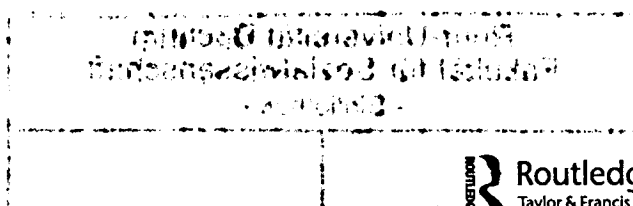

The Routledge Handbook of Critical European Studies

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European economic governance

A feminist perspective

Muireann O'Dwyer

Introduction

Is European economic policy gendered? The answer may seem obvious. But it may seem obvious to those who answer in both the affirmative and the negative. It seems obvious to those who regularly consider questions of gender equality that European economic policy is gendered. Many would even argue that all policy is gendered (Fraser 2013; West 1988). Politics and policy are about power, and power is gendered. Additionally, economies are gendered by inequalities, segregation and stereotypes. Policymaking is done by individuals, and so will reflect the gender, life experience and biases of those individuals. However, to read the prominent literature on European economic policy, of which there is a veritable library, it would seem clear that the answer to the above question is no. Obviously economic policy isn't gendered. Apart from some rare interconnections with gender equality policies, economic policy is about managing the economy. It is about questions of the relationship between the state and the market. It is about managing scarce resources and regulating firms and individuals. It is gender-blind. For people who hold the latter view, it is not unusual that the policy makers of European Economic Governance rarely, if ever, discuss gender. It makes sense that the major texts of the economic crisis and the governance regime that followed do not examine the gendered nature of policy or crisis (Baldwin and Giavazzi 2015; Blyth 2013; Dawson 2015; De Grauwe and Yuemei 2015; Fabbrini 2016; Hall 2012; Jones et al. 2016; Laffan 2014; Matthijs 2016; Scharpf 2015; Schmidt 2016; Streeck 2014). This chapter will explore why such analysis is limited by its lack of gender-sensitivity. It will begin by outlining the current economic governance regime, then it will explore the gendered impacts of that regime, and finally it will explore how the omission of gender analysis is a fundamental part of European economic governance.

EU economic governance since 2008

In the wake of the European Economic Crisis, the European Union adopted several reforms in the field of economic governance and budgetary surveillance. These reforms, in the Six Pack, Two Pack and the Fiscal Compact Treaty, have established the European Semester system of governance and oversight. Described as a 'silent revolution', these reforms have key implications

for the legitimacy of the European Union (EUObserver 2011). Despite the expectations of many scholars that the politicisation of European policy in the wake of the crisis would make reforms and further integration more difficult (Falkner 2016a, 2016b), there have been 'major integrative changes' to the architecture of European Economic Governance (Kreuder-Sonnen 2016, 3). Intervention in the form of surveillance, measurement and recommendations for member state economic policy marks the biggest shift in power in the wake of the crisis. While fiscal policy remains officially a devolved competence, with member states formally in control of domestic budgetary decisions, the development of a broad range of measurement, oversight and recommendation mechanisms means that decision-making power has shifted decisively towards the EU institutions. This shift in power has led to increased questions about the Treaty basis for such invasive oversight (Gearty 2015; Kilpatrick 2015). Goals for economic policy – at both the level of broad macro-economic indicators and more specific employment and budgetary reforms – are set at the European level. I will now describe the procedural changes that have been involved and the new timeline for budgetary approval, as well as the requirement to supply information to, and respond to questions or comments from the Commission, all of which have changed the way economic decisions are made and debated at the member state level.

The new powers allocated to the Commission comprise a preventative arm, with monitoring, reform recommendations and goal setting, and a corrective arm, with procedures for increased oversight and scrutiny, as well as new procedures for issuing fines to member states that breach the rules (European Commission 2012; Dinan 2016). The establishment of the new economic governance regime took place in three stages, with the adoption of the Six Pack of five regulations and one directive in December 2011; the *Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance* (Fiscal Compact) in January 2013, and the Two Pack of regulations in May 2013. These reforms built on, rather than replacing completely, the pre-existing economic governance regime that was structured around the Stability and Growth Pact. The Stability and Growth Pact, made up of two regulations, operated through the Open Method of Cooperation and was based around norms of benchmarking and collective learning and reflexive adjustment (Hodson and Maher 2001). The new regime refers to similar norms, however, as discussed below, there have been significant changes in scope and implementation.

The surveillance system is managed through the European Semester, which seeks to harmonise the budgetary procedures of the member states, with several key moments for oversight at the EU level. These include the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and monitoring report, the submission of draft budgetary plans, reviews within the excessive deficit procedure, and the excessive imbalance procedure. This process of review culminates in the publication of yearly Country Specific Reports (CSRs), which identify areas for correction, and review progress towards the goals set out in the Six Pack and the Fiscal Compact, along with additional goals and targets set out in period statements, such as the Five Presidents' Report, and within the broader frame of the Europe 2020 strategy (Begg 2017; Dawson 2015; Laffan and Schlosser 2016).

According to an official in the European Parliament, 'non-compliance with rules was identified as the cause of the crisis, not the good or bad performance of economies' (Laffan and Schlosser 2016b, 239). As discussed above, a large part of this can be traced back to the timing and narrative of the crisis, whereby Greece was perceived to have created the euro crisis by failing to abide by the EU's fiscal rules (Laffan 2014). This analysis reflects much elite rhetoric whereby the problem was identified as one of compliance, rather than, for example, as an inevitable result of a currency union without a political or fiscal union. As such, the priority in the negotiations that shaped the reforms of the economic governance regime was to strengthen the rules, by making them both broader in scope and more detailed and specific, and by increasing the power for sanctions. A summary overview of the reforms is offered in Table 12.1.

Table 12.1 Economic governance reforms in the EU

| <i>Reform</i> | <i>Legal nature</i> | <i>Member state involvement</i> | <i>Purpose</i> |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| Six Pack (December 2011) | Secondary EU law | All | Reform of the Stability and Growth Pact; detecting and addressing macroeconomic imbalances; establish the European Semester |
| Two Pack (May 2013) | Secondary EU law | Eurozone member states | Establish process of enhanced surveillance; ensure deeper fiscal surveillance/ institutionalise the European Semester |
| Fiscal Compact (January 2013) | International treaty | All except the UK, Croatia and Czech Republic | Enshrine the balanced budget rule into national law; automatic correction mechanism |

The European Semester has implications for the budgetary politics of member states. The European Semester sets out the timeline not just for actions by the EU institutions, but by the member states themselves. This temporal shift requires member state governments to adjust their processes of budget drafting and debate, as well as impacting significantly on the actual budgets. This level of interference suggests that economic policy can no longer be described as a competence devolved to the member states, since both the decisions and the process are subject to intense EU interference. The idea of 'coercive comparisons' (Erne 2015) captures the politics of how the European Semester process uses the various moments of publication to influence the policy debate in each member state. The ranking of member states' economic situations (via the score card) influences economic debate within member states. This, along with the temporal transformation wrought by the Semester, has led to a real transformation of economic governance in EU states.

All of the above reforms have contributed to the centralisation of economic decision-making. This has occurred at several levels. At the EU level, decision-making rests with the Commission and the Council. While the Parliament itself has sought to increase its power in this area, through increased levels of economic expertise and the publication of alternative reviews and documentation (Schout et al. 2016), the limited impact of these publications shows that the Parliament is mostly side-lined.¹ Furthermore, developments within the Council and the Commission themselves have centralised decision-making, with an increasingly dominant Germany in the Council (Dinan 2016) and a newly centralised bureaucracy and College of Commissioners under the former Commission President Juncker (Dinan 2016).

The centralisation of decision-making illustrates the very political nature of these new governance reforms. Power has shifted, and rarely, without contestation (Laffan and Schlosser 2016b). Further, politics can be observed in the operation of the new economic

governance process. In contrast to the Stability and Growth Pact, the requirements and recommendations that follow from the new regime are inherently subjective, based on the interpretation and collection of data by the Commission (Scharpf 2014). Further, despite the streamlined process for the use of so-called 'automatic sanctions', tangible sanctions have yet to be applied. This is in spite of repeated and clear breaches of the targets by some countries. Both Portugal and Spain, for example, were judged to have failed to meet to the standards set out by the new regime but due to political circumstances, no financial penalty was applied to either member state (European Council 2016; Financial Times 2016). What has developed is a system of increased oversight, without increased enforcement.

The detail, scope and enforcement mechanisms of the new economic governance regime signify a qualitative advancement in the power of the EU to intervene in member state policy-making. The level of oversight and detail of guidance given to countries that have been identified by the EU institutions as requiring additional oversight in macro-economic management is extensive, covering areas of policy that were previously within the purview of member state governments: Fiscal and labour market reforms. It is this focus on the supply side structural reform that is central to the new economic growth model promoted through contemporary European economic governance (Stockhammer 2016).

The structure of the Eurozone meant that labour market (wage and other benefits) and fiscal choices were all that was left to member states seeking to steer their economies when confronted with a crisis (De Grauwe 2013; De Grauwe and Yuemei 2015; Stiglitz 2016): Monetary policy was moved to the European Central Bank, and the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (now the Fiscal Compact) meant that, in most cases, debt-financed public investment was no longer an option. Under the new economic governance framework, fiscal and labour market policies are now subject to EU scrutiny, through the pre-submission of budgets, and EU intervention, through recommendations and sanctions. The economic governance is, therefore, clearly different to the structures in place prior to 2007–2008. The very nature of the oversight involved in the European Semester, therefore, reflects a distinctive shift in competence.

Under the European semester, the Commission and its experts are reviewing budgetary policy at a level of detail that far supersedes the evaluations under the Stability and Growth Pact. Before 2008, few could have imagined the Commission making recommendations on housing policy, for example. The length and specificity of the Country Specific Reports published each year, covering budgetary and policy areas such as child care, pensions and labour market regulation (Bauer and Becker 2014; Dawson 2015), provides clear evidence of a transformed governance system. There is also a change in the accountability mechanisms of the regime, with the traditional avenues of contestation and evaluating of policy decisions noticeably absent. As the recommendations are country-specific and not hard law,² they do not emerge from any of the previous legislative processes of the EU. As such they appear not to be contestable before the courts (Chalmers 2015), as they are not 'laws'.

Further, this large corpus of 'technical' recommendations is not presented as ideological or political, though of course they are. They have deeply redistributive consequences and major implications for the budgetary policy of and economic debates within member states (Scharpf 2014). As such, they *should* be subject to either political or judicial oversight, or both. As it stands, the European Semester is a deeply political process, removed from political oversight. This is not a technocratic regime; decisions are not based solely on an objective review of the numbers. At various points in the cycle of the regime, there are opportunities for political decisions. This is seen most clearly when the choice is taken not to apply sanctions. But it is also seen in the prioritisation of reforms that takes place within the Semester. The European Semester is political then, in that it requires decisions by political actors. It is not, for example, a simply mathematical

algorithm that rules on member state budgets. There are multiple opportunities for human judgement and, therefore, for politics. Most recently, there have been attempts to 'socialise' the European Semester, with the inclusion of social policy recommendations. However, the primary goals of economic growth and stability still overwhelmingly shape the recommendations (Dawson 2018).

Additionally, there is a variation in the number and significance of recommendations given to each member state, with the goal of convergence asking a lot more of some states than others. It is this diversity in the experience of the new framework, as well as the increased potential for penalties (whether formal sanctions or informal shaming), that has led some to talk of a new type of governance. Dawson (2015) describes it as 'asymmetric sovereignty transfer', whereby countries which already comply with the norms of the European Economic Governance regime are required to change little, whereas those who had historically operated on a different social and economic model, have to give up much of their decision-making scope (Dawson 2015; Dawson and Witte 2013). Further, this asymmetry is exacerbated by existing divergences in the economies of the member states (Johnston and Regan 2015; Regan 2017). The bifurcation between export-led and domestic demand-led growth models played a role in the crisis itself (Johnston and Regan 2015) and continues to complicate the policy responses.

The asymmetry of the European Economic Governance regime reflects the divergence in the economic structure of member states, and also their various economic fortunes since 2008 (Magone et al. 2016; Stiglitz 2016). This diversity can be viewed in light of the literature on other diversities, such as linguistic and cultural amongst EU member states (Héritier 1996; Kraus 2008), and raises key questions for the legitimacy and democratic character of the regime. Integration in the context of such diversity, whether it's economic, cultural or linguistic, will mean that any European policies may have different impacts when translated into the national context. This helps to explain why, even though the stated aim of the regime is convergence to a European growth model based on competitiveness (Ryner 2015; Scharpf 2010; Stiglitz 2016), the evidence shows that, in fact, divergence is the trend (Censolo and Colombo 2016; Matthijs 2016; Regan 2017; Stiglitz 2016).

Gendered impacts of the European economic governance reforms

This question of divergence mirrors the literature on EU gender regimes (Walby 2004). Gender regimes in the EU reflect a diverse understanding of gender among policy makers, elites and society at large (Cavaghan 2013; Ostendorf 2012). Different gender regimes reflect different norms around equality, gender roles and gender itself. In particular, this literature highlights how a universally applicable, or apparently neutral policy or framework can have significantly diverse outcomes, mediated through the different gender regimes of member states or policy areas. For example, attempts to increase participation of women in certain economic roles will have different outcomes depending on the generally held understandings of gender and its relationship to such positions. This experience is replicated in the different experiences of the implementation of the Six Pack and Two Pack. That is, both the existing economic structure of a member state and the dominant gender regime influence the implementation of the EU recommendations. The greater difference between the economic or gender regime of the member state and the overarching ideology of the EU, the more adjustment that is required (Dawson 2015). Further, existing gender and economic structures and beliefs can cause unanticipated consequences when the recommendations are implemented. Indeed, in the case of European Economic Governance, there have been significantly gendered impacts documented by feminist scholars.

Beginning with work in the field of gender and development (Elson 2004; Elson and Cagatay 2000; Howes and Singh 1995; Singh and Zammit 2004), a rich body of scholarly work on feminist political economy has developed on the gendered nature of economic policy. This literature highlights key gender biases embedded in economic regimes, with a particular focus on neoliberal economic policies. This research has explored the application of austerity, in particular in the United States and the United Kingdom (Griffin 2015; Pearson and Elson 2015), and there has been some application of this approach to the economic governance of the EU (Cavaghan and O'Dwyer 2018; Klatzer and Schlager 2014; Pauli 2014; Rubery 2015). These early studies have demonstrated how the policy changes which have resulted from the governance regime described in this chapter have had significant gendered impacts, for example, leading to an increased risk of poverty for some groups of women (Karamessini and Rubery 2013). However, there has been little interaction between feminist political economy and European integration studies (Allwood et al. 2013; Kronsell 2005; Weiner and MacRae 2014), or in the literature on economic governance. Indeed, the absence of gender mainstreaming from the European Economic Governance framework itself is a striking puzzle that has not yet been addressed significantly.

This absence has meant that the political debate ignores the deeply gendered nature of redistributive economic policy. The absence of what was supposed to be a fundamental aspect of all EU policy-making, namely gender mainstreaming (Cavaghan 2017b; Lombardo and Meier 2006; Verloo 2005), speaks to the crisis context, to the broader questions of legitimacy and the place which gender equality as a principle holds within the contemporary EU. Additionally, the lack of awareness of this absence within the mainstream literature on European Economic Governance speaks to the wider disconnect between such literature and feminist EU studies.

An economic policy regime that set out to discriminate against either men or women would clearly be gendered. Similarly, an economy that was built on explicit discriminatory laws around work and commerce would be easily identifiable as gendered. However, the absence of such outright discriminatory practice and language is not, in itself, a sign of a regime without any gender bias. There are multiple ways in which economic policy can be gendered, and an economic policy can be gendered in multiple ways simultaneously. In fact, the absence of any reference to gender can be conceived as an indicator of a gender-biased regime. Such an absence ignores the ways in which the actual economy itself is 'gendered via the social norms and networks which are functional to the smooth operation of those institutions' (Elson 1994, 39). Presenting something as gender-neutral or unrelated to gender excludes considerations of the different positions and experiences of men and women (O'Dwyer 2018). As a result of this exclusion, such discourses are likely to bias towards one gender. Clearly, this process of gendering through exclusion could happen within the context of European Economic Governance.

In the absence of gender sensitive analysis, economic policy perpetuates male biases. For example, while the austerity policies of the United Kingdom never overtly targeted women, several empirical studies have shown the gendered impact of this regime (see also Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage in this volume): For example, women have been more likely to face pay cuts or even redundancy due to public sector cutbacks (Elomaki 2012; Karamessini and Rubery 2013; Pearson and Elson 2015). So, the first empirical test for the economic governance regime of the EU is to see whether or not there are checks for such discriminatory impacts. Including this sort of analysis in the policy-making process was one of the aims of the European gender mainstreaming project. However, there is no evidence that gender mainstreaming has been embraced in the field of economic governance (Bruff and Wöhl 2016; Cavaghan 2016; Weiner and MacRae 2014). This means that, in Elson's phrasing, 'even though the policy reforms may not be male biased by design, they will be male biased by omission' (Elson 1994, 40).

Gendering by omission

According to Elson (1994), it is the gendered nature of institutions and social relations that make gender neutral economic policy-making impossible. In this analysis, the existing gender biases generated by male dominance in networks, institutions and social relations more broadly are simply reproduced by policy that does not take account of them. This can be clearly seen as a potential risk in EU economic policy-making, given the male dominance of key decision-making sites, both within the EU institutions such as the European Commission and the European Central Bank, and at national level in finance ministries (Schubert and Young 2011).

Table 12.2 below outlines the references to gender and gender inequality contained within a broad collection of documents of the European Semester. The table shows the results of NVivo analysis. I began by identifying the mentions of some widely accepted economic terms, as a base-line (Banking, Employment, Competitiveness and European Economy). As is to be expected, the mentions of these terms are in the thousands. I then identified some key terms for gendered analysis. Additionally, I performed a search for other categories that may be excluded by the dominant definition of the economy, such as racial or ethnic discrimination. The results are stark, with gender or gender equality garnering only one or two mentions across the documents in some years. Other discrimination concerns are equally underrepresented.

As is shown in Table 12.2, there is a clear picture of the economy that emerges from these documents. This sets the terms for the debate over economic issues. The first four terms reflect the dominant themes of the European semester. They are among the most used words in the documents, and were selected due to their centrality to the regime. They provide a baseline with which to compare the frequency of other keywords. The other keywords were selected as representative of a gender-sensitive understanding of the economy. They provide an illustration of the low level of attention paid to concerns with gender equality, gender differences in the economy and women's particular economic experiences.

Table 12.2 Keyword analysis of the European semester

| Year | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | Total |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| European Economy | 4 | 336 | 168 | 266 | 254 | 150 | 1170 |
| Employment | 505 | 601 | 758 | 850 | 997 | 906 | 4617 |
| Banking | 117 | 213 | 193 | 142 | 223 | 144 | 1032 |
| Competitive/ Competitiveness | 107 | 321 | 277 | 333 | 249 | 202 | 1489 |
| Social Policy | 0 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 19 |
| Gender | 1 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 20 | 11 | 42 |
| Gender Equality | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Care Work/Care Responsibilities | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Unpaid Work | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Child Care | 6 | 5 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 9 | 83 |
| Segregation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Pay Gap | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Discrimination (not gender-specific) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Race/Ethnicity | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Roma People | 0 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 18 |

Source: Author's analysis.³

Over a vast collection of documents, there is a border being drawn between what should be the concern of economic policy-making, and what should not be. This indicates that 'gender bias by omission', as outlined in the previous section, is definitely a problem within these policy documents. This analysis indicates a view of the economy that ignores the very real economic differences and pre-existing gender inequalities across the member states.

These documents make up the corpus of European economic policy. The Country Specific Reports evaluate each member state's economic policy. The Annual Growth Survey establishes the context for policy for the forthcoming year. The CSRs set the specific agenda for reforms. As such, the fact that gender and gender equality receive such scant mention is of great concern. As I discuss above, this can lead to a wide range of gendered outcomes. In particular, the policy of austerity and structural reforms that are promoted throughout the documents have significant redistributive effects. These effects have led to an increase in inequality both within and between member states (Emejulu and Bassel 2017; Matthijs 2016; Stiglitz 2016). Having no regard for the gendered nature of such redistributions is a key factor in the outcome of 'gendered austerity' observed across the member states (Bruff and Wöhl 2016; Elomaki 2012; Kantola and Lombardo 2017; Karamessini and Rubery 2013). For example, decisions about spending cuts in the public sector did not consider that women would be disproportionately impacted, both as users of publicly provided services and as disproportionately represented in the public sector workforce (Karamessini and Rubery 2013; Rubery 2015b).

The absence of gender analysis in the EU's economic policy-making reflects a broader issue: Concerns with gender equality are presented as 'political' in contrast to the more technocratic concerns of economics (Cavaghan and O'Dwyer 2018; O'Dwyer 2018). Economic governance is presented as a political – technocratic, objective, incontestable. This presentation is a key aspect in the exercise of authority for institutions that lack democratic mandates. Gender analysis, done by NGOs and academics, has shown the very political outcomes of the policy decisions of the Commission and the broader economic governance regime (Annesley and Scheele 2011; Bruff and Wöhl 2016; Cavaghan 2016b; Elomaki 2012). In the first year following the onset of the crisis, there was an atmosphere of 'fire fighting', and the absence of gender sensitive analysis was accompanied by the absence of other social or environmental concerns. However, as the reforms enacted in response to the crisis become normalised as the governance system, the narrow focus remains.

A close reading of one of the key documents of economic governance, the Five Presidents' Report (European Commission 2015), illustrates how the omission of gender works in practice. This report was officially delivered by President of the Commission Juncker, in close cooperation with the other presidents from the Parliament, the European Central Bank, the Euro Group and the European Council. The report sets out the vision for the Economic and Monetary Union, and has set the agenda for economic governance since its publication in June of 2015. It sets out the priorities for the development of the economic governance system, and as such is representative of the norms and ideology of the system. Additionally, it is an illustrative document given the high profile and decision-making power of its authors.

The Five Presidents' Report sets out to transform the post-crisis economic regime into a normalised and sustainable governance system. In doing so, it relies on the assumption of a European economy (Rosamond 2002). It refers to the EU as 'the world's largest trading block and the world's largest trader of manufactured goods and services' (European Commission 2015, 17). It also refers to a Europe which is 'emerging' from 'the worst financial and economic crisis in seven decades' (European Commission 2015, 4). This reliance on an image of a unified European economic sphere is a key foundation in the depiction of the economic governance regime that this report seeks to normalise. As Rosamond has noted 'there seems to be considerable weight

attached to the assertion of a European economic self as the basis for enhancing the legitimacy of both the deepening of integration in particular policy directions and the "Europeanization" of governance capacity' (Rosamond 2002, 157).

The Five Presidents' Report is a core document of the new regime. It sets out all of the key reforms and goals for Economic and Monetary Union, with a focus on structural reforms and convergence at its core. It does not mention gender or inequality. It is a clear example of economic policy-making that can be gendered by omission. Despite the focus on convergence, the diversity of gender inequality across member states is never mentioned. Additionally, as the reforms focus on transforming the labour markets of member states – in some cases dramatically – the lack of appreciation of the role of unpaid and care work is striking. Indeed, even child-care is not mentioned within the report. The Five Presidents' Report represents an economic governance regime that has 'generalized the immediate crisis responses of fiscal restraint and supply-side reforms without systematically considering their impact on structurally heterogeneous Eurozone economies' (Scharpf 2016, 17).

It perhaps not surprising then, that the gender blind analysis of the crisis response is now being embedded into a gender blind economic policy regime. However, the absence of any reference to gender mainstreaming in the document is notable. Even in policy areas where gender mainstreaming was judged to have failed in its transformative goals, high level agenda setting documents tended to acknowledge its importance, and propose plans for meeting its standards (Cavaghan 2017). Even the EU's treaty commitment to gender equality is not referenced. This is, therefore, quite a striking example of omission of gender concerns.

The issuing of EU-wide goals during each round of the European Semester furthers the framing idea of a European economic sphere. While these goals and targets are adapted for the particulars of each member state in the CSRs, it is in the EU-wide goals that the major priorities, and shifts in these priorities, can be observed. For example, issues of social protection were long absent in the EU-level goals, and this was reflected in the CSRs. Additionally, when the Commission and other actors sought to 'bring the social back in', it was through change to the EU-level targets (Clauwaert 2015; Zeitlin et al. 2014). This deployment of EU-wide goals and metrics is now a key symbol of European Economic Governance – it represents the shift in competence from the national to the EU level. As such, the discourses of these goals and metrics are a key site of the discursive construction and legitimation of European Economic Governance.

All of this is reflected in the development of EU-level economic measurements. The Commission, the European Central Bank and Eurostat have all developed economic indicators that seek to measure and evaluate interaction at the broad European level. National level indicators such as inflation, unemployment, foreign direct investment and GDP have all been redeveloped as EU-wide measures. Indeed, the Commission in particular has worked to harmonise the use of these measures across the member states (Penissat and Rowell 2015). However, such measurements are not completely neutral. In encouraging discussion of developments in EU-level data, they shape a shared understanding of the European economy as a defined sphere (Mügge 2015). These measurements are presented as measures of the European economy, implicitly asserting that such an economy exists, while also shaping the boundaries of that economy through the decisions over what to include and exclude from such measurement.

There are existing biases in measures such as GDP (Fitoussi et al. 2009; Stiglitz and others 2009) which are carried over from their use at national level to the European level. While some of the measures do address gender as a demographic factor, such as by breaking down unemployment numbers by gender, there is an overall absence of understanding of the gendered nature of society and economics. GDP, in particular, does not capture unpaid work (Saunders

and Dalziel 2017; Waring 1999). This work, which is overwhelmingly carried out by women, goes uncounted and therefore never discussed. Additionally, there is a wide variety in the levels of unpaid care work across the member states. This means that economic measurements that do not address this aspect conceal evidence of the heterogeneity of the EU member state economies (Höpner and Schäfer 2012; Wolski 2015).

Conclusion

This biases of omission can be seen to culminate in one of the key policy proposals – that of austerity. As I have argued elsewhere (O'Dwyer 2018), the omission of gender is essential to both the coherence and the legitimacy of austerity. This is true in the rhetoric of policy makers, such as in the Five Presidents' Report, but is also observable in the economic models and measurements used by the EU. These instruments led to extreme human suffering (Kantola and Lombardo 2017; Stiglitz 2016). They also led to great enrichment for some (Mattei 2017; Matthijs 2016). Understanding the nature of these decisions comprehensively is therefore essential. And any understanding that excludes gender will only exacerbate the gendered distribution of such suffering. It is intellectually remiss to continue to discuss economic policy as though it was gender neutral. Gender sensitive analysis, such as that suggested in this chapter, will allow for more nuanced and more comprehensive analysis of economic policy.

In a Europe that is now defined by the presence of crises, it has perhaps never been more difficult to have gender concerns taken seriously. Crisis rhetoric can serve to side-line gender concerns, and the immediacy of events can excuse simplistic analysis that doesn't take account of the implications of gender in the economy, and in the discourses of European integration. However, in this, same Europe defined by the presence of crises, it has never been more essential to take such concerns seriously. The EU may never live up to its promise of peace and prosperity for all, but if it is to try, there are worse places to start than in recognising that gender matters.

Notes

1. Informal dialogues between the Parliament and the Commission have been established, and there are proposals in the Commission's recent reflection paper on economic governance to formalize them.
2. "Recommendations" are explicitly mentioned in the Treaties, and defined as non-binding
3. The list of documents analysed is available here <https://muireannodwyer.com/2016/09/27/european-economic-governance-documents-appendix/>

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