. Since a perspective, say, of racism, or sexism would be unacceptable, as it would not permit the possibility of solidarity across many worlds. What it does, what it does is see equality and difference as inseparable because an allowance for differences premised on the acceptance of all is equal in the first place. So I think there's lots in there. But one of the things that pluriversality made me think about again, and again, when you were talking is the expansion, and the multiplying and what happens when we force power, however, we're conceptualising, that to expand to have multiplicities in it, the power is dispersed. And for me, there is something when we think about how hierarchical orderings work and how domination works, rather than categorization processes, which can be more or less dominating, right. I mean, there's usually always problematic but, but more or less dominating, you know, domination is a very different experience, you know, the sorts of stuff we were just talking about, I was just talking about in relation to migration than me, I don't know having a crap day at work. And I don't want to reduce that either. Because the point is, they're related. But I, it's, for me, it seems like a constant struggle, if we're interested in producing interventions via writing our practices, whatever, whatever it may be, if there is something really important about producing space, and, and, and rethinking what it means to produce space, and I was thinking it was making me think, again, about some stuff that I just wrote for ethics and social welfare on human bodies called decolonizing. White care, I think, but I'm talking about the kind of complex overlaid argument there but but one of the things I'm interested in thinking about one of the only means by which we can do whiteness differently, that's really a mangling of the argument, but, but he's through through the production of space. Which, and, and the refusal, or I don't even know the refusal works of any one person, thing or object to take up the space. So there is a, again, I don't know how helpful this is, because I've taken a slightly on a tangent in terms of the liveness of whiteness, but there is something about being it's not even being smaller in the space. But But anyway, the point is the Pluriversality, and that, for me would be multi dimensionality multi modality, you know, whatever. The this is really, really important to get our heads around. And I think that that's, again, one of the things that gets raised for me, in the board and in your work. So I think those are I don't know how long I've gone on sorry, but those are the different things that I just you know, and I mean, there's many more as well, but I'm sure he has got our own thoughts and other people will too. So yeah,

**Rachael Dobson** 29:48

let me let me just come in there. So just to allow Fiona just a moment to think about from which angle to come in at those various kind of thoughts. I did just want to To say, there's still, you know, a lot of people here who have been with us now, you know, since the start of Fiona. Talking today, I'm sure that people have their own thoughts and reflections as well as we're talking. So please, if you want to put them in the chat, because we will move on to kind of a broader conversation all of us. And what we can do is, have a look at the chat when we come to that. And we can pick up on some of the reflections that are being posed there. And think about perhaps how some of those reflections connect into each other and connect with our thoughts and Fiona's thoughts as we're going through. So please feel free to do that. I can see that Steve's done that. There. So please just do add to that as we move through a few if you want to. If you feel provoked to So, okay, for you over. Where do you want to start?

**Fiona Williams** 30:54

Right, just acknowledging Steve's comment. Thanks. And? And also, yes, I think the lack of, of theoretical discussion and social policies is, is awful sometimes. I agree with that. But coming on to showing us many comments. I mean, I think the one that I think you're most the most the one that I shouldn't duck in a way, the one that is more challenging is about, you know, what am I doing using black feminist theorising, you know, etc. And actually, I, I read your article in ethics and welfare, is it called ethics and social, which I've found very, very helpful in thinking about what white privilege not only what white privilege is about, because after all, you kind of one knows a bit about that. But doing whiteness differently, and I hadn't, I hadn't thought in those terms. But But I suppose what I would say in relation to that, is that I think, I mean, in my book, for people who haven't seen it, there is an appendix, where I've, I've talked about my own life, in social policy, not my own personal life, so much, but my own life as somebody travelling through this discipline. And I wrote that sort of, you know, from the heart rather than, you know, constructing it and everything. And it was only in, in writing that out. And at the end, you know, I sort of I don't answer it, but I, I say, you know, there are obvious limitations in being, you know, a white woman, you know, now in a kind of professional roller, pass race, Gen, all the restaurants, some of which work for me, and some of which I have to, I have to use my commitment and imagination to think about. But actually, at the end of the day, because of my different life experiences, particularly, as I say I, I was actually my early years was spent in Cairo. And it was coming back to to England as a very small child with my family. That I set, I mean, even to say that I had, I had come from Egypt, and for children around me to say she's an Egyptian she's an Egyptian right, and stuff like that, you know, you kind of developed some sort of sensitivity, and also being in a family that was kind of socialist and anti colonialist. And all the rest of it. You know, those things stuck at that age. They, as I say, in the book, that the invasion of the Suez Canal, was a terrible event in our household. It stuck with me. And so when I went to university, you know, I was looking for answers to all of these things. So, you know, the anti imperialism, in the Americans in Vietnam, all of these things, and they weren't answered, you know, they just weren't answered. And I, and I even, you know, I went to Nigeria and did work around race and gender and nobody was interested. So when eventually I read Empire Strikes Back and Hazel Carby I thought, wow, somebody is actually answering these questions, you know, which I have been not in the middle of, but sort of on the margins of, and I just thought, this is the way to go. This is the way to go. And as I say, I think any form It isn't just any form of border thinking is so important. It's so important. It just sees the world in different way. So, so I, I hope I acknowledged my limitations in doing some of this. But on the other hand, you know, it's important to do it, it's very important to, to, if those are the theories that make sense to you, then it's important stick by them. So the other the other question? Well, there are a lot, you know, about hope. The poet, Emily Dickinson said, hope is the Thing With Feathers that perches on the soul, which I think is wonderful, because it expresses how, how very frail hope is. But nevertheless, it's in there, right? And because of its frailty of this little thing with feathers, because of its frailty, we have to protect it. And we have to bring it out, when we can, whilst you know, obviously being pessimistic about the conditions in which we live, hope and optimism is a different set of, of feelings and ideas. And it's just very, it's one of the most important things, and it's one of the most important things now, because of the nature of the world that that we we live in. I don't feel it all the time. But I do. Write to it. I think some of the other things. Oh, yes. You said where do we start from in relational? Organising what we start from ourselves? Of course, don't we. And I think where both of your work is very good is in drawing, the kind of psychosocial into understanding, you know, why people have defended attitudes, and so on and so forth, which is very good. And so, I mean, I think that that's where I turn to the ethics of care, because that's, that's the writing around that is about so many personal things, and interpersonal things, about feelings and about emotions, as well as being about those kinds of big theoretical issues that I deal with. So I'll stop there in case there are other questions, or? I mean, I do think I have other things to say. But in case there are other people who would like to come in.

**Rachael Dobson** 37:53

And yeah, I mean, we, I would say, we've probably got another five minutes that we could commit to just if you did have some more kind of thoughts to say, Fiona on any of those things. I mean, we can just move to q&a. But if there was anything, then there is actually a little bit of time if you wanted to use it.

**Fiona Williams** 38:09

Yes. Well, I think going back to that question of hope, I mean, the point that Shona raised about who's crises is, of course, very important. And, and that's something I do discuss in the book that, you know, we think of the crisis of care is something that affects, you know, women in the West, trying to deal with childcare and, and work. But of course, if you look at it in terms of the global South, though, those kind of dilemmas and difficulties are kind of 10 times greater, that, although they are very similar, you know, they are very similar. There is a point of commonality there. But there's also a difference of, of context and experience. And so I think that that's, that's very important. But if you were looking, you know, when I was I was talking, presumably you'd say, you know, about the third or second, I can't remember which one, but the one about the racialization of external borders and how that comes in. And, you know, we're faced all the time with a kind of a growing kind of denial amongst people of what is actually of the horrors that are happening. But I'm also struck by how people also know, you know, people are contradictory and they also know about those things. And it isn't that difficult. You know, something like Bradford refugee action. You know, it's, it's one of these organisations But I'm surprised at how many different sorts of people it it sort of involves and how many people are actually within themselves and their own houses, kind of very concerned and touched by the, the experiences of refugees and migrants. I mean, sometimes it's because there are personal connections, postwar connections, but at other times, it's just, oh, blimey, you know, blimey, this is horrible. And, and wanting to latch on to something where they can lose them. So I'm always aware of the contradictions in people and those very people. And although you, in your article shown it, you might see that as a sort of benevolent and Saviour type thing. Nevertheless, it's important.

**Rachael Dobson** 41:01

Okay, Shona, did you want to come back? Or should we move,

**Shona Hunter** 41:05

move? Just wanted to say that? Yeah, actually, in relation to that, though, I think this is the thing about multiplicity, isn't it? We have to understand this in order to really be able to make any sort of effective. I don't even know you know, what I'm like, I never like words, do I use a lot of them for this reason, but interventions, whatever sort of intervention or impact or imagining we, we think we're having, you know, I can I wanted to say that as well, I really will shut up, I think is your work makes me think differently about words. Actually, you know, I was thinking about when you were talking, how differently, I started to think about the notion of settlement when I read your work, and I know that's because, of course, all the big boys, the old white boys are always on about settlements, but they just don't they just that's like used as a descriptive kind of term as though it's a thing that that isn't happening. Isn't isn't constantly negotiate, you know, I don't know. Sorry, that wasn't what I wanted to say. I think the only thing that I that I did want to bring in and it was in relation to the feminist theory to the black feminist theory and black feminist theorising stuff. Because for me, it links to the question in the chat, actually, and it links to this thing about theory that niggles me right. So can't little in inverted commas, theorising be theorising, I mean, this is the point for me, theorising from experience tells us about the world. And that's what when I think about somebody like Syria nayaks work, like, you know, feminist black feminist theory is the theory. That's the whole point that she's making. This is not like an add on, this is the thing, and that's what your work taught me, you know, so, and then it opened me up to the theory, you know, if you want to put it like that, and I was then able to trace all these amazing things, but so and I so I think that that is like a fundamental repositioning of actually what theorising is, and it is the relationality of all of these things that is important. And that's why, you know, I mean, good grief, some of the Neo and Neo Institutionalists work, let alone the institutionalist work is so far away from this thinking. I mean, we can have another conversation another day if we could even be bothered really about the context of social policy as a discipline and the relationship to academia, which I think this stuff relates to but I don't even know whether the conversation on that level you know, I think there's so many people doing this work that confined each other through the reading actually, maybe anyway, I'm gonna leave it there though actually in relation to that and then and then I promise we will open this up but I'm just taken by something you were saying there around. Did you say movement? I don't think you did. I think that's my word. But I think that is an interesting point a reflection on on the chain is making on your work Fiona. And perhaps that's one of the things that I'm reflecting on in terms of the the evolutions of your writing and the commonalities and the in the kind of differences I guess, between your writings over time, but that idea of movement and capturing movement and complexity and capturing complexity. So I'm thinking about that in relation to a kind of agentic level, but also thinking about welfare state practices, you know, I think that for me, definitely. Not only does your work was your has your work been a kind of using shown as a gateway into understanding the connections between the agentic and the institutional and the kind of instead I practices in a way that does not, you know, give into those kinds of typical micro meso, macro constructions, I suppose, I think that for me, your writing has always enabled a sense of movement, and a sense of sort of being able to, to feel, I guess, the kind of sense of relationality. So, relationality is not something that you just write on. For me, it's something that I'm able to grip and feel, I guess, or feel and grip and start to kind of grasp in a way that that is generally very, very difficult to do, and generally is not particularly done, and particularly done well within policy writing that alone any other kind of writing. So I think that that's interesting. And I am curious as to how conscious you are of that thing that I suppose has been quite significant. Yeah. But I suppose that for me as well, what happens slightly? Is that when we move, and I think I'm thinking, why is it that the stuff on hope is kind of capturing my attention so much? I suppose it for me, talking explicitly about hope, and possibilities for transformation. What that potentially does, is it? It's like, I'm trying to find the words. It's like, it fixes things in a moment in time, I suppose. It's like a pause, and maybe a pause is okay, you know, maybe a pause is okay, maybe it's about sort of saying, Okay, we observe all of this happening. And the pause is necessary, and it has a function to it. But I wonder if I'm thinking about the stuff around hope a lot, because it for me slightly works against that sense of fluidity or movement, or whatever we want to call it, that I find so useful, actually, for thinking about possibilities for transformation, if any of that makes sense. Anyway, so yeah. I've just wonder if you have any kind of thoughts on that?

**Fiona Williams** 47:17

Yes. I'm also aware that Steve has, has asked a question, which I think Shona has to answer. But But anyway, yes. And I realised there was the one other area that Shona raised, but actually, it's rather similar. I think that yes, I've had a discussion or a sort of discussion, through email with John Clark about some of these things. about there being whereas I, I think I would say yes, that notion of fluidity multiplicity and all the rest of it is absolutely, theoretically important, right. But in the same way, that within political movements, despite of all all, the difficulties around this, sometimes, you need a bit of strategic essentialism, sometimes you need to stop things in order to push forward a bit. But you have to, you have to strategic essentialism, for those who haven't heard of that, is the idea that if you if you are part of a particular group, say a women's group, and you're fighting against Women Against Violence, that there comes a point in time, where you might have to really not simplify but reduce your, your strategies to focus on gender and violence and nothing else, right? In order to kind of move forward, right? Even though this might be a way of essentializing, who you are, and not being open, not having your borders open to all sorts of different people by arguing that I'm not incidentally, arguing about the recent gender criticism, sort of argue I'm not arguing about that. But but sometimes it is necessary to kind of stop and say what you think is relevant here and now, right? Even though you're saying it's all changing at the same time, I think in orders, because you can, you can go round and round in circles too much. If you're right Getting any way that you have to can. And also I find when I'm writing, I only know what I think when I've written it so and that that process in itself is like halting things. And that process of Oh, right. So this is what I think. Now I can move on to expand that or to question it or something. The other thing I wanted to come back to was that Shona had said, about if you if you were to open up to deliberative democratic dialogues, right, and involve the floor, reverse causality involve everybody. It would be and power would be dispersed by the by this plurality of different acknowledging different views and everything. And there again, you see, I think there's a constant tension. I mean, in the discussion that I have about intersectional dialogues. I say that, that the awful tension is that these are urgent, you know, these are needed urgently, that we need to develop these solidarities across difference urgently, we need to get on with it. But at the same time, these things take time. You know, it's a, it's a really difficult thing. If we're going to do these things properly, they take time. And I think that's one of the kind of real political difficulties at the moment is that, you know, we need to move on. But at the same time, we need to respect where people are at.

**Rachael Dobson** 51:40

Thank you. Thank you, Fiona. And I thank you so much for sort of engaging with the spirit of, of what we're sort of trying to do here, which is to just think and learn and think and learn together. So so thank you for just want to take a moment to say thank you for doing that. And joining in with that. So generously. Should we move to seeing if anybody else has any thoughts? I mean, I know Steve. Hi, Steve, you've put that question in the chat. And perhaps if anybody else has any questions, then you know, we can get the microphones on you don't just have to confine any questions. So the chat if, if anybody has a question for Fiona, or, indeed anything else that's been discussed or just a reflection, then please do speak up. You'd be very welcome. I can't see anybody's face. I'm afraid. So I'm just relying on people turning microphones off. Hi, Steve.

**Steve Iafrati** 52:43

Right. Yeah. My microphone on for a minute. Firstly, Fiona, thank you so much. That was really interesting. And shown anyone who says I love Birmingham that's just made my afternoon. So there you go. Yeah, I just sort of wondering because one of the things I'm really sorry, I can't remember if it was your writing Fiona or the article did recently Coretta Phillips, we talked about micro, macro meso and micro levels. I think they actually just corrected, but I can't remember sorry, should really before came here. And I just don't think that's the thing about the epistemic fallacies, really. But I think if we're not careful, we get to experience and we just almost use those experiences as a way of explaining that this is what's important. And, and I think my own research about food banks is about well, as if I'm honest, I think there's too much research looking at the experience of food banks. And that almost explains what the problem is. And that isn't what the problem is. They're just a symptom of a broader problem. I think there is something important about recognising that that bigger picture, I suppose really. So I mean, Shona doesn't have to answer my question by the way. I was really just thinking, thinking in the chat as much as anything.

**Fiona Williams** 54:04

Do you want to go Shona?

**Shona Hunter** 54:06

Oh, would it okay, do you want to go first? I can go definitely but muted Fiona. Okay, I'll go, I'll go. Well, no, I mean. I'm trying to think about how, how. So I'm going to respond from my point of view, because I actually think my point of view and Fiona's, I don't think they're different, necessarily, but I think we might I think this relates to my middle out point, which is another way in which I understand experience. So I think this very much I think, the notion of the fallacy issue and experiential fallacy, actually, is a question that, that that implies and you might disagree, Steve, you know, But implies that experience is qualitatively and quantitatively, or sizely. I don't know whether that works, but what different than systems. And I think that I think it's the qualitative difference actually, that that is at stake there. Because where you are in a, in a system, where you are in a person depends on the location within a broader set of relations for me. So one of the, this might not be helpful because there's a lot overlayed in this in the writing here. But one of the articles that I find most helpful for really getting me to think about how world systems are enacted in the person in the relationship. Oh, God, I'm forgetting now. 2010 Maria Lugones, the decolonialality of feminism or fit, I can't even remember it's basically a state, a statement of decolonial feminist theorising and the point that she she is making there is that scale depends on where you are in a system. Now, all of that kind of abstract thinking, is really important in relation to, for me anyway, to getting us to think differently about what it means to have an experience. So I take your I think the point that you're making Steven, I might be miss reading it, but it relates to the kind of this issues around responsibility and systems thinking and where the problems in a system actually are. Right. So for the food, I don't know which work you're talking about in relation to the food banks, but I know what you mean, like the experience of engaging with a food bank, or the experience of engaging with, with anything in the world that might be problematic if we reduce the issue to one of individual experience rather than a system, artefact, inequality, death, whatever thing we're looking at, not having enough food or, or not being serviced? Well, all the structures of food banks not working or that so the point for me, I'm not answering I'm kind of going on a bit now. But the point for me really is about how we understand the relationship or how we understand experience. And there is something there about the location within a system. So I don't know what you think for yet, because I don't know, I can never work out if we agree or don't, but I think you're better at it. You're so much like better of me and helpful for me in thinking about systems. So a lot of for me, that's, I don't know. So anyway, that's a very kind of scattered way of responding to what I think is an important kind of set of issues that's raised in that question, Steve, and then in Fiona's book, obviously.

**Fiona Williams** 57:53

Yeah, yes. Am I on? Yes. I think I mean, I have a certain sympathy with the question you ask Steve. Because, I mean, I also think that along with the other turns that I described in social policy, there has been a turn and I don't think your work is like this Shona, because you contextualise your experiential work in a much broader set of, of social relations of power. But, but what I mean, in being sent lots of articles to read for, for the journals, I find that there's a lot of closely observed work. But what it fails to do is to kind of situate it and in the meaning of that in a broader context, and it, it, it restricts that the meaning to the meaning for the people who are interviewed, and even the, the researcher, you know, I just want to say, Oh, come on, come on, you know, and in a way, I hope, if I've done anything in my book, I've encouraged people to kind of just think about the frame, the broader frame that they might be doing that very detailed work, because I do believe in that detailed work, you know, but unless you can relate those answers that people give about food banks, to the wider discourses to other things, you know, it's kind of it can get get lost, I think. So, all I have to say, I mean, you know, when I've read the sort of work that both of you Shona, and Rachael produce, you know, I can think, oh, there's all that detail, you know, and I haven't looked at I mean, not in this book, I haven't looked at that detail, but I did, I have done bits of research which have looked at that detail. And even then I found myself drawn to, to the the to place it within a a very big backdrop. And that's the way I kind of deal deal with it. I think

**Rachael Dobson** 1:00:08

there's also, I mean, just just coming to that, I think that one of the interesting things, yeah, I mean, for me, the only work, it really precisely thinks about locatedness. You know, and very, very much so very explicitly, so you speak to what it means to be located. And I feel like that if I think about your work over time, that that's, that's such a kind of consistency that you do sometimes very, very, very explicitly. You know, for example, I know I keep on going on about it, but maybe it's because I've been using it so much recently, but that Social Politics article, the 95 article, you do speak so explicitly about what it means to be located. And I think that possibly one of the issues that we're talking about here, and not everybody here may be, you know, intimately engaged in it in the way that perhaps the four of us who are having this conversation are, but you know, it is the kind of problematic of agency structure, that kind of dog social policy, and its resistance, I think, in in terms of engaging with what constitutes agency, what constitutes structure in any kind of either meaningful and mature, but also kind of intellectually really, really rich sense. And so, you know, perhaps that's a kind of wider and bigger conversation. But I'm really mindful that I'm saying all of that, but also, dashing on to somebody else. Amy has had a hand up for a while. So Amy, can we come to you? Do you want to put your microphone and camera on? Hi, hello,

**Amy** 1:01:40

um, I have several questions. But I'm going to stick to one. The one that struck me, I'm really interested in intersectionality theory. And I was really interested in the way that you were drawing on intersectionality theory to bring it together with critical social policy. But then it seemed i You made me sit up actually, at a point when you talked about the intersections of those different forms of crises, you know, the financial crisis, the care crisis, and I thought to myself, gosh, that's, that's a different way to understand intersectionality. So I thought maybe you could say something a little bit about how this book is contributing towards intersectionality theory, because that felt that felt like a different way to understand it. Yes. Oh, thanks for that question. Great question.

**Fiona Williams** 1:02:25

Because I don't, I only draw attention, I think in the final chapter of the book, to the way that I have gone out of step in my use of intersectionality. And it relates in a way to the point I made earlier, which is that one of the limitations, I think of intersectionality is that it's very, it's located, you know, in the local law, or the national and, and I wanted to use those ideas to show that it's not just people, you know, it's institutions, its policies, it's it, this is a useful concept for us to look at something which is global, actually, in order to understand not not to determine that people themselves are caught in these intersections. But to explain that context in which things relate to each other. And that things are not stable, you know, they're kind of criss crossing all the time, that policies criss cross with other policies, you know, and so even in social policy to kind of a social policy is divided up into looking at education, health, personal social services, even that doesn't capture the way that people live their lives, and the way that that governance happens at different levels. So I do spell it out a bit in relation to using intersectionality. In the chapter that I do on the transnational migration of care, I spell out the different ways in which I'm using intersectionality at the level of personal relationships between the migrant care and the person that they're caring for. And then I say, but actually, they're operating in a context in which that care, that care practice is affected by migration rules, it's affected by care policies, it's affected by employment policies as well. And there is an intersection of those that that captures them, but at a wider level, there are these global crises, you know, the crisis of of care, where women from the global south have to seek work elsewhere, combined with the difficulties they have in migrating elsewhere, you know, there are these crises which intersect in their lives. So So yes, I mean, I'm I'm glad that you you saw that, and at some point, I hope I can, I can write more about how I think that intersectionality can be used. I mean, I, I was kind of slightly worried that people would say, you know, this isn't intersectionality but but anyway, I struck a path and, and that's it.

**Amy** 1:05:21

That's brilliant. Thank you, I will look out for more writings about how you think intersectionality should be used.

**Rachael Dobson** 1:05:28

Just reflecting on how helpful that that conversation there is really for, you know, returning to that sense of kind of movement, you know, that, that, that that that really is what the kind of application of an intersectional kind of lens does, I think, for me it for me, within within the book, and it has, it really connects them thinking about Tess Lea's most recent book Wild Policy that very, very explicitly through the concept of policy ecology, thinks about that, you know, that kind of refuses the singularity of policy analysis. And perhaps that's, you know, if I reflect on some of Steve's comments there, that that is what this book, but also, you know, again, your your body of work has done Fiona, which is a resistance to singularity, whether it's, you know, the singular focus on the agentic experience, or the singular focus on kind of the mid the big macro kind of regime analysis, which has a singularity to it, you know, that was that was sort of the point for me of, of when you were reflecting on that earlier. And of course, if we, you know, the the kind of frustration that I think that you can feel when you're kind of reading social policy and welfare analysis, but it just feels so singular in its focus in a way that just is unreal, like it has an unreal oneness, like it doesn't, it doesn't actually, it's just not what people experience. You know, I mean, that I mean that in a very material way. So, yeah, so that that, Amy, I'm really glad that you kind of pushed that point forward. Because I think for me, I didn't quite make that explicit connection there. You know, and, of course, it is a strong feature of the book. Yeah. Showing what are you thinking something can see your face thinking something?

**Shona Hunter** 1:07:24

Well, yeah, I was I was just and it does, it does relate to this question of Steve's again, you know, I think and again, it's this issue of scale is so important, it really, you know, I can't think of anybody else that does it in another sort, maybe like some of the American theories that you actually introduced me to Fiona like, I'm showing her all are for these sorts of it, you know, that that? Oh, what is it? The modernity book? I can't I can't remember what it's called, can you rethinking modernity or re theorising? Let me get it because? Because then people will be able to remaking modernity, their system, isn't it this? Good? You remember? Yeah. But these bits, but that's, again, is like a rethinking of institutional theory, isn't it? You know, and, and actually, they begin people like Gail Lewis, but But what I was thinking was, it's so interesting, and it's interesting to hear you respond to what I was saying, Fiona? Because I think people read my work in two different ways, almost. And it's almost like there's a refusal to bring it together at the end. And I'm not talking about you here. But I'm just I think that's, you know, that's a personal reflection on how my work is received. But I think it relates to this, what people's capacities are. No, that's not fair. But what am I trying to say? It's something about how our analyses are split often. And I think this plays into the governmental, the set of governmental issues that you're reminding us about in relation to crisis. You know, it's thinking about one of my pieces, that's totally like, I don't know whether anyone reads it, but nobody cites it, but it is so about the way it's the relational choreography one, so it's not the one that you've read, it's probably again, you know, probably the only people that have read it, people interested in The Empire Strikes Back or the police or whatever, because it's a really kind of intimate engagement with my own relationships to the state, but it is about scale. It's about understanding the scale and the relationship between all of these things. So I don't know what um, yeah, I just think this is I think it's exciting. I do think it's exciting. You know, I think, and I What sorry, I'm just going to what I also love is it's the global analysis, I don't mean that you're necessarily always doing it, but you open that out in a different way. And there is something about movement. And again, this question that Amy was asking My reading of it around the intersectionality stuff, you know, I mean, one of the things I used to do at least on the governing cultures course, was I used to use your first book as a way of getting people to think about coloniality. And how the state, the the English or British welfare state is not constructed for itself. It's constructed, in a sense as a mode of global domination, you know, it's part of that process. So sorry that some went on, again, a bit there. But we kind of haven't really even talked about the imperialism aspect of export.

**Fiona Williams** 1:10:43

No, well, it might come in on on that.

**Rachael Dobson** 1:10:47

You may, you may, Fiona, that will be very helpful, because actually, I was thinking about that about 20 minutes ago. So I have no thoughts on that.

**Fiona Williams** 1:10:56

Well, as I mentioned, in my talk, that I've written something recently, which is in the British Journal of Sociology, the current edition, and a number of us were asked to respond to Gurminder Bhambra's very, very interesting article on how basically, to cut it short how the British welfare state from its origins, particularly from the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20, know that the welfare reforms in the first decade of the 20th century, were, in fact financed through colonial taxation. And not only were they financed through colonial taxation, but that process of taxing in the colonies never gave anything back to the colonies, but it, placed it back with the government, in Britain. And, and I have used that to look at what I think are two, it's interesting, in relation to your whiteness, I think, work in relation to, to kind of almost like counter movements over the 20th and 21st century, as far as welfare is concerned. And one is the how policies like that. And, of course, at the time, you know, there was much rejoicing that that, you know, we were a big Imperial country that was able to, to fund, you know, old age pensions and everything else, not that if you are a refugee, you could get an old age pension. And so this there is through the development of the 20th and 21st century, the reproduction of white privilege, to social rights and social norms as well, you know, that, that that is incorporated in different ways at different times, through the mountains or off the site. But at the same time, I argue that there's been this domestic colonialism, you know, the colonialism brought back to the welfare state, which has dominated. And actually, it's the techniques of domestic colonialism, which have not only affected minority racialized groups, but they've also been applied to those groups who are who are marginalised through other means, right? And I show the different ways. And my, my contemporary example, of course, is how those external bordering practices are brought in, and not only applied through Windrush and everything, but applied to disabled people, you know, that those same techniques. So I think that what I'm trying to do, and I think that Robbie Shilliam does a similar thing. And I have to say that these ideas, a lot of them, were inspired by an ad in el el neon, his work on bordering Britain. But I think that that means that it kind of destroys the binaries around racialization, you know, because some people get racialized, almost, who are white, who are white marginal characters, and I think, to show that to show that more closely, I mean, I've stepped sketched out a kind of frame of looking at that, but I think to show that is quite an important kind of political development in a way and Social Policy.

**Rachael Dobson** 1:14:47

Yeah. Well, what are you thinking Shona

**Shona Hunter** 1:14:51

See, I'm just, I know I totally I just love this actually. Because you do make me better Fiona. Just you know I feel emotionally that you make me better, because I totally like I haven't read the new the new stuff in the current sociology. I get intensely frustrated actually about like I love the Shilliam book as well. I think Robbie Shilliam is that the New Poor or is it the New Poor, it's a really good book Gurminder Bhambra's work is really important. There's another one as well, this guy had not come across him before. But here you go the Empire at home James Trafford, I don't don't know where that of you know, so I'm giving loads of people plugs today anti foot. But you know what, I get so frustrated because I'm like this, how much work in this area? And it's not, it does frustrate me that it's not engaged within quite the sort of way. You know, maybe that's just my little love letters in my head, you know, but, but I do think there's something about his relationship to feminist theory, and feminist theorising, I have to say, and I do think it's something to do with a bit the question that came up from Steve, again, it's, there is something people are willing. And actually maybe it's about our distancing and our ability or our desire to distance from something, we're happy to do historical sweeps, but when we're reaching out can see the, you know, the, but when it's about us, like and our relations, those historical sweeps, I think academics generally not all the time, you know, but get a little bit. Oh, and I think, again, to come back to the book, you know, this is the thing, you never theorise without the multi layers, you'll never writing without the multi layers, there might be a bigger emphasis at different points. And actually, again, you know, talk it Rachael's work the same hopefully, my what, you know, this, this is what this, some people are really trying to and it's important to do that to keep those things together, I think because it does do that challenge. But anyway, yeah, so there's a plug again, for the

**Rachael Dobson** 1:18:47

Yeah, well, I think. I mean, there's so much to say. And obviously we you know, we're gonna continue a conversation, the three of us in a bit, but I think that where we've landed, I think what's interesting about these kinds of events is that actually right now, I feel like what right, we're ready to go, you know, it's like it that I also think so. In other words, okay, now we're in the richness of a conversation. And now there's so much you know, that we could all say and want to say, that hasn't been said already. And I think a fair amount has been said already. I think also that feeling speaks to the richness of your work Fiona, both in relation to its historic kind of the your engagement with the historic your engagement with the global and the let that your capacity to think and write in a way that is, you know, this word layered has been used. So if, if, if I'm saying I feel like we're getting to the point of oh my goodness, there's so much I'm thinking about now and there's so much kind of percolating I think that very much speaks to, you know, your body of work and how you do the work that you do. And so, yeah, that's my sort of final reflection for the minute I think. And thank you very much for taking part in this first session. So obviously a straightforward Thank you Fiona. Yeah. Shona. Any final thoughts? You done? shown us done, Fiona? Any final thoughts?

**Fiona Williams** 1:20:19

Yes. Well, one was an incidental thought. But what I want to say is thank you very much. I mean, you No one writes these things on one's own, and sort of cries over them and all the rest of it. And so to feel that it's gone into the outside world, and people have got something from it is just so rewarding, you know. So thank you, thank you very much, both for your comments. But also, for setting up an occasion like this, it is wonderful to me, you know, I live on my own and locked down, just, you know, I didn't have these conversations, you know, I wrote away and didn't have the conversations. And so it's lovely, even if I'm having now. There's just an incidental comment, actually, when I read Shona, your article, about decolonial ethics and care. I, I was, I was struck with guilt when I read your phrase, relational choreography, and I thought, Oh, my God, I should have, I should have put that into chapter, which, whenever it is five on agency, it should have gone in there. Because it is a kind of different way of I mean, I talk a bit about Brick Lane, which I don't know whether you've read the Brick Lane stuff. I mean, very, very interesting, I think. But it is a kind of different perspective on on the sorts of issues that that the collage people are trying to develop as well. And so it's just an idea that, you know, a discussion between vicarage and, and relational choreography would be quite interesting.

**Shona Hunter** 1:22:06

Yeah, I know there is more to do there for sure.

**Rachael Dobson** 1:22:10

Yes, and I can feel myself sort of revving up for more thoughts. So my, but my thinking is, shall we? Let's call it to a close here. For now, I'm sure this won't be the end of our thinking together, of course. So let's just, perhaps let's call it to a close today. Thank you very much for everybody who has stayed from the very beginning, right to the very end.