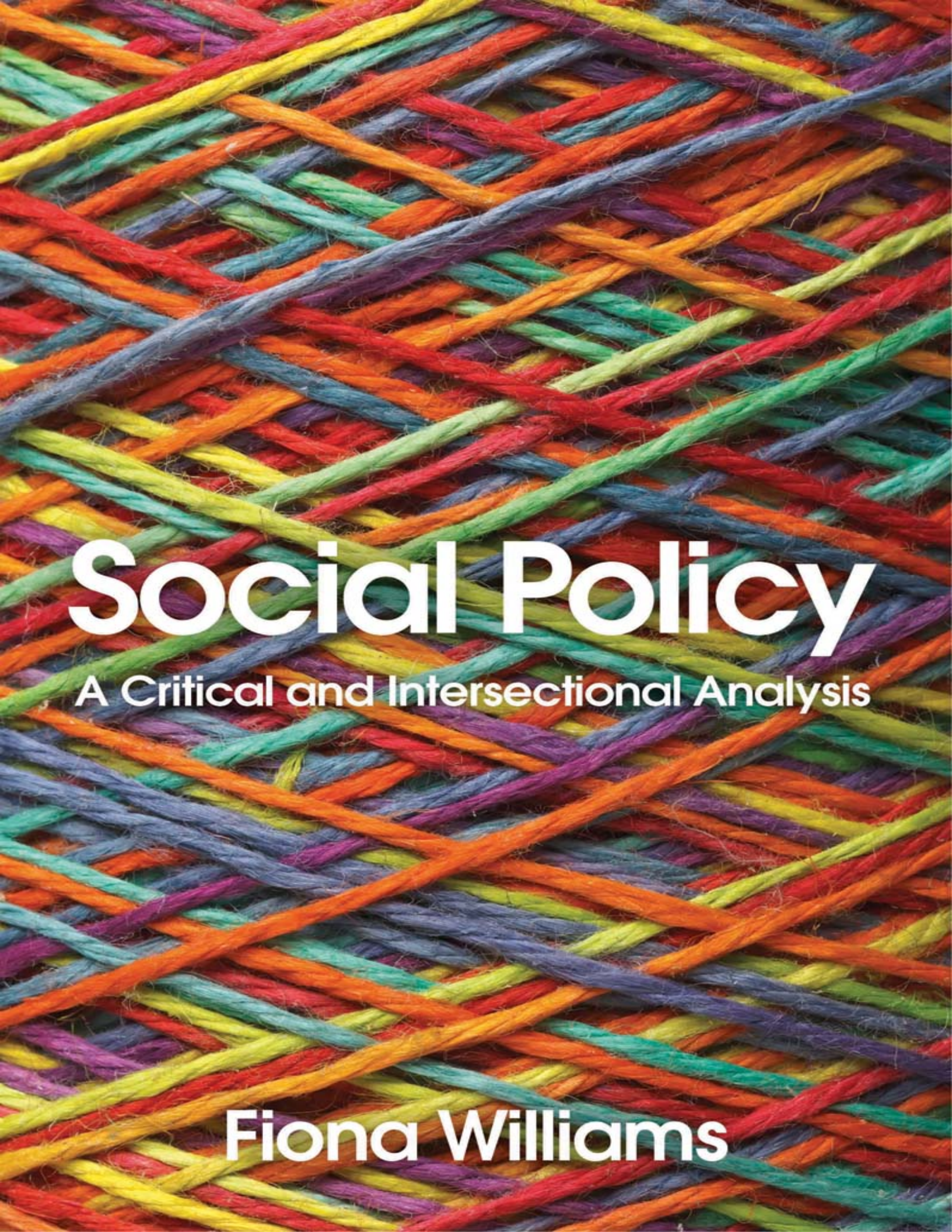
Social Policy
A Critical and Intersectional Analysis
Fiona Williams

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

List of Tables

Social Policy

A Critical and Intersectional Analysis

FIONA WILLIAMS

polity

First published in 2021 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
101 Station Landing
Suite 300
Medford, MA 02155, USA

ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-4040-2

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Williams, Fiona, Professor, author.
Title: Social policy : a critical and intersectional analysis / Fiona Williams.
Description: Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA : Polity Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: “A leading figure in the field offers her view on key questions for social policy and its future”-- Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020053296 (print) | LCCN 2020053297 (ebook) | ISBN 9781509540389 (hardback) | ISBN 9781509540396 (paperback) | ISBN 9781509540402 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Social policy--21st century. | Social problems--History--21st century.
Classification: LCC HN18.3 .W538 2021 (print) | LCC HN18.3 (ebook) | DDC 306.09/05--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020053296
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020053297

subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: politybooks.com

Acknowledgements

I am extremely indebted to John Clarke, Wendy Hollway and Janet Newman for their invaluable encouragement, discussions and comments on drafts of the book. My thanks go to Ruth Lister for talks and walks over the Yorkshire Dales and, for their interest, ideas and conversations, to Rianne Mahon, Greg Marston, Ann Orloff, Coretta Phillips, Jane Pillinger, Sasha Roseneil, Tom Shakespeare, Paul Stubbs and the late Bob Deacon. I am very grateful to Mike Farren for taming the bibliography. For care, love and support I thank Rowena Beaty, Jean Carabine, Emilyn Claid, Rowan Deacon, Joe Deacon, Brian and Maureen Lawrence, Gillean Paterson, and the Wharfedale Poets. Special thanks go to Yvette Huddleston and Mandy Sutter for Friday night drinks throughout the pandemic in gardens and parkland, come rain or shine, in person or in spirit.

A source of intellectual stimulation was my association as advisor with Ito Peng's international project Gender, Migration and the World of Care and Jenny Phillimore's cross-national Welfare Bricolage project. I thank the Compass zoom discussion groups for rich debate on political strategies and activism.

An earlier version of chapter 3 was published in *The Struggle for Social Sustainability*, edited by Chris Deeming (Policy Press, 2021).

Finally my grateful thanks go to Jonathan Skerrett and Karina Jákupsdóttir at Polity Press for their patience and encouragement.

I dedicate this book to my grandchildren Zephyr, Bodhi, Nova, Delaney and Victor in the hope that the earth they

inherit and change will be more flourishing, just and humane.

A Note on Terminology

Terminology changes. This is especially the case where those social categories constituted through social relations of power and inequality are the focus of contestation. An important first principle is to respect the terms that members of social categories prefer to use to describe how they identify while recognizing that these terms will vary. For example, in the UK, disability studies uses the term 'disabled people' whereas many international organizations such as the United Nations refer to 'persons with disabilities'. Another example is the acronym LGBTQI+, which refers to sexual orientation (lesbian, gay and bisexual) as well as gender identity (queer, transgender, and intersex), while '+' allows for differences within, across and outside those categories. A second guideline is to avoid terms that deprive groups of their personhood, such as '*the* poor' or '*the* elderly'. It is more humanizing to talk of 'older people' or 'people living in (or with) poverty'. A third consideration is how to employ those general terms – race, disability, gender – which register the political significance of relations of power without homogenizing the experiences of racism, sexism, disability, and so on. This is particularly an issue for race, where, to begin with, it is important to be clear that the concept is a social construct and not based upon any biological or essentialist difference. For that reason it is often placed within quotation marks as 'race'. Accepting its social construction enables analysis of how race is given meaning over time and place. This book is particularly concerned with processes of racialization in social politics – that is to say, how groups come to be defined as racial subjects and the unequal power relations and inequalities that contribute to and flow from these processes. The concept of racialization allows an

understanding that racism operates in various ways, constructing difference through culture, religion, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship status or language, as well as intersecting with class, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.

The adjective Black (capitalized) is often used as a political attribute rather than a description (Black Lives Matter). However, in analysis of race, racism and racialization it is important to recognize multiple identities and heritages which are constituted through experience, geographical and cultural heritage, faith and national citizenship (such as African Caribbean, Black British or British Asian). As well as people from the countries of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Central and Latin America, the Middle East and Oceania, historically and today in the UK racism is directed at Gypsies and Travellers, Jewish, Turkish and Irish people, and recent migrants from Central and Eastern Europe.

Recently the use of the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic), or BME (Black and Minority Ethnic), has become standard by public bodies and services and in statistical data. It has replaced ‘ethnic minorities’ as an administrative category. Its advantage is that it recognizes a degree of multiplicity, and, in the use of the phrase ‘minority ethnic’ (rather than ‘ethnic minority’), it acknowledges that all people, not just minorities, have an ethnicity. The downside is that, in becoming an administrative category, it tends to a static and homogenizing implication devoid of political meaning. Avoiding this means using the term in a context which refers to its multiplicity and political meaning. The term ‘people of colour’, which derives from the US, is preferred by some to acknowledge their social and political collectivity. In this book, I have used different terms in different contexts and, when referencing studies or statistics, I have followed the terms used in the source material. I have employed the adjective ‘white’ except in

those places where the source material has referred to ‘White’ as a group. Notes on equality and diversity in use of language can be found on the British Sociological Association website: www.britsoc.co.uk/Equality-Diversity/.

1
Introduction

Welfare states face profound challenges. Widening economic and social inequalities and insecurities have been intensified by the post-financial crisis austerity politics, sharpened by the rise in ethno-nationalism, and cruelly exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, recent decades have seen a resurgence of social justice activism at the local and transnational levels. Major global movements such as Occupy, Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and Global Women's Strike have been as compelling in their necessity as in their massive mobilizations. Yet the transformative power of feminist, anti-racist and post-/decolonial, and ecological thinking is still relatively marginal to core social policy theory, while other critical approaches – around disability, sexuality, migration, childhood and old age – have found recognition only selectively.

This book offers an analysis that attempts to bring many of these issues together. Combining critical and intersectional approaches with ideas to have emerged out of contemporary struggles for social justice, it examines key issues and themes in social policy today. These range from questions of agency; the constitution of welfare subjects through austerity; the social, ethical and contested relations of welfare; global crises; and the transnational social and political economy of care. The approach informs and connects critical and intersectional analyses of multiple social inequalities and social justice with questions of political practice: not only how to 'do' social politics but also how our lives together might be better lived.

The analysis has three integral elements. First, I argue that we need to contextualize the development of neoliberal and austerity welfare not only in terms of the crisis of financialized capitalism but also in terms of the interconnected global crises of care and social reproduction, the environment and climate change, and the external and internal racializing of national borders. Together these threaten human and planetary sustainability while also generating multiple and intersecting inequalities. The second element translates this global context into national social policy through an analysis of the dynamics of intersecting social relations of power; these are articulated through the meanings, materialities and policies attached to family, nation, work and nature. Third, I explore how the contestations for social justice that these crises provoke provide new political ethics and prefigurative politics, especially in the understanding of new formations of interdependence, relationality and democracy, solidarity, and humanity. These provide a guide to consider the transformative possibilities for a future eco-welfare commons.

There is for me a sense of déjà vu about the marginality of radical and transformative thinking in mainstream social policy. In 1987 I published an article entitled ‘Racism and the discipline of social policy: a critique of welfare theory’ (Williams 1987). This outlined a new analysis of how imperialism, colonialism and nationhood had framed early social policy and the post-war welfare state; how this analysis should be informed by the struggles of racialized groups; and how these were intersected by class and gender relations. *Social Policy: A Critical Introduction: Issues of ‘Race’, Gender and Class*, followed, in which I argued that these three social relations needed to be interconnected and central to an analysis of social policy. I offered an analytical framework of family, nation and work

through which these social relations were articulated (Williams 1989). I was one of many scholars in the UK at the time pursuing such analyses shaped, as we were, by the strength and limitations of Marxism reflected in the new social movements of the time, especially around feminism, black feminism, anti-racism, and gay and lesbian liberation (Weeks 1977; Wilson 1977; Hall et al. 1978; Lewis and Parmar 1983; Amos et al. 1984; Bhavnani and Coulson 1986; Phoenix 1987; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Brah 1996).

Fast forward thirty years. In July 2019 the UK's Social Policy Association published a commissioned report: *The Missing Dimension: Where Is 'Race' in Social Policy Teaching and Learning?* (Craig et al. 2019; see also Cole et al. 2020). The report examined curricula of social policy courses, journal and conference content over the previous five years, and BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) representation among students and staff. In terms of the curriculum and literature, the report found the lack of focus on race and racism to be 'dismal'. In terms of staff and student representation, this was overwhelmingly white. BAME students did not find the curriculum relevant to their concerns. This repeated the point made earlier by Craig: 'It is still not uncommon for mainstream social policy texts to treat debates on "race" and racism as marginal' (Craig 2007: 610). This is in spite of the fact that, as I argue in this book, since that time policies around the racialization of national borders, bordering practices within the UK, and a 'hostile environment' have all had detrimental outcomes on the citizenship rights and social and economic inequalities of minority ethnic and migrant groups. These have had specific gendered effects but have also provided a policy template for the abjection of other welfare subjects (Tyler 2013; Mayblin et al. 2019; Humphris 2019). Alongside this, there has been a rise across many regions

of nationalist, anti-immigration movements and parties in which welfare chauvinism – blaming immigration for declining social provision – has been a central theme. Social policy as a discipline is not alone in its neglect. A Royal Historical Society report (Atkinson et al. 2018) arrived at similar conclusions. British criminology has also been held to account (Phillips et al. 2020), as has sociology (Hesse 2014). It is in these contexts that academics and students in the social and political sciences and humanities have recently put forward demands to 'Decolonise the Curriculum' (Bhambra et al. 2018; Rhodes Must Fall 2018).

While this marginalization is specific to both race and racism, where it is most marked, there are corresponding trends with other critiques. Far-reaching as they were, the earlier feminist analyses lost their 'bite' in mainstream social policy over subsequent decades (Williams 2016). No surprise, then, that in a review of the discipline Ann Orloff comments that, while the debates between feminists and mainstream scholars in comparative social policy have been productive, 'yet the mainstream *still resists the deeper implications* of feminist work, and has difficulties assimilating concepts of care, gendered power, dependency and interdependency' (Orloff 2009: 317; emphasis added). More recently and more specifically, Mary Daly and Emanuele Ferragina (2018) note the lack of integration of comparative family policies research into comparative studies of the welfare state and of austerity. Without this, they argue, not only are particular struggles around equality lost from analysis, but so are the connections of the shifts in social and cultural values and the ways family policies reinforce measures such as targeting, fiscalization or workfare. Set this against a broader political context, in which the gender pay gap, gender violence, everyday sexism, reproductive justice, and (more recently) inadequate recognition of paid and unpaid care work are

high on the agenda of feminist organizations such as the Fawcett Society, Southall Black Sisters and Sisters Uncut (and see Campbell 2013; Olufemi 2020).

Other new perspectives emerging from struggles and research around disability, sexuality, migration, childhood and age also find themselves in specialist silos, obscuring their radical implications for social policy. The issue of the environment and climate change has been pushing hard to get on to the social policy agenda over the past two decades (Fitzpatrick and Cahill 2002; Fitzpatrick 2011, 2014; Snell and Haq 2014; Gough 2017; O'Neill et al. 2018). It has recently been given momentum by the arguments of Fitzpatrick (2014) and Gough (2017): that there is interdependence between social policies to improve the social infrastructure and the need to achieve sustainability. Social policy solutions are needed to ensure just adaption and mitigation policies, and social policy provision has itself to be delivered in a sustainable manner.

Continuities and changes

This complexity of continuity and change is reflected in the world outside of academic social policy. The context of neoliberalism and austerity politics, racialization and dehumanization of border practices, care crises and ecological disasters – including the 2020 pandemic – feels overwhelming. Yet recent decades have seen not only the impact of global social movements that I mentioned earlier but also a resurgence of local feminist and anti-racist activism, eco-activism and anti-austerity campaigns – the last often spearheaded by disability organizations. Alongside these, innovative democratically run decentralized initiatives have been established in communities 'discarded by the market and disregarded by the state', where people 'are already doing economics

differently' (Chakrabortty 2018). These include new cooperative schemes, new unions, new forms of municipalism and community development, healthy cities, social enterprises, new models of co-production and service delivery, and new democratic modes such as citizens' assemblies (Featherstone et al. 2020; Miller 2020). New global networks of 'Fearless Cities' are transforming cities through street-level democracy and feminist and anti-racist, pro-migrant solidarities (Barcelona en comú et al. 2019). Many experiments exist in generating zero growth and ecologically sustainable local economies in transition towns (Red Pepper 2020). Transnational movements have developed for indigenous peoples' and migrants' rights, against militarism, and for territorial justice, along with the remarkable international mobilization of school students' strikes against climate change started in 2018. International campaigns for LGBTQI+ rights have achieved significant cultural recognition, albeit uneven and contested, that would not have seemed possible at the turn of the century (Weeks 2007; Abrahams 2019). In addition, in many areas, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed street-level actions of generosity, kindness, mutual aid and care (Solnit 2020).

While this resurgence signifies challenge and change, there is also a sense of intensified continuities – the 'unfinished business' of everyday and institutional racism, sexism, ableism and ageism finding consequential logics in different forms of inequalities, insecurities and child poverty, all of which were magnified by the pandemic crisis. The increased precarity of working conditions, combined with austerity cutbacks in services and benefits, disproportionately affects the wellbeing of black and minority ethnic women (WBG and Runnymede Trust 2017). A systematic account of ethnicity, race, discrimination and racism published in 2020 found that these were entrenched

for all minority groups in all areas of society – education, employment, housing, health, criminal justice and policing, as well as politics, the arts, media and sport (Byrne et al. 2020). Even the Conservative government's Racial Disparity Unit worried in 2018 that 'there is still a way to go before we have a country that works for everyone regardless of their ethnicity' (Cabinet Office 2018: 1).

These forms of inequality were reproduced in the disproportionate effects of the Covid-19 pandemic: in the UK, BAME men and women were over four times more likely to die than their white counterparts (ONS 2020a). The high numbers of deaths of care-home residents (ONS 2020b) underlined the low value given to both residents and workers in care homes and the creaking health and social care infrastructure. Disability organizations have been at the forefront of campaigns around welfare benefit cuts; at the same time they have also been the target of a big increase in hate crimes (Burch 2018). Transgender activists have made headway in challenging transphobia, yet trans and gender-diverse as well as LGBTQ people face significantly greater risk of unemployment, hate crime and homelessness, risks which are heightened for BAME trans groups (Bachmann and Gooch 2017; Hines 2013; Abrahams 2019).

New critical thinking that has been inspired by and inspires such activism also involves a double movement of continuity and change: introducing new ideas as well as interrogating and resituating 'old' concepts. In addressing the continuing forms of marginalization both on the ground and in social policy's mainstream, I develop an analysis that is informed by contemporary thinking and activisms within and outside social policy and also connects to critical thinking in social policy that came out of social movements from the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, intersectionality emerged in the 1970s to make visible the struggles of women of

colour whose experiences were reconstituted through the intersections race, gender, and class relations of power (Combahee River Collective [1977] 1995; Hull et al. 1982; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Lewis and Parmar 1983; Crenshaw 1989). This re-emerged in the twenty-first century both as a reassertion and a reflection of the power of black feminist thinking and as 'the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far' (McCall 2005: 1771). It serves as a methodological and political concept to reflect the multiplicity of identities and forms of domination and subordination as well as the need to recognize the connections that link theory and method to political practice (McCall 2005; Cho et al. 2013; May 2015; Hill Collins and Bilge 2016; Carastathis 2016; Hancock 2016; Romero 2018; Nash 2019).

That connection between the struggles of then and the possibilities of now has been likened to two bookends holding between them half a century of neoliberalism (Barnett 2020). At one end are the struggles for civil rights, solidarity with the Vietnamese against American imperialism, the Prague Spring, the 1968 student uprisings and the new social movements that followed. Within these were fundamental critiques of exclusions of those marginalized from the so-called universal progress of modernity since the Enlightenment in social, civil and human rights. At the other end, the global struggle for a new humanism is again asserting itself in different forms – the surfacing of a seam of activism that has continued in parallel to neoliberalism. Its impact was marked by the fact that, when Covid-19 struck, most governments felt obliged to prioritize, however incompetently and short-run, people's lives and health over the financial interests of capitalism. This feeling of the value of human life, structured in people's consciousness across the world, was

given expression by the support for the Black Lives Matter protests in May 2020.

The ‘bookends’ metaphor is relevant to social policy. The development of a critical approach to social policy emerged from those sharpened understandings of welfare states in the 1970s and 1980s which provided feminist and anti-racist critiques of social policy and revised the class-centric perspectives of Marxist political economy. In particular, along with critiques based on disability, sexuality and age, they elaborated the social and organizational relations of power within welfare states and looked to participatory democratic and alternative ‘prefigurative’[1] ways of meeting people’s needs. The uptake in activisms in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis combined with the changing political context has shaped critical reflections on these earlier concepts. For example, the social concepts of ‘race’ and ‘Black’ once served to politicize and unify experiences of racialized oppression, yet, on their own, they do not convey the specificities of experiences of those constituted as minority ethnic groups (Modood [2007] 2013; Murji 2017) or the reconfigurations of diverse migrations (Vertovec 2007; Phillimore et al. 2021). Ethnicity, religion, nationality, language and migrant status (not to mention class, gender, sexuality, disability and generation) shape those experiences in different ways at different times. However, those categories are given shape and meaning through social policies and public (and popular) discourses. Such developments challenged the fixed binaries (male/female, Black/White, gay/straight, etc.) attached to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability and generation and introduced more fluid and dynamic interpretations of diverse subjectivities, identities and social positionings.

From the 1990s critical efforts were concentrated in reinstating the area of ‘the social’ into both welfare regime analysis and analyses of the cultural, ideational,

organizational and material challenges to the Keynesian welfare settlement (Clarke and Newman 1997; Williams 1995; Lewis 2000; Lister 2003; Béland 2009). These developments influenced new thinking in social policy around both the agency of providers and users of welfare and their psychosocial dimensions and around welfare governance and its fluid and contingent reach to multiple publics (Clarke and Newman 1997; Williams et al. 1999; Lewis 2000; Hoggett 2001; Newman and Clarke 2009; Newman 2012a; Barnes and Prior 2009; Hunter 2015; Lister 2021). In addition, the issue of care has been transformed from being about family policy to a domain of intersecting and intersubjective power relations, a labour as well as a commodity, a relational ethics, and a dynamic central to the postcolonial transnational political economy, to democracy and to intersectional global justice (Sevenhuijsen 1998; Tronto 1993, 2013; Daly 2002; Robinson 1999; Williams 2001, 2018). Earlier anti-essentialist refusals to see 'nature as destiny' shifted to exploring the dynamics of power relations between human life, nature, technology and science in the 'new materialisms', in ecofeminism, and in ideas of the posthuman and critical disability studies (Coole and Frost 2010; Braidotti 2013; Goodley et al. 2014). These new forms of interdependence between the human, non-human and living world have created new challenges of developing eco-social policy analysis (Gough 2017; Jackson 2016) and new models for a wellbeing economy (Raworth 2017; Care Collective 2020) and for the possibility of a social commons (Ostrom 1990; Mestrum 2015; Newman and Clarke 2014; Coote 2017; Gough 2017). Prefigurative activism is now understood as part of the methodology of Utopian thinking (Levitas 2013; Cooper et al. 2020). Postcolonial critiques interrupt the dominant readings of globalization and of welfare regimes that ignore its history in a colonial world order whose logics of racial, gender, sexual and bodily

subordination and dehumanization have been carried into contemporary geo-social politics (Mignolo 2011; Bhambra and Holmwood 2018; Shilliam 2018). Within social policy, Mbembe's (2019) powerful concept of necropolitics, which refers to the state's capacity to decide who is and who is not disposable, illuminates an understanding of the relationship between welfare policies and the situation of migrants, asylum seekers and BAME groups more generally (Mayblin et al. 2019).

Piecemeal and marginal to mainstream welfare theory as they may be, these new developments have influenced critical thinking in social policy. I have suggested elsewhere (Williams 2016) that these constitute 'five turns',[2] to: (i) agency, understood in relational rather than individualist terms; (ii) political ethics of care, of ecology, and of decoloniality; (iii) the global, post-/decolonial and geo-political relations of welfare states; (iv) prefigurative politics; and (v) the (re)turn to intersectionality. What they have in common is their attention to the complexity and multiplicity of power and inequality and to the connections between cultural, social, economic and political marginalization. They are informed by local and transnational activism. They provide new lenses on an understanding of possibilities of humanness and society's ethical obligations, and, in doing so, they point to possibilities for future social policy. What each of these 'turns' means will become clear in the description of the book's structure that follows.

Structure of the book

The book is divided into three parts: *Orientation* discusses the theories that influence this book and my main frames of analysis. *Analysis* applies these theories and frameworks to three different areas: the welfare austerity decade in the

UK, the question of agency, and the transnational political and social economy of care. *Praxis* discusses the implications of political ethics (of care, ecology and decoloniality) and contemporary prefigurative politics for a future eco-welfare commons.

Chapters 2 and 3 contribute to explaining the book's orientation. In chapter 2 I first elaborate and provide an explanation for the point I have made in this chapter: why it was that the theoretical and political insights of feminist, anti-racist and other critical-thinking analyses remained on the edges of the core theories of the discipline. I argue that there were a number of contradictory dynamics involved in this (re)marginalization which came not only from within the discipline but also from social, economic, political and intellectual developments over that time. The second part of the chapter considers possibilities for enhancing the explanatory power of new critical developments in social policy in order to bring these marginalized issues into the centre of social policy analysis. This involves combining an intersectional analysis with critical approaches to social policy. While acknowledging the limitations of some applications of intersectionality, I argue that its strength for social policy lies in its potential to unearth – through lived experiences and struggles – the multiple complexities of social power and inequalities (around gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc.) as well as participatory and transformative possibilities for social justice. It challenges fixed and essentialist approaches in which social positions or economic systems are seen as given, natural or overdetermining. It emphasizes relationality, the contingencies of time and place, and the contested, contradictory and unsettled nature of phenomena, and it prioritizes ideas that emerge from the margins and inform resistance. At the same time, I argue that it is important to recognize the times and places when the salience of one

particular form of inequality is greater, in social justice terms, than the others. It is also important to place an intersectional reading in an understanding of welfare states' relationship to a capitalism that is patriarchal, extractivist and racially structured. It is here and in critiques of the social relations between providers and users of welfare that critical approaches to social policy can strengthen intersectionality.

Chapter 3 synthesizes this combination of intersectionality and critical social policy approaches into a framework for analysing contemporary welfare states. I argue that those analyses of recent developments in neo-liberal and austerity welfare as emerging from the 2008 financial crisis of capitalism are not able to explain the particular forms of gender, race, class and disability-related inequalities that are its consequence. Building on but critiquing Fraser's feminist reinterpretation of Polanyi's analysis of the history of capitalist crisis, I propose that we should contextualize austerity welfare in terms of four intersecting crises, all of which threaten human and planetary sustainability: the financialized crisis of capitalism; the crisis of care and social reproduction; the crisis of the environment and climate change; and the crisis of the external and internal racializing of national borders. Within this frame I develop a second framing for analysis of social policies at the national level. This articulates the key organizing principles of contemporary welfare states as family, nation, work and nature. It is the social relations, changes and contestations in these four domains that unsettle welfare governance, but at the same time these domains are among the principal vectors through which governments seek to legitimize their attempts to resettle and restructure welfare.

The second part of the book, on Analysis, contains three chapters. In chapter 4 I apply the family–nation–work–nature analysis to the decade which starts in 2010 with

austerity and ends in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic. (The pandemic struck as I was over half-way through the book, so references to it are largely time limited to the late summer of 2020.) The analysis focuses on three clusters of social policies during the era, each of which mutually connects one of the four domains of family, nation, work and nature to one of the others. Thus, the first section draws out the intersecting inequalities that are linked by 'hard work' and aspects of family, care and intimacy – the depletion and devaluation of care, the responsibilization of parenting with the attribution of blame, the intersectional effects of austerity on BAME women, and, in contrast, the recognition of relationship diversity. The second focus is on bordering practices in a post-racial context. 'Post-racial' refers to the perspective which regards the issue of race, anti-racism and multiculturalism as a thing of the past, something that is settled. As Goldberg (2015: 34) defines it: 'The post-racial is the racial condition in denial of the structural.' I show how this perspective reinforced assimilation and integration in ways which were Islamophobic while, at the same time, instituting bordering practices that increasingly set minority groups in the population apart and subject to surveillance and to restrictions in their social and civil rights. This includes the well-known case of the Windrush betrayal. The term 'bordering' refers back to external bordering practices against migrants and asylum seekers (discussed in chapter 3) which became the template for the governance of other social groups. This attempt to settle a 'post-racial' common sense signals the creep of necropolitics through 'nation' and 'nature', which is discussed in the third section through three different events: the Grenfell Tower fire; the politics of welfare ethno-nationalism in the Brexit debate; and, last, the Covid-19 pandemic. I show how all three clusters of policy were constituted through a style of governance that was incompetent and indifferent. Its

method of gaining public consent for policies was depriving and dehumanizing in two ways: first, a shape-shifting of liberal values of fairness, equality and tolerance which gave rise to quite the opposite outcomes; and, second, the exercise of the classic underserving/deserving divide. As the decade wore on, this binary became more dependent on ethno-nationalist populism. The pandemic was to expose many of the inequalities and incompetencies that marked the decade.

Where chapter 4 explores the constitution of people as welfare subjects, chapter 5 turns to agency, activism and the nuances of contestation. It looks at how the 'turn to agency' from the 1990s in the discipline of social policy was one of its most important critical developments. This chapter explains what prompted the turn and its key shift into understanding agency as relational. It offers an intersectional approach to agency that works in two ways – in understanding the interconnected, shifting and multifaceted nature of power in the exercise of agency and in making visible those spaces of resistance that often remain out of sight. It also focuses on the 'double helix' of agency – that is, where one spiral relates to multiple social relations of gender, class, race, etc., and an interconnecting spiral signifies the relationship between welfare providers and users. This chapter is the book's pivot: it provides an understanding of how resistance and contestation is carried through everyday actions and quiet solidarities of mutual care and support; it explains how this happened during the decade of austerity in spite of earlier ideas that feminism and anti-racism had had their day; and it links to the prefigurative politics explored in chapter 7.

In chapter 6 I turn back to one of the four crises in chapter 3 – care and social reproduction and its links to transnational mobility – to examine the phenomenon of migrant care workers who move to care for the families

and households in richer countries, often leaving their own children behind to be looked after by others. The chapter develops an analysis of the imbricating scales of global, national and interpersonal that migrant care workers inhabit. At the global level are both the care market and the possibilities for reform and advocacy through international organizations and transnational migrant support groups. At the national scale migrant care work is shaped by the ways care practices and policies intersect with employment policies which devalue care work and rules and regulations around migration which deem care work unskilled. At the interpersonal scale are a complex of social relations between the migrant care worker and the person for whom she cares or works. At all scales, this is about the intersections of inequalities of gender, race, class, migration status and nationality, underpinned by geo-political inequalities between richer and poorer nations, historically constituted in colonial relations of racialized servitude. This raises challenging questions for the meaning of global social justice. I argue that there are a number of immediate strategies that would improve the position of migrant care workers, but, in the long term, the complex relations of inequality it embodies require, for a start, that the everyday relations of paid and unpaid work are not subsumed under the goals of economic growth but become central to global social justice and strategies for sustainability.

The third and final part of the book explores praxis. Chapter 7 brings many of the themes of the book together. Recalling the point made earlier that some of the most significant struggles today are around the provision of care and support, around climate change and around the dehumanization of racialized groups and migrants, I explore three sets of political ethics – by political, I mean ethics that are not abstracted but grounded in struggles for

emancipation. I examine the ethics of care, environmental ethics and decolonial ethics. While there are differences across and within these ethical positions, they share a critique of Western-centric liberal notions of rational white male, able-bodied, heterosexual autonomy. They also challenge neoliberal values of individualism, autonomy and competition and the dependence of capitalism upon economic growth. Instead they promote interdependence, reciprocity, human flourishing and sustainability. Together they expand the notion of interdependence to include moral obligations not only to distant strangers across the world but also to the planet and its non-human and living organisms, to future generations' right to inherit a sustainable planet, and to those past generations who suffered slavery and other forms of dehumanization from colonialism and imperialism. They point to new models for the economy, for deliberative democracy and for the recognition of different forms of knowledge that incorporate a new pluriversal humanism. I combine these guiding principles with the resurgence of prefigurative politics of civil society actors and their attempts to develop in new ways the principles of multiple interdependencies, relationality, democratic deliberation and interpersonal, local and translocal solidarities. With these in mind, I explore commonalities and tensions in different proposals for a social commons and a changed relationship between people and the state, emphasizing the urgency of the need to reimagine the welfare state.

The implications of these and other analyses in the book for teachers, researchers, students and scholar activists are taken up in chapter 8 as a conclusion. I summarize the theoretical approaches in the book and then look at social policy as a field of study in terms of, first, reconstituting its knowledge base with an emphasis on decolonizing the discipline; second, developing relational knowledge and