

2 WOMEN, RECESSION AND AUSTERITY: DEVELOPING AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

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The relationships between gender, recession and austerity must be considered as historically and societally specific. Gender relations have evolved over time but following country-specific paths and the impact of the recession and austerity programmes will depend on both the form and the robustness of gender relations in a specific country context and on the particular form that the recession and austerity programmes take in interaction with wider labour market, social and political institutional arrangements. This focus on institutions, including, following Martin (2004) gender relations as an institution immediately distances the framework adopted here from the current dominant but opposing frameworks used within mainstream economics and policy analysis to understand the relationship between gender relations and the wider economy. These alternate between a perspective that treats women universally as essentially carers first and thereby permanently in a state of contingent and temporary participation in the labour market work and the more optimistic scenario which regards discrimination as only a residual legacy linked to a past where institutional arrangements did indeed dominate, as opposed to the present where the market ensures the triumph of meritocracy and the even treatment of individuals, whatever their gender. The former approach sees women as the natural candidates to

bear the burden of the downturn in demand but may well overestimate the scope for reversing women's integration into employment. The latter perspective focuses on the rate of progress towards closing gender gaps and glosses over the need for women to defend their existing gains and resist reversals in equality or the emergence of gender inequality in new forms.

The institutionalist approach adopted here instead links the analysis to both cyclical and longer term change in national employment and social models and to the social construction of gender relations within a specific institutional and political context. Furthermore, it identifies gender as both a relevant variable in assessing the outcomes of change but also as a factor that may shape the specific path of adjustment to recession and the sovereign debt crisis. That is gender relations are both an input into and an outcome of the national model and the associated adjustment process. This gender mainstreaming of the analysis of social and economic change also allows for variations in the impact of recession by gender across countries and social groups, according to the interactions between gender relations, institutions and the chosen adjustment mechanisms. The analysis utilizes some of the new terms that have been developed to explain incremental institutional change (Streeck and Thelen 2005) and considers how the continued co-existence of competing ideologies with respect to women's roles can give rise to variable outcomes, depending on the extent to which emergent ideologies of equality are pushed aside by the far from dormant ideologies of subordination and difference. The framework thus puts in question the predictions of a modernist linear progress towards equality while at the same time regarding the changes over recent decades as long term and not readily or easily reversed.

The organization of the chapter is as follows. In the first section we explore frameworks for understanding the cyclical effects of recession on job loss, labour supply and public policy. The second section considers the specificities of the current recession, taking into account both the evolving and changing position of women and the specific nature of recession and the subsequent political responses. This provides a context for considering in the third section the extent to which the current recession and austerity programmes can be expected to constitute a critical juncture in the evolution of gender relations and the types of institutional changes that may ensue.

Analysing women's economic position: a review of frameworks

Gender differences in vulnerability to recession and austerity derive from differences in women's position, relative to that of men's, in the job structure, in the family and welfare economy. However while these differences in position will shape possibilities and likely outcomes we also need to consider how these likely outcomes may be modified by the behaviour of social actors, including employers, trade unions and the government.

Men and women are differently positioned in the job structure and the pattern of gender segregation can provide insights into why recession and austerity may have differential impacts by gender (Rubery 1988). At a basic level gendered impacts can be anticipated because of differences in the playing out of the recession by sector, occupation or employment contract. Gender differences in labour market position may be due to both exogenous factors, that is where sex-typing of jobs is relatively independent of

economic conditions, and to endogenous factors, that is where, for example, a concentration of women in the most precarious jobs reflects women's perceived position as less committed or less advantaged workers. The latter type of jobs have been labelled buffer jobs, that is numerically flexible labour intensive jobs that facilitate adjustment of labour input to demand changes (Bettio, 1988). While the allocation of women into these types of jobs may be regarded as related to their position in the family system, there are different views on the factors that account for the share of buffer jobs in the economy. For some the persistence of low skill and low value added jobs is attributed to the differential impact of technology (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). Some feminist scholars offer an alternative explanation where the crowding of women into separate segments lowers incentives to use innovation and technology to convert these jobs into stable high value added jobs. Poor job quality may be thus an outcome of an available labour supply for low wage work (Bergmann, 1986). Women may react to poor job quality by being more unstable workers than might be the case if they were able to access jobs with better employment conditions (Felstead and Gallie 2004).

Sex typing of jobs is not confined to these buffer-type jobs and may be related to other 'stereotypical' characteristics of women (England 2005), ranging from their caring roles in the family, their assumed greater altruism associated with an apparent preference for public service jobs or their deemed suitability for posts requiring attractive or people-oriented service and administrative staff. Segregation, even though based on stereotypes, may protect women against job loss by shielding them from competition from men (Milkman 1976; Bettio 2002) and by placing women in protected sectors. Segregation also reduces employers' scope to use women as a flexible buffer or as a

cheap labour substitute in male-typed jobs. Indeed results from earlier work found that greater cyclical volatility for women was primarily confined to a number of manufacturing industries and was not found either for employment as a whole or in sectors where women's employment share was low, where women primarily may have been undertaking administrative tasks that in this time period may have been regarded more as fixed overheads (Humphries 1988; Rubery and Tarling 1988).

While the prevailing pattern of segregation is likely to influence the initial employment shakeout, the disturbance to companies' profits and cost structures as a result of the downturn in demand may induce them to initiate or to accelerate programmes of longer term restructuring and employment changes, with consequences for the pattern of gender segregation. Women's availability at lower wages than equivalent men may provide incentives for longer term processes of substitution and restructuring within previously male-dominated occupations. Reskin and Roos (1990) identified processes of substitution and changes in occupational and gender hierarchies in the US (see also Crompton and Sanderson, 1990 and Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007 for the UK). Either whole occupations may become feminized or new divisions within an occupation may emerge, with women concentrated in the lower status areas. In these studies substitution was induced more by labour shortage or new technological possibilities than by downturns in demand. However, although substitution may be easier in times of labour shortage, when employers begin to hire after a major downswing, there may be an enhanced imperative to reduce costs that could induce processes of substitution. Furthermore, to the extent that the substitution may take place through outsourcing to lower cost providers, this could occur even in a context of job destruction. This form of

substitution may be between higher paid and lower paid women, for example through outsourcing of public sector jobs to private sector companies, rather than between men and women. To the extent that recession leads to downgrading of wage and employment expectations of men, the outcome could also include some men moving into female-type jobs, even at the same wage levels as women.

This review suggests that while segregation is key to understanding gender differences in impact, these gender differences will also vary across groups of women and men (Rubery 1988). Some women may provide a flexible reserve in buffer jobs but so will men, particularly in sectors where women are not significantly represented. The age, class and nationality of buffer groups will also vary with young men and migrants particularly vulnerable as buffer groups in the current crisis (see Bettio and Verashchagina this volume). Some women and some men are likely to be employed in occupations or sectors that are protected from cyclical volatility, although the protected sectors may vary over time and according to the nature of the recession (see below). And some may enter new jobs that provide direct or indirect substitutes for higher paid core jobs. These different roles will affect different labour force groups and sectors and at different stages in the business cycle. The importance of these different processes can also be expected to vary both by recession and by country, according in particular to the prevailing gender regime.

The gender impact of recession is also likely to reflect differences between the positions of men and women in relation to the family economy and to the welfare system. These differences include not only the material and work relationships, such as contribution to

family income, to caring work and access to benefits and public services but also social norms with respect to the appropriate and expected gender roles. Women's presumed distinctive characteristics as carers first and labour force participants second have underpinned the notion that women may act as either a voluntary or involuntary labour reserve (Bruegel 1979; Rubery and Tarling 1982). The notion of a flexible reserve that can be mobilized to supplement or to act in competition with the core labour force links to Marx's general notion of a reserve army with floating and latent components. However, the presumption of labour supply flexibility now informs more of the debate in mainstream economics on labour market flexibility. This literature regards women as contingent and intermittent participants, that is as outsiders to the labour market and who will consequently be negatively affected by employment protection legislation protecting insiders (Bertola *et al.* 2002;2007; OECD 2006). As outsiders women, along with others such as younger people, are argued to be vulnerable to unemployment in a recession and to long-term exclusion if regulation reduces job vacancies. Moreover, Bertola *et al.* (2007) hypothesize that trade unions take advantage of women's contingent commitment to paid work to push up wages and employment protection above competitive levels in those sectors where the labour displaced will not become openly unemployed but will willingly take up non-wage work activities. Displaced women are assumed to take up childcare full-time, on the presumption that women across developed countries are always carers first and workers at best second.

This approach takes the position of women as common across countries and time, such that gender simply becomes a dummy variable in cross country analysis (for a critique see Figart 2005; Rubery 2011) while more institutionalist and feminist research has

tended to stress the path dependency of women's relationship to the waged labour market (Pfau-Effinger 1993; 1998), influenced both by the pattern of employment opportunities and the constitution of women's roles in welfare and economic regimes as primarily wives, mothers or workers (Sainsbury 1996). Path dependency suggests that even if it would be convenient for capital, the state or for unemployed men if women could be reabsorbed back into the family economy in periods of job shortage, this is unlikely to be feasible if their integration into wage employment has induced changes in the family economy and in social norms related to the gender division of labour that are not readily reversible (Humphries and Rubery 1984). Domestic labour may no longer be able, for example, to act as an effective supplement to wage income where mass-produced commodities have become cheaper than home production. The notion of relative autonomy of social reproduction (Humphries and Rubery 1984) provides a framework for exploring under what conditions one might anticipate any rolling back or reversal of women's integration into and commitment to wage employment. This approach calls for an analysis of the role played by the state, in the form of the tax and welfare systems, in shaping work incentives on the one hand or childcare support on the other. However, the logic of the relative autonomy approach is that women's participation over time may move from contingent to permanent, such that even a major retrenchment of welfare support may not lead to voluntary withdrawal if dual earner patterns have become embedded in social norms and in household finances and consumption patterns. Any reversal may also have a significant negative impact on aggregate demand and potential for growth in consumer-led capitalism. The extent to which women withdraw, voluntarily or involuntarily, may take on particular importance in the current recession due to the absence of other mechanisms of adjusting labour

supply as opportunities for early retirement or dependency on disability benefits are being cut rather than expanded. The need to reduce open unemployment for political reasons in a period of recession may encourage the cutback of support services for working parents but while the cutbacks undoubtedly cause problems they will not necessarily induce women's full withdrawal.

Although the state may not be able to readily reverse or manipulate women's labour market participation, there is no doubt that public policy has had significant impacts on the long term development of women's employment integration, within and between countries. These effects are both long term, linked to the path specific evolution of welfare, employment and gender regimes, and more recent, linked to the relatively widespread positive developments in state-supported equality policies across Europe including the UK (Ray *et al.* 2010; Waldfogel 2011). These more recent developments, which to some extent suggested a process of convergence of public policy, were spurred on by the policy arguments that women's employment had a positive role to play in boosting employment rates in an ageing Europe (Lewis *et al.* 2008, see also Villa and Smith this volume). Similar arguments were developed to argue a business case for more female friendly retention strategies such as work life balance options or stronger gender equality policies in order to extend the utilization of female talent. These arguments were always context specific and importantly focused only on the economic benefits to the neglect of both the social justice arguments (Noon 2007) and on the need for rights to work not to be interpreted as obligations to work regardless of care provision (Lewis and Giullari 2005). The key issues raised by the recession and the follow-on austerity measures include first the extent to which social actors, including

the government, employers and trade unions, will revert to prioritizing male employment at time of jobs shortage. A second key issue is whether the legacy of the focus on women's integration into employment may take different forms for different groups; for example for those dependent on state benefits, the outcome may still be a focus on wage work and integration at the expense of rights to care while those who could be supported within the family may be encouraged to return to full-time caring.

This review of the factors shaping gender effects through demand side, supply side and policy change has already identified a number of key areas where both the specifics of the gender regime and the specifics of the crisis and the policy response can be expected to impact on the actual outcomes. It is a consideration of these specifics that we now turn.

Post 2008 recession and austerity: the gender implications in context.

To restate the cliché- more often than not forgotten in economic analysis- context is all. Four types of context are relevant here: first the historical development of the gender regime; second recent trends in gender relations and gender-related policy; third the origins and pattern of the 2008 financial crisis; and fourth, the subsequent emergence of the sovereign debt crisis and the political context in which responses are being made.

To turn first to the gender regime context, it is well known that there have been distinct paths of development of gender regimes, reflecting the different process of exclusion and integration of women into the productive economy, the different institutional arrangements in the labour market and the different evolutions of family and social

systems including gender relations (Orloff 1993; Pfau-Effinger 1993; 1998; Stier *et.al.* 2001). Furthermore, while there are clusters of different gender regimes, giving rise to notions of types or typologies, there are also within these clusters major exceptions and subtle nuances that may provide different contexts for understanding responses to recessions. For example although Sweden, Finland, Norway and Iceland can lay claim to fit a Nordic or Scandinavian group model based on a distinct adult worker form of gender relations supported by public services there are significant differences between the actual Swedish, Norwegian or Finnish models, manifest in for example the extent and form of part-time work or in policies with respect to the form of childcare support (Elligsæter and Leira 2006, see also Thorsdottir this volume). Likewise although there is an apparent Southern European model where a strong family system and high employment regulation is associated with low female participation, Portugal does not fit the model as it has one of the highest shares of full-time female employment despite sharing many other characteristics of the southern model including the low incidence of part-time work (Tavora 2010, see also Ferreira this volume). Neo-liberal economies such as the US and the UK also differ in significant respects with US women more likely to work on a full-time basis than women in the UK despite even lower levels of support from public services. Eastern European countries share a common legacy of high female integration but differ in the extent to which alternative ideologies, associated for example with a resurgence of religion, have affected attitudes to women's work post the political change.

Recent years have seen some challenges to these differences in patterns of female integration and in associated employment and social models as there has been an almost

universal trend towards more women in higher education, more women in employment and consequently greater frequency of dual earner households. These changes in behaviour have also been by and large increasingly supported by a spread of parental leave and childcare arrangements, supported to some extent by the state. There have also been changes in the pattern of family formation, although these have taken on different forms according to the social model (Anxo *et al.* 2010a; 2010b) to oversimplify, in some countries the main effects had been a decline in fertility- particularly in the southern countries- while in others the more dominant trend has been towards children born outside marriage. This implies a general decrease in children born inside marriage, with the main variant whether it is an acceptable social norm to have the children outside of marriage. Overall, however, this also constitutes a decline in women's acceptance of their traditional role to have children within the institution of marriage, a behavioural change which is also likely to reflect a reduced willingness among men to commit to marriage and also to children. The key question for this paper is how this apparent convergence towards a greater and more long lasting integration of women into wage employment, supported by more welfare services, and facilitated by reduced fertility, is likely to affect responses to the recession. Here we would hypothesize, in line with the notion of the relative autonomy of social reproduction argument, that the changes that have taken place over the past two decades or so in family formation, the household economy and in social norms and attitudes are sufficiently profound and embedded to be resistant to cyclical policy changes. Nevertheless, the degree of embeddedness varies and resistance may be weaker where the move towards dual earner models is more recent and where there is more evidence

of the co-existence of competing models or competing ideologies or social norms with respect to women's roles and behaviours.

The impact of recession by gender obviously depends on the context in which recession occurs, through which transmission mechanisms and sectors. The crisis that started in 2007-8 had different immediate effects across countries due to a range of factors, including, to name but a few, the importance of the financial sector, the reliance of the country's demand on construction and the associated property boom, the impact of the crisis in the country's key export markets and the government responses to the downturn (through fiscal and financial policy and through measures to stabilize employment). Applying this approach to understanding potential differences across countries, we can hypothesize that where the main effect of the crisis was indirect, through changes in demand levels, then it was mainly manufacturing and construction that took the immediate hits, areas which in most countries, though not all, are male dominated (CEC 2010: chart 9). The fall out from the financial sector had a more mixed gender effect, although more women appear to occupy buffer type jobs in the finance sector (Rubery and Rafferty 2013). To the extent that the rest of private services have been affected in a second round, as a consequence of job loss first in finance, manufacturing and construction, the full impact on women's employment can be considered to have been delayed. Moreover governments have been more likely to provide temporary help to high profile manufacturing and construction sectors in the form of support for short-time working or additional assistance to those made redundant than in private services and retail¹. The initial recession path was held to primarily affect men due to the destruction of male-type jobs, though the effects may have been

modified in some countries such as Germany by short-time working measures (OECD 2009; 2010). However, the second round impacts are now being felt across the service sector, thus changing the focus from a male- to female-dominated recession, at least in some contexts. Of course the groups that are most immediately affected by the jobs shortage are the new entrants, mainly young people, both male and female, and those who have been made redundant but there is another less visible group that may also be affected, namely women in prime age who have taken temporary breaks from employment to care for children but who may face major problems of re-entry.

The economic crisis that has engulfed the world since 2008 is not a standard deficient demand crisis but instead is a debt crisis that started with banks and individual indebtedness, based on asset bubbles, but where that debt has now been transferred to sovereign states. The markets that created the debt and the bubbles are now questioning the ability of states to finance it, thereby reducing the ability of states to act as the financiers and employers of last resort. The economic recession can thus not be divorced from the current fiscal and sovereign debt crisis which has led most countries to retreat quickly from the fiscal stimulus policies adopted immediately when the crisis began. Instead their focus is now on trying to reduce the deficit by fiscal tightening. While those policies are clearly in many cases worsening rather than resolving the debt crisis, the development of an alternative strategy requires global action and leadership which is lacking. Thus, whatever the merits of the policies, in most countries citizens face significant cutbacks in public expenditure with consequences for both jobs and for public services and benefits. These austerity policies clearly have the potential to shift

the burden of adjusting to the debt crisis back on to women as they have most to lose from cutbacks to both services and public sector jobs.

There are a number of important features of this sovereign debt crisis which may have particular implications for the gendering of outcomes. First of all, in some contexts the fiscal deficits are being blamed not on private indebtedness and bailouts but on public sector profligacy and the presence of an overpaid, bureaucratic and essentially unproductive sector and workforce. Given women's predominance in many countries in public sector work, this approach is potentially converting women's public sector jobs from high social value to low social value or from productive to unproductive jobs. Secondly, the public sector is no longer a stabilizing but more a destabilizing influence on the economy, contributing to rather than offsetting jobs cuts, at least in some countries. Third, the alternatives to public services are often unpaid family services, with direct implications for women's unpaid labour.

The severity and spread of the debt crisis, the emergence in many OECD countries of right leaning governments and the lack of global leadership to lead us out of this crisis provides a context in which the outcomes of this crisis could well turn out to provide a significant turning point for both gender relations and employment and welfare arrangements in European and OECD societies more widely. There is therefore a need to consider how this current crisis could lead to significant forms of institutional change. Institutional change both impacts on and is influenced by gender relations and it is to potential scenarios for institutional change that we now turn.

The current crisis as a critical juncture: the potential for long term institutional change in gender relations, employment and welfare systems.

The current crisis is far from simply a standard downside of a business cycle and is likely to lead to far reaching social and economic change. We need therefore new frameworks for analysing both the potential impact of this critical juncture on the path of gender relations and likewise the influence of prevailing gender relations on the specific policy responses adopted to deal with the crisis and sovereign debt problems.

If we regard gender relations as socially constructed and therefore subject to change, we can draw on recent debates on institutional change in varieties of capitalism to start this process. It is worth noting that the varieties of capitalism literature has in fact largely excluded gender from the scope of socially constructed institutions (for a critique see Mandel and Shalev 2009). Instead gender is largely absent from and treated as independent of the institutional arrangements at the heart of the varieties of capitalism; where gender issues are addressed the essential characteristics of gender relations are treated as universal, not as socially constructed (Estévez-Abe *et al.* 2001, Estévez-Abe 2005; Soskice 2005). In contrast we follow Martin (2004) in insisting that gender is a social institution:

While “traditional” institutions like the family, economy, and polity are accepted as “distinctly social” in character...., gender is not. Gender is reduced by many scholars and by popular culture to biology — genes, hormones, morphology — and psychology in ways that deny its sociality and susceptibility to social

construction. Thus, insistence on gender's collectivity, sociality, and fluidity are required to make the case for its institutional status. Attention to its collective character and historical and geographical variations will, I believe, affirm its susceptibility to human agency and its changes and variations over time.

(Martin, 2004:1262)

Among the frameworks we have outlined so far, the one that relates most closely to theoretical debates on institutional change is the concept of relative autonomy of social reproduction. Under this approach gender relations are socially constructed and relatively enduring but also subject to mediated influence from change in other institutions including the production, welfare and family systems. To provide more detailed analysis of these mediating influences, it is useful to draw on some of the key concepts that have been developed to explore both incremental and more disruptive forms of institutional change within national models.

A particularly useful approach for understanding institutional change, developed by Crouch and Keune (2005) to explain the ease with which Thatcher changed the institutional climate in the UK, is to recognize the presence of competing or conflicting ideologies within an institutional environment, thereby providing latent resources that can be mobilized to support quite radical institutional change. In the Crouch and Keune example, Thatcher could draw on internal support from the city of London to bring about the dominance of neoliberalism against the established Keynesian and pluralist establishment. Applying this approach to gender relations requires taking explicit account of the presence of multiple and contradictory ideologies underpinning gender relations. In particular the ideology of greater equality is likely to co-exist with

ideologies of essential difference and/ or subordination to the interests of men. These contradictory values may even be held by individual women (Fortin 2005) and the dominance of one view may change over time to fit more with their experience (Kroska and Eman 2009). Thus, even where there appears to be an emerging dominant ideology of greater equality, there is still potential for the revival of more conservative ideologies. Moreover, there is scope for divergence in ideologies between the political and the domestic domains as well as between groups and between genders. This also has resonances in gender studies where there is now recognition of multiple femininities and multiple masculinities, for example by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) on hegemonic masculinities where the authors call for recognition of ‘social struggles in which subordinated masculinities influence dominant forms’ (op.cit.:829). In this work gender ideologies are constantly being reconstructed to fit new conditions and under influence from multiple rather than singular social norms.

Adopting this approach allows for a more open perspective on the meaning of path specific development, where there are multiple internal resources on which to draw and where political choices at critical junctures are key in shaping the actual path of development followed (Djelic and Quack 2007). In short path dependency does not imply historical determinism. Instead, as Crouch (2005a) has argued, social actors, in shaping the next phase of development of a social model, are likely to draw on a range of societal resources, potentially including discarded or dormant institutions and ideologies. This process of institutional bricolage may be influenced by struggles between competing gender ideologies such that no linear or smooth process towards the

adoption of a gender equality ideology, without contradictions or reversals, can be anticipated.

This more open approach to the path of institutional change is also in line with arguments that challenge the more functionalist versions of varieties of capitalism. In these approaches synergies and complementarities between institutional domains are assumed to exist and to shape and limit the path of change, thereby reducing the focus on the possibility or likelihood of tensions and conflicts between different institutional domains (Howells 2003). Moreover, Crouch (2005b) has pointed out that even the notion of complementarity has multiple meanings: in some countries institutions in one area provide compensation for gaps in another area, while in others the institutional arrangements work in the same direction and are more synergistic than compensatory. Where one institutional domain is compensatory the complementarity may have arisen by chance rather than as an outcome of common ideologies or social norms and practices across domains. In a period of rapid change this chance development of compensatory arrangements may break down. Indeed a non functionalist approach to institutional change has to recognize the likelihood that the forces acting on institutional domains may vary in form and intensity, leading to the potential for mismatch to emerge over time. Gender relations have probably experienced more sustained change than other institutional domains, resulting in many countries in an increasing mismatch between the form of gender relations as practiced by citizens and the form of gender relations embedded in welfare states and labour markets. This disjuncture can be expected to continue under the crisis and there may be no effective mechanisms at work to bring the institutional domains back into synergistic or compensatory relations.

In addition to acknowledging the possible influence of both competing ideologies and tensions between domains in shaping responses to the current crisis, we can mobilize some of the tools developed for classifying and exploring processes of incremental institutional change (Streeck and Thelen 2005) to hypothesize about the form of institutional developments at this critical juncture. Here we draw on the notions of a) *displacement* where over time subordinate institutional arrangements may increase in importance and displace traditional arrangements b) *conversion*, where a policy or institution may take on different meanings and functions as circumstances change; c) *drift* where compliance with an institution may lapse as conditions change.

This range of tools enables us to develop some speculative hypotheses on the scenarios with respect to gender relations that could emerge under a prolonged and unresolved financial and fiscal crisis, resulting in persistent job shortage and associated with major reductions in public expenditure. We are interested here in the two-way interactions between gender and other institutional arrangements, where institutional changes reshape the form of gender relations and the form of gender relations influences the path of institutional change in the labour market and welfare system.

To consider first the impact of the crisis on the constitution of labour supply, a key issue is whether the emerging gender egalitarian ideology gives way to a revival of a more conservative ideology of women as homemakers and carers. This potential *displacement* of an emerging dominant ideology may be more plausible where there are strongly competing ideologies and where these ideologies are both embedded in social policy.

Two examples can be found, in Germany and Austria, where the egalitarian and the conservative models seem to be operating side by side (Anxo *et al.* 2010a; Mairhuber 2010– see box 2.1). In such cases the balance between the two ideologies may change in a recession, even though full displacement is unlikely. Conversely change in the dominant ideology is less likely where there is a relatively strong or enduring egalitarian ideology, reinforced by the continuous and often full-time integration of women into wage work, such as occurred in France, Finland or Sweden (Pfau-Effinger 1993; 1998; Lewis *et al.* 2008; Anxo 2010; Erhel *et al.* 2010).

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The ideology of women as the homemaker and care giver may be applied selectively; for example in the UK, there is evidence of disincentives being introduced and state support being dismantled for mothers to work when there are young children where the mothers are in couple households. However, a different approach is taken where there is no male partner, so that lone parents, mainly mothers, are being required to seek work even when the children are very young, in order to avoid the state taking on responsibility for family income provision. This policy area also provides an example of a case where there may be a *conversion* of apparently progressive policies prior to the recession into more oppressive and coercive policies for a specific group. Thus the focus on women's right to integrate into wage employment which dominated policy debates in the 1990s and 2000s may be converted into a policy which stresses not the right to work but the obligation to work combined with a reinforced lack of a right to care unless supported by a partner.

Institutional *drift* could occur if the economic calculus changes significantly such as to induce non compliance with a social norm. Changes to the costs of higher education in countries such as the UK could in principle lead to *drift*, that is a movement away from compliance with the social norm established over recent decades that participation in higher education is determined by academic criteria not by differences in life chances by gender. Women now account for more than half of university students such that decisions to invest in education by parents and by individuals do not seem to have been strongly influenced by differential access to high paid jobs over the lifecycle. However, if employment prospects decline and other countries follow the UK lead requiring students to fund their education, some women or indeed their parents may redo the calculus and decide against the investment. This would reverse one of the major social changes over recent decades.

However, the response to these changing conditions is not predetermined and indeed in the UK's case the share of female students has continued to rise in 2012, the first year of the higher fee levels. This could be explained not only by women's higher expectations and aspirations being enduring and not easily reversible but also by the reduced certainty and prospects for young men. Women may feel less certain that they could, even if they so wished, rely on male partners to gain the jobs and sufficient income. Enhanced uncertainty could reinforce women's commitment to education and employment, even in a context in which the benefits from education for women over the lifecourse are likely to be significantly reduced due to their lower earnings and more intermittent participation, while funding the same level of fees. Again however the specifics of the institutional arrangements may be critical as any unpaid loans will be

written off after thirty years so that actual risks for individual women for the present are thereby reduced. In short the economic calculus is changing in different directions so that the outcome on dominant institutional arrangements is unclear.

If we turn to the possible impact of gender on the institutions in the labour market we can find a potential example of *displacement*, where the so-called standard employment relationship (SER) (Bosch 2004) is no longer the dominant employment institution. Instead it may be displaced by the panoply of non standard or flexible arrangements that have grown alongside the integration of women into the labour market and which, particularly in relation to part-time work, have been associated with the diversification of labour force groups (Vosko 2010). This growth of non standard employment has already facilitated the displacement of certain aspects of the SER in some contexts, particularly the move to abolish pay for unsocial hours and the decline in job protection for those on standard contracts (Rubery 1998). The prolonged recession could take this a stage further if the norm for employment moved closer towards a spot contracting system, at least for the less powerful groups, including the majority of women and some men. Already in the UK the standards at the bottom of the private sector labour market are being used as the benchmark for what can be considered reasonable employment conditions, with anyone paid better or given greater security, as in the public sector, regarded as too privileged. These minimum private sector labour market standards are arguably reflective of the conditions under which disadvantaged or discriminated groups can be expected to work. The initial argument for more flexible floors to the labour market, made for example by the *OECD Jobs Study* (1994), was to allow those with low productivity to price themselves into work. Now there is a process of

conversion taking place, with these low standards becoming a benchmark or a norm for all. In this sense women, against their own wishes and interests, may act as a reserve army of labour by providing a benchmark for companies to use to reduce employment standards. Paradoxically, notions that gender difference is a thing of the past may facilitate the generalization of apparently neutral but poor employment standards.

Another *conversion* of an institution that may take place applies to public sector employment, as this is converted from a quality to a cost-focused employer, in response to the notion that it is public sector employment that is the drain on tax payers and the cause of the crisis. This would have direct implications for the quality of women's employment experience but also for public services, as in the US, where high quality staff are difficult to recruit and retain in public services due to the low value attached to public sector employment in both material and ideological terms (Donahue (2008) quoted in Hutton (2011)). However, nation states in Europe may be hoping that the general downgrading of employment opportunities may enable them to continue to recruit and retain women in the public sector or even in some countries in outsourced and even lower paid private sector employment.

The current and deepening recession and debt crisis may thus yet prove to be a critical juncture resulting in significant changes in institutional arrangements in labour markets, welfare and family systems that bring about a reshaping of gender relations. However, there is no simple way to predict the outcomes unless one takes a non-institutional view of gender, such that outcomes will be dependent upon biological differences rather than on the actions of social actors in reshaping and reconstructing the social institution of

gender. The social institution of gender relations is also likely to shape the pattern of change and development in institutions but in varying ways, reflecting the differences in gender regimes between countries. In discussing pressures for change we need to allow for processes of resistance as well as compliance or simple economic adjustment. Resistance may take different forms; women, for example, may be resistant to attempts to revitalize non-egalitarian ideologies, resulting in increased commitments to education and employment or reduced fertility. Men may be resistant to being pressured into employment arrangements associated with women, for example into part-time work, even if these pressures are reinforced by the carrot of in-work benefits or the stick of threatened benefit removal if such jobs are turned down. Not only may individual men feel that this form of work does not fit with their social identity but there may also be concerns over the potential impact of this normalization in that it may result in a lowering of employment standards for all.

While the actual outcome is unknown it is hard to predict a positive scenario under current political conditions unless the economic crisis becomes a catalyst for progressive political change. Yet, in discussing the impact of the crisis for gender relations, it becomes clear that critical junctures are not only about choices between progressive and regressive policies but also about different scenarios of regression, for example towards either greater exclusion from wage employment or towards potentially more inclusion but through a levelling down of employment standards. This outcome would contrast with the expectations that equality would involve upwards equalization with men. Within and between these various scenarios there is clearly much scope for conflict among men and women. However, it is also the case that the interests of men

and women coincide as well as conflict. For example, both sexes have an interest in preventing the downgrading of employment conditions as this outcome may provide a new lower standard against which men's employment may also be compared. Likewise at the household level both sexes have an interest in strategies to protect the household against unemployment and poverty which may well include the development of strong dual earner households so that there is some buffer to household finances if one of the partners becomes unemployed. Thus the important issue at this critical juncture is to identify sources of solidarity and common interests among the sexes, a process which is in fact facilitated by recognizing and identifying potential sources of conflict and difference among the sexes, instead of treating the crisis as either gender neutral or inherently biased against men. The importance of establishing common ground across the sexes is raised by the danger that the current crisis is changing the role of the state (Rubery 2013) from an agent that in principle promotes gender equality to one that may reverse gender equality gains made over recent decades. This agency may work through cuts in social services and associated reversals of policy to support women's employment, through changes to the amount and quality of public sector employment and through specific tax and benefit policies designed to encourage women to quit the labour market or to take on highly flexible and low paid employment.

Conclusions

This overview of frameworks for analysing the effects of the financial crisis and the austerity programmes on the position of women in the labour market has considered both the shorter term effects and the potential for this critical juncture to induce significant institutional change, possibly in unanticipated directions. The openness of

the frameworks presented reflects the identification of potential but opposing tendencies in both gender relations and in labour market organization. In gender relations there is the strong evidence over recent decades of long term and persistent change in both women's aspirations and labour market activities and in the associated organization of the family economy and relations. The long term secular change, however, coexists with continuing processes of discrimination and non egalitarian ideologies which could still emerge in some contexts to challenge this secular trend. There is also an openness about predictions with respect to labour market trends, as the crisis and austerity measures could be anticipated to lead to processes of exclusion of women as contingent workers on the one hand but equally on the other hand to inclusion but through processes of substitution that may facilitate a levelling down of labour standards. The most likely outcome is that these alternatives will co-exist with mixed outcomes for employment prospects. Thus there may be some increase in the number of women who are inactive due to problems of lack of public services and job opportunities, coexisting both with some improvements for some women in career opportunities and chances relative to men and some increase among women in employment in precarious and debased terms and conditions of employment. The different gender ideologies will also have an uneven impact, with the rise of conservative ideologies more likely in some countries and contexts than others. However, even within a society the multiple ideologies may be mobilized to women's disadvantage but in different ways and different contexts. For some women the issue will be that they have not achieved a right to work, but for others, particularly those dependent on benefits, the issue is more likely to be that they have not achieved a right to care.

Furthermore, the future prospects for women are being particularly challenged by the nature of the crisis and the associated austerity measures. The public sector has played a crucial role in providing women with employment, with professional career opportunities and with higher minimum standards at the lower end of the job ranking. All of these advantages are being challenged by the austerity cuts. Women are also the most dependent on public services to enable them to work and are the group most likely to have to provide the services that are cut from public provision through their unpaid labour.

Overall, although the outcome may not be uniformly negative, the likelihood is that the next years will not only bring some severe hardship to women but also potentially call into question some of the cornerstones of women's progress over recent decades, including even their rights to education and the option of public services as a substitute for domestic labour.

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Notes

¹See Brenke *et al.* 2011 for an analysis of the concentration of short-time work in manufacturing and in industrial services in Germany.