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The global politics of social protection

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Abstract: Since the early 2000s international development agencies have actively promoted social protection as a new global public policy. This process can be understood as flowing from related shifts within the global political economy and of development ideology, and involved international development agencies deploying strategies of governmentality to ‘render technical’ social protection, and cash transfers in particular, as the logical solution to myriad development problems, including within Africa. The paper places this move in historical perspective and examines the role that a particular aid agency played in shaping the transfer of cash transfers to Africa.

Keywords: Africa, policy transfer, politics, social protection

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1 Introduction

Since the early 2000s social protection programmes have proliferated across much of Africa (Garcia and Moore 2012). One interpretation presents these as part of a ‘quiet’ ‘development revolution from the global South’, constituting an alternative to both the ‘neoliberal economic model’ and ‘the northern model of social protection’ (Hanlon et al. 2010). A second interpretation also presents them as part of a global process of policy reform, but one that was largely imposed by the World Bank (Peck 2011; Peck and Theodore 2015). Transnational ideas and actors have indeed played a major and active role in processes of reform, but these have entailed ‘translation’ rather than ‘diffusion’ or even ‘transfer’. The World Bank’s partial embrace of cash transfers in the early twenty-first century energized reforms, but the World Bank had only modest success in persuading governments in Africa to implement the ‘conditional’ cash transfers that it prefers as investments in human capital. Other transnational actors—including especially the British Department for International Development (DfID), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (Unicef), and HelpAge International (a British-based non-governmental organization [NGO] network)—all actively promoted alternative forms of social protection in Africa, based on a range of ideas and norms, and all with uneven success. Diverse governments across Africa have generally resisted the models promoted by transnational actors; when and where they have implemented reforms, they have generally translated models into a local form—as demonstrated by our case study research.

In this paper, we examine how and why transnational agencies sought to promote social protection as a new global public policy (Stone 2008) in the early twenty-first century and their role in negotiating the uptake of specific social protection policies within Africa. We adopt and extend Tania Murray Li’s framework for understanding how development ideas travel and become sustained in the global South. Murray Li (2007) draws on Marx to understand how processes of accumulation, exploitation, and exclusion create the grounds for certain policy ideas to become relevant, on Gramsci to understand how ideological contests over different forms of development are fought and play out, and on Foucault to understand the way that powerful actors ‘render technical’ challenges such as poverty and inequality, in order to sustain particular modes of governmentality. Section two sets out this framework and argues for an extension of Murray Li’s approach, one which frames the actual spread of global public policies as a negotiated form of ‘institutional practice’ by certain development agencies. Borrowing from Mosse (2005), this involves interrogating the internal workings of the ‘aidworld’ and of particular aid agencies in order to appreciate the often contingent and personalized histories that lie behind the development and promotion of particular agendas in specific times, places, and ways.

Section three examines briefly the role of transnational actors and ideas in social protection in Africa through the twentieth century. We show how ideas from Britain and elsewhere inspired reformers in its colonies and dominions, while officials in London and in the colonies (and dominions) sought to contain reform. In the decades after decolonization, global agencies generally continued to discourage African governments from introducing social assistance programmes. Nonetheless, the changing political economy on the ground in some parts of Africa meant that they were unable to prevent social assistance reforms entirely.

Section four examines in more detail the shift towards the social protection agenda among transnational agencies in the 2000s. We show how a new poverty agenda emerged, framed by the Millennium Development Goals, and was given momentum by successive crises within global capitalism. The post-millennial ‘socialization of global policy’ (Deacon 2007; Peck 2011) that characterized the rise of the Post-Washington Consensus, involved international development agencies vigorously deploying various modes of governmentality to render social protection

technical as a tool for poverty reduction. At the global level, this can be understood in part as involving a Gramscian ‘war of position’ between different development agencies with competing perspectives (Deacon 2007). The position that different agencies adopted within this struggle, ranging from the neoliberal residualism of the World Bank through DfID’s ‘third-way’ poverty focus to the rights-based welfarism of the ILO, would directly shape the forms of social protection that came to be promoted in Africa. However, it is important to recognize how this debate played out within national governments in Africa, and also *within* as well as between specific aid agencies. As our case study of DfID in section five suggests, the organizational politics of aid agencies played a significant role in shaping the construction and promotion of social protection as a global policy agenda and, in particular, its application in Africa through specific forms of governmentality.

The paper’s concluding section considers the implications of this ongoing process of transnational policy construction and transfer for the politics of development in Africa, including the ideological bias of both development agencies and elites in Anglophone Africa towards forms of social protection which are attuned with certain (and broadly liberal) ideas around state, citizenship, and welfare, the negotiated politics of aid and the need for a wider focus on building ‘fiscal contracts’. We also acknowledge the limitations of the material presented here and show how the framework we adopt helps to identify fruitful lines of further investigation and analysis. The evidence base for the paper is derived from interviews undertaken with key actors involved in the construction of social protection as a global policy agenda and in-depth qualitative case studies of how processes of transnational policy transfer have been negotiated between international actors and African elites over the past two decades within 15 countries in Anglophone Africa.¹

2 Conceptualizing the rise of social protection as a global policy agenda

Surveying the increasingly rich literature on the ways in which ‘global policies’ become developed, promoted, and taken up in different contexts, Stone (2012) identifies two broad schools of thought on this process, namely ‘rational-institutionalism’ and ‘constructivism’. Rational-institutional frameworks interpret the behaviour of international actors as dependent on the balance of power between nations and the incentive structures shaping self-serving decision-making by particular policy-making individuals or groups nationally, or who represent nation states within multilateral organizations (Haas and Haas 2002). From this perspective, policy mobility is imagined as a process of ‘diffusion’ (Stone 2012), whether through ‘best practice’ sharing across transnational networks of state officials in pursuit of innovative problem-solving, or through the coercion of one state to adopt a model being advocated by another for political or economic gain.

This perspective has been challenged from multiple perspectives. Weyland’s (2007) analysis of how pension privatization and health care reform spread across Latin America during the 1990s suggests that policy elites operate within the confines of ‘bounded rationality’ when deciding which policy lessons to adopt from other countries, rather than on the basis of ‘comprehensive cost–benefit calculations’. This involves taking ‘cognitive shortcuts’, often influenced by the timely availability of innovative policy models that meet immediate pressing needs (Weyland 2007: 5). The rational-choice approach has also been opposed on two counts from a critical constructivist perspective. First, for overlooking the politics inherent in the policy transfer process, which is ‘deeply structured by enduring power relations and shifting ideological alignments’ (Peck and Theodore 2010: 169), and, second, for offering a structurally deterministic account of how these

¹ Collectively, our projects involved examining the rise of cash transfers in 15 countries: Kenya, Tanzania (and Zanzibar), Malawi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Mozambique, Uganda, Lesotho, Ghana, and South Africa.

power relations work in ways that neglect the potential for social interaction to reshape the model being advocated or the ideas shaping the behaviour of agents in the process (Mosse 2005; Stone 2012). Critical constructivists generally use term ‘translation’ rather than ‘diffusion’ or ‘transfer’, partly in recognition of the role played by domestic political agency in this process.

Constructivist accounts of policy transfer range from the more liberal accounts of how ideas circulate within the global agora (e.g. Stone 2008), which tend to adopt a non-normative view of which actors and ideas are likely to gain ascendancy within this public market place for ideas, and more critical approaches that start from the perspective that global policy spaces are riven with unequal forms of power relations. This more Gramscian view of global civil society views it as a space within which hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects contest for ideational influence.² Here policy transfer flows from the outworkings of specific sets of power relations, not only between global actors and national governments but also between global actors as informed by different geopolitical projects and ideological biases. International policy spaces are viewed here as ‘terrains of contestation’ within which advocates of different ideological camps play out ‘wars of position’ over development ideas and policies, including those around social protection (Deacon 2007).

Adopting a critical constructivist perspective to understand how development ideas are formed and travel, Tanya Murray Li (2007) proposes an integrated framework of analysis that includes considerations of political economy, ideational contestations, and processes of governmentality. In terms of political economy, materialist analysis is required to understand how policy ideas are generated by the need for imminent policy solutions to deal with problems of exploitation and dispossession that arise from immanent processes of development (Cowen and Shenton 1996). Tracking how policy ideas arise in relation to the contradictory forces of capitalism is particularly relevant here in terms of Polanyi’s ‘countermovement’, whereby the urge to mitigate the damaging effects of commodification expresses itself in an impulse for social protection (Murray Li 2007: 21–2).

Moving beyond the material to the ideational, Murray Li (2007: 243) proposes a Gramscian focus on contestations over ideas and the role of discourse, noting how discursive shifts within the ‘expert field’ could result in different policy models and projects. These ideational shifts, often influenced by political economy changes, are partly ideological or normative in character, particularly in terms of paradigmatic worldviews, but are also closely related to ‘expert’ evidence on policy solutions to specific problems (Schmidt 2008). Murray Li’s third dimension draws on Foucauldian studies of governmentality to understand ‘the ways in which rule is actually accomplished’, and borrows from Nicholas Rose’s framing of British social policy to ask: ‘what authorities of various sorts wanted to happen, in relation to problems defined how, in pursuit of what objectives, through what strategies and techniques?’ (1999: 20). This involves examining the way that powerful transnational actors ‘render technical’ the intractable challenges of poverty and inequality in order to sustain a particular world order. This process of problematization is linked to the availability of solutions and corresponding assemblages, and places processes of knowledge production at the centre of how new global public policies are produced and promoted. For Stone (2008: 32), such ‘Knowledge networks and epistemic communities give discursive, intellectual, and scientific structure to the global agora. They provide scholarly argumentation and scientific justification for “evidence-based” policy formulation.’ An important role is played here by ‘policy

² For example, Parmar (2002) examines how the Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford Foundations helped to consolidate US hegemony after 1945 by constructing and mobilizing policies, ideologies, and norms through a range of mechanisms, including the financing of research institutions and research programmes that favoured particular lines of inquiry at the expense of others.

entrepreneurs' who 'use their intellectual authority or market expertise to reinforce and legitimate certain forms of policy or normative standards as "best practice"' (Stone 2012: 494).

This framework has revealed compelling insights into how development ideas travel in the case of World Bank community-driven development projects in Indonesia (Murray Li 2007). However, what is missing from this account is a clearer sense of how such ideas are actually formed and travel within the specific development agencies that are often at the centre of creating and promoting new global public policies, and the contingent processes that this involves (Bebbington et al. 2006). As Peck and Theodore (2010: 172) note, 'While technocratic networks may resemble self-acting systems—or spontaneously adjusting regimes of auto-governance—they are also, of course, nonetheless socially produced.'

To capture this 'social' process we make two related conceptual and methodological moves. Conceptually, we extend the spirit of Murray Li's approach through the work of another critical development ethnographer, David Mosse, who draws attention to 'the complexity of policy as institutional practice ... the social life of projects, organisations and professionals ... the perspectives of actors themselves and ... the diversity of interests behind policy models' (2005: 6). For Mosse, Gramscian forms of analysis ought to be better at accessing the fuller 'terrain of contestation' between different ideological camps, but also at getting inside the camps and exploring the ideas and incentives at play at the level of organizations and individuals, as well as wider projects. In methodological terms, we sought to achieve this through in-country analysis of how aid agencies actually formulated and promoted particular forms of social protection in Africa. The process-tracing methodology employed, which involved key informant interviews with all stakeholders involved in these processes, revealed that DfID had been a particularly influential protagonist at the country level, more so than the World Bank or United Nations (UN) agencies that have hitherto been the focus of research into the global politics of social protection. DfID's distinctive contribution merits the in-depth focus we give to its role here. Although this move is also no doubt influenced by the Anglophone bias of our case studies,³ it has the further advantage of helping to reveal some of the historical continuities regarding the century-long influence of Anglophone ideas on welfare on the continent, thus offering a more historicized account of policy transfer than has hitherto been proposed.

This conceptual and methodological approach, applied over the *longue durée* of transnational–national interactions around social protection in Africa, can, we hope, help make a distinctive contribution to the growing literature on the formation and spread of global public policies (Stone 2012), the 'socialization of global policy' (Deacon 2007; Peck 2011) and the more specific literature on the rise of social protection. Bob Deacon's seminal work already provides an authoritative account of the rise of the Social Protection Floor, and the 'wars of position' this involved between the ILO and the World Bank around their competing positions on social protection (Deacon 2007, 2013). Recent contributions from Moritz von Gliszczynski have traced the active role that specific international organizations have played in terms of promoting particular models of social protection that fit with their institutional interests and focus, albeit with a particular focus on ideational shifts rather than issues of political economy, governmentality, or organizational sociology (von Gliszczynski 2015; von Gliszczynski and Leisering 2016). In adopting a more historical and comprehensive frame of analysis, and extending the methodological focus from the process of policy development to that of policy transfer through an original case study of DfID,⁴

³ Even Mozambique and Rwanda have become partially Anglophone. Mozambique joined the Commonwealth in 1995, and Rwanda joined in 2009. As such, Ethiopia is perhaps the main outlier within our sample.

⁴ For example, von Gliszczynski and Leisering focus only on the first of the three key stages of rolling out global public policies, namely policy development, policy diffusion, and policy implementation (Orenstein 2008, cited in von

we hope to both build on these contributions and identify promising avenues for further research into how development ideas travel.

3 Transnational actors and social protection in Africa across the twentieth century

Models and ideas from outside Africa had effects within Africa long before the resurgence of social protection in the 2000s. A series of episodes of reform—in South Africa between the 1920s and 1940s, Mauritius between the 1940s and 1960s, and Botswana between the 1960s and 1990s—illustrate the ways in which foreign ideas and models were translated into social assistance reforms, and remind us that social assistance programmes are hardly a ‘new’ idea in the global South (cf. Hanlon et al. 2010). Between the 1950s and 1970s, both the ILO and British officials shaped reforms of social insurance across most of Africa. More importantly, external agencies—beginning with the British Colonial Office and ending with the World Bank and ILO—all sought for long periods of time to deflect or contain calls for the expansion of social assistance, prioritizing instead a version of ‘development’ that precluded programmes that provided cash or benefits in kind. In the early 2000s these agencies did not shift to an embrace of some aspects of social protection from a position of neutrality; rather, they shifted from a position of active opposition.

In the early twentieth century, British colonial officials and their counterparts in the self-governing settler states (especially South Africa) increasingly saw their role as promoting economic growth. While their primary role remained the maintenance of social order, the predominant view was that this could be achieved through allowing controlled labour migration to the new towns, industries, and plantations, while leaving the majority of the population in the countryside alone, generally under indirect rule. Colonial states recognized that they had a responsibility to intervene to prevent famine in times of drought, although they preferred to do so through market mechanisms rather than direct interventions. Whereas in India colonial officials had well-developed ‘famine codes’ that set out clearly how colonial governments should respond to drought, the Colonial Office does not seem to have developed any similar codes in its African colonies,⁵ and often did too little too late, as during the 1949 famine in Nyasaland (Vaughan 1987). The ILO, for its part, was concerned primarily with forced labour and compensation for employment-related injuries, and prior to the 1950s did little to promote in Africa even its favoured contributory, employment-related programmes. When ‘welfare’ was on the agenda, it generally referred to education, health, and, in urban areas, sanitation and housing.

Sometimes, however, local conditions did push states to reform. Several colonies and dominions had rudimentary poor laws or equivalent arrangements, providing minimal relief to small numbers of ‘destitutes’, that is, people without either means or families. From the 1920s, a series of dominions and colonies considered following the example of Britain in modernizing poor relief to expand coverage, render it more generous, and reduce any stigma. In South Africa, in the 1920s and 1930s, the state was faced with a ‘poor white problem’, which meant that a minority of white people, mostly pushed off the land into towns, were unable to sustain a ‘civilized’ standard of living that separated them from the black majority and preserved the racial hierarchy. In order to mitigate poverty among ‘poor whites’, and to sustain a clear racial hierarchy, the state borrowed from programmes in Britain, Australia, and New Zealand: modest grants or pensions were introduced for poor single mothers, the elderly, and the blind and other disabled adults. Similar programmes

Gliszczynski and Leisering 2016: 326). By examining ‘diffusion’ as well as development, we are able to offer a fuller sense of the process through which social protection has been formulated and rolled out as a new global public policy.

⁵ The Sudan Political Service, which fell under the Foreign Office not the Colonial Office, did develop a famine code in the 1920s.

were considered or introduced for the white minority populations in other settler states, including Southern and Northern Rhodesia. In South Africa, some officials pushed for reforms to cover black South Africans also, first achieving success with respect to pensions for the blind in the late 1930s. While these new programmes served to modernize poor relief, local elites tended to view the poor—whether white or black—with deep distaste, and worried about both ‘dependency’ and ‘affordability’ (Du Toit 2016; Seekings 2007, 2008).

Colonial officials began to consider similar reforms in some other colonies, especially island economies dominated by sugar plantations such as Mauritius and some of the Caribbean colonies. Emergent nationalist elites, often linked to Fabian socialists in the UK, demanded labour and welfare reforms along British lines. Faced with riots, some reformist colonial officials borrowed from British legislation to propose old-age pensions and other reforms. The Colonial Office in London was horrified, and sought to rein in its officers on the ground. The divergence between the imagination of local elites and the Colonial Office in London culminated in the middle of the Second World War. The publication of the Beveridge Report in December 1942 fuelled demands for reform, including in Southern Africa. In South Africa, it served to motivate further advocates of the expansion of welfare programmes to the African population. In 1944, non-contributory old-age pensions and disability grants were extended to African men and women, albeit with lower benefits than were paid to white pensioners. The Colonial Office was determined to challenge this clamour for reform. In 1943, a memorandum on ‘Social Security in the Colonial Territories’ was written, primarily by the head of the Colonial Office’s Economic Department, Sydney Caine. The memorandum, published and distributed in mid-1944, warned that it would be ‘unfortunate if the precise plan now being discussed for this country [Britain] came to be popularly regarded in the colonies generally as a panacea for all their social ills or if alternative means of establishing genuine social security more appropriate to the social structure of a particular Colony were overlooked’ (quoted in Seekings 2013: 15). While there was a general responsibility to redistribute to the needy, this should be done through ‘the tribal or family group’ or the ‘self-contained rural community’ in societies ‘in early stages of development’ (quoted in Seekings 2013: 15). In most colonies, therefore, ‘the first consideration should be to support, for the time being at least, the existing social structure which ensures this traditional provision’, while developing agriculture and thereby raising ‘the general standard of living’. Only in the ‘more advanced’, wage-earning economies were ‘more sophisticated’ programmes appropriate. This point was emphasized in the covering letter sent to colonies in Africa. The message from the Colonial Office was clear: the colonies should ‘develop’, economically, rather than introduce the kind of programmes proposed by Beveridge to mitigate poverty in the UK. Britain might get a welfare state, but the colonies (with possible exceptions) would get development (Seekings 2013).

Some colonies did continue to press for reforms, despite opposition from the Colonial Office. In Mauritius, strong lobbying from the leaders of the Mauritius Labour Party led, in 1950, to the introduction of non-contributory old-age pensions (Seekings 2011). In 1948, the ILO began to advocate the expansion of contributory programmes for the small number of workers in formal employment, and the British state implemented some reforms in an effort to control the urban and industrial workforce (Cooper 1996). Even here, however, colonial (and post-colonial) initiatives rarely replicated the British model. In many British colonies, provident funds (essentially individual savings schemes) were preferred to the kind of contributory pension funds established as part of the social insurance systems of most of Europe (Kaseke et al. 2011; McKinnon et al. 1997).

During the Second World War, the ILO had flirted with a broader vision of social protection, but after the war it reverted to a single-minded concern with social insurance for the small number of workers in formal employment. Under growing pressure not to ignore the poorer majority of the population in most developing countries, it too embraced development. In the 1970s it promoted

a strategy of addressing ‘basic needs’ primarily through employment creation, targeted investments in health, education, shelter, access to water and sanitation, and then also the promotion of small-scale agricultural production (see e.g. ILO 1982, on Tanzania). Social protection played no part in this strategy. To some extent, the ILO was accommodating the developmental preferences of post-colonial elites (see Lal 2012, also on Tanzania). Across most of Africa, transnational actors and domestic governments shared a deep ambivalence towards social protection between the 1950s and 1990s. Mauritius was perhaps the only clear-cut exception, introducing child grants in the early 1960s on the advice of Fabian intellectuals from the UK.

There was one respect in which the priority attached to agricultural development—together with education—as the mechanism for poverty reduction required governments and their transnational partners to expand social protection. Across most of East and Southern Africa, intermittent drought drove interventions on the part not only of most African governments but also governments across the global North, whose citizens were exposed to accounts (and, later, televised images) of starving children. From the mid-1960s, droughts rarely if ever caused starvation in countries south of the Sahel, because governments worked with transnational agencies (especially the World Food Programme) to deliver massive food aid into drought-affected areas. Botswana—which became independent in 1966 in the middle of the worst drought for more than a generation—pioneered programmatic reforms, including large-scale school and other feeding programmes, food-for-work public employment programmes, and ‘destitute’ relief for people who were unable to work. Initially introduced during drought, these soon expanded to the post-drought ‘recovery’ phase and then became permanent programmes. In 1996, Botswana modernized its destitute programme through the introduction of an old-age pension (Seekings 2016). These reforms were shaped by the government’s interactions with transnational actors (the Colonial Office, prior to independence, and then the World Food Programme), and reflected the Famine Codes developed by British colonial officials in India. But none of these transnational actors had any plan to expand social protection. Their preferences were generally conservative, to put a brake on reforms.

This historical account of how social protection has been adopted within sub-Saharan Africa reveals that the process has always been transnational in character, and characterized by a contested process of negotiation between actors based in the global North and South around different ideas and interests. However, the effort to promote social protection in Africa since the early 2000s also reveals a significant degree of discontinuity, with transnational actors changing their approach dramatically in relation to major shifts within the political economy and dominant ideologies of development. Having sought to limit the expansion of social protection—or at least social assistance—for most of the twentieth century, transnational actors now embraced social protection as a new global public policy to be actively promoted through the full range of strategies at their disposal.

4 The rise of social protection as a global public policy

4.1 The political economy and ideological drivers of the social protection agenda

The 1990s witnessed tentative moves to incorporate social protection within international development, including minimalist efforts to address the social costs of structural adjustment through social action funds and a largely rhetorical focus on ‘safety nets’ within the 1990 *World Development Report* (World Bank 1990). However, it would take a larger rupture within global capitalism, namely the financial crisis in East Asia during the late 1990s, for mainstream development ideology to shift significantly enough to offer social protection in an ideological environment, termed the Post-Washington Consensus (Hayami 2003), within which it could

flourish. In forcing development actors to recognize the negative consequences of unfettered market capitalism, and the need to try to re-embed processes of commodification within a social logic, a Polanyian impulse towards social protection seemed to take hold among leading development agencies. The global financial crisis of 2008 would give further impetus to this effort, as would another striking phenomenon of the global political economy over the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, namely the ‘rising powers’ phenomenon, that has seen a number of large countries in the global South undergo rapid economic development. One effect of this process has been to draw closer attention to policy experiments emanating from the global South, including the Latin American experience with cash transfers. This occurred to such an extent that Bob Deacon (2007) framed the global social policy landscape in the early to mid-2000s as a terrain of contestation involving three main ideological camps: the ‘USA-influenced desire for global neoliberal policies’; the ‘European-influenced desire for global social democratic policies’; and ‘[s]outhern-centred debates about getting out from under any northern-imposed agenda for global economic and social policy’ (2007: 22). While Deacon (2013) goes on to focus on the ‘war of position’ that took place between the World Bank’s neoliberal approach and the ILO’s rights-based form of welfarism, this conjuncture has led some to claim that the rise of cash transfers constitutes a southern-led revolution (Hanlon et al. 2010).

This section deploys the conceptual framework outlined earlier, with its focus on political economy, ideology, and the strategies of governmentality employed by particular development agencies, to offer a different account of the main drivers behind the rise of social protection as a global policy agenda (summarized in Table 1). While acknowledging the distinctive role played by southern-based policy experiments in this process, we show how these were co-opted and promoted primarily by international development agencies, and that the ‘war of position’ that most directly shaped the roll-out of social protection in Africa did not take place between the World Bank and the ILO. Instead, it involved struggles between competing policy tendencies within national governments that, although informed by the ideological differences that Deacon sets out, tended to involve DfID rather than the World Bank or ILO as the main protagonist.

The formulation of social protection as a global public policy

The World Bank’s flagship *World Development Report 2000/2001* (2001a) included a strong emphasis on social protection, particularly within the ‘Security’ dimension of its triptych, and the early 2000s saw both the World Bank and the ILO seeking to develop a new and stronger policy focus on social protection. The World Bank’s emphasis on the role of safety nets in managing ‘risks’ led to the publication of its first *Social Protection and Labour Strategy* in 2001 (World Bank 2001b), which focused on social risk management, the related formation of the Social Protection and Labour Unit, and the funding of experimental conditional cash transfer programmes. Meanwhile, the ILO was increasingly concerned that its long-standing commitment to certain forms of social insurance was of little relevance to poor people, who would require tax-financed social assistance programmes (van Ginneken 1999: 3, 179). In 1999 the Governing Body of the ILO proposed a re-examination of social security at a future International Labour Conference (ILC). The 2000 *World Labour Report* addressed many aspects of social security, under the title *Income Security and Social Protection in a Changing World* (ILO 2000). In 2001, the ILC decided to campaign on ‘Social Security for All’, and two years later formally launched a ‘Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All’—although this was initially focused on community-based micro-insurance. In 2004, the World Bank published a re-evaluation of its approach to pension reform in Latin America (Gill et al. 2004), which led to a more general restatement in *Old-age Support in the Twenty-first Century* (World Bank 2005). In 2005, both the ILO and World Bank published their first studies of the cost of social protection programmes in Africa (Kakwani and Subbarao 2005; Pal et al. 2005), while DfID also produced their first position paper on cash transfers. This period also saw each agency convene a large number of workshops and conferences to work out and promote their particular

approach to social protection (Deacon 2007; Holzmann 2008). The debt-leveraged poverty reduction strategy papers, arguably the main policy totem of the Post-Washington Consensus, would provide an avenue for this country-level advocacy, opening room for dialogue on pro-poor policies that the World Bank and other agencies such as DfID would use to promote national social protection in countries such as Uganda and Zambia (see below).

This movement towards social protection becoming a new global public policy accelerated following the financial and economic crisis of 2008–9, which led the major development agencies to considerably upgrade their lending and policy efforts around social protection (Davies and McGregor 2009). For Deacon (2013), the period 2009 to 2012 marked a rapid expansion in the global-level attention to social protection, not only within the UN system and G20 but also within the Washington-based international financial institutions (IFIs), with even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) now starting to make the case for extending the fiscal space for social protection as an important counter-cyclical policy measure. The World Bank launched its \$500 million Rapid Response Fund and expenditure by certain key bilateral agencies such as DfID also spiked after this crisis. A report entitled *The Global Financial Crisis and Its Impact on the Work of the UN System* was presented at the chief executives' board meeting of the UN in 2009, calling for coordinated action, including working towards what would become the Social Protection Floor. The ILO persuaded the other UN agencies to launch a Social Protection Floor Initiative (co-chaired by the ILO and World Health Organization) (Cichon and Hagemeyer 2007), as one of nine UN joint initiatives to cope with the effects of the economic crisis. The World Bank initiated a review of social protection in Africa (completed in 2012, and published as Garcia and Moore 2012). In 2010, the ILO published a guide to *Extending Social Security to All* (ILO 2010a) as well as its *World Social Security Report* (ILO 2010b). The Bachelet Advisory Group—chaired by former Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet—was appointed in 2010, and reported in 2011. In 2012, the ILC adopted Recommendation #202 on Social Protection Floors, in what Cichon gushingly described as 'a "Magna Carta" of social protection' (2013: 37). This had 'the aim of ensuring effective access to at least essential health care and a basic level of income security as a matter of priority, as the indispensable foundation for more comprehensive national social security systems' (ILO 2014: 5).

The World Bank itself restated its case for social protection in a new strategy document for the period 2012 to 2022 (World Bank 2012a), published its study of cash transfers in Africa as *The Cash Dividend* (Garcia and Moore 2012), and followed this with a dedicated *Africa Social Protection Strategy* (World Bank 2012b). In 2014, the ILO published its first *World Social Protection Report* (ILO 2014), essentially as a mechanism to monitor progress towards the realization of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, and the World Bank published its first *State of Social Safety Nets Report* (World Bank 2014). This post-crisis period also marked a degree of *rapprochement* between the World Bank and the ILO, with the World Bank offering at least nominal support for the Social Protection Floor,⁶ and helping to establish a new mechanism for global co-operation on social protection under the Social Protection Inter-agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B). The global financial crisis even persuaded the IMF to argue the case for increasing the fiscal space for social protection at country level (Deacon 2013), with a joint ILO–IMF assessment of the fiscal feasibility of national Social Protection Floor policies resulting in the significant decision to increase social protection expenditure by about 40% (ILO and IMF 2012).⁷

⁶ The World Bank has never actually signed up to the Social Protection Floor, preferring to talk of 'social protection systems' and retaining strong references to 'social safety nets' in its policy and research work. Both terms, 'social protection systems' and a 'social protection floor' are currently deployed within in the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁷ Although the neoliberal mainstream seemed initially to double-down on its precepts and secure the resurrection of financial capital (e.g. Sheppard and Leitner 2010), the IMF's new position on social protection may reveal at least a

By this stage, both the ILO and the World Bank clearly felt that they had established social protection as a global public policy in ways that were fit to be transferred to Africa. As the ILO put it, social protection was now at the ‘forefront of the development agenda’ (ILO 2014: xix), while one senior World Bank staffer stated in her foreword to *The Cash Dividend* that social protection was central to the innovative thinking about development that would enable Africa to tackle the ‘unparalleled challenges’ facing it: ‘enthusiasm for conditional cash transfer programs in other regions has spilled over into the continent. Many policy makers are excited about how cash transfers can be used to meet Africa’s poverty and development goals’ (Garcia and Moore 2012: xiii).

For Garcia and Moore (2012: 9), ‘the question is not *whether* cash transfers can be used in the region, but *how* they should be used, and how they can be adapted and developed to meet social protection and development goals’ (2012: 9). As a way into examining how this process of constructing social protection as a new global public policy was converted into an active process of policy transfer through the deployment of various strategies of governmentality, we first consider whether this process was a ‘southern-led’ movement and how far it was shaped by global-level ‘wars of position’.

The rise of new economic powers, particularly in the form of the ‘BRICs’ (that is, Brazil, Russia, India, and China), has constituted one of the major developments within the global economy over the past century. Reflecting shifting patterns of global wealth (OECD 2010), this move brought a handful of erstwhile ‘developing’ countries to the wider attention of regional neighbours and international development actors alike, and raised the profile of some of their policy developments. The success of conditional cash transfers (CCTs) in Latin America, as demonstrated by positive evaluations of Mexico’s Progresa (a government social assistance programme, later renamed Oportunidades and now Prospera) and Brazil’s Bolsa Família, played a key role in catalysing the rise of social protection as a global policy agenda, leading some to claim that the rise of cash transfers constitutes a southern-led revolution (Hanlon et al. 2010), characterized by South–South processes of policy learning.

degree of movement towards a more Keynesian perspective on the significance of undertaking counter-cyclical measures (Fischer 2012). This is suggestive of the powerful influence that political economy has over ideological shifts (Hall 1993; Schmidt 2008).

Table 1: Explaining the rise of social protection as a global policy agenda since the late 1990s

| | Key dimensions | Exemplar |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Global political economy</i> | <p>Crises within global capitalism (1997, 2008) and its inequalities</p> <p>Rising powers: South–South learning</p> <p>Colonial histories and the resolution of the southern debt crisis</p> | <p>Millennial shift to Post-Washington Consensus</p> <p>Major scaling-up of social protection financing after 2008</p> <p>The conditional cash transfers model; World Bank global learning forums; study tours</p> <p>Transnational ideas contested by domestic political actors</p> |
| <i>Ideological struggles around social protection</i> | <p>From global ‘wars of positions’ to convergence?</p> <p>Competing policy ideas on social protection</p> <p>National-level ‘wars of positions’</p> | <p>ILO vs. World Bank on the Social Protection Floor; SPIAC-B and the IMF</p> <p>‘Conditionality’ and labour</p> <p>Civil society vs. Finance Ministry tendencies</p> |
| Governmentality | <p>Rendering social protection as a technical solution to poverty</p> <p>Thinking and working politically</p> | <p>Formation and deployment of a new epistemic community on social protection</p> <p>Policy and practice entrepreneurs promote different versions of social protection</p> <p>Study tours, evidence-building</p> <p>Donors build coalitions of support, advocacy</p> |
| Aid world and the organizational sociology of aid agencies | <p>Internal governance</p> <p>Individual leadership</p> <p>Paris Declaration: coordination</p> <p>Corporate branding/positioning</p> | <p>Policy team formation</p> <p>Key post-holders lead process</p> <p>Shapes influence in country</p> <p>Shapes which forms of social protection get promoted</p> |

Source: Authors' compilation.

Rising powers and the new transnational politics of policy transfer: a southern revolution?

There is some evidence for this claim, including even earlier evidence that it was Bangladesh’s stipend programme that informed Santiago Levy’s pioneering work in devising Progresca in Mexico.⁸ Powerful ‘neighbourhood’ effects within Latin America have been identified in Weyland’s (2007) studies of pension reform and health insurance, and by Sugiyama (2011) on CCTs. The experience of India’s MGNREGA (an Indian labour law and social security measure) was also an influence on the decision to focus on public works schemes in Ethiopia and Rwanda (Lavers 2016a, 2016b). The primary example in Africa would be those countries within the orbit of South Africa that adopted non-contributory pension schemes without any direct international

⁸ In exchange, Santiago Levy would later visit India to help persuade policy actors there of the logic of extending its existing public employment schemes into a national employment guarantee scheme (MNREGA).

encouragement, such as Botswana (in 1996, see Seekings 2016) and Lesotho (in 2004, see Granvik 2016).

However, international aid agencies would swiftly find ways of inserting themselves within these incipient process of policy learning and reshaping them in line with their own ideas. The growing ubiquity of cash transfers owes less to South–South policy transfer than the World Bank’s decision to model the Mexico experience and, from around 2006, to take a leading role in promoting CCTs (von Gliszczynski 2015: 43–4), within Latin America (Sugiyama 2011) and to other middle-income countries (Holzmann 2008). In knowledge-broker mode, the World Bank helped to establish a Latin American ‘community-of-practice’, providing an electronic platform to allow practitioners to learn from each other. By the late 2000s, advances in communication technologies had rendered the World Bank’s teleconferencing facilities obsolete as a form of knowledge exchange. Meanwhile the World Bank had already begun to hold a series of international conferences through which it could both facilitate and influence processes of policy learning; this started with the Istanbul conference in 2006, which institutionalized an ongoing series of ‘South–South Learning Forums’ (Interview with World Bank Policy leader on social protection, 7 December 2015).

DfID has also sought to utilize South–South learning, supporting study tours and more specific missions. This included the facilitation of a visit by Brazilian social development ministry officials to Ghana to help devise what would become their first national-level cash transfer programme in 2008 (Grebe 2015). DfID would also join forces with the World Bank to help enable the transfer of the Ethiopian model of public works plus cash transfers to Rwanda in 2008 (Lavers 2016a, 2016b). These more specific and demand-led efforts seem to have been more successful than DfID’s supply-led efforts to generate wider African ownership of this new policy agenda through the Livingstone Process. Here, aid agencies and international NGOs joined forces to persuade the African Union to create the Africa Platform for Social Protection, with related national branches, in alignment with the two Livingstone Conferences and subsequent Call to Action in 2006. Although this led to the adoption of the African Union Social Policy Framework for Africa (AU-SPF) in 2008,⁹ the direct influence of this donor-driven effort has been limited, even where national platforms have been formed, as in Zambia (Kuss 2015). Despite efforts to frame the recent spread of social protection as a southern revolution (Hanlon et al. 2010), then, we argue here that main impetus behind the promotion of cash transfers to sub-Saharan Africa has been through international aid organizations whose agendas were reshaped by wider political economy and ideological shifts around the turn of the millennium. As discussed in more detail below, most South–South policy learning that took place during this process was usually filtered through the ideological lenses and institutional practices of international development agencies.

Ideas and wars of position over social protection

The ‘socialization of global policy’ that occurred around the turn of the millennium was not simply a product of crises within global capitalism but flowed from a long-running ideological struggle over competing visions of development. This revolved mainly around different positions on the relative significance of growth and redistribution, and the relative roles to be played by the state and market as institutional drivers of development. The resulting Post-Washington Consensus, representing a more ‘inclusive’ if not fully ‘social’ form of neoliberalism (Craig and Porter 2006), enabled at least some degree of *rapprochement* between these opposing perspectives, with social protection coming to perform an emblematic role for this new agenda. Nonetheless, these ideological differences would continue to inform both the nature of social protection’s

⁹ See Wright and Noble (2010) for more on the Livingstone Process.

incorporation into the development mainstream and debates over the form that social protection should take as a global public policy. Deacon (2007) shows how a ‘war of position’ over the form that social protection should take as a global public policy ensued between the neoliberal, residual approach of the World Bank and the more European social model of universal provision promoted by the UN and the ILO in particular.

From the perspective of our country-level analysis, the ‘war of position’ that has directly shaped the progress of social protection in much of Africa has taken place between two competing policy tendencies that Ravi Kanbur (2001) has referred to as the ‘Finance Ministry’ and ‘Civil Society’ tendencies, and which broadly map onto the global-level distinctions identified above.¹⁰ Ministry of Finance officials, many of whom were inducted into the neoliberal orthodoxy through training offered by IFIs and embedded programmes of technical assistance, would provide the key obstacle to the transnational policy coalitions that European and UN development agencies would seek to construct with the ministries and departments of social welfare, labour, and community development, along with international and national NGOs, to make the case for more expansive—and even transformative—forms of social protection.¹¹ This battle, then, was closely shaped by earlier efforts to roll out neoliberalism as a global policy, a process which had strongly aligned the IFIs with Finance Ministries and left a strong cadre of technocrats willing to fight hard to control public expenditure, often in the name of macro-economic stability, and maintain a limited role for the state. As we discuss at length elsewhere, in some African countries this Finance Ministry tendency formed the greatest obstacle to promoting social protection in a range of countries such as Uganda (Grebe 2015; Hickey and Bukenya 2016) and Zambia (Pruce and Hickey 2017), where it was rooted in the mid-2000s in a party political platform (Kabandula and Seekings 2016).¹² Neoliberal opposition to a large state sometimes combines with a conservative veneration of an idealized, patriarchal family.

However, there is also something of a disconnect between global-level discussions and what we found on the ground in Africa. First, neither the World Bank nor the ILO were at the forefront of actually establishing cash transfers in Africa, partly because during the mid-2000s, when the agenda started to take hold, the World Bank was more focused on safety nets and (contributory) pensions, while the ILO remained concerned primarily with social insurance. Moreover, each wielded relatively little traction on social protection policies in aid-receiving countries: while the ILO generally lacks the national-level presence to directly influence domestic policy processes, the World Bank had, in some cases, been forced to relinquish its leading role in the social protection sector under Paris Declaration principles during this key period of policy transfer (see next section). In Africa’s low-income and Anglophone countries, this space was often filled by the UK’s

¹⁰ The Finance Ministry tendency includes not only ministries of finance, but also of trade and business, central banks, many officials within IFIs and certain civil society organizations, including think tanks. The Civil Society tendency, meanwhile, is usually constructed of social sector ministries, UN and European aid agencies, and civil society organizations. For Kanbur (2001), the deep disagreements between these policy tendencies are based on differences related to level of aggregation in terms of economic policy outcomes, time horizons for the consequences of these policies, and, most significantly, market structure and power.

¹¹ This is a delayed contest, then, with the bureaucratic foot-soldiers of the Washington Consensus at war with those of the Post-Washington Consensus, and certain aid agency advisers. Kanbur’s (2001) policy tendencies aptly capture this, with the important caveat that we are now also seeing the emergence of a more productivist dimension within the Finance Ministry tendency (perhaps more aligned with new than traditional donors), in ways that can either create further distance between this tendency and social protection or converge with certain forms of social protection (e.g. public works programmes).

¹² In a Post-Washington Consensus twist to this war of position, the World Bank in some instances utilized its long-standing links with Ministries of Finance to achieve progress for its preferred social protection instruments, as with the promotion of public works schemes in Tanzania (Ulriksen 2016).

DfID, in alliance with other bilateral and multilateral agencies (and European-based NGOs, often funded from aid budgets). While DfID's focus on government-led forms of social protection was more in line with the ILO's than the World Bank's position, it generally adopted a halfway-house position between the two camps, focusing more on poverty than either risks or rights (Munro 2008), and a pragmatic approach to identifying which policies could be feasibly adopted in different political contexts. As discussed below, this positioning was influenced not only by the 'third way' ideological tendencies of DfID under the New Labour party that was in power at the time (Abrahamsen and Williams 2001), but also a conscious strategy of creating a niche for itself in the contested process of forming and rolling out this new global policy agenda. The way in which it went about this also reflected its own institutional forms of governmentality.

The governmentality of social protection: from 'rendering technical' to working politically?

To render a set of processes technical and improvable an arena of intervention must be bounded, mapped, characterised and documented; the relevant forces and relations must be identified; and a narrative must be devised connecting the proposed intervention with the problem it will solve. (Murray Li 2007: 126)

The lack of access to social protection constitutes a major obstacle to economic and social development. Inadequate or absent social protection coverage is associated with high and persistent levels of poverty and economic insecurity, growing levels of inequality, insufficient investments in human capital and human capabilities, and weak aggregate demand in a time of recession and slow growth. (ILO 2014: xix)

the Expanding Social Protection Programme has been critical: field trips, advocacy meetings, international field trips, a relentless building of the politics. If it doesn't work after this then...! (Interview with development agency official, 18 February 2014).

International development agencies have made significant efforts to frame social protection as a legitimate technical solution to a wide range of problems (Schmidt 2008), consistent with the assertion that 'a deepening reliance on technocratic forms of policy development and delivery is a widely observed feature of late-neoliberalism' (Peck and Theodore 2010: 172). However, this was often also a highly politicized process, with donor agencies consciously seeking to render social protection political through the deployment of new tools of the trade and active efforts to build political support for social protection on the ground. This section sets out some of these processes in broad terms, before exploring them in more depth in the next section through a case study of DfID.

In conducting research into 'social protection', or welfare-state-building, in countries across Africa, again and again one runs into the same organizations and even individuals. The organizations include international agencies (the World Bank, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the ILO), donors (including DfID, GiZ,¹³ IrishAid), and NGOs (such as HelpAge International, Save the Children, and Oxfam). A central strategy of such agencies has been the construction of a global epistemic community charged with measuring and identifying specific forms of poverty and vulnerability, and then linking these to particular social protection interventions. This community, consisting of academics, policy experts, and 'policy entrepreneurs' capable of not only articulating the social protection agenda but also designing and delivering programmes, has been critical to the spread of social protection in Africa. While this community has been founded mainly by northern-

¹³ The (German) Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit. The GiZ was established in 2011, incorporating the prior Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

based actors based at north-west European universities and consulting firms,¹⁴ efforts have also been made to develop southern-based expertise. This includes DfID's funding of the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) in Cape Town, which provides training, technical assistance, and policy advocacy on social protection throughout the continent (and, more recently, beyond).

In terms of problem-framing, the World Bank funded a series of national-level risk and vulnerability assessments from the early 2000s, in part to help provide a diagnostic basis for its risk-based approach to social protection (Kozel et al. 2008). Maia Green (2011) argues that agencies even produced new categories of vulnerable groups, such as 'orphaned and vulnerable children' (OVCs), with its expansive notion of orphans to include those 'single-orphans' who had only lost one parent. This helped produce a new target group that would be seen as particularly deserving of assistance, including in the form of social protection.¹⁵ In terms of articulating solutions, von Gliszczynski (2015: 28–30) describes how, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, German development consultant Bernd Schubert became arguably the first cash transfer policy entrepreneur. Although his first experiment (a pilot project in Mozambique from 1990 to 1992) made little impact, his later work on the Kalomo pilot project in Zambia played a hugely influential role in helping this emerging epistemic community to make the argument that cash transfers could work in Africa. By the mid-2000s, a wider group of policy entrepreneurs had emerged, some connected to specific agencies or perspectives associated with Deacon's 'war of position'. For example, Francisco Ayala, an ex-World Bank staffer from Colombia, established the Ayala Consulting Group to provide technical assistance for the design and implementation of social protection programmes, with a particular focus on CCTs. Michael Samson, Director of Research at EPRI, meanwhile, was consciously working to promote a more rights-based and welfarist form of social protection. While the World Bank would encourage governments to use Ayala to design their social protection instruments, DfID and its allies would push Samson (interview with ex-DfID policy leader on social protection, 30 June 2015).

All of these organizations—and the individuals—dispense ideas, most often in the form of models for policy reform. International organizations have a large toolbox to draw on in order to deploy 'soft' power, that is, the power of persuasion over national policy makers. Organizations distribute—often selectively—reports that document and analyse the experience of reform elsewhere in the world. They also take politicians and officials on study tours to other countries and to international workshops. They organize regular interaction between personnel from international organizations, government and civil society, and nurture (and sometimes fund) civil society organizations to make the case for social protection. They also provide advisers and other technical assistance to government departments, including in drafting 'social protection strategy' documents. They sponsor and evaluate 'pilot' programmes, and disseminate evaluations when these demonstrate efficacy in reducing poverty. They arrange for politicians and government officials to visit the pilot sites as well (see e.g. Hickey et al. 2009).

¹⁴ Certain researchers and think-tanks have been particularly significant players in this process, including social protection units and experts at the Institute for Development Studies, the Overseas Development Institute, and the University of Manchester. Further research is required to investigate in more detail the way in which this epistemic community was constructed, how it operates, and the implications this has had for the particular agenda and interventions now unfolding both globally and within national contexts.

¹⁵ On UNICEF's role in promoting the OVC Grant in Kenya, see Wanyama and McCord (2017). Green (2011: 19), argues that 'OVC as a category exists in its current form because of the nature and institutional requirements of international development as a project of spending. It is a category of management accounting, enabling a directed spend which can be subject to audit.'

Contrary to the language of governmentality, however, this process has been highly politicized. Realizing that evidence and policy articulation alone would not carry the day in countries with no extensive tradition of social assistance, and with often high levels of resistance from bureaucratic and political elites, some development agencies went to great lengths to generate political support for social protection in line with the new agenda of ‘thinking and working politically’ (Booth 2014). The main agency to deploy these new strategies of governmentality in pursuit of persuading political elites to adopt social protection has been UK’s DfID.

5 Transnational policy transfer as institutional practice: on how organizational sociologies within the aidworld helped shape the promotion of cash transfers

In his account of the ILO’s role in constructing the global social protection agenda, Bob Deacon (2013) emphasizes David Mosse’s insistence that any analysis of how development ideas are formed and travel needs to interrogate the internal workings of the ‘aidworld’ and of particular aid agencies in order to appreciate the often contingent and personalized histories that shape these processes. For Deacon, it was critical that Michael Cichon became director of the ILO’s Social Security Department from 2005 to 2012. Cichon played a significant role in gaining top-level buy-in from the director general of the ILO precisely when the ILO took over chairing responsibilities for a key UN committee during the global financial crisis.¹⁶ In seeking to further interrogate the rise of social protection as a global public policy, but also to move beyond this to examine how it travelled within Africa, our comparative analysis of how this played out within (Anglophone) Africa strongly suggests that the most significant player here was DfID. DfID was not a pioneer in the construction of social protection as a global public policy in the way that either the ILO or the World Bank has been; rather, DfID sought to ride the wave created by this new policy movement and create a niche for itself therein. Nonetheless, it did make a distinctive contribution to the form of social protection that would be ‘transferred’ to sub-Saharan Africa, through being one of the first agencies to argue the case for introducing (unconditional) cash transfers to the continent during the mid-2000s. More importantly, there is compelling evidence that DfID has been much more successful than other international development agencies in securing support from national governments for its preferred schemes, through a mixture of its ideas, financing, particular strategies of governmentality, and the exploitation of its long-standing presence in particular African countries. This focus also enables historical comparisons given the longer period over which African governments have been influenced by Anglophone ideas around social protection, while also serving as a reminder regarding the limits of the Anglophone bias in our choice of country cases.

5.1 The rise of the social protection agenda within DfID

DfID’s interest in social protection grew slowly during the early to mid-2000s, informed by the growing interest in social protection within international development but also by policy discussions within its partner countries across Africa. DfID staff based in London at this time recall attending World Bank meetings on social protection in Washington DC during 2003–4, noting that: ‘We saw ourselves as largely falling in with the Bank, we were sent to the Bank to listen and learn, not to challenge’ (interview, 12 June 2015). DfID officials were also increasingly aware of ongoing discussions on social protection within Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries, particularly from Scandinavia. DfID had by now largely withdrawn from Latin America, and so lacked the World

¹⁶ A similar story could usefully be told regarding the shifts of leadership of the World Bank’s Social Protection and Labour Unit.

Bank's first-hand insights into how cash transfer programmes were playing out there. Instead, and in a partial echo of the role played by colonial officials in the 1950s, the southern-based influence on London flowed from its country-level presence in Africa, where its livelihoods advisers were discussing how to construct more permanent solutions to chronic problems of food insecurity and repeated humanitarian crisis, usually due to drought. AIDS posed additional challenges to food security across much of East and Southern Africa, inspiring initiatives such as the Kalomo project in Zambia, which DfID would effectively take over from GTZ (the German development agency) in 2006. In countries where food insecurity was not the pressing problem, DfID was drawn into a focus on social protection by the pioneering efforts of other agencies, including World Bank efforts to train civil servants in 'social risk management' (SRM).

Despite a strong focus on poverty reduction in successive white papers (1997, 2001), DfID had no strategic policy focus on social protection until the formation of the Reaching the Very Poorest Team (RtVP) within the Policy Division in 2002–3. Driven by a concern with those left out of mainstream processes of development, and directly informed by research on poverty and social protection undertaken within the DfID-funded Chronic Poverty Research Centre (Barrientos et al. 2005), the RtVP team became the locus for exploring and promoting an institutional-level focus on social protection. A key event here was the appointment of a particular social development adviser (Stephen Kidd) as team leader in late 2004. Frustrated at the absence of a clear policy focus within RtVP's early discussions on social protection,¹⁷ and with the support of the then head of social development, the new team leader demanded a much more specific focus on cash transfers as the key instrument around which the agenda would cohere. Aided by key team members, including an economist transferred from the Ministry of Work and Pensions, Kidd commissioned a series of papers aimed at articulating a clearer policy agenda around social protection and persuading senior staff within DfID of the need to incorporate social protection as one of its key policy offers. The 2005 'practice paper' on 'Social Transfers and Chronic Poverty' (DfID 2005) formed the first statement that set out the case for social protection as a key policy agenda for DfID to adopt in its pursuit of poverty eradication and inclusive economic development. When the paper was first presented at the senior investment committee it was greeted with scepticism by the then director general of DfID, but other senior civil servants at the meeting were more supportive and, by the end of the meeting, the agenda had a sense of forward momentum (interview with DfID team member, 3 June 2015). Buoyed by this initial success, the team leader changed the name of the RtVP policy team to 'Social Protection' and (to the annoyance of some within DfID) started to use the 'practice paper' as if it were a policy paper spelling out DfID's official and strategic commitment to social protection.¹⁸

¹⁷ The absence of a coherent policy focus in London can be explained in part by the influence of specific countries over policy development around social protection and the related involvement of policy advisers from different specialist backgrounds. In countries where social protection was being discussed primarily as a response to problems of food insecurity, livelihoods advisers took a lead (e.g. Ethiopia), whereas social development advisers took the lead elsewhere (e.g. Uganda). To arrive at a coherent policy platform across the two professional cadres was difficult as both were seeking to be seen as the lead profession in this growing new agenda within an institutional context where each felt the perennial need to prove their relevance and build their status vis-à-vis better resourced and more influential cadres (e.g. growth, health). As one insider observed, the livelihoods cadre had never been very strong and the social development cadre felt that they were on the back foot after the 2001 White Paper effectively made poverty the business of all cadres, thus undermining their *raison d'être*. Something of a struggle broke out between the professions over the agenda, including within the RtVP team. Although this was resolved in London in favour of the social development cadre (the cadre to which the Social Protection Team leader belonged), livelihoods advisers continued to play an influential role within country contexts.

¹⁸ Other papers were also commissioned to try to offset potential resistance from elsewhere in DfID. As one team member noted: '[Our] economists were asking about dependency, fiscal space, does this lead to corruption, these were the three big concerns. Stephen Kidd had me writing papers trying to dispute this, and he did the 2005 paper'

DfID's 2006 White Paper provided an important opening for the team to push the case for social protection to be seen as an essential public service, along with education, health, and water and sanitation. Securing a focus on social protection in this flagship policy document was seen as a major achievement. However, it also led the then head of profession for governance and social development to announce that the Social Protection Team would be disbanded, having successfully achieved its objective of articulating and promoting its policy focus within the organization.¹⁹ Keen to protect both their institutional status and the policy agenda, team members informally back-channelled promotional material directly to ministers, including the then Secretary of State, the Labour Party's Hilary Benn. At the 2006 Christmas meeting in the department's atrium, and to the surprise of most, the Secretary of State announced to all staff that he wanted them to focus on five things, the first one of which was social protection. According to one observer, the face of the head of profession who had just announced the closure of the Social Protection Team went white (interview, 30 June 2015). The dilemma was swiftly resolved by combining the Social Protection Team with another (on Social Exclusion) into a broader Team on Equity and Rights under the leadership of Stephen Kidd. For the newly promoted team leader, this meant having a larger budget of £2 million with 'complete authority over how spending could be done ... that helped us fund all these events, get these things out and going' at country level.

The way in which the social protection agenda was promoted by DfID in recipient countries would flow directly from this financial flexibility and what insiders refer to as the 'missionary zeal' of the team leader. Before examining DfID's role in ensuring that this new development idea travelled to Africa, we first examine its efforts to reshape the form that social protection would take as a global public policy.

DfID's role in constructing the global social protection agenda

at that time, it was all about risk, they (the Bank) weren't talking about chronic poverty, so we saw a gap ... ILO and WB [World Bank] are the polar opposites. We [DfID] see it in contextual terms, what works and is required in different contexts. We tend to provide support from poverty perspective, so de facto.... We did in the early 2000s frame ourselves in a way to create a niche for ourselves. (Interview with DfID Social Protection Team member, 3 June 2015)

By the mid-2000s DfID was becoming confident enough to challenge the World Bank's efforts to construct a particular type of social protection agenda at both the global and national levels.²⁰ At the level of ideology, DfID's country-level advisers now sought to displace the influence of the World Bank's SRM approach among country-level bureaucrats by employing consultants who favoured more transformative forms of social protection to retrain bureaucrats in African countries in this approach. At the level of policy solutions, DfID also sought to challenge the World Bank's assumption at the time that social assistance was only feasible in middle-income

(interview with first author, 3 June 2015). However, the level of contestation was higher among those actively discussing social protection than with those in more senior positions. The then chief economist (Adrian Wood) was supportive, although his deputy and head of profession (John Burton) was more sceptical until exposed to a presentation on risk management by a leading economist at Oxford.

¹⁹ This was in line with stated policy in the Policy Division at the time, whereby policy teams were given a specific period of time within which to fulfil their brief and then wind down.

²⁰ DfID's decision to adopt a poverty-focused approach to social protection flowed from the role it played alongside other European donors and the UN in establishing the social development agenda in the late 1990s, which in turn would eventually lead to the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (Hulme 2010). Its move to position itself vis-à-vis the World Bank reflected the wider institutional imperative established in the late 1990s, under then Secretary of State for International Development Clare Short, of seeking to establish DfID as a European counterweight to the World Bank as a knowledge broker (Hulme 2010).

countries and that cash transfers had to be conditional (interview with World Bank policy expert on social protection, 7 December 2015).²¹ DfID could not point to a strong evidence base that proved social assistance could work in Africa, but nonetheless sought to challenge the World Bank both on this and also with regard to conditionality. Here DfID was on firmer ground, as it could argue that the evidence did not yet support claims that conditions (rather than the transfers themselves) were driving the successful outcomes in Latin America, and that Africa lacked the quality of social service provision and enforcement capacities to make conditionality a legitimate and viable option.

This policy-level ‘war of position’ was played out during an international conference on social protection in Istanbul that the World Bank had organized. Keen to challenge the World Bank’s hegemony, and to create more room for itself as a policy entrepreneur in the field, DfID’s Social Protection Team helped co-finance the conference through a £50,000 grant. This ensured the presence of its favoured consultants, including Dr Michael Samson of the DfID-funded EPRI in Cape Town, who would argue at the conference that there was no evidence to support the World Bank’s insistence on conditionality. Norbert Shady, a senior economist in the World Bank’s Development Research Group, strongly opposed this view during the conference, but DfID secured an agreement to undertake further research into the role of conditionality.²² While the World Bank would seek to roll out CCTs in middle-income countries such as Turkey and the Philippines, its focus on social assistance in Africa remained limited to supporting community-driven development initiatives and public works schemes.²³ This effectively left the door open for DfID to play a leading role in promoting government-led programmes of social assistance in Africa.

From rendering technical to working politically: DfID’s governmentality

DfID’s approach to promoting social protection in Africa would be strongly informed by its institutional practices and the ‘zeal’ of the Social Protection Team leader, as well as its wider ideological positionality. Faced with an often sceptical response from government officials, DfID advisers were able to respond rapidly to requests for financial and technical assistance in considering and developing social protection policies (e.g. fiduciary risk assessments, pilot evaluations), and proved much more nimble than the World Bank, with its more cumbersome internal workings, in doing so (Hickey et al. 2009). This helped keep the agenda moving and to establish DfID as the more influential player on social protection within several countries. This was further assisted by the coincidental advent of ‘harmonization’ under Paris Declaration principles, which in the mid-2000s gave DfID the opportunity to take a leading role within the social protection sector working groups that it had helped establish, often in partnership with like-

²¹ This did not apply universally, however, with some World Bank staff promoting CCTs in countries like Angola.

²² A similar confrontation took place within a lower-level workshop on child protection in Kenya, where DfID funded a consultant from Inter-American Development Bank to challenge the World Bank’s favoured consultant (Francisco Ayala) on the role that conditions had played in cash transfer programmes in Latin America. This also led to an agreement to test conditional against unconditional grants, and also hard against soft versions of conditionality. According to a DfID team member, the evidence for conditions fell apart once tested on OVC grants in Kenya (interview with first author, 20 June 2015).

²³ It was not until 2012 that the World Bank decided to include a focus on unconditional transfers in its strategic portfolio, apparently persuaded by the consultations and evidence-gathering process it employed when constructing its new social protection strategy (World Bank 2012a).

mindful European bilateral agencies and Unicef, while the World Bank took on more significant sectors.²⁴

DfID's approach to promoting social protection included a strong focus on rendering it as a technical solution to development problems. Standard forms of technical and financial assistance were deployed, including a concerted effort to develop a stronger evidence base around social protection and explore different modes of operationalizing cash transfers on the ground. However, where elite resistance was encountered, DfID moved to adopt the new advice on 'thinking and working politically' that had started to emerge during the 2000s (Dasandi et al. 2016). DfID had been an early adopter of this new approach, and by the mid-2000s had moved from employing political economy analysis to inform country-level processes of programming and policy engagement to commissioning studies of particular policy sectors (DfID 2009). This included at least three studies of the political barriers and opportunities associated with promoting social protection in sub-Saharan Africa.²⁵

This led DfID staff to work on building broader 'coalitions' in support of social protection, largely to overcome resistance within powerful ministries of finance and parliaments in countries like Uganda (Grebe 2014; Grebe and Mubiru 2014; Hickey and Bukenya 2016) and Zambia (Kabandula and Seekings 2016; Pruce and Hickey 2017; Siachiwena 2016). Tens of millions of pounds were spent on 'policy engagement projects' aimed at influencing African governments to adopt social protection.²⁶ Senior bureaucrats and politicians were sent on study tours to witness the benefits of successful cash transfer projects in a range of Latin American and African countries, and DfID money has also funded media campaigns to help spread awareness of cash transfers and their effectiveness. Pilot projects that were launched to help generate country-specific evidence on the effectiveness of cash transfers, started to generate their own political dynamics, leading citizens and MPs to lobby their governments to extend cash transfer programmes.

This contrasted markedly with the World Bank's country-level approach to policy engagement. Although a community-of-practice around using political economy analysis had emerged in the World Bank at this time, it had not really moved into sector-level political economy analysis at this time (Fritz et al. 2014; Yanguas and Hulme 2015), and its country-level engagements on social protection revolved around negotiating the three-year Country Assistance Strategy rather than ongoing policy advocacy. As one World Bank policy expert on social protection noted, when it comes to 'influencing, we don't do the DfID thing' (interview, 7 December 2015). The approach also created some disquiet within DfID, in part as there was a sense that the advocacy effort was running ahead of the evidence base regarding the effectiveness and affordability of cash transfers in sub-Saharan Africa. As one DfID team member admits, 'We were in advocacy mode, we over-

²⁴ This helped the coherence of the advocacy effort, which now no longer needed to reflect or resolve the tensions between different versions of social protection (Deacon 2007), and could focus instead on dealing with lower-level policy issues around targeting and overcoming resistance, including that flowing from competing policy tendencies (Kanbur 2001).

²⁵ These included studies commissioned by country offices in Zambia (Barrientos et al. 2005) and Uganda, and a broader report into the politics of achieving policy influence around social protection in a wider range of countries (Hickey et al. 2009).

²⁶ One example here is the Expanding Social Protection programme in Uganda, which spent over £54 million between 2009 and 2015 to try to increase the level of political commitment to social protection in Uganda and the capacity of the Government of Uganda to deliver a coherent social protection strategy, to help address the challenge of 'the government's approach to social protection (SP), formerly characterized by limited reach and lack of coherence, in the absence of a long-term vision and co-ordinated leadership on SP' (<https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-200349>).

egged the growth aspect if we're honest' (interview, 3 June 2015), while another was concerned that: 'We were handing very difficult problems to our partners, with missionary zeal, and it wasn't very savvy. That is an NGO's job not a donor's job, not really for the UK to throw its weight around in other countries in that way' (interview with Social Protection Team member, 15 June 2015). As discussed elsewhere, there are good reasons to criticize DfID's approach to engineering 'ownership' rather than allowing national governments to develop control of their own policy agendas (Whitfield 2009). However, and continuing the comparison with the World Bank's promotion of social protection as a form of its own particular brand of institutional practice, it is notable that the initiatives launched by DfID during this period now seem to have become more embedded within government systems in Africa than those promoted by the World Bank. Examples here include World Bank-promoted public works programmes in Tanzania and Ghana that remain externally funded and run largely outside of government structures, despite the sense in which these schemes fit more strongly with the ideas of African political elites than DfID's more welfarist approach.²⁷

By the late 2000s, then, DfID had worked with other international agencies and domestic policy actors to establish pilot cash transfer projects and national-level social protection policy processes in a range of countries. This offered a further stimulus for DfID's investments in the field, which rose steadily to 2009 and then spiked in 2010 in response to the global financial crisis. DfID's expenditure since then has plateaued at a rough average of £200 million per year as compared to around £70 million per year during the mid-2000s, and might have declined rapidly at this stage given that 2010 also saw a change of government in the United Kingdom. This brought to power a coalition government of the Conservative and Liberal parties that lacked Labour's instinctive ideological support for social welfare. Proponents of social protection within DfID were concerned that the Coalition government would be less supportive and wary of the way that the policy team responsible for social protection had been depleted. The remaining members sought an early meeting with the new Secretary of State in 2010 to set out their case. Unimpressed by their pitch, the Secretary of State (Andrew Mitchell) stopped them in mid-flow and sent them away with the demand that they come back once they had a stronger case to make. In the meantime, two academics who had helped influence DfID's initial focus on social protection through their work within the Chronic Poverty Research Centre had joined forces with a journalist-academic to publish a populist book entitled *Just Give Money to the Poor* (Hanlon et al. 2010). Mitchell read the book, and was sufficiently persuaded to endorse the book's message in an open letter to a national newspaper (*The Guardian*) and to endorse DfID's policy focus on cash transfers.²⁸ The agenda received a further boost in 2011 when a National Audit Office report commented favourably on DfID's support for cash transfers.

Placing DfID's contribution in context

This inside account of DfID's role in promoting social protection in Africa emphasizes the value of going beyond a focus on how wider material and ideological shifts shape processes of global policy formation and transfer to include a focus on how aid agencies pursue development as a form of 'institutional practice'. Although DfID's focus on poverty reduction, and the UK's longer

²⁷ Whether this derives from DfID's more politicized approach to policy transfer or other factors would be an interesting question to pursue further.

²⁸ A report in *The Guardian* on *Just Give Money to the Poor* (Hanlon et al. 2010) was followed, the day after, by a letter to *The Guardian* by the Secretary of State for International Development affirming that the new governments 'will explore using cash transfers more often' in the UK efforts to eliminate poverty. Letter by the Secretary of State for International Development, 29 June 2010 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/29/revolution-global-aid-poor>).

historical experience of social welfare, predisposed it to becoming aligned with the social protection agenda in ideological terms, examining the ways in which international agencies conduct development as a form of institutional practice helps reveal that the influential role that it ended up playing was not pre-ordained. At least three moments of serendipity critically shaped the level of organizational emphasis DfID would place on social protection: the appointment of a new team leader in 2004, escaping the planned dismantling of the Social Protection Team in 2006, and the timely arrival of a populist academic book that helped persuade a sceptical new government minister of the rationale for cash transfers in 2010. If these moments had played out differently, one wonders if DfID would currently be supporting the national-level roll-out of increasingly large social protection programmes in so many countries, or whether, given this void, other agencies would have operated in similar ways or to similar effects.²⁹

This case study also helps reveal some interesting continuities regarding the longer *durée* of transnational–national interactions over the uptake of social protection in Africa. First, it is notable that any support from the UK for social protection in Africa in both the 1950s and the early 2000s flowed as much from its direct experience on the ground as it did from London or from global debates over social protection. Just as colonial officials located in Africa sought to promote social protection there in the 1950s, in-country DfID advisers played a significant role in making the case for social protection—and more specifically for unconditional cash transfers, in contrast to the World Bank—in the early 2000s. The difference this time was that their concerns were shared in London during what was a very different period of time in ideological and political economy terms. Second, the specific form of social protection that UK officials have considered promoting in Africa, namely government-led programmes of social assistance, has also been largely similar over time. Just as DfID was the primary advocate of (unconditional) cash transfers in Africa during the 2000s, British delegates located at the ILO between the 1920s and 1940s championed social assistance—with strong support from the Scandinavians—and played a major part in the ILO’s briefly radical commitment to income security in its 1944 Philadelphia Declaration (while denying at the time that this was relevant in colonial Africa). In this UK officials have been directly influenced by their own traditions of welfarism—social pensions and child-focused grants such as the family allowance have long played an iconic role within the British welfare state and politics³⁰—rather than any direct evidence that such forms of social assistance were appropriate in different African contexts. It is this largely ideological commitment to government-led programmes of social assistance, to be delivered as a right of citizenship, which has proved definitive for DfID’s role in constructing and promoting social protection in Africa. Importantly, this has raised problems of ideational fit with the paradigmatic beliefs of African elites, who have often resisted DfID’s approach in favour of more conditional, means-tested, less generous and less institutionalized forms of social protection.³¹

²⁹ Bebbington et al.’s (2006) study of the rise of social capital debates and associated interventions within the World Bank also emphasizes the contingency of such processes, albeit in relation to the kinds of ideas that it is possible to promote at given ideological moments within specific and organizational contexts.

³⁰ This historical continuity is overlooked in von Gliszczynski and Leisering’s (2016: 333–4) account of Unicef as the leading advocate of family allowances during the mid-2000s.

³¹ See the Introduction to this paper, and also a forthcoming work by the authors on how different models of social protection have attained different levels of ‘ideational fit’ with African elites.

6 Conclusion

The formation of social protection as a global public policy since the turn of the millennium, and its subsequent roll-out in sub-Saharan Africa, has been driven by the convergence of different aspects of political economy, ideas, and governmentality, as worked through the aid world and the role of aid agencies in promoting development as specific forms of ‘institutional practice’.

Viewed in historical perspective, which shows that the role of international actors and ideas in promoting social protection in Africa has been a century-long process, what is particularly distinctive about the current phase has been the convergence of material and ideological shifts within international development, with the greatly increased use of strategies of governmentality. Understanding this recent phase of promoting social protection as a form of ‘development as institutional practice’ (Mosse 2005) underlines the significance of viewing policy transfer as a form of governmentality, while also raising questions about the extent to which ‘global poverty management’ is quite the technocratic and depoliticized process that governmentality critics tend to suggest (e.g. Murray Li 2007; Peck 2011). Cash transfers have certainly been presented as the ‘practically feasible solution’ to an ‘ideologically framed consensus’ regarding poverty alleviation, but what we found striking is rather the highly and deliberately politicized approach that this has often involved.

The influential role that particular international organizations have played in shaping the global policy agenda on social protection in their image has led to the production of ‘a fragmented and incomplete universalism’ (von Gliszczynski and Leisering 2016: 325). This incompleteness includes the absence of a focus on forms of social protection that go beyond the ameliorative and embrace either more transformative forms of social protection (e.g. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004). In one sense, this fits with the critique that global policy transfer today involves promoting technical and ameliorative responses to the highly political challenges of poverty and inequality in order to sustain a particular world order (Murray Li 2007; Peck 2011). The result is a strategy for promoting poverty reduction that responds to failures in market access and poor governance rather than an effort to fundamentally redistribute wealth and power through a new southern-based model of welfare capitalism.

However, if one takes more seriously the role of domestic elites and their ideas in transnational processes of policy transfer, there is little evidence to suggest that a more radical approach would have been welcomed by political or bureaucratic elites on the continent, whose ideological perspectives are arguably more closely attuned to the liberal and conservative forms of social protection, involving minimal transfers to labour-incapacitated or otherwise highly deserving individuals (Seekings 2016), than to more radical forms of social protection. African elites have for around a century been receptive to certain liberal ideas around social assistance, but generally to a parsimonious extent. The pauperist model of welfare reform took hold in some parts of Africa in the mid-twentieth century, and expanded (evolving into a more citizenship-based model) in the (unevenly) democratized polities of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Africa because some of the relevant ideas and models articulated or promoted by outsiders resonated with local colonial and post-colonial elites in the face of changing social and economic conditions, which are of crucial importance. Foreign models were therefore only embraced and adapted where they were aligned with the underlying normative worldview of local elites. It is interesting in this regard that the strongest forms of elite commitment to social protection have little to do with an alignment with the World Bank’s residualist position, the welfarist rights-based approach of the UN or DfID’s third-way poverty agenda, than with the productivist development ideology that has been

adopted fairly broadly in Africa since the early to mid-2000s, particularly among governments with more developmentalist ambitions (Lavers 2016a, 2016b).

Arguably there has been more space for an approach that reflects the wider lessons from the redistributive benefits of progressive fiscal policy in Latin America (Melo et al. 2016) rather than seeking to cherry-pick the most transferable intervention from its wider context. Cast within the broader goal of securing a stronger fiscal contract between states and citizens (Teichman 2008), this would have involved adopting a more joined-up approach to promoting improved levels of revenue-generation and more progressive forms of taxation, and government capacity-building alongside a more ambitious focus on transfers and employment. Promoting a narrow and limited focus on cash transfers risks problems of convergence in the realm of politics as well as development risks:

in the absence of a redistributive societal compromise involving both increased taxation and social spending, progress on the social policy front (particularly increased financial commitment) raises the specter of a descent into populism unless increased financial resources are forthcoming. (Teichman 2008: 455)

This scenario already seems to be unfolding in countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, where cash transfers are converging with clientelistic and populist forms of politics.

The broad perspective offered here on how social protection came to be promoted and rolled out as a new global public policy has involved skimming over significant aspects of the story that deserve to be told in more detail. Hopefully our framework has helped draw attention to some of these, including the processes through which a global epistemic community on social protection was formed and what this means for the interface of research and policy worlds, and how each of the specific forms of social assistance that has become popular at the global level fits with elite ideas around social protection.

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