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Regendering governance in times of austerity: dilemmas of research, theory and politics

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**Re-gendering governance in times of austerity:
dilemmas of feminist theory, politics and practice.**

Janet Newman

Chapter for the proposed volume 'Missing in action': gender, power and governance',
ed Hudson, C, Techtsoonian,, K. and Rönnblom,, M. pp 26-48.

It is now widely acknowledged that austerity is bad for women. But, this paper argues, the gendering of austerity is multifaceted. It can be understood not only as the effects of welfare retrenchment and cuts on women (policy) but also as governmentality; as ideology. The paper traces the contours of each, and goes onto highlight the dilemmas created for feminist theory, politics and practice.

Introduction

A decade ago I was writing about the disappearance of gender from analyses of politics and power (e.g. Newman 2005). I noted how the 'Third Way' politics in Britain and other nations drew feminist scholars and activists into new relationships with governments – with positive results in terms of childcare strategies, policy reform on pensions and benefits policies, investment in health, housing and schooling. But I also noted how gender tended to disappear from political discourse: feminism was assumed to have been successful and was thus yesterday's agenda (McRobbie, 2009). The consensus governance approach of the Third Way, with its emphasis on partnerships and participation, while apparently sympathetic to women, also squeezed the spaces of feminist politics (Newman 2001).

The picture today is very different. The reassertion of gender as an analytical category and material dimension of power is becoming increasingly urgent as governments across Europe - and beyond – are engaged in shrinking the state, curbing inward migration and imposing 'austerity governance' as the contemporary face of neoliberalism. The consequences for women are profound. But rather than simply listing consequences, in this chapter I trace different approaches to gendering austerity. Following Wendy Larner's (2000) important work on neoliberalism, show how austerity can be understood not only as policy (the effects of austerity policies

on women) but also as ideology and as governmentality. Together these suggest mutually reinforcing elements of austerity as a highly gendered political project., raising a series of dilemmas for feminist scholars and activists which I discuss in the final section.

It is usual to write chapters such as this by setting out long and careful analysis of the regimes of power and their malign consequences, tracing a narrative of closure around neoliberalism, austerity and other bad things before, in the final paragraphs, mentioning the possibility of resistance. Here I want to reverse that process by briefly highlighting examples of how women are shaping responses to austerity. Some reflect grassroots projects, while others tackle structural inequalities. And they are from a diverse range of contexts. I make no apology for this rather random selection: indeed, as the paper proceeds I show they can be mapped within some of the conceptual frameworks offered.

I begin with what was, at the time of writing, a successful series of protests against threats to displace women from their homes in the context of rising concerns on the left about the spiraling and highly profitable redevelopment of London for a global housing market. In December 2014 a group of working class mothers (the Focus E15 group) living in Newham occupied the flats in which they lived to protest against imminent evictions by a private landlord, and to demand rehousing by the local authority. They won a victory in the courts and a commitment from the authorities to house homeless people in the flats. This was followed by a series of protests by women living on the New Era housing estate in Hoxton, whose homes were about to be purchased by property developers. After huge pressure and a campaign that was taken up in the national press, the developers sold the estate to a charitable foundation (Guardian 18/12/14). Both protests brought the perverse consequences of a privatised and deregulated housing market to public attention in the face of a range of austerity measures by the then Coalition government.

The second example also concerns women's responses to some aspects of welfare policies. It comes from Catherine Kingfisher's study of 'welfare mothers' living in poverty in two contrasting sites (Aotearoa, New Zealand and in Alberta, Canada. In both, poor single mothers were 'subjects of state interference designed to alter who they were as persons' (Kingfisher, 2013: 141). As such they were subject to

discursive patterns based on stigmatising framings of welfare recipients. But these discursive patterns were subject to processes of translation by both welfare workers and by the mothers themselves. Her research shows, for example, how the women in her studies navigated – and exploited - the tensions between neoliberal and neoconservative prescriptions: the former requiring that they adopt identities as independent worker-citizens, the latter focusing on their role as primary caregivers and dependent housewives.

The third example reflects women's roles in meeting the gaps and reversals in welfare provision and public services. The intensification of care work is an obvious concern, as is the failed policy promoting the so-called 'Big Society'. But the example I have chosen here is a report by the New Economics Foundation (NEF 2015). While not explicitly about women, this report traces the work that takes place in highly gendered spaces: community groups, local government, housing associations, voluntary sector groups and campaigning organizations. The report nicely maps responses to austerity in three categories. The first, 'adapting', shows how such organizations and groups have attempted to support people most affected by austerity by, for example, providing advice services, and by reallocating funding to support free school meals services, credit unions and other developments. 'Challenging' includes publicizing evidence about the consequences of austerity, challenging private landlords and other businesses exploiting hardship, and seeking to influence future government policy. The third category, 'Imagining', centres on innovative experiments that prefigure possible ways of rethinking politics, public and welfare services in the future – including cooperative, coproduction and entrepreneurial responses.

Finally I want to point to the work of feminist academics and policy experts who analyse and publicise the gendered consequences of austerity in the UK. The Women's Budget Group (www.wbg.org) conducts a gender impact assessment of every budget statement by the Treasury in the UK. It also offers guidance on gender responsive budgeting; updates about legislation on the equality duty of public bodies; changes in social security and other issues. Its careful research not only monitors government action and intentions, but also offers informal policy advice to

government and shows how gender auditing can be conducted by other public and private organizations. For a recent example of its work, see the paper 'Poverty in the UK: the need for a gender perspective' (www.wbg.org.uk/gender-and-poverty-briefing-june-2015-pdf).

In what follows I want to suggest a way of mapping these developments onto a framework developed by Wendy Larner for analysing the multiplicities and ambiguities of neoliberalism. Larner (2000) argues that it is important not to view neoliberalism as a single unassailable force sweeping all before it, but to distinguish between neoliberalism as policy, as ideology and as governmentality. She argues that 'this delineation of different interpretations of neoliberalism is not simply an academic exercise: our understanding of the phenomenon shapes the scope and content of possible interventions' (2000: 5). At a simple level we might point to the Women's Budget Group, New Era and E15 groups as being concerned with policy; the mothers given voice by Catherine Kingfisher as resisting some elements of neoliberal ideology; and the NEF study offering interventions around questions of governmentality. Of course most of the interventions work across these categories, but I nevertheless want to use the framework for developing my arguments about gender and austerity.

Austerity as policy

Austerity is conducted, at root, through economic policy. The social policies that women have fought for over many decades, and that women as policy actors, professionals and public sector workers have delivered, are now subordinated to the primacy of debt reduction and state retrenchment. The analysis of austerity policy as gendered, then, inevitably focuses on the effect of cuts and how these disadvantage women in particular. What follows is an inevitably depressing iteration of consequences.

There is a great deal of evidence on which to draw in the UK, documented by in official reports, and the findings of think tanks, NGOs, campaigning organizations, feminist economists, journalists and other sources. For example '*A fair deal for women*', an umbrella organization of 11 women's rights charities, was published as the new Conservative government of 2015 launched its legislative programme. It warned that the UK risked widening gender equality because of the disproportionate impact of austerity policies on women. (Guardian 28/5/15). The London School of

Economics published a research report '*Social Policy in a Cold Climate*' in January 2015, outlining the Coalition government's record on policy, spending and outcomes. The Institute of Fiscal Studies and the Fawcett Society, supported by the Women's Budget Group, produces a gender impact analysis of the government's tax and benefit changes at each budget.

Together these highlight worsening resources for care, education, health, the impoverishment of communities, the reduction or removal of benefits, changes to pension entitlements, all coupled with the demand that women take their place as full worker citizens. O'Hara (2014) draws on data from a range of sources to show how inequality between the richest and poorest is increasing sharply, and divisions of class, race, gender and other axes of difference are intensifying. She traces the effects of UK austerity policies on the material conditions of life – the relationship between prices, wages and benefits, the rise of personal debt, the erosion of support for those out of work, people with disabilities, the effects of cuts on women, homeless people, and those reliant on social care services.

Viewing austerity through a gendered perspective matters since the focus of dominant critiques of the effects of austerity tend to centre on issues of production and consumption; as Pearson and Elson (2015) argue, the sphere of *reproduction* is often omitted. Austerity tends to generate a withdrawal of or significant cuts to state support for childcare, out-of-school provision, family support and the care of the frail elderly. This has different consequences for women depending on class, affluence and closeness to family and neighbourhood support networks: many middle class women solve the care gap by purchasing the services of other women. These may work in the formal or informal economy, but are often migrants working apart from their own families, thus stretching care crises across the globe (REF).

However cuts to care and other services do not represent a simple policy of withdrawal: as Lonergan (2015) argues, UK policy on social reproduction has been paradoxical: 'The Coalition Government [2010-15] has taken a significant interest in social reproduction as a means of creating the next generation of 'good' neoliberal citizens; yet, the current austerity measures involve the withdrawal of state support for social reproduction activities' (2015: 124). Her powerful ethnographic study of women in Sheffield and Manchester shows that the government has shown a particular interest in the social reproduction activities of ethnic minority migrant women 'because of the concern that they will be unable to produce 'good' neoliberal

citizens' (2015: 124). Similar arguments can be made about government concern about the reproduction activities of benefit claimants, single mothers, homeless women and others, all of whom are the focus of both policies of support and control. However, as I go on to argue, such policies are buttressed by ideological depictions of the 'good' mother, and stigmatising practices that render many women the subject of abuse and neglect.

Developing analytical frameworks that link policies on production and reproduction, and identifying their compound effects, matters since the gendered costs of care, unpaid household labour and women's role in the informal economy tend not to feature in statistical representations of the consequences of austerity. However some studies have attempted to work across these different axes. For example in the UK the Fawcett Society (2012) shows how women face a 'triple jeopardy'. First, given that the public sector was disproportionately staffed by women – at the front line, in the professions, in administration and support services, and in contracted services (cleaning, catering, care agencies etc) – so women have been hardest hit by cuts to public service jobs wages and pensions. Second, women, as the primary users of many state services and benefits are most strongly affected by cuts in welfare and public services, from children's services to rape crisis centres and women's refuges. Third, it is women who tend to fill the gaps opening up as state services are withdrawn – though unpaid labour in the home, in voluntary work and in community provision.

But as the study by Kingfisher cited earlier shows, this intensification of unpaid work takes place in the context of significant ideological and material pressures to take on paid work, and the reduction in incomes, processes of contractualisation and other labour market changes results in many women taking on multiple, insecure and low paid jobs, taking out 'pay day' loans at high interest rates, and becoming further mired in debt. But it is not only women in poverty who experience disadvantageous shifts in paid work. The spatial stretching of work as a result of digital technology blurs the boundaries between public and private space with significant consequences for women. Gregg's analysis of gendered analyses of 'immaterial labour' (Gregg 2011) has important implications for the changing politics of domestic and personal lives. Conceptions of work and care, then, are constituted through the relational dynamics of economic production as well as production.

Despite some transnational resonances (for example those traced by Kingfisher, cited in the Introduction) it is important to note that the meanings and practices of austerity vary across nation states, and the consequences for women depend not only on the characteristics of different national economies (the extent, for instance, of the state sector) but also on the varying roles of women in production and reproduction. Even within the UK the consequences for women have varied, being more intense in the north than the south of England, and in England rather than Scotland and Wales, both of which retained a stronger commitment to state provision. But beyond this spatial variation, the impact of austerity also varies across different classes and categories of women. It has struck most hard at those who were already most vulnerable: those in greatest poverty, those with unclear citizenship status, those with the greatest care responsibilities, those with disabilities or suffering from ill health, those responsible for the care of others. For example for migrant women their experience of cuts in support services and welfare state retrenchment is overlaid on the pernicious effects of shifts in immigration policy. Black and ethnic minority women are particularly affected since they are more likely to be living in poverty, to have been working in the public sector, to receive a higher proportion of their income from benefits and tax credits, and are more likely to confront racialised forms of discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market (Sandhu and Stephenson, 2015). Women caring for children, disabled family members or elderly parents were adversely affected by cuts in health and social care provision, often coupled with increasing poverty as wages fell and welfare benefits were cut. Women struggling with their own ill health or disability are disadvantaged not only by the loss of income but also by problems of accessing professional support and the loss of local services provided by voluntary and community sectors.

Here Elena Vachelli (2015) offers a gendered perspective on the impact of austerity on women's voluntary organisations. She examines the combined effect of the cuts and the localism agenda on women's grassroots organisations, showing how this has jeopardised their ability to provide essential services to women in vulnerable positions. Support services and refuges are suffering cuts in funding in many cases closing as grants and contracts from local authorities – themselves under intense financial pressure – are cut. (Walby and Tower, nd; Women's Resource Centre 2013). It was reported in August 2015 that none of the 46 Rape Crisis centres in England and Wales had secure funding beyond March 2016, despite a 50% increase in the number of victims receiving support and a sharp rise in calls to helplines (Guardian 112/08/15, p1). This matters since financial problems have tended to

exacerbate violence and other forms of domestic abuse. In Greece Carastathis examines the impact of austerity on violence, linking the politics of austerity to the 'affective economy of hostility that articulates gendered and racialised modes of belonging and estrangement' (Carastathis 2015).

The effects of austerity are, then, cumulative rather than linear. While much of the analysis focuses on the financial costs of austerity for women, the compound effects of different policy shifts can only be understood through ethnographic studies that depict the personal consequences of 'living in fear and dread': struggling to comply with the inflexible demands of the workfare regime, with the consequences of cuts to social care and welfare benefits, with hard choices about how to feed and clothe a family. The result is the rise of self-hatred, mental strain, suicide attempts and sheer hopelessness. Despite some evidence of new political movements resisting austerity and its consequences, the wounds in the fabric of personal and social life will not be easily healed whatever the prospects for future economic growth might be.

As the state retreats from making and enacting social policy, so an analysis of policy, however important, might not tell the whole story. In the next section I trace the importance of considering how legitimacy for austerity is buttressed by ideologies with particular gendered consequences.

Austerity as ideology.

Austerity is predicated in a separation of the economic from other domains of social life, and rendering it as super-ordinate to them. Clarke addresses 'the heterogeneous forms in which lives, relationships, social formations are imagined as 'fundamentally' economic – and what is at stake in, and excluded from, such imaginings' (Clarke 2014 p. 3). This primacy of the economic works to render social and welfare questions, matters of sustainability, care, community, well-being and solidarity as subordinate, as residual. It seeks to reassert financial power and restore the credibility of the banking sector by placing blame for the 'crisis' elsewhere (on past governments, on greedy home owners, on nations which fail to deal with their debt burden and so on). In a similar way the language of crisis can be viewed as a 'technique of everyday governance' that frames problems and poses solutions in a particular way (Griffin 2015). As such it serves to turn attention away from inequality: the problem is defined as one of public debt (and the search for blame) rather than of social inequality and cohesion. A return to growth is depicted as both the ultimate

goal of nation states, and as the primary measure of the success of national economies. This re-valorisation of growth serves to erase the possibility of alternative rationalities of sustainability and other 'green' agendas rather than a continuation – indeed intensification – of hyper-consumerism.

This is a profoundly gendered ideology, one that foregrounds masculine – even macho - imagery of rugged, striving and thrusting endeavour (of nations, economies, governments and corporations, as well as citizens). But these images are articulated with a different set of gendered ideologies. Austerity is predicated on a *moral* economy. It valorises self-discipline and prudence (rather Victorian female virtues) and notions of responsibility and ethical conduct. This was very evident in the brief promulgation of notions of a Big Society in the UK. This was an idea that was attractive to many women, even though it implicated them in the responsibility not only to work but also to provide for the welfare of self and others (rather than relying on 'outdated' and unsustainable forms of state welfare). It was rapidly dropped from political speeches and papers since it attracted little political support within the Conservative party. However austerity remains a profoundly moral idea. It speaks to, and helps constitute, ethical subjects, all pulling together to solve the problem of unsustainable welfare states. Muehlebach (2012), writing about Italy, argues that neoliberalism requires, and seeks to constitute, compassionate, ethical and feeling citizens; what she terms 'moral neoliberals':

The subject I am interested in performs two kinds of labors of care at once: it feels (*cares about*) and acts (*cares for*) at the same time. This subject is one that the state and many other social actors... imagine to be animated by affect rather than intellect, by the capacity to feel and act upon those feelings rather than rational deliberation and action. (2012: 8).

The idea of moral neoliberalism, she argues, valorises feminised forms of work that the state no longer provides, thus mediating the effects of its own withdrawal. But the sentimental image of community, morality, care and solidarity also provide an anti-capitalist imagery that serves to buttress neoliberal rule. That is, neoliberalism seeks to colonise alternative rationalities, appropriating concepts from social and moral discourses so that economic, business and growth imperatives gain a surface legitimacy.

The ideology of austerity is not just a matter of ideas; as a discourse it works through affective registers, seeking to elicit feelings of mutuality, fairness and responsibility. But it has a darker side, resulting in new politics of hatred and rage (Newman

forthcoming), or what Ahmed (2004) terms an 'affective economy of hostility'. This marks a political culture produced by the bombardment of negativity for job seekers, the demonization of benefit claimants, the division of citizens into 'skivers and strivers' and so on. Women's relationship to citizenship is ambiguous (Roseneil 2013); they are sometimes ideologically positioned as part of the people and at others as 'other', requiring different strategies of governing. This ambiguous citizenship status is not unrelated to the ways in which the differential impact of cuts on women has resulted in little protest or dissent among the wider population.

Austerity as governmentality

Here I want to focus not on the direct consequences of policy but on the instruments through which it is realised. Governmental technologies and practices that appear gender-neutral, but that serve to reorder patterns of expertise and authority. The gendering here is ambiguous: the NEF report cited in the introduction surface a range of innovative technologies, many of which were developed by women in thinktanks, grassroots organisations, policy advice networks, local government, voluntary organisations and so on. And the research itself was conducted by a woman. But there is a hidden agenda in the discussion of renewal and innovation: that of economic development and alternative economic forms rather than a return to the state as provider. This can be set in the broader context of the privileging of financial calculation (Adkins, 2015). Such calculations have become highly technical, thus further removing financial such calculations from arenas of democratic politics. Austerity, in other words, heralds a privileging of technocratic governance: the manipulation of financial instruments and governing logics that are less than transparent. Such technologies serve to depoliticise the workings of governmental power by distancing them from mechanisms of voice, representation and accountability.

In an earlier paper (Newman 2012) I traced how governing processes and practices in the UK were being reordered through a series of apparently neutral and technical instruments: those of devolve, divest and design. Each promised greater diversity and other benefits. *Devolution* takes pace at different scales. Within the EU power is delegated to a range of governmental and non-governmental actors (NGOs, governance technocrats) creating a shrinking policy space over which national and local governments can have influence. For example after the crash of 2008 many nations within the Eurozone, each with nominal power to set and manage their own

budgets, were required to meet tight criteria of budgetary management in order to secure and maintain so called 'bail out' loans from the European Central Bank. This meant, in effect, that they had to impose their own austerity regimes and open up their budgetary practices to scrutiny by EU and European central bank officials.

Within nation states, imperatives to devolve power and authority are intensifying as governments seek to draw on capacities and realise assets beyond the state, especially at local level. Governmental rhetoric paints an attractive picture of local involvement, action and enterprise flourishing if the state gets out of the way – the Big State is depicted as a handicap and barrier rather than enabler and resource provider. This is a thesis that has been widely discredited (Alcock, 2012). But it has spawned a range of policies, from those promoting market mechanisms by opening up public services to competitive bids by 'any provider' to a programme of training 'community mobilisers' to promote local action. There is much to criticise here: notions of local community provision is not readily aligned with social and cultural diversity, and the valorisation of 'faith' providers (especially, but not only, of schools) opens up new challenges to those committed to a politics of gender or sexuality. The local can be a defensive space, turned in against itself against alien others, especially in conditions of austerity as poverty intensifies and increasing inequality gives rise to political disaffection and dissent.

As such, devolution is ambiguous in the outcomes it delivers. It may open up more local involvement, and enhance the focus on women as community actors and local mobilisers. However as power is devolved to local authorities to manage severely reduced resources, they are, in England and Wales, focusing budgets on core services, at the expense of grants to the voluntary and community sectors (see Vachelli, 2015, on the impact on the women's voluntary sector, discussed earlier in this paper). In addition local power may be severely constrained by the operation of centrally imposed financial systems and instruments, targets and accountability structures. For example in the UK while funding to local authorities became significantly squeezed, additional central government funding was made available through a 'Transformation Fund' that invited local authorities to bid for funds to 'fundamentally transform' the ways in which local services were delivered. In practice this required fundamental changes to ownership and accountability systems.

This takes me to the second governmental technology: that of *divest*. The dominant narratives for the last decades have centred on the shifting relationships between

state and market, the fate of the New Public Management and the rise of network governance. But divestment involves the stripping away of governing functions – not just service delivery - from the state itself. This includes new commissioning models in which commercial bodies and consultancy firms ‘manage’ the commissioning process on behalf of (nominally) public bodies. It involves the sale of public assets to non-state providers (under the ethos of creating a greater ‘diversity’ of suppliers, but usually leading to the consolidation of market power of a few international companies. Divestment leads to a proliferation of new models of organisation (trusts, academies, foundations) for formerly public services, especially schools and hospitals, again in the name of diversity and choice. Those commissioning services and setting contracts are subject to national legislation and guidelines, though these may be subject critique (as ‘red tape’) and amendment (as happened with the Public Sector Equality Duty in the UK: see www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk, accessed 11-3-15). More generally, as well as reducing accountability and opening up new forms of marketisation, such developments make it increasingly difficult to ‘steer’ policy from the centre. The intentions of Ministries charged with responsibility for women and equalities are limited in their power and scope, and any gender proofing of policy becomes restricted to policies over which the state retains direct responsibility. But more generally, divestment represents the creative destruction of a public realm – a realm predominantly staffed by, and largely benefiting, women, as well those they care for in families and communities.

The extent of divestment is somewhat masked by a third set of rationalities. The contemporary pre-eminence of *design* (in social systems as well as in architecture) is associated with the performance of a post-welfare economy based on knowledge intensive and creative industries. Some design work takes place in well-paid consultancies, some in think tanks, some in small-scale enterprises and some in universities (the latter increasingly seeking new forms of legitimacy by securing applications of their research to the world of practice). All promote the benefits of redesign over traditional policy planning models. Some use crowdsourcing methods or emphasise the value of coproduced design involving a local community or the users of a particular service. Others draw on experimental methods based on randomised control trials. All promise to both deliver extensive cost savings and better outcomes. But all involve a fundamental shift in hierarchies of power and expertise.

Together these developments suggest some of the ways in which austerity governance is taking shape beyond the big narratives of debt reduction and welfare cuts. They help surface some of the contradictions at stake as governments struggle to position themselves as efficient and prudent economic managers while retaining electoral support; that is between technocratic and politicised forms of governing. They each also challenge existing narratives of governance established before the financial crisis took shape. Narratives that looked beyond the New Public Management to models of network governance that privileged partnerships and participation (Newman 2010) now seem a little beside the point. In the UK, networks are being torn apart as governments pursue strategies of 'disintermediation', stripping away layers and returning services to their 'core business'. Inter-organisational partnerships are no longer a desirable norm; rather new configurations are emerging as organisations establish joint back office functions and call centres, while 'failing' organisations are becoming subject to take-over by those deemed to be successful. The language of partnership has been displaced by that of coproduction, with users and communities being involved in both the design and delivery of services, or taking over formerly public assets and services.

These new governmentalities are apparently gender neutral, but I want to suggest at least three consequences for women. First, while they involve forms of expertise that may open up new spaces of power and influence, they undermine the authority of those exercising traditional forms of professional expertise and discretion. As such they close many of the spaces in which women had worked as agents of change within state bureaucracies. Second, they also bypass democratic channels. Political accountability – the opportunities for representation and voice – tends to be weakened. As such the possibilities of women using representative channels to voice claims and influence policy has severely shrunk. This does not of course mean that democratic channels themselves are now closed to women; indeed in the UK the disproportionate numbers of women and men in parliament has become a matter of high visibility, and most of the main political parties are attempting to develop strategies to secure more women MPs. My point here however is not about the balance of male and female representatives, but the bypassing of political institutions as 'technocratic' governmentalities become dominant, and as governing becomes more a matter of making the 'right' calculations rather than an arena of political debate and judgement.

Third, women tend to be responsabilised as both economic and community actors. Feminist perspectives have brought into view the association between women's activism and micro sites or levels of governing: home, family, community and the everyday worlds of care and personal lives. Yet at the same time feminist work has shown how these same sites have been the focus of increasing governmental concern as governments seek to roll back state welfare while promoting a concern with everyday happiness and well being (Newman and Tonkens, 2011).

Dilemmas and contradictions

These different dimensions of austerity – as policy, as ideology, as governmentality - are overlaid on each other in ways that are mutually reinforcing. For example the differential impact of austerity policy on women is taking place precisely at a point in which the spaces in which women might influence policy are shrinking. This is not only a matter of women being ejected from spaces of power within the state and public services; it is also due to the exercise of new governmentailities that render governance a technical rather than political process, thus decreasing the possibilities of women's representation and voice. And the ideological redrawing of feminism as yesterday's agenda means that women are further disadvantaged in the distribution of the pain and hardship that austerity governing produces. Women in western welfare states have become ideologically posiitoned as both the main agents in and beneficiaries of a regime of governing that is now outdated – one that furthermore has helped create the 'problem' of an overweening welfare state and unsustainable public sector, both of which were implicated in the generation of public debt and thus as 'causes' of the financial crisis itself. .

So how might feminist researchers and theorists respond? I want to end by trying to tease open some dilemmas and contradictions. The first is the uneasy articulation of feminist and governance theory. Feminist theory has contributed to the reframing of concepts of governance to encompass more interpretive, embodied and affective framings of practice. Many governance scholars have turned towards a greater focus on interpretive methods (Rhodes and Bevir 2015), and a concern with 'community' and 'everyday' practice (Larner and Craig 2008, Jupp 2010) all developments that in principle opened up space for new forms of feminist work. Yet in doing so, how it is possible to also offer critiques of structural patterns of inequality that disadvantage women? Here feminist scholars have been inflecting 'grand' theories of political economy, challenging conventional approaches to understanding neoliberalism,

governmentality and economy: see for example Larner (2000), Sharma (2008), Li, 2007, Fraser 2009). A special issue of *Feminist Review* in 2015 included a number of papers offering analyses of financialisation (Adkins, 2015) the production and meaning of 'crises' (Griffin 2015), on economic policy (Pearson and Elson, 2015), all interventions into what are male dominated theoretical canons. But it is important, alongside these interventions, to continue feminist inflected forms of ethnographic and anthropological research.

A further dilemma is how to hold on to a feminist analysis as the category 'woman' is deconstructed. Post-structuralist theory has opened up fierce debates about the ways in which 'difference' can be understood` (e.g. Butler, 1990). But at the same time notions of 'intersectionality' have highlighted the multiplicity of identity and enabled analyses of the interaction of different forms of disadvantage and struggle (Grabham et al 2009). I am interested in how such theoretical perspectives might be aligned with the challenges to mainstream political economy on the part of black and minority ethnic feminist scholars, from migration studies and from post-colonial theory. Such studies demonstrate how women experience the effects of globalisation and are differentially positioned in shifting global political and economic landscapes. They foreground changing population flows in which women become subject to highly gendered forms of economic exploitation: as part of global care chains, as victims of forced marriage, as sex workers. Such work also helps illuminate patterns of difference and solidarity across borders (e.g. Mohanty, 2003). The political challenge here is how to build responses to austerity across border s when its consequences are experienced very differently in different states and regions; and in which patterns of exploitation and abuse become exacerbated as austerity policies deepen. Yet, as the studies of agency set out at the beginning of this chapter, sometimes the categories 'woman' and indeed 'motherhood' can be useful figures around which action can be mobilised. Where political interventions are designed to influence government and policy actors, in contrast, the importance of gender tends to be masked – as in the New Economics Foundation study that appeared gender neutral. In contrast the work of the Women's Budget Group is explicitly feminist and, in pre-austerity days, created positive alliances with feminist actors within government.

A third dilemma concerns the shifting relationships between public and private authority. Feminist perspectives have brought into view the association between women's activism and micro sites or levels of governing: home, family, community

and the everyday worlds of care and personal lives. Yet at the same time shifts in practices of governing have expanded the concern of the state with the conduct of personal and private lives: new norms of responsibility, participation, self development, personalisation and coproduction both draw on feminist concerns and at the same time potentially reinforce the gendered power relations of governing, especially in conditions of austerity and the rolling back of welfare states. The diverse ways in which these contradictory movements are experienced in particular women's lives can be traced in some of the examples of women's agency with which I began this chapter. The micro sites of governing that were the focus of the research by Kingfisher, and the grassroots struggle by the E15 women and on the New era estate, trace very different ways in which new governmentalities are embodied and experienced, and the ways in which they may generate dissent and an ambiguous politics of hope. While the former works at the interstices between government power and personal lives (workfare schemes), the latter suggests the emergence of collective struggles against corporate power, supported by considerable media interest and sustained by actors beyond the specific site. These differences suggest that public and private are not absolute categories but are shaped – and transformed – by women's agency.

Feminist scholarship has also generated perspectives on the emotion and affect (Ahmed, 2004, Wetherell 2012), and the ways in which these surface in the practice of governing, from Hoschild's key work on emotional labour to more recent studies of the dynamics of governance (Hunter 2015, Jupp et al forthcoming). But what of austerity? how might this open up new questions about the relationship between material lives and affective registers? The Women's Budget group, cited in the Introduction to this paper, has a clear focus on the effects of budget cuts on the material lives of women. In contrast Catharsis (2015), writing about the effects of austerity policies in Greece, notes how austerity operates through racialised and gendered modes of belonging and estrangement, producing scapegoats on to whom economic and political anxieties are projected. This opens up a more complex view of gender, as embodied and differentiated female subjects – hatred for migrants, those claiming state benefits rather than in paid employment, single parents, homeless, drug users, 'irresponsible' or 'feckless' mothers and welfare users in general. In other work (Newman forthcoming) I point to the significance of culturally embedded registers of stigma, disdain, rage and other malign consequences of austerity. But I also point to 'hope' as the inspiration for countless new movements, protests and forms of activism.

This body of theory suggests something of the current resurgence of feminist theory and research. But such work relies on the support of institutions (universities, funders, research organizations) that are themselves subject to many of the governing rationalities and austerity measures traced in this paper. Academics in the UK have to respond to university policies that encourage researchers to chase large grants rather than to seek funding for small-scale ethnographic studies. Women at the start of what they hope might be an academic career operate in an ideological environment in which research on gender is seen as something of a backwater. And the governmentalities that surround research and scholarship – demonstrating ‘impact’, publishing in high ranking journals, and the tight performance management of individual working lives, all militate against the kind of collegial, gender sensitive, theoretically innovative and politically engaged work of the women I have cited throughout this paper. While women in the academy are relatively privileged, austerity is not merely an object of study; it is lived and embodied in the relational dynamics of research and writing.

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