

Introduction

This book assesses the relationship between gender and social policy, for the purpose of both taking stock and sketching out a future research agenda. Having the benefit of decades of scholarship and policy enables us to take the long view in surveying developments over time. As well as an examination of the main theorizations, a series of empirical analyses are undertaken to identify key developments and reflect upon what we know about women's and men's situations in regard to social policy and what remains unknown. The gap that the book seeks to fill is a lack of convincing assessments of both progress already made and the significance of a range of social policy approaches in this context.

Looking back some 40 or so years, much has changed from when, first, women-oriented and, then, gender scholarship started to take hold in the analysis of social policy. In the mid 1980s, for example, the average proportion of women in the labour market in the European Union (EU) was 45 per cent; in 2017 it was 66.4 per cent (European Commission, 2019). One of the lowest ever gender gaps in employment in the EU was recorded in 2017, an 11.5 percentage point difference between women (66.4) and men (77.9). A higher female presence in parliamentary representation across Europe and beyond represents a similar story. And yet, the scale of contemporary gender gaps and inequalities in living situations and access to resources is striking. For example, in the EU women expend five times more of their time than men in caring and household duties; 40 per cent of women live in a single-person household compared with 19 per cent of men; the pay gap between women and men has hovered for years at between 15 and 20 per cent; the average gender pensions gap is of the order of 38 per cent (European Commission, 2017a, p. 16). On a global basis, the United Nations (UN) estimated that in 2015 women earned 24 per cent less than men on average and performed two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work (UNRISD, 2016). If we start to pick away at these statistics, we will find many differences, with mothers generally earning less than non-mothers and women of ethnic minority background even more poorly placed still (LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, 2015). While acknowledging that such differences and inequalities play out differently for different subgroups, gender inequalities combine

to systematically undermine women's chances of economic independence, making them far more likely than men to fall into poverty and to be low or secondary earners throughout their lives.

However, there has been action to counter gender inequality. The 50 years have been busy (although admittedly not all of them), playing host to different types of policy response – even pioneering an approach in gender mainstreaming. The three decades from the 1970s to the start of the new millennium saw much policy reform in the EU. With gender strongly present in these years, the period oversaw an assault on direct and indirect discrimination against women in regard to access to employment and some welfare benefits as well as measures to improve working conditions and address the intersection of family and work lives. Gender inequality came to be a 'problem' known to and recognized by policy makers. However, since then – and especially for at least the last decade or so – gender inequality has been a fading star in social policy reform in Europe. The former thrust towards equalizing entitlements to welfare benefits and opportunities for women as individuals has come to a halt and there is growing (re)centring of familial situation for the purposes of benefit and service design and access. This, the subject of so much feminist critique as prolonging women's dependency, suggests strong continuities with the (deeper) past.

In Europe, the great recession which started in 2008 was generally taken as an opportunity to deepen neoliberal impulses in social policy. What this spells, *inter alia*, is a policy reform portfolio that seeks to cut back and reduce the scope of welfare state services and benefits, remove or downgrade rights-based conceptions of social policy and shepherd the core service institutions (income support, health, education) in the direction of market principles and away from a public bureaucratic ethos (Yeatman, 2018, p. 21). The impact has been deep, in fact far deeper than many realize. The LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power (2015), among other contributions, pinpoints women as being disproportionately affected by a crisis which it sees as also normalizing austerity policies. The EU Gender Equality Index – which measures six dimensions of inequality – recorded only marginal progress between 2005 and 2012 (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017a). With an overall score of 52.9 out of 100 in 2012, one interpretation is that the EU remained in 2012 only halfway towards equality, having experienced a meagre rise of 1.6 percentage points in the index since 2005. This has since improved, but not hugely. The most resilient gender gaps are in the distribution of unpaid work and domestic activities and men's over-representation in all areas of decision-making, despite marked increases in women's representation in the political sphere. Moreover, any changes in gender equality have gone

hand-in-hand with soaring socio-economic inequality in most parts of the world (Watkins, 2018, p. 7). These are global trends, leading to strong commonalities among world regions (although the scale of the gaps and the presence and impact of supportive architecture vary hugely and should not be under-estimated) (UNRISD, 2016; Nieuwenhuis et al., 2018).

We are making our way out of the recession now and the changes effected are becoming visible, at home and abroad. It is generally agreed that social policy played a key role in the European states, in either exacerbating or ameliorating the impact of the crisis (depending on the countries in focus) (Ólafsson et al., 2019). It is also clear that burdens and disadvantages were not equally shared. As well as robust gender effects, a social class gradient saw to it that across countries it was the three lowest income deciles that suffered the greatest setback in income (with Iceland as a notable progressive exception in this respect) (Ólafsson et al., 2019). When we probe for the living situations of those most affected, we find among them the unemployed, the low paid, immigrants and lone-parent families or those of two parents with more than one child. It has also taken longer for these sectors to recover from the impact. Indeed, full recovery may be impossible for some (Cavaghan and Dwyer, 2018). Beyond doubt is that the globalized neoliberal paradigm that has been predominant for some decades continues to hold sway (Ólafsson et al., 2019). That said, there is no one generally accepted roadmap for the future. Social investment policies have been inserted or sit alongside austerity approaches, for example, and this has seen selective and particular social investment accompany disinvestment. The contemporary consensus appears to agree on stronger policies for labour activation and human capital development, especially for the youngest cohort through childcare and early education, and disinvestment in income maintenance more broadly (Morel et al., 2012). However, there are trends that might up-end this settlement. The growth of right-wing politics across the EU is one such trend and Brexit is another. It is not easy to decipher the specific social policy project inherent in either. What they appear to share in common is a favouring of conservative gender and nationalist values. Hence, we might expect such politics to call forth a social policy in the image of the traditional, male-fronted family with migrants conceived in terms of ‘undeserving other’ (Erel, 2018). And in regard to Brexit in the UK, it has been pointed out that gender issues, while among the most significant in terms of likely impact, are downgraded if not silenced in the debates and politics (Guerrina and Masselot, 2018; Women’s Budget Group et al., 2018).

It is interesting to observe in this context how some policy-related agency, and in particular that of the EU, some international organizations and some national governments, is turning to women, tapping the

‘empowering’ and freeing up of women’s economic engagement and female initiative as a way forward as male incomes and economic growth both stall. This kind of emphasis is to be found in the EU’s turn to social investment policies for example, which foreground the promotion of labour market participation (especially for women) and human capital development as the appropriate role for social policy (Morel et al., 2012). Such policies have purchase for both women and men, emphasizing labour market engagement and policy environments that are supportive of family life by enabling a better balance between work and family (Jenson, 2009). A modernized family model is called for especially in a world where the main purpose of the welfare state is seen to be as an investor in human capital. Only a limited understanding of social and economic life as gendered underlies this perspective (Saraceno, 2015; Jenson, 2018).

The need to take stock also arises from the existence of research from which to learn. On the back of some 30–40 years of researching gender-equality developments, we are in a position to interrogate the range of perspectives that have prevailed as well as identify the impact and shortcomings of particular intellectual and policy approaches. There have also been some developments that were not fully anticipated. The great recession, for example, which, as well as authoring a substantial change in social policy and reducing standards of living for most Europeans, has occasioned structural change in the economy affecting, for example, employment levels and demand for skills, and potentially lengthening young people’s dependence (Eurofound, 2015). Nor did we expect that social policy would go inside the family in the way that it has and seek to influence the practice and texture of family life to quite a fine degree (especially through parenting-related measures which will be detailed in Chapter 7). Another unexpected occurrence was the undermining of what is in many respects a feminist ideal – the Swedish welfare state model. Among the changes made there are greater privatization of social services, extensive reforms effecting greater diversity in both service and provider, and changes in the scale of state provision on the grounds that people prefer choice and are prepared to assume greater responsibility for themselves and their families (Burström, 2015). The Swedish commitment to social equality – including gender equality – and universal rights has weakened. This has delivered a blow to envisioning a different gender order although it might, viewed in a different light, prove to be a fillip to scholarship, moving us beyond a rather one-dimensional idealization of the Swedish model for its institutionalized model of gender equality (Gornick and Meyers, 2009; Martinsson et al., 2016).

One of the questions that especially arises is what happened from the 1990s on to break a momentum that appeared progressive. In this regard it

helps particularly to take developments in feminism into account for it has played a large role in the fields of interest in this book, both as scholarship and political/policy engagement. Feminism has been and is present today but the kinds of gender politics that prevail now are noticeably particular, especially in the liberal countries of the UK and US (among others).¹ Observing the self-identification as feminists of high-profile businesswomen like Cheryl Sandberg of Facebook and Anne-Marie Slaughter, analysts speak of a ‘neoliberal feminism’ (Fraser, 2009, 2013; McRobbie, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014, 2018). What is being referred to here is the rehabilitation – and transformation – of feminism as ‘a broad constellation of socio-political interest converging around the category of woman’ (McRobbie, 2013, p. 120). This feminism is hallmarked by an individualist orientation, a belief in formal equality, a valorization of self-responsibility and self-realization, and a downgrading of the significance of material conditions as defining features of life situation. Maternity is a central consideration, with women urged not to turn away from maternity but to postpone or manage it in such a way that it can be the subject of a chosen personal engagement and ‘balanced’ with other achievements (Rottenberg, 2018). Good timing and planning for positive affect and material success is essential. Policy has little place in this landscape and when considered it is mainly corporate policy that is addressed.

The ‘#MeToo’ movement, the international campaign raising awareness around sexual assault and harassment, is also significant, spearheaded as a Facebook campaign by high-profile women largely from the world of entertainment (although its roots are earlier and less celebrity oriented). Its modus operandi has been to shame male public figures accused of sexually inappropriate behaviour, while at the same time giving women a voice and creating empathy for them. The #MeToo movement does call for collective action and has feminist underpinnings in that the underlying problem is seen to be male power and a societal tolerance of – if not support for – a form of masculinity characterized by aggressive and sexualized male behaviour. To the extent that it targets change, it is change in the law’s approach to male violence against women that appeals, including reform of the procedures for reporting incidences of violence and harassment, and the ways such reports are received and handled by the authorities. Since it is still new, it is difficult to predict how it will develop and whether it will evolve to become a broad-based social movement oriented to societal transformation and a shift in power structures from a gender perspective.

¹ However, see Watkins (2018) for an account of very different feminist approaches in Europe and North America, as well as some Asian countries. Fraser et al. (2018) also covers this theme, among others.

At present, it has many ‘silences’, especially in regard to the experiences of minority women (Tambe, 2018). We have to keep open, therefore, the question of whether and how these developments map onto feminist critiques of the dominant political order and liberalism’s promotion of a form of gender equality and economic model that both tolerates and deepens exclusions and inequalities.

THE BOOK’S APPROACH

Situated within the fields of social policy and gender studies, the book uses the latest evidence to reveal the reality of core aspects of women’s and men’s everyday lives and enquire into how social policy is implicated. The quotidian focus comes out of a long tradition of feminist social policy research on the reality of people’s situation and the conditions under which women especially live their lives (as will be outlined in Chapter 1). In key ways, it pinpoints social location, a concept and approach prioritized especially in identity and intersectional studies. ‘Quotidian’ here does not spell an exclusive focus on the micro; rather, it seeks to reveal how people’s lives are lived out in the shadow of policy. The core orientations can be appreciated from the kinds of research questions that guide the book: How do women’s and men’s living situations compare and what role does social policy play in affecting these and shaping gender patterns? What are the different ways of addressing gender inequality in social policy and with what results? How is the intersection of gender with other inequalities managed, reproduced or changed by social policy? And what are the constituent elements of a research agenda for the future that identifies the most pertinent theoretical frameworks and asks the most penetrating research questions going forward? Where these questions are to be answered through empirical data, the analysis mainly concentrates on empirical data from 2005 on. However, these are data points and do not define the book as a whole, which, throughout, aims for a historically informed discussion.

The approach taken to answering these questions and developing a research agenda has a number of hallmark features. First, I am convinced that a comprehensive investigation of the relationship between social policy and gender should examine not only the content or make-up of social policies and their associated outcomes but also the ways these are studied and understood (the ‘knowledge’ about them). Hence, the underlying epistemology encapsulates both theoretical and empirical developments. This and the task of constructing a future research agenda are also informed by an interdisciplinary approach. As well as gender and social

policy studies, knowledge and insights from sociology and political science are central. These are disciplines convinced that the transformations (or not) in women's and men's lives matter.

A further notable feature is the book's international and comparative scope. An active search for variation leads the way, rooted in a conviction that only when we comprehend versions or forms of a phenomenon in varied contexts can we truly understand it. Broad-based comparison is the main method used, with the usual health warning that, while this enables us to overview developments in a systematic manner, it tends to under-appreciate relevant phenomena as features of particular settings. The book is especially oriented to developments and experiences in the EU. The EU is taken not as a unit of convenience but because it has a strong history as an anti-gender inequality, supranational project. It also offers us the convenience of engaging with a large chunk of the existing scholarship, especially that which seeks to categorize and compare countries in terms of historically embedded policy models. This literature has organized itself comparatively around the existence of systematic social policy variation in European countries, differentiating between the Nordic countries, the Continental European countries, the liberal countries (especially UK and Ireland) and the Mediterranean nations (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996). My core interest is in identifying systematic patterns and pathways within and across countries and not regimes per se. There are two methodological points to note about the EU focus. First, with 28 member countries it implies a 'zoom-out' lens rather than a 'zoom-in' perspective.² The empirical analyses, therefore, will concentrate on the broader EU picture. A second point to note about the EU focus is that it steers us generally in the direction of the high-income/developed welfare state nations and hence the rich capitalist democracies of the global North. Of course, not all of the member states are wealthy but they are all part of a political and economic bloc that, in a world context, constitutes an area of very high income and political and economic weight, and they all have a history of the welfare state (although again there are significant variations in the nature and depth of the welfare state in particular national settings).

² At the time of writing the UK is in the process of exiting the EU, which will leave 27 member states. It might be helpful to note at this stage – given the significance of the EU for gender equality policy – that the Union expanded in waves. To the original six member states the so-called BENELUX countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands), Denmark, Ireland and the UK joined in 1972. Greece joined in 1981 and was followed by Spain and Portugal in 1986 and Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1995. These are often known as the EU-15. All further expansions were to the south and the east. Ten countries joined in 2004: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007 and Croatia was the last to join in 2013.

While the book does not systematically examine wider processes beyond this region, it is sensitive throughout to wider global developments and accepts as a first principle the impossibility of separating developments in one part of the world from everywhere else. But every focused project has to set boundaries, even if recognizing that these are porous.

KEY CONCEPTS

Some words are in order at this stage about the key concepts, and in particular the meanings of ‘gender’, ‘gender inequality’ and ‘social policy’ as they are used throughout the book.

Gender has now become one of those taken for granted words in both academic scholarship and public discourse. Harewood (2014), in a review of over 160 articles published in sociology journals between 2006 and 2010, found that gender is rarely defined explicitly and that the terms ‘sex’, ‘female’ and ‘male’ are used frequently – and often unreflexively – in work that is gender focused. She coined the term ‘gender reduction’ to describe a particular feature of the way the term ‘gender’ is used to limit and simplify complex issues. This suggests the need to be explicit about the particular gender approach being adopted.

Gender is an ambiguous concept, although it is now widely understood to refer to a socially constructed rather than a biological category (Milkman and Townsley, 1994). It is a strongly relational term, conceiving of women and men in comparison to each other and as engaged in complex relations at different levels (Scott, 1986). Apart from the relationality aspect, one of the key elements of gender as a lens for analysis is that it signposts particular domains of life. Bradley (2013, p. 16) guides us here: “gender refers to the varied and complex arrangements between men and women, encompassing the organization of reproduction, the sexual divisions of labour and cultural definition of femininity and masculinity”. Connell and Pearse (2015, p. 11) are equally clear about focus when they claim gender as “the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of processes that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes”. Both Scott (1986) and Ferree (2010) remind us – more generally – that gender is a relationship of power connected to and realized through institutional and normative processes.

Informed by the above but drawing explicitly from Joan Acker’s work (e.g. 1992), gender is conceived of here to refer to constituent elements of social relations and social structures which are based on and lead to differences and inequalities between women and men as individuals and social categories, and is a primary signifier of power in regard to access

to resources and status. What about gender in social policy analysis? Taking such a lens, Shaver (2018, p. 2) defines gender as “the basis of complex, social inequalities, taking the forms of both material inequalities of income, assets and social status and social inequalities reflecting unequally valued social identities”. We can connect the welfare state in this view to a system of social distribution. The study of gender connects us especially – but not exclusively – with work that is ‘feminist’ in orientation. Orloff (1996, p. 52) defines her feminist approach to analysing the welfare state as taking “gender relations into account as both causes and effects of various social, political, economic and cultural processes and institutions” that produce “. . . gender differentiation, gender inequalities and gender hierarchy in a given society”.

The term ‘feminist’ is used in this book to apply to work which has as a germinal interest the unequal positioning of women vis-à-vis men and the processes, relationships and structures that constitute this. Feminism’s spring-loading of a critical approach especially appeals. It spells, among other things, a privileging of the experiences of women and a commitment to using ‘voice’ to convey and enable agency (as set out by Gottfried, 1996). Ackerly and True (2013, p. 136) point out that for feminist research a commitment to a process and set of research ethic(s) is more important than following a lock-step set of rules. They regard a critical feminist methodology as hallmarked by the following commitments (inter alia): attentiveness to unequal relations of power; attentiveness to relationships; attentiveness to boundaries of inclusion–exclusion and forms of marginalization; and situating the researcher in the research process. Not all of these are relevant to the current endeavour but they do seem like worthwhile principles by which to be guided.

Gender scholarship over the last few decades has been hallmarked by engagement with intersectionality as a promising and challenging development. This perspective eschews single axis analyses of the dynamics of difference and sameness, and views gender as intersecting with other inequalities and subject to multiple causality (Cho et al., 2013). It challenges our usual habits of argument by positing overlaps and conflicting dynamics among race, gender, class, sexuality, nation and other inequalities (Lykke, 2011). To the extent that intersectionality has been applied in social policy analysis, it has mainly been utilized to recognize women’s multi-positionality and/or explore the situation of subgroups of women. However, these are just some of the possible applications (Choo and Ferree, 2010; Cho et al., 2013) as will be discussed further in Chapter 2. For now suffice to say that intersectionality is taken forward in a number of ways in this book. First, an attempt will always be made to go beyond universal categories and identify how the ‘categories’ of women and

men are permeated by other differences and divisions. This means that we view women and men not as singular monoliths but as differentially placed regarding social class and also ethnic background, age/generation and other relevant markers of intersectional location and political and structural inequalities. Second, the book is intersectional by virtue of its approach to policy – seeing it as a set of cross-cutting policy (life) domains rather than a series of separate policy spheres. This has the added advantage of pointing us in the direction of the general architecture of the social policy system and away from particular programmes (singular programme specificity being a strong characteristic of gender and other scholarship in the last decades). Thirdly, the empirical chapters – especially 3, 4 and 5 – are organized around cross-cutting resources of income, work and time.

The foregoing may well prompt a question in the reader's mind about men and where they fit into the book's canvas. Of course, men have always had a central (if unacknowledged) place in welfare and other scholarship, because it was their typical life experiences that formed the basis for much of the analysis. A gender approach creates an opening to analyse the situation of men more explicitly because it means that they are no longer the 'silent counterfactuals'. However, that opening has not been widely taken up, and certainly not in comparison to the women-oriented scholarship. It is in their role as workers that men most appear on the pages of the gender and welfare state scholarship but there is work also engaging with domestic violence and young men's vulnerability. There is also some discussion of social policy's engagement with masculinities and men as actors with gendered subjectivities in the broader sociological literature (well outlined and considered by Ferree, 2010 and Hearn et al., 2018). But in social policy research that guides this book, the main engagement has been with men's status and agency as fathers and as members of families (in terms, for example, of their participation in the family/household division of (caring) labour and their role as breadwinners) (Hobson, 2002; Hearn, 2010). It has taken a long time for a scholarship on men to build up (perhaps because this required recognition that, while structures might favour and reproduce male privilege, the experience and agency of individual men was taken for granted and was ultimately not as powerful as that of women in revealing hidden structures).

Gender inequality is a second leading concept. It too requires some clarification at the outset. I am primarily interested in it as a 'problem' or goal-set for policy. And, as befits a social policy discussion, my focus is on material inequality rather than status in the sense of essential difference/recognition. Although academic and policy debates have operated with different versions of equality, one robust differentiation is that between equality of access and equality of outcome. The former, access, view of inequality centres upon the starting conditions and in particular the

absence of legal and institutional barriers to entry or participation, whereas equality of outcome refers to the distribution of economic and other resources and benefits and therefore is focused on tangible results (Rees, 1998). ‘Equality of opportunity’, embracing the capacity and resources to participate, falls somewhere between the two. One could argue at length about the appropriate conceptualizations of equality – and the relative success of EU and other types of equality policy – but I treat it here as a multi-layered concept which means that, *inter alia*, equality of access becomes an essential first step towards a higher-order equality. Htun and Weldon (2018, pp. 6–7) offer a good definition: “We understand gender equality as an ideal condition or social reality that gives groups constituted by gender institutions similar opportunities to participate in politics, the economy, and social activities; that values their roles and status and enables them to flourish; in which no gender group suffers from advantage or discrimination; and in which all are considered free and autonomous beings with dignity and rights”. One of the key analytic questions that the book addresses is what outcomes were targeted by policy in regard to gender inequality and whether these have changed.

Social policy is the book’s third anchoring focus. As used, it refers to publicly organized and funded benefits and services to achieve goals around public welfare and social protection (recognizing that these are contested terms) and interventions in the distribution of income, earning and opportunities, and resources over the life course in market-based societies. The focus on social policy directs us to the material elements of gender inequality – such as income and employment – but these are not treated independently of relational elements. In terms of the usual social policy fields, income-support measures, employment policy, family policy and social services feature prominently since these are the most relevant domains of social policy for the present purpose. I do not draw a rigid boundary around these, however, and include also other service areas and policies which affect social and economic organization and gender relations more generally (directly or indirectly). These include taxation, social care policy and also, on occasion, early education policy. As mentioned, policies are treated as intersecting – hence I do not interrogate them individually but combine them for how they contribute to setting up the environment and resource sets within which women and men conduct and manage their lives as individuals and members of collective units. The one exception made is for (gender) equality policy (which receives a chapter of its own – Chapter 6). This is because gender inequality was specifically problematized in its own right by the EU and so merits scrutiny and critical assessment as a case study of the achievements and limits of targeted policy.

The concepts of 'social policy' and 'welfare state' are used interchangeably, in recognition of the systematic elements and relationships involved, and to foreground the state (or the public authorities) as a key political actor.

BOOK STRUCTURE

Excluding this introduction, the book consists of eight chapters, divided into three main sections. The first reviews existing literature; the second undertakes empirical analysis of developments relating to access to income, employment and resources; and the third part undertakes a review of policy. This vision provides the book's organizing structure – the set of chapters identifying what is happening empirically is bookended by two other sections, and two short intermezzo passages connect the different parts of the book. The purpose of the latter is to provide connecting threads, especially in terms of making clear the lines of investigation and framework of analysis followed.

The structure is as follows:

1. Women, gender and social policy in early work
2. Contemporary approaches to gender and social policy: bringing scholarship up to date
3. Income, wealth and poverty
4. Access to employment
5. Inequalities of time use and life satisfaction
6. The EU, equality and social policy
7. Gender and social policy more broadly
8. Scoping a future research agenda

To offer a more detailed outline, the first two chapters are scene-setting, engaging in an intellectual history of the key concepts and approaches on the basis of the substantial 'archive' that has been built up over a remarkably short period. The first chapter sets out the early evolution and the extant theoretical approaches and main concepts while the second tracks the themes, theories and questions that have dominated since the 1990s. To some extent the date point at which to break the chapters is arbitrary, although there was a significant change of direction from the 1990s. Together, these two chapters mine the existing literature for insights, frameworks and policy approaches. We are fortunate here in that, while the currency of gender inequality in popular discourse and as a motivator of policy reform has varied over time, no one could deny the influence of

gender as a 'social problem' for academic work. Even more, social policy is one of the domains where gender made an early and relatively strong impact on scholarship (as we shall see in Chapter 1). As well as calling for historical sensibility, this means that a body of work exists which can be drawn upon to illustrate how the welfare state was gendered historically and, going forward, interrogate the reforms undertaken to see if they addressed the intricate ways in which gender differences and inequalities have taken shape.

These two chapters also function to identify emerging insights over time which serves as a bridge between the first part of the book and the analysis undertaken in the second part (with key insights highlighted explicitly in the form of a short intermezzo that sets out the theoretical/empirical framework). These three empirical chapters examine access to particular resources, outlining in turn access to income, employment and time. What they seek to do, in essence, is to identify the prevailing female/male comparison in access to different types of resources in the broader context of living patterns and existing institutional arrangements. Each makes an attempt to link the patterns found to broader questions relating to inequality and change. Chapter 3 considers women's access to income and relative financial well-being. It examines in turn comparative financial equality, wealth and the gender distribution of poverty. It then goes on to explore how access to welfare state-related benefits is associated with gender inequalities, paying particular attention to old-age pensions and gender gaps therein. Chapter 4 scrutinizes women's access to employment. In focus here is the patterning of gender and other axes of inequality in regard to engagement with the labour market. As well as absolute employment levels, the chapter also looks at part-time work and pay-related and other inequalities. In the second part, Chapter 4 considers the factors that contribute to inequalities, interrogating the latest evidence to explain inequalities in women's labour market engagement and relative pay. The third empirical chapter – Chapter 5 – looks at time as a resource and how this is associated with the arrangement of family/home life and satisfaction therewith. The chapter considers in turn work–family forms and arrangements, and how these are changing, the volume and distribution of paid and unpaid work, changes in time use, life satisfaction and the role of attitudes, culture and other factors in explaining developments and persisting inequalities.

The final section of the book turns to policy review. The three chapters comprising this part scrutinize some of the main relevant policy developments and draw conclusions about where we might go from here, especially in terms of a research agenda. It is preceded by another short intermezzo section that sets out the rationale for what is considered.

Chapter 6 looks at gender equality in policy, focused on the EU approach. What this chapter seeks to reveal is the policy approach that has been taken to gender inequality and how this has changed, or not, over time. As mentioned, the EU is the focus because it has a long history of problematizing gender inequality and has sought to develop a policy portfolio around gender inequality, and in more recent times other inequalities. Chapter 7 aims to enquire into gender-related social policy reform more generally, and so defines relevance beyond policy with gender equality in its nomenclature or discrimination in its targeting. The first part of the chapter discusses two important policy frames or rubrics: work–life balance and social investment. Subsequent chapter sections analyse the policy reforms that have sprung from these and other dominant considerations, considering in turn measures investing in parenting, childcare and care for older people. This is followed by a concluding chapter which sets out an over-arching research agenda, drawing together conclusions about what is clear but also remains unknown from the domains considered in the preceding chapters. The chapter especially sets out some ‘knotty issues’ that scholarship (and policy in practice) has to deal with.

I should note that I am forced to exclude important areas – such as violence and health and reproductive rights.³ This is regrettable, given that these are fields of experience and policy that profoundly shape women’s lives and well-being.⁴ Justification for their exclusion includes constraints imposed by word limits but, especially, the book’s core focus on social policy. This, as mentioned, is taken to refer especially to income, employment and family life in a perspective that is most sensitive to material resources and organization, and policy’s role in regard to people’s status, access to resources and opportunities and redistribution. I am also forced to exclude women’s representation (and therefore matters of political representation and associated contestation and causality). The detailed consideration necessary is not possible in the context of space limitations. But to some extent also, it is not essential to the book’s purpose, which is to examine both the nature and consequences of policies rather than explain them as the outcome of political engagement. That said, not only am I mindful of the signature importance of politics, I take forward insights from that body of work implicitly if not explicitly – they are inherent in my complex conception of the state, for example, in the book’s understanding

³ See the study by Htun and Weldon (2018) which looks at the factors affecting the institutionalization of a range of women’s rights relating to violence against women, family and employment law, reproductive rights, and parenting-related leave and childcare.

⁴ See the LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power (2015) for a very good discussion of gender-based violence and gender in the media and culture and communications.

of the political interests associated with gender, the awareness that all social policy is in key ways a product of political engagement and political interest, and that the issues of gender, women's and men's paid and unpaid work and family are fundamentally associated with the distribution of power and authority.