Introduction. Cash Transfers and the New Welfare States

From Neoliberalism to the Politics of Distribution

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Something unexpected has happened in the last two decades. We have become used to a debate pitting triumphalist accounts of the global spread of "free-market" capitalism (decreeing the end of history, or telling us the world is flat) against critical accounts of that same ascendancy that tell a formally similar story but with the moral polarity inverted.[1] But both sides of this great debate seem to agree on the story's fundamental plotline: unfettered, "free-market" capitalism is regnant, and "neoliberal," market-based systems of economy and governance are everywhere on the march, while the welfare state is embattled, in retreat, or barely hanging on. In this context, it has been profoundly surprising to see that recent years, in a host of different sites across the global South, have in fact yielded something quite different: the creation and expansion of extensive social welfare programs targeting the poor anchored in schemes that directly transfer small amounts of cash to large numbers of low-income people.

The ideological narratives of market triumph (pro or con) made it easy to miss this development, since the narratives seemed agreed that neoliberalism is (as sociologist Peter Evans [2008, 217] put it) "congenitally blind to the need for social protection" and that "the poor" therefore must, in these market-friendly and state-slashing times, receive less attention (not more) from national states. But they also made it easy to suppose that whatever interventions or innovations *were* occurring in the world of development and poverty policy must be those that fit the narratives, leading to a burst of scholarly attention to such paradigmatically "neoliberal" things as microcredit and microfinance schemes. But now that the smoke has cleared, it is plain to see that the really big "development" story of the last twenty years is, in fact, not microcredit but (as a recent policy review put it) "the rise and rise of social protection" (Roelen and Devereux 2013, 1).[2] And the central mechanism of the new anti-poverty programs is not credit, securitization, or any other sort of neoliberal predation but the startlingly simple device of handing out small amounts of money to people deemed to need it. As the title of one volume of full-throated advocacy for such cash transfers recently put it, *Just Give Money to the Poor*.[3]

Whatever one may think of this outcome, it is decidedly *not* where dominant narratives of marketization and neoliberalism expected us to end up. And it is a turn of events that implies some quite different sorts of political possibilities and dangers than those suggested by the usual neoliberalism story. This book, then, is a sustained reflection on these new worldwide developments and their political and social significance, with southern Africa (a region I have studied for more than three decades) as its key point of focus.[4] The book's goal is less to explain these developments than to reflect on what they might mean and how they may be transforming the field of political limits and possibilities, both within the region and beyond it.

Neoliberal Welfare States? The Surprising Outcome of Political and Economic Restructuring in Southern Africa

The disjuncture between certain influential scholarly stories about neoliberalism and concrete developments at the level of social policy is especially pronounced in southern Africa. Here, narratives about neoliberalism have been central to most critical understandings of the massive political and economic changes of the last few decades, as I will describe below. But at the same time the region has been a widely hailed pioneer in the expansion in social protection that has swept the globe. South Africa here has led the way, with an extensive national system of social payments anchored by old age pensions, child care grants, and disability payments. But others in the region have followed suit, and there are now

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similar major nationwide programs in Botswana and Namibia, along with smaller ones in Lesotho, Swaziland, and Mozambique, as well as pilot and regional programs (intended to soon be scaled up to the nationwide level) in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.[5]

Southern Africa (and especially South Africa) has sometimes been seen not only as an instance of neoliberalism but even as a paradigmatic case of it (see, e.g., Klein 2008). And if neoliberalism is, as some accounts have (rather Eurocentrically) tended to suggest, first and foremost a worldwide project centered on the erosion, rollback, or downsizing of the Keynesian "social" states that dominated the post–World War II (Western) world (see, e.g., Harvey 2007), it seems clear enough in what direction "neoliberal" southern Africa must be headed: toward the heartless world of neoliberal capitalism, in which the welfare state withers while the poor are ever more exposed to the depredations of "the market." With the issues framed in this way, even the most astute of the region's many critical observers have sometimes paid less attention than they should have to a remarkable set of events in the region, events that have in fact led to sustained *expansions* (rather than reductions) in programs of social assistance and indeed to the emergence of what could reasonably be described as a new kind of welfare state. And while many influential accounts of neoliberalism have seen only ever-growing social exclusion, we here must also take stock of a new kind of *in*clusion as millions of poor citizens previously ignored or worse by the state have become direct beneficiaries of cash payments.[6]

The most influential critical accounts of neoliberalism in southern Africa center on the region's economic core, South Africa, so it is important briefly to review how such accounts understand South Africa's postapartheid transition and the economic changes that came in its wake. As the story is generally told, the African National Congress (ANC) party that took the reins of government after the 1994 transition, having abandoned its old commitments to socialist economic transformation, opted for what Patrick Bond (2005, 6) has termed a "homegrown" structural adjustment program, yielding without much of a fight to the World Bank/IMF orthodoxy of the time that called for the opening up of markets (via deregulation and privatization), in the hopes of making the new South Africa an attractive destination for international capital investment. Following a brief and transitional commitment to a "Reconstruction and

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Development Plan" (RDP) that articulated a broad if vague social democratic commitment to a "mixed economy," 1996 saw an official shift to a new, more "neoliberal" approach, the "Growth with Employment and Redistribution" (GEAR) program. At the heart of the plan was the claim that a business-friendly, "growth-led" strategy would generate sufficient economic growth to secure substantial employment growth and in the end to lift all boats.[7] But moves to "open up" the economy to "the market" yielded only limited economic growth, disappointingly failing to come close to the optimistic early projections. Even more dramatic was the failure to generate much employment. Not only was there no burst of new employment; old standbys like agriculture and mining actually shed huge numbers of jobs—just the sorts of jobs that had formerly allowed low-skilled and low-waged workers to sustain urban and rural livelihoods and communities all across the region. The result was a rapid acceleration of a shift that had begun already in the 1970s, from a labor-shortage economy to one of massive labor surplus (Seekings and Nattrass 2005; Marais 2011). With persistent mass unemployment (official figures stuck near 25 percent and broader measures generally much higher[8]), many of those at the bottom of the economic heap seemed to have little to show for their supposed liberation. New wealth was certainly being generated, some of it now conspicuously accumulated by black South Africans (often well-connected ANC elites), but inequality rose to levels exceeding even those seen under apartheid. This led to a society whose superficial prosperity disguised formidable underlying ills, including inequality, mass unemployment, and lack of full social inclusion.

This critique, in its broad strokes, gets a lot right. Both its account of economic liberalization and its diagnosis of the social ills that followed in its wake are broadly correct. But there are two gaps in such accounts that make them of only limited value in understanding the region's new welfare states.[9] First, the critiques are inevitably most articulate about what they are *against* ("neoliberalism") and have often struggled to lay out convincing and realistic alternatives and strategies. Too often, in fact, critical accounts of neoliberalism have settled into a politics of denunciation (what I have elsewhere [Ferguson 2010] analyzed as "the politics of the anti-") in which political identities are constituted or consolidated less by concrete programs of government or political mobilization than by a declaration of opposition to a malevolent and polymorphic "other"

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named "neoliberalism." The result is a strange state of affairs in which nearly every intellectual and politician in South Africa today condemns "neoliberalism" but no major political parties have emerged advocating any very substantially different policy path (at least until very recently).[10] The second problem is not unrelated. It is that the now-standard critical accounts of South Africa's "neoliberalism" fail to attend to the very substantial ways in which that country (pioneering a path for many of its neighbors) has taken a turn that, in some respects at least, seems almost the opposite of the standard neoliberal model: that is, by elaborating an enormous system of non-contributory social benefits that today transfers 3.4 percent of the nation's GDP directly to "the poor" via non-market cash payments that are now received by more than 30 percent of the entire population (National Treasury 2013, 84–86).

It seems clear that this development was the product of a quite particular conjuncture. For it was at just the moment that the post-apartheid ANC regime came to power, with a mandate to transform the economic conditions of the poor and working-class people who made up its political base, that a worldwide economic restructuring undermined the low-wage employment that had long provided the entire region with its economic core. (On the brutally abrupt collapse of labor markets for low-wage and low-skilled labor, see Seekings and Nattrass 2005; Marais 2011.) Facing the pressing political need to deliver concrete changes to the new black political majority, and with "pro-market" economic policies failing to yield the rapid economic growth that had been supposed to "lift all boats," social protection became a key domain of policy innovation. South Africa and several of its neighbors had long had quite well-developed social welfare systems for whites, but provisioning for blacks was rudimentary at best (see chapter 2). As part of the transition to the new, post-apartheid regime, pension rates were equalized across racial groups, and social assistance rapidly became of much greater economic value for the majority populations. At the same time, a decision was made to implement a substantial new nationwide cash benefit for those caring for small children. Similar programs were soon taken up by neighboring countries Namibia and (to a lesser extent) Botswana, and the range of beneficiaries was rapidly expanded (in South Africa, the age limit for a child's eligibility was gradually raised from seven in 1998 to the current age limit of eighteen).[11] The rapid growth of such programs responded not only

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to post-apartheid political expectations but also to another conjunctural feature of the regional moment: the emergence in the 1990s of a massive HIV epidemic that was creating huge numbers of orphans even as it left many elderly caring for the ill.

The result of this complex conjuncture has been the emergence of a very extensive set of state commitments to provide monthly cash payments to a wide range of beneficiaries. In South Africa, grants are paid to more than sixteen million individuals (some 30 percent of the total population), in the context of a doubling (in real terms) of overall social spending between 2002–3 and 2011–12 (National Treasury 2012, 78). Nearly three million South Africans aged sixty and over receive old age pensions (each with a 2013 value of R1260 [~US$125] per month), with another eleven million receiving child support grants (now set at R300 [~US$30] per child).[12] These benefits are non-contributory (i.e., not based on any payments previously made by recipients) and are paid directly from the state treasury. They are nominally conditional on an income test, and in principle school attendance is required for child support grants. But such strictures have in practice been only loosely applied (if at all), meaning that for the most part the grants do not have the strong "conditions" that have often been attached to cash transfers in Latin America and other regions (indeed, the Ministry of Social Development is currently planning to phase out even the means test for old age pensions). And it must be noted that the benefits (while, of course, tiny when compared in absolute terms with those of Northern welfare states) are, in the context of the lives of low-income people in the region, quite substantial; indeed, as one recent study has pointed out (Garcia and Moore 2012, 311), the South African old age pension as of 2010 amounted to 1.75 times the median per capita income. The grants reach a huge swath of the population, with some 44 percent of all households nationwide receiving at least one grant, a figure that rises to nearly 60 percent in the predominantly poor and rural provinces of Eastern Cape and Limpopo (Statistics South Africa 2013, 19–20).

Namibia has expanded its old age pension scheme along lines very similar to those of the South African program. It has also introduced the Child Maintenance Grant, modeled on the South African Child Support Grant, as well as a number of other, smaller programs. Due to a less flexible implementation and poor administration, the child care grants are not

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as widely distributed (yet) as in South Africa, but here too both expenditures and the number of recipients have expanded rapidly in recent years. As of 2008, some 12 percent of Namibia's total population were receiving social grants (Levine, Van der Berg, and Yu 2009; Garcia and Moore 2012, 287–90). Botswana also has a comprehensive non-contributory old age pension system as well as a major program providing cash payments to those caring for orphaned children—no small thing in a country where some 15 percent of all children are reckoned to be orphans (Dahl 2009). Social protection schemes are less developed in other southern African countries, but the successes of the South African model have inspired even the poorest states in the region to attempt to emulate it, albeit with much lower levels of benefits. Swaziland, for instance, now has a universal old age pension, and even Lesotho (long widely regarded as lacking the financial means to attempt any sort of social protection) introduced a modest old age pension in 2004 and is now developing a program of child care grants (Garcia and Moore 2012, 264).

It is now well documented that these programs, in their own terms, "work." For South Africa, where the programs have been studied most intensively and for the longest time, a robust consensus now exists that, as one recent evaluation study put it, "South Africa's social grants have been extremely successful at reducing poverty" (DSD, SASSA, and UNICEF 2012, 3; see also the authoritative overview of the evidence in Neves et al. 2009). According to a recent national survey, the percentage of households that reported experiencing hunger decreased from 29.3 percent to 12.6 percent between 2002 and 2012 (Statistics South Africa 2012, 4). A recent comprehensive evaluation of the Child Support Grant program concluded that it clearly yielded "positive developmental impact" not only in nutrition but also in educational and health outcomes while at the same time providing some protection to adolescent recipients from "risky behaviors" in the context of the high HIV prevalence. A recent survey of living standards (based not on reported income but on concrete lifestyle markers such as the presence of running water or flush toilets and ownership of key goods and appliances) found that the proportion of South African adults falling into the lowest of ten categories for living standards had fallen from 11 percent of the population in 2001 to just 1 percent in 2011.[13] Major declines were also found in the other lowest categories, along with substantial rises in proportions occupying the

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middle rungs of the scale. One of the researchers (Georgina Alexander of the South African Institute of Race Relations) provided this explanation of the results:

> The improvement can be attributed in part to the increase in the number of people receiving social payments, such as old age pensions and the child support grant. In particular, the number of recipients of the child grant increased by 1200% between 2001 and 2010/11. In 2001 some 8% of South Africans were beneficiaries of grants. This proportion increased to 29% in 2010/11 and accounted for 10% of government expenditure.[14]

It is not only quantitative surveys that attest to the efficacy and importance of the expanded programs of cash transfer. Among the scores of experts and ethnographic researchers whom I have consulted in the course of this project, many with very long and intimate familiarity with the social realities of the region's poverty, none doubted that social grants are playing an absolutely vital role in sustaining poor households and communities and in preventing the worst sorts of destitution. When I asked one such highly knowledgeable researcher what South Africa would be like without the grants, he paused before replying simply, "Apocalyptic. Off the chart."

In Namibia, social protection programs have been less well studied and assessed, but what data is available suggests that the effects of the programs have been broadly similar to those in South Africa. A recent overview found that these schemes are making "a substantial and growing contribution to poverty reduction" and concluded that social cash transfers have lowered the number of "poor" individuals by 10 percent and the "very poor" by 22 percent (Levine, Van der Berg, and Yu 2009, 49, 50). The report also finds the programs to be broadly sustainable in fiscal terms, projecting a gradual reduction in social grant expenditures (as a percentage of GDP), since GDP growth is expected to outpace the projected growth in number of recipients (Leving, Van der Berg, and Yu 2009, 42, 45).

Not surprisingly, these programs have been generally popular among those receiving the cash payments.[15] What is perhaps more surprising is that a broad acceptance of these programs appears to extend across nearly the whole range of society, with feelings about the legitimacy of

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public assistance quite widely shared across both class and race divides. Jeremy Seekings has shown that, when asked about both specific social assistance programs and a range of scenarios in which a person in a certain situation might or might not "deserve" government assistance, South Africans of different races proved to have surprisingly similar views (Seekings 2008c). At least in South Africa (and thanks to a history that I trace in chapter 2), it seems to be broadly accepted that it is a normal and proper part of the mission of the state to issue monthly cash payments to a wide range of people deemed to be in need. Indeed, despite their substantial size and cost, the programs of social grants that I have described here are not a particularly contentious or embattled feature of the political landscape in any of the countries I have reviewed here. To my knowledge, in fact, no major political party has ever proposed eliminating them, or even reducing their amounts.

How did this come about? In South Africa, especially, it is very clear that the original ambition of the post-apartheid regime was hardly to create a welfare state catering to those excluded from the world of wage labor. Its first political imperative, on the contrary, was to generate jobs and to improve the condition of workers. The ANC, of course, had its intellectual roots on the political Left, and it has governed from the start as part of a "tripartite alliance" linking it with the powerful trade union federation COSATU and the South African Communist Party. Partly for this reason, a high value has long been placed on labor as the central mode of social incorporation, and on "the workers" as the figuration of those to whom the government must answer (see Barchiesi 2011). But in the context of new economic realities, as the country went through a wrenching economic restructuring that shed jobs as much as it created them, more and more of the population looked to government as a direct provider and provisioner. "Service delivery" was the new slogan, and increasingly black South Africans sought their "liberation" in the form of direct state provision of such goods as housing, electricity, water, sanitation, and social services. "Service delivery protests," indeed, became a familiar feature of everyday life in poor and working-class neighborhoods across the country. In this context, a patchwork of older programs of social assistance (inherited from the apartheid regime and newly deracialized) provided the starting point for the development of a vast institutional apparatus that would make it possible for the new state to provide highly

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visible and very effective support, in the form of direct cash transfers, to its electoral base—a way of "delivering" something tangible and valuable, even in the absence of jobs.

This was a matter of practical politics and pragmatic policymaking.[16] But along with the political and institutional innovations I have described here, it is also possible to trace the emergence of new ways of thinking, new ways of reasoning about matters of poverty and distribution. As Michel Foucault once remarked, the work of governing always involves at least a certain amount of thinking (Foucault 1988, 152–56). I am interested, then, not only in the new programs of social assistance but also in the new ways of thinking that are growing up alongside them, new "rationalities" of poverty and social assistance that, I suggest, may be understood as both harbingers of, and intellectual resources for, an emergent politics. This is what I term a "politics of distribution," and it involves new ways of thinking about a range of things that includes labor, unemployment, the family, and the meaning of "social" payments. We will not get far, I suggest, by either simply condemning these new ways of thinking or simply celebrating them. Instead, I wish to think both about them and with them, hoping thereby to gain a better understanding of both the political possibilities and the dangers of the present moment.

An older way of thinking (shared, at some fundamental level, by both official apartheid planners and their most radical critics) saw the majority black population first of all as a source of labor. Black populations confined to rural "homelands" or "Bantustans" appeared principally as "labor reserves," providing a steady supply of low-wage migrant labor, most of all to big employers such as the mines. While a permanently settled workforce would have provoked both political demands and a need for higher wages (high enough, at least, to cover the costs of the work force's own reproduction), state control of black movement and residence attempted to solve both problems by forcing labor to remain "migrant." As Marxist critics pointed out, this was accomplished only by off-loading the costs of social reproduction (including raising children and caring for the sick and aged) onto already-impoverished rural communities, thus enabling a kind of "super-exploitation" that afflicted not only workers themselves but also their communities and regions of origin.[17] For those who would replace the nakedly exploitative and repressive system of apartheid with something better, the starting place was therefore the idea that it was not

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only those directly employed by capitalists who were exploited by capitalism. People from the poor rural peripheries of the southern African political economy, even if not directly employed, were not at all marginal to the production system. On the contrary, thanks to the role they played in the reproduction of labor, they were in fact central to the massive production of wealth that was occurring at the industrial centers of this regional system. This was an analytical claim (i.e., that even the region's most peripheral people and locales were in fact vital for capitalism, "reproducing the labor force") that contained embedded within it both a functional imperative ("social reproduction" could only take place via the provision of at least some minimal "social wage" enabling it) and an ethical claim (those who were helping to generate wealth were also entitled to share in it).

But the developments of recent years force us to question the logic that allowed an earlier generation of critics to link the productivity of the industrial economy to the entire society in such a direct and compelling way. In a labor-scarce political economy, even the most remote rural reaches of the southern African region could plausibly be understood as providing vitally needed labor reserves for a vast and encompassing system of production. Today, however, a restructured capitalism has ever less need for the ready supply of low-wage, low-skilled laborers that the migrant labor system generated. As Tania Li (2010) has argued in an Asian context, the marginalization and impoverishment of so many today cannot be regarded as "a strategy of global capital" but is instead, in her terms, "a sign of their very limited relevance to capital at any scale" (2010, 67). This point was made to me most dramatically in the comment of a South African social researcher with long experience working with poor rural communities. "I wish this weren't true," he said, "but the fact is that there are at least ten million people out there who could drop dead tomorrow and the JSE [Johannesburg Stock Exchange] wouldn't register so much as a ripple."[18]

Under such circumstances, it has become more and more difficult to argue that the value produced at the region's industrial centers is generated by the suffering of those at its periphery; instead, the suffering of the poor and marginalized appears as functionally isolated from a production system that simply no longer has any use for them. And if such people increasingly receive social payments, this cannot plausibly be understood as

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part of a vital and necessary functional logic of reproducing a workforce, for there is simply no demand for the kind of labor such payments might plausibly "reproduce." On the contrary, insofar as today's social protection programs do support a sort of social reproduction, it is the reproduction of precisely that class of people who have increasingly slim prospects of ever entering the labor market at all.

At the same time, people whose labor is no longer wanted have acquired other kinds of power—specifically, political rights within a democratic regime whose political base is precisely the impoverished and historically excluded masses of "the poor."[19] And this regime has felt the need to "deliver" a range of goods and services to people whose claims are increasingly based neither on labor nor its reproduction but instead on such things as citizenship and political pressure. In this context, a "neoliberal" program of selective privatization and marketization has been combined with a far-reaching expansion of programs of direct distribution that are increasingly decoupled from issues of labor and labor supply.

A Worldwide Shift: The Cash Transfer Revolution and Its Meaning

These developments are not unique to southern Africa. It is true that southern African programs, especially those providing old age pensions, have their own, quite specific, historical roots (reviewed in chapter 2). But as I suggested at the start, their recent rapid expansion is clearly part of a much larger, worldwide trend.

In fact, the last two decades have seen the rise of new kinds of welfare regimes all over the world. The programmatic element that has been at the heart of this transformation has been "cash transfers," most with at least nominal "conditions" (typically school attendance for children and clinic visits for improved health) attached to them (thus "conditional cash transfers" or CCTs). These programs, in their modern form, can be traced to Latin American roots, in particular the Opportunidades program in Mexico (Molyneux 2007a, 2007b; World Bank 2009), followed by the Bolsa Familia program in Brazil, both focused principally on families with children. The latter, in particular, has served as something of a global model and inspiration, delivering benefits as it does to more than eleven million families, with what has been claimed to be both a strong anti-poverty impact and the familiar Keynesian benefit of enabling con-

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sumption and thereby stimulating the economy (Soares et al. 2010; cf. Lo Vuolo 2013). But what was once largely a Latin American phenomenon has gone global. A 2009 World Bank report traced the growth of cash transfer programs across scores of countries worldwide, noting that "countries have been adopting or considering adopting CCT programs at a prodigious rate" (2009, 1). Hanlon, Barrientos, and Hulme (2010) have characterized this shift as a "development revolution from the global South" and pointed to "a wave of new thinking" rooted in the conviction that "it is better to give money to poor people directly so that they can find effective ways to escape from poverty" (2010, 1). A recent literature review done by the United Kingdom's official development aid agency identified the spread of cash transfers as a "quiet revolution" and noted that such programs are now estimated to reach between 0.75 and 1 billion people (DFID 2011, i).

Southern Africa, as I have noted, arrived at such programs via its own route, and due to a unique history. But beyond southern Africa, social protection schemes elsewhere on the continent were until recently rudimentary or nonexistent. In fact, only a few years ago, social assistance hardly seemed to be in the cards for a continent renowned for "weak states" characterized by feeble fiscal capacity, bureaucratic dysfunction, and widespread corruption. Yet in the wake of the much-touted success of cash transfer programs elsewhere (and especially the examples in nearby southern Africa), today there is an explosion of new programs for transferring cash to "the poor" across a number of African states (albeit at significantly lower levels of benefits than those seen in southern Africa). A recent World Bank review identified no fewer than 123 cash transfer programs in operation across the continent and provided detailed reviews of programs in 28 countries (Garcia and Moore 2012; see also Ellis, Devereux, and White 2009; World Bank 2009).

Most of the discussion about these programs has been in the public policy field—asking questions about whether or how well such programs "work," how they can be improved or scaled up, and so on. I have suggested that the empirical evidence (at least for southern Africa) strongly indicates that these programs do in fact yield powerful improvements to a range of measurable "development" goods (for reviews of similar evidence worldwide, see Hanlon, Barrientos, and Hulme 2010; DFID 2011). There is a strong case, that is, that these programs have amounted to

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good public policy. But I wish to argue that there is even more at stake here than pragmatic gains in ameliorating the worst forms of poverty. Instead, I want to suggest that these new modalities of distribution are associated with both new kinds of political claim-making and new possibilities for political mobilization, even as they are also bound up with new ways of thinking and new rationalities of poverty. These new developments point both to the exhaustion of older forms of politics and to vital possibilities for new ones. In this respect, both the new official willingness to "just give money to the poor" (Hanlon, Barrientos, and Hulme 2010) and the new kinds of distributive politics associated with it are of deep interest and, from the point of view of progressive politics,[20] simultaneously exciting and deserving of critical scrutiny. My aim, then, is to describe a certain sort of new thinking in the domains of social policy and distributive politics while at the same time attempting to think both about it, and along with it.

Perhaps the first question that must be answered is whether, for all the talk of a "development revolution," the programs and perspectives I have here pointed to are in fact as novel as they pretend. There is, after all, nothing new about welfare states giving money to the disadvantaged—indeed, "the dole" is perhaps the most widely known and discussed of the many "social" programs associated with the classic welfare states of the global North. And the idea that it might be beneficial, both for economic growth and for the well-being of the underconsuming "poor," to put money into the hands of those most likely to spend it is not some sort of new discovery but a standard element of the Keynesian common sense that supported the creation and growth of the classical Northern welfare states of the twentieth century. Is the "revolution," then, really just a matter of the South catching up, belatedly achieving the sorts of social assistance that were pioneered elsewhere more than a century ago? The answer to this question is no. As a number of authors have pointed out, the new regimes of social assistance in the South have a number of distinctive features that distinguish them from their older and better-studied Northern cousins.[21]

First of all, there is real novelty in the very idea that "less developed" countries could even consider having extensive nationwide welfare institutions. As detailed in chapter 2, the architects of the European welfare states assumed that such programs presupposed both a "developed" in-

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dustrial economy and something approaching full employment, at least for male "heads of household." Where "welfare" institutions were developed in the colonial world (as in South Africa and a few other places in Africa), they were chiefly for whites and a few privileged others. In colonial settings in which huge proportions of the population were both impoverished and outside the wage economy, "informal" social security such as "the African extended family" was the only solution that could be imagined.

Then, too, the conditions under which payments are received in the new welfare states of the South look quite different from earlier Northern models. In the North, the central conception was typically of a "safety net" that could provide social support for a "breadwinner" (often presumed to be a male "head of household") and his "dependents" in conditions either of the worker's old age or death or those exceptional contingencies that might interrupt wage labor (accident, disability, temporary economic slumps). And the usual mechanism for ensuring such payments was a kind of insurance system, based on payments made into a "system" by those who might one day need to be caught by the "net."[22] But the southern African schemes I have reviewed here are non-contributory, meaning that they are paid out of general treasury funds and make no reference to prior "contributions" by beneficiaries.[23] Such payments are made with no reference to employment histories and are allocated instead based on such labor-independent criteria as absolute age (for pensions) or number of children being cared for (for child care grants). What is more, the large share of the population that has come to rely on such grants strains any notion of a "safety net" as an extraordinary measure for dealing with abnormal contingencies. In South Africa today, for instance, 44 percent of all households receive one or another sort of grant (Statistics South Africa 2013, 19–20), meaning that, across many of the country's regions and neighborhoods, being at least partially supported by social transfers is more the norm than it is the exception. In the poorest communities, in fact, the ability to access an income often depends less on one's ability to work than on the ability to claim a condition that might give one access to a monthly cash transfer. Anxieties that poor women might decide to have children simply for the income do not appear to be well founded (birth rates have in fact gone down or stabilized since the child care grant was introduced [Macleod and Tracey 2009, Neves et al. 2009]). And economists' worries that disability grants may perversely incentivize such

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things as contracting HIV tend to rest more on second-hand anecdotes than on convincing data. But while such worries may be ill-founded, they are a response to a very real, and rather startling, new fact, which is that conditions associated (in the "safety net" model) with *losing* a steady income (illness, old age, disability, needing to care for small children) are now, for many, more likely to appear as the only plausible way of obtaining one in the first place.

Yet the incomes thus obtained are, by design, not comparable to the sorts of incomes associated with full-time wage labor. While the traditional "dole" in the North was meant to replace the normal paycheck for an injured or temporarily unemployed worker, the much smaller cash transfers that are at the heart of the South's new welfare states are explicitly not intended to be a substitute for other economic activities but rather a catalyst—enabling, supporters claim, both "informal" livelihoods such as small businesses and sometimes even access to wage employment itself. A recent comprehensive literature review found very little evidence that cash transfers produce any negative effects on labor market participation, and noted, on the contrary, that many studies have found positive effects, as cash transfers cover costs associated with job seeking or create new employment opportunities by creating new markets in poor and remote areas (DFID 2011; cf. Neves et al. 2009). In this respect, cash payments are less about replacing income lost through inactivity than they are about the rendering active of people who (due to poverty, poor health, lack of transportation, and so on) have had their range of economic activity acutely restricted (cf. Ferguson 2007).

Also important is the way that new cash transfer programs (at least in southern Africa) have broken with the ambition (long central to Northern welfare states) to govern or police the structure of domestic life.[24] Since 1998, for instance, South Africa's huge program of child support grants has had no requirement that the recipients of the grants be in any prescribed familial relation, either conjugal or filial. The marital status of the recipient is not considered, nor is the question of whether or not they reside with a partner (of either gender). Indeed, the "primary caregiver" who receives the grant is not required to be a parent, or even a relative, of the supported child. Unlike traditional Northern systems that became notorious for seeking to apply moralizing familial norms via intrusive social workers, there is here no attempt to identify "real parents,"

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to impose responsibilities on fathers, or to impose "proper" behavior or family forms.[25]

Most radically, some new thinking on social policy is beginning to break from the central conception of the classic welfare states—the conception that social payments are fundamentally a way of dealing with the interruption of a "normal" situation in which adult heads-of-households (most of all men) earn wages that support their dependents. Until now, social protection programs in the region have effectively ignored the fact of mass unemployment, supposing that "social" support is needed only for "dependent" categories such as the elderly, those caring for children, and the disabled. Working-age "able-bodied" men, in contrast, are all counterfactually presumed to be able to support themselves through their labor. Directly challenging such conceptions, a campaign in South Africa and Namibia has in recent years proposed a "basic income grant" (BIG) that would provide a small monthly cash payment to each and every individual citizen. The amount of the payment was initially set at R100 (N$100) per person (an amount that was, at the time of the initial proposal, worth about US$16). (The proposal is discussed at greater length in later chapters, especially chapter 6; see also DSD 2002; Standing and Samson 2003; Meth 2008; Haarmann et al. 2009.) In such a program, there would be no means testing of any kind, so all citizens would receive the grant (though the better-off would have their $16 and then some recouped through the tax system). In this conception, receipt of a social payment would make no reference to gender, age, employment status, or family configuration, and even "able-bodied" working-age men would be eligible. In this, the most innovative of the new social payment schemes recently envisaged or implemented in the region, cash transfers to citizens are completely divorced from calculations about wage labor and family structure alike.

As discussed in the next chapter, powerful criticisms can be leveled against most currently existing cash transfer programs precisely on the grounds that they do not go far enough toward the radical rethinking of the meaning of social payments that can be observed in the basic income grant campaign. Indeed, I will argue at some length that social policy across the region is in too many ways still trapped within the terms of the old European "social" state, as if that old imagined world of breadwinners and their dependents could be meaningfully mapped onto social settings

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more often characterized by mass structural unemployment, "informal" livelihoods, and highly fluid domestic groups. It is also noteworthy that existing programs, based as they are on national citizenship, have yet to find satisfactory solutions to the issues of migration and xenophobia that bedevil all welfare states, issues that reveal the conventionally nationalistic particularities that still lie beneath the surface of even the most ostensibly universal programs (this set of issues is discussed in the book's concluding chapter). But if one looks closely, it is possible to see that there is also some profound and sometimes very challenging new thinking going on in and around these new programs. And in the end, it is that new thinking, and not simply the presence of this or that concrete policy, that makes southern Africa such an interesting site for thinking about distribution today. Perhaps because of the region's dramatic political history as well as the extremity of its current inequalities, one is constantly struck by both the starkness, and sometimes the boldness, with which key issues are posed. With inequalities both extreme and (in large measure) color-coded, they are both especially visible and openly contested. And while many regions of the world have had to deal with the consequences of the decline of certain forms of low-wage labor, here the change has been so abrupt and wrenching as to open up space for thoughts that might elsewhere be unthinkable, or only furtively and hesitantly pondered in the safety of private musings or low-level policy conclaves. Here, the unthinkable is in fact being thought, quite publicly, and often with a very high level of intellectual rigor and critical self-consciousness. Thus, one might open up a leading South African business daily and read the following remarkable argument (by the well-known political and cultural analyst Jonny Steinberg):[26]

> "If we create enough jobs to keep the youth off the streets, we will be saved. If we cannot, South Africa will implode." I put the statement in quotation marks because it has become a gospel truth. Question it and you risk being declared insane.
>
> And yet it is wrong. If we are honest with ourselves, we have long ago given up trying to employ everyone, or even to halve unemployment. . . . South Africa started bleeding jobs in the mid-1970s, along with much of the rest of the world. We have been bleeding jobs ever since. . . . It hasn't mattered who has been in power or whether our

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> political system has been a racial dictatorship or a democracy, or whether our labour law has been rigid or flexible—we cannot employ everybody. We can't even come close. To think that we can is to indulge in millenarian thinking, as if Jesus will come and remake the world, as if there is a thing called magic.
>
> Deep down, we know this. For while we talk about creating jobs, we have been doing something else—we have been handing out grants. Some say that it is a stopgap measure, just to tide us over until jobs are found. Others say that it is creating a culture of idleness from which there will be no return.
>
> But if we are honest, it is what we do now and what we will keep doing forever. It is a substitute for work and it holds the country together; it has saved many millions from starvation and misery.
>
> If we accept that welfare is permanent, we must go the whole hog; we must start giving grants to the one category of poor people entirely excluded from them—young men.

A whole series of taboos that govern thought and discourse around employment all across the world are here summarily discarded as so much superstition. While leaders in every nation promise jobs for all, Steinberg simply states it as a fact that, for a huge swath of the population, wage labor–based livelihoods are simply not going to return, and new forms of distribution are a permanent and necessary feature of the new world. Won't the expansion of grants create "dependency" and undermine the will to work? According to Steinberg, "that is dead thinking that made sense long ago, in a time when jobs were plentiful. There isn't sufficient demand to employ this country's young men. We will either give them grants or they will get nothing. They are our fellow citizens, after all. To put some money in their pockets to spend as they wish is to confer upon them some dignity" and to bring "life, not idleness" to the lives of the poor.[27] Indeed, he suggested in a companion column a few weeks later that in a context in which millions have inherited structural unemployment from their parents, where the promise of decent jobs is "not even a living memory," arguing that welfare will make people lazy "borders on madness."[28]

I will return to Steinberg's provocative arguments in the book's conclusion. For the time being, I offer this short excerpt only as an example

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of the openings that are today allowing bold thinking and heterodox ideas to emerge and to be articulated even in quite mainstream venues. It is this, the crisis-born opening up of possibilities for new thinking (over and above any specific program or policy), that makes the story of southern Africa's new welfare states such an interesting one. And we do not yet know how it ends.

Toward a Distributive Politics

Beyond the specifics of the new programs of social assistance, this book is also about a broader set of questions that they have provoked—questions about the general processes of distribution as they unfold in contemporary societies, and about the sorts of binding claims and counterclaims that can be made about these processes. It is this that I refer to as the politics of distribution, and this volume has the ambition of linking the recent rise of new sorts of welfare states in the global South to the possibilities and dangers of emergent forms of distributive politics that are unfolding in contexts where ever more "working-age" people are supported by means other than wage labor.

It is useful to start by considering the issue of distribution in its most general form. How are the goods we produce distributed? Which of them may I have access to? Differently organized societies, economic anthropologists have long pointed out, have provided a wide range of different institutional answers to that question, ranging from the obligatory rules for meat-sharing among hunter-gatherers to such famously elaborate ceremonial gifting institutions as the *kula* ring and the *potlatch* (Mauss [1924] 2000). But in modern capitalist societies, a standard account would point out that while I may access certain goods directly by producing them myself or receive others as gifts, the normal way that people access most of the goods and services they consume is via "the market." Which, then, of the vast quantity of goods produced each year, are distributed to me? In the simplest terms, I may have those goods which I can buy. And how is it that I have a certain quantity of funds to buy goods? The usual answer to this question is that I work for it. I exchange my labor (or its products) for money, and then can use the money to buy the quantity of goods that "the market" allows. Whether one reads neoclassical economists or their Marxist critics, it would be easy to arrive at the conclusion that

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distribution in capitalist societies is organized by "the market," that the exchange of labor is the source of most people's purchasing power, and that purchasing power in the market is both the fundamental mechanism of distribution and the underlying source of consumption.

Even some of the most articulate and insightful recent critics of the hegemony of work seem to accept the basic premise that, as Kathi Weeks (2011, 6–7) puts it, "Waged work . . . is, *of course*, the way most people acquire access to the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter" (emphasis added). But plainly that is simply not the case in much of Africa, where only small minorities participate in waged work and where a range of other activities and mechanism allow "most people" to obtain their livelihoods. And lest we write this off too quickly as a symptom of Africa's "underdeveloped" condition, let us linger for a moment on the supposedly "advanced capitalist" United States, generally taken as a country in which the wage labor form is especially dominant. Here, too, I want to suggest, paid labor may be less central to processes of distribution than is often imagined. Indeed, in the United States, as in the rest of the world, the question of how people actually gain access to the things they need turns out to be far more complicated than simply exchanging their labor.

We are used to tracking a very narrowly defined official "unemployment rate" (the percentage of the workforce that is, at any moment, actively seeking but failing to find employment). The fact that this rate is generally in the single digits (currently around 7 percent) might lead one to believe that the rest of the population (the ninety-odd percent who are *not* "unemployed") is in fact employed. But in fact, official labor force statistics for 2012 show that *only 58.6 percent of the adult population of the United States is actually in employment*.[29] In a total national population of 314 million, just 142 million were (as of 2012) employed.[30] Of the rest, only 12 million were officially "unemployed," while nearly 90 million adults[31] were reported as neither employed nor unemployed but simply "not in the labor force" (i.e., "those who have no job and are not looking for one").[32] These adults of course include traditional "dependent" categories such as retirees and stay-at-home mothers, but it includes many others, too. Indeed, a recent article by *New York Times* columnist David Leonhardt noted with alarm that even at the core of the classic "breadwinner" group (men aged 25 to 54), nearly one out of five were neither employed nor seeking employment but "managing to get by some other way."[33]

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Such observations have led conservative ideologues to characterize the distributive economy of the contemporary United States in terms of a huge underclass of "takers" living on the productive virtue of their economic betters. Leonhardt's concern was directed specifically at the expanding rolls of the federal disability program, but he might just as well have pointed to the huge numbers of working-age adults living in households that receive nutritional support from the federal SNAP program (some forty-eight million Americans, or 15 percent of the population, currently receive so-called food stamps)[34] or, indeed, the astonishing number of working-age men incarcerated as prisoners (at any given time, one out of every forty-eight working-age men is in prison [Schmitt, Warner, and Gupta 2010, 1]).

But the importance of receiving a livelihood via direct distribution rather than as a market exchange for labor is not only something one finds in the lower reaches of the socioeconomic order. As Kimberly Morgan has recently pointed out, nearly all Americans are recipients of benefits from one or another government program (96 percent, according to her sources) and the receipt of such benefits in fact flows disproportionately to those in the middle and at the top of the income ladder (Morgan 2013). And let us remember that, for all the popular fantasies about welfare cheats and loafers on unemployment benefits, if one really wants to find idle non-workers nonetheless receiving generous cash incomes, the better-off end of the spectrum is surely the place to start. It is difficult to calculate the percentage who live on invested capital, but there is no doubt it numbers many millions—the super-rich, of course, but also many upper-middle-class people retired on private pension plans (including many who retire early in life), and young adults supported partly or wholly by trust funds. And, of course, there are uncounted young people who have reached adulthood but are still supported by parents or other kin as well as the millions of students (university, graduate, and professional) who are supported by some combination of parental largesse and institutional grants and scholarships. In fact, while a certain common sense tells us that "everybody" has to work for a living, the plain fact is that massive numbers of Americans (indeed, most of them, if one includes children) do not (at least not the sort of "work" that is counted by the U.S. Labor Bureau). Instead, they are supported not by exchanging their labor for its market value but by being granted distributive allocations from other individuals, institutions, or both.[35]

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This is, of course, even more true in southern Africa, where massive unemployment is the norm and a myriad of distributive practices (from "informal" remittances and kinship-based sharing to state programs of grants and pensions) have long furnished livelihoods to a huge chunk of the populations (see chapter 3). Yet the distributive mechanisms through which so many Americans and Africans alike make their way in the world are widely disparaged. As discussed at some length in chapter 1, a kind of productivist common sense has too often rendered distribution subsidiary, invisible, or even contemptible.

This neglect and denigration of distributive modes of livelihood has continued, even as such livelihoods have become increasingly important across much of the world. As Mike Davis (2006) has pointed out, vast masses of poor people across the global South have left rural livelihoods for city living in recent decades. Yet instead of being swept up in an industrial revolution that would turn them into proletarians (as both modernization theory and Marxism might have predicted), they have more often been recruited into informal slums where they eke out a living via a complex range of livelihood strategies to which agriculture and formal-sector wage labor alike are often marginal (see chapter 3). The exclusion from wage labor of those exiting small-scale agriculture (whether they come to the city or remain in the countryside) is certainly not happening everywhere (as witnessed by the massive recruitment of rural peasants as industrial workers in some regions of very rapid economic growth, notably in China), and one should beware of the temptation to extrapolate current tendencies toward some inevitable global future of universal mass redundancy. But it is unmistakably the case that (for the present and for the foreseeable near future, and across much of the world) people lacking access both to land and to waged employment form an increasingly prominent part of our social and political reality. Equally important, those occupying such precarious and ill-defined social locations are both pioneering new modes of livelihood and making new kinds of political demands. It is in this context that distributive practices and distributive politics are acquiring a new centrality.

Distributive issues in the southern African region are probably most readily identifiable in the tense debates around land reform and the nationalization of mineral resources. Yet such explosive issues have sometimes taken the spotlight away from another distributive discussion—the

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discussion about the social payments that have come to form such an important part of the economic and social structure in the region. It has often been observed that the relative decline of wage labor as a basis of livelihood has produced a kind of crisis of masculinity, in which young men whose social power long rested on their ability to earn wages have found their position undercut and rendered more precarious. But at the same time, it is clear that new powers and possibilities have often opened up for those occupying other social positions (notably women and pensioners) who previously had far less social and economic power. This is partly due to the relative expansion of work in service industries that are more open to women than the old "blue-collar" industrial jobs of the past. But a rich literature also makes it clear that such transformations are also, at least in substantial part, a product of the expanded availability of social grants.[36]

Indeed, in a context of scarce and diminishing employment opportunities, distributive outcomes for those at the bottom of the economic heap are increasingly determined within the domain of social policy. Social protection has thus emerged as a key arena within which fundamental questions are addressed concerning how resources should be distributed, who is entitled to receive them, and why. The possibility to which this book is devoted is that the new regimes of social payments may be not just ameliorative, but that they may also open new possibilities for moving more fundamental issues of distribution to the center of our analytics and our politics.

The essays that compose this book therefore seek to document an emergent politics, and to offer a critical assessment of its dangers and possibilities. Chapter 1 reviews the ubiquity of anti-distributionist sentiment in the domains both of scholarship and of practical policymaking and explores the masculinist and misogynistic bases of such hostility toward distribution. It then notes certain reasons to believe that this state of affairs may be changing, introducing some of the book's key assertions about the growing role of distributive politics and the importance of distributive claims grounded in ideas not of need or charity but of a "rightful share." Chapter 2 provides historical contextualization for this story. It shows that earlier, mid-twentieth-century versions of "the social" never had much purchase in most of Africa, allowing for a common but mistaken view that "welfare states" simply bypassed the continent. But the welfare state had

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its own distinctive history in Africa, especially in the settler-colonial societies of southern Africa, and it is only out of that peculiar and highly racialized history that a new kind of social protection has emerged.

Chapter 3 reviews the way that new state programs of distribution intersect with long-established vernacular processes and practices of distribution. There is a vast and rich regional literature on the multiple livelihood practices that are utilized by low-income people across the region and on the social relationships that sustain and enable such practices. This chapter attempts to distill the key insights of this literature and to draw some lessons from it about how to understand the place of what I term "distributive labor" in the regional political economy. The fact that distribution and production are here (like the social and the economic) so intimately entangled requires us to bring together domains that are often kept separate. Chapter 4 follows up on this point by tracing the conceptual dualism that continues to plague thinking about market and society and the pernicious effect of such dualism on understanding distributive processes and distributive politics. It traces a persistent conceptual error found on the political Left (confusing money and markets with capitalism) and explores an alternative framework for understanding "cash payment" and the socialities with which it is associated. Here certain new thinking emerging in the domain of social policy provides both an object of analysis and a sophisticated inspiration.

The "mutualities of poverty" that bind poor southern Africans to both markets and each other are, of course, riddled with inequalities. In livelihoods that depend on distributive relations (whether with other persons or with institutions), distributive practices are typically bound up with relations of dependence that are unequal, hierarchical, and often exploitative or abusive. Chapter 5 explores the ironic fact that, in societies we like to think of as "liberated" and "postcolonial," many actively seek precisely such hierarchical and dependent relationships with well-placed others. Tracing a regional history in which social orders based on the scarcity and value of people were abruptly overturned by ones in which people came to be regarded as in surplus, it seeks to historicize both the contemporary hunger of many of "the poor" for social dependence and the evident eagerness of the propertied classes to evade such entanglements. Understood against this long history, the chapter argues, the desire for dependent relations with powerful others is not some archaic and

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reactionary remnant of the paternalistic past but a very up-to-date (and in at least some measure effective) response to current economic conditions. This has implications for contemporary debates around social policy in general and for discussions of "dependency" in particular.

Finally, the book concludes with a survey of the possibilities the current conjuncture raises for progressive politics. It suggests that emergent new forms of distributive politics, involving both cash transfers in specific and the broader ground of "service delivery" in general, are demonstrating the potency of new kinds of mobilization and claim-making. The social question today therefore is not simply a technical matter of whether certain sorts of social assistance can ameliorate certain sorts of poverty. More fundamentally, it involves the emergence of new understandings of what cash payments are, or could be, and of why and how distributive payments ought to be received by citizens. While thinking on questions of distribution has long been trapped within the conceptual opposition of gift (social assistance seen as a kind of generosity) and market (wages understood as a market exchange for labor), chapter 6 traces the emergence of other ways of understanding the meaning of social transfers, including the idea of cash payments as rightful shares that are due to owners. Distributive claims here are rooted in a conviction that citizens (and particularly poor and black citizens) are the *rightful owners* of a vast national wealth (including mineral wealth) of which they have been unjustly deprived through a historic process of racialized dispossession—a conception that provides a very different, and much more politicized, justification for cash payments than is available in the usual framework of "social assistance" as generous help for the needy. The concluding chapter provides a speculative look forward, noting a range of sites where new thinking is emerging around new kinds of distributive politics and seeking to assess the significance and promise of such thinking.

"Increase the Experiments Wherever Possible"

As I noted at the start, I have been drawn to this project by an impatience with the increasingly empty (as it seems to me) politics of "opposing neoliberalism." Critiques of neoliberalism have had an important and necessary place, but one reaches a point of diminishing returns when the same critiques are simply repeated over and over (as they today seem to be) in

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what I have elsewhere called a “politics of the anti-” (Ferguson 2010). In place of such denunciations, the more pressing issue seems to me to be the challenge of positive government, the need to develop real strategies and tactics that would enable one to mobilize around specific programs or initiatives that one might be for, not against.

In his 1979 lectures on neoliberalism (2008), Michel Foucault famously spoke of the “absence of a socialist art of government,” and the historic failure of the Left to develop an “autonomous governmentality” comparable to liberalism. And he concluded his discussion of socialist governmentality by insisting that the answers to the Left’s governmental problems require not yet another search through our sacred texts but a process of conceptual and institutional innovation. “If there is a really socialist governmentality, then it is not hidden within socialism and its texts. It cannot be deduced from them. It must be invented” (2008, 94).

Such invention will probably happen (if it does) not in the lectures of philosophers or anthropologists but in the push and shove of actual governing and actual politics. And my suggestion is that important elements of such invention may be emerging as we speak, in the working out of new forms of “social” governance and new modalities of distribution in the new welfare states of the global South.

That is not, of course, to say that the sorts of programs I analyze here are in any simple way socialist, or necessarily subversive of dominant capitalist forms of economic organization. On the contrary, the programs I analyze in the book are creatures of their time. In certain ways, they undoubtedly do partake of the neoliberal spirit of the age. As I have noted elsewhere (2007), even the proposals for the basic income grant (BIG) (which I have suggested is the most conceptually ambitious and interesting of the new cash transfer schemes on offer in the region) have relied on a number of characteristically neoliberal arguments.

One example of this is the common use of ideas of “investment” and “human capital” as justification for social grants, including the standard neoliberal move to treat the poor individual as a kind of micro-enterprise. The BIG would (as the BIG Coalition website once claimed) “enable working families to invest more of their incomes in nutrition, education and health care—with corresponding productivity gains” (Tilton 2005). Arguments for social transfers today in fact normally rely on language that recasts social spending as investing in a kind of capital (see Fine 2000

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for a useful critique of "social capital" theory). Similarly, arguments for social payments sometimes draw on neoliberal valorizations of "informal" enterprise, seeing grants as catalysts for improvised livelihoods that might energize the inactive unemployed into entrepreneurial "activity" (Ferguson 2007).

Such compatibility with certain elements of neoliberalism has been central to many Left critiques of the new cash transfer programs. Patrick Bond, for instance, has recently characterized the South African social policy regime as a merely "tokenistic" complement to neoliberalism as usual, providing "talk left" ideological cover for the real "walk right" policies of the ANC regime (Bond 2014). Franco Barchiesi (2011), while recognizing that programs of direct distribution may hold out more radical possibilities, notes that existing programs are only too compatible with the expansion of "precarious" forms of casualized labor that has been characteristic of neoliberal restructuring. But as I have noted, these programs (and certainly the most progressive among them such as the basic income grant campaign) also include elements that seem to move in the opposite direction. Rather than turning everything over to "the market" (as we are told neoliberalism is determined to do), they grant unconditional claims to income rooted in national citizenship. Rather than transferring resources upward to the "1 percent," they rely on progressive taxation to impose real, if modest, income redistribution. Organizations like the International Labour Office (ILO), as I discuss in the conclusion, even see such social protection programs as the first stage in the development of international norms that would guarantee a right to a minimum income in the same way that we now expect states to provide basic education. As shown in chapter 6, contemporary demands for cash transfers may also involve claims to social payments as a "rightful share," received not as "aid" but as the share properly due to owners. This, as I will argue, raises the possibility that the new programs of direct distribution may become the terrain of a far more radical politics than is usually associated with social "assistance."

Is it, then, the case that substantively "pro poor" effects may be obtained even in the face of the presence of countervailing neoliberal elements? In fact, the situation is more interesting than this. For it is not only that such effects are obtained *in spite of* "neoliberal" program elements and modes of reasoning; it is also that formally "neoliberal" elements may *themselves* be put in service of those effects. For instance,

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while the standard neoliberal objection to social assistance points to the danger of "dependency" on the state, contemporary advocates for new social transfer programs use neoliberal reasoning to neatly reverse the argument. It is the *existing* "safety net," say promoters of a basic income grant, that breeds dependency, since any economically productive poor person, under the current system, is surrounded by dependents who must be supported. This dependency constitutes a "tax" on the productivity of the poor, which both creates a disincentive to work and degrades human capital. The "dependency" of absolute poverty is a drag on productivity, and it makes workers unable to be economically active, to search for better jobs, and so on. What is more, insecurity breeds passivity and inhibits entrepreneurship and risk-taking. A poor South African thinking of starting a small business under present circumstances, for instance, must consider the terrible risk of falling into destitution and hunger in the event of failure. The same person with a monthly BIG payment would be empowered to be much bolder. Providing basic income security for all, it is claimed, will enable the poor to behave as proper neoliberal subjects (i.e., as entrepreneurs and risk-takers); the status quo prevents it, and promotes "dependency" (see, e.g., DSD 2002, 61). In this conception, the BIG would provide not a "safety net" (the circus image of old-style welfare as protection against hazard) but a "springboard"—a facilitator of risky (but presumably empowering) neoliberal flight (Ferguson 2007).

A similarly ironic reversal can be observed around another characteristically neoliberal element: the valorization of transparency, evaluation, and measurable quantifiable outputs that is at the heart of what has been termed "audit culture" (Strathern 2000). These neoliberal elements have often been associated with Foucauldian ideas of "governmentality" and with objectionable forms of control and surveillance. But in the push for cash transfers, both in southern Africa and around the world, the "neoliberal" demand for transparent indicators and measurable results has often been used to argue precisely for "no-strings" cash grants—for the simple reason that such programs are relatively easily implemented, can be effectively evaluated, and generally produce (as most development projects do not) immediate and quantifiable gains in a range of "development" indicators of health, nutrition, education, and so on (World Bank 2009).

The relative simplicity and "transparency" of cash transfers is another point on which neoliberal reasoning is deployed toward a political end not

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usually associated with neoliberalism (i.e., expanding social protection). Neoliberal discourses on welfare have traditionally disparaged social assistance as a form of paternalism (as in the old Thatcherite complaint about the "nanny state" that tries to run everybody's life in the name of the needs of "society"). Yet advocates for new forms of social payments such as the BIG use these arguments not to argue against welfare but to argue for a new and expanded form of it. They point out that simple, universal, and unconditional cash transfers neither make moralizing judgments about "the deserving poor" nor require the surveillance, normalization, and so on that are normally associated with "social assistance." The BIG that they propose would be paid to everyone; citizens would access their funds (in the ideal scheme) by simply swiping their national identity cards in an ATM. They would use the funds in the way they saw best, knowing their own problems and their resources for addressing them better than any state agency could. There would be no policing of conduct, no stigmatizing labels, no social workers coming into homes—and no costly bureaucracy to sort out who does or doesn't qualify. While means-tested conditional cash transfer programs (and still more so public works schemes) inevitably require elaborate bureaucratic and informational apparatuses and spend much of their budgets on administrative costs, the relative simplicity of the unconditional cash transfer allows more of the money allocated to end up in the hands of the intended beneficiaries. Through the bold step of eliminating means testing (and, in some versions, replacing documents with biometric technology [see chapter 2]), it is proposed that even an extremely far-reaching transfer scheme need not require an overbearing or oppressive state presence. The state is here imagined as neoliberally "slim" (in the sense of eschewing costly and intrusive government programs for engineering the conduct of those under its care) while at the same time carrying out a very substantial economic intervention (both redistributing resources and acting as a kind of direct provider for each and every citizen).

Ideological lines often become blurred around programs of cash transfer, today as in the past. Critics on the Left, for instance, sometimes seek to discredit programs of direct distribution by pointing out that the arch-neoliberal Milton Friedman supported a "negative income tax" that had certain similarities to contemporary cash transfer programs. But they often fail to note that at the same time Martin Luther King Jr. (1967)

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was advocating for a guaranteed income in terms very similar to those of today's advocates of basic income. At the same moment in history that Richard Nixon was proposing a "Family Assistance Plan" that would have provided a minimum income for all households with children, his ideological opponent on the Left wing of the U.S. mainstream, George McGovern, was campaigning on a platform that called for giving every U.S. citizen a redistributive cash payment of $1,000 per year. Such strange bedfellows are misunderstood if they are thought to reveal the sinister "neoliberal" essence lying beneath an only-apparently progressive policy proposal. What they reveal is only the radical political indeterminacy that always attends any specific governmental technique. As I have argued elsewhere (Ferguson 2010), specific institutional and intellectual mechanisms can be combined in a great variety of ways to accomplish quite different social and political ends. With social technologies as with any other sort, it is not the machines or the mechanisms that decide what they will be used to do.

Stephen Collier (2012, 188) has recently pointed out that those who see "neoliberal" elements as marking the necessary and nefarious presence of a sinister "big Leviathan" known as "neoliberalism" or "the neoliberal project" are ironically reproducing the reasoning of the original neoliberal, Friedrich von Hayek, who erroneously believed that there could be no such thing as a "mixed economy" since the presence of "socialist" elements of planning and redistribution could only lead to "serfdom" (i.e., totalitarian dictatorship). Just as Hayek could not imagine that (as Collier [2012, 188] puts it) "elements of the Marxist programme could function in systems that bear no resemblance to a dictatorship of the proletariat" so do contemporary "anti-neoliberalism" critics seem to struggle to imagine how ideas and techniques with "neoliberal" origins or affinities might contribute to quite different sorts of political and social systems than those imagined by the likes of Hayek and Friedman. Yet if history has shown us anything, it is that it has no respect for original intentions, promiscuously throwing together diverse institutional and conceptual elements with little regard for ideological purity. Just as socialist elements ended up mingled with liberal capitalism to yield what we today know as social democracy or the welfare state, so might apparently "neoliberal" elements today be in the process of becoming something else (cf. Ferguson 2010).

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If we are willing to consider this possibility, then we will need to cultivate in our thinking certain virtues, first among which are an open mind and a willingness to be surprised. Our politics must become less deductive and more inductive, less judgmental and more experimental. Are cash transfers, for instance, bound to remain trapped within the limits of national citizenship and the chauvinistic xenophobia with which they are often associated (a question addressed in this book's conclusion)? Might they simply expand the domain of precarity (a danger of which Barchiesi [2011] has warned)? Or actually increase certain sorts of insecurity (as Dubbeld [2013] has recently suggested)? Are such payments really a device for demobilizing the poor (as some traditional Marxists claim)—effectively buying the political quiescence of those who have the most to gain from radical social change for a paltry token sum? Or do they, as many proponents of a politics grounded in demands for direct distributions such as basic income argue, help to open up a new space of mobilization and political demand by decoupling labor and consumption and opening a new domain of distributive politics? These are not the sorts of questions to be answered theoretically or ideologically; the only answer that really convinces is the empirical and experimental one: let's find out!

Such a stance, I suggest, allows us to begin to meet the challenge that Foucault posed to the Left, the challenge of inventing arts of government adequate to the times. For Foucault, government and politics alike were always more about experimentation than denunciation, puzzling out possible ways forward in concrete settings rather than deducing the correct path from a general political theory (cf. Koopman and Matza 2013). In an interview on social security, Foucault insisted that what was required for a progressive rethinking of social policy was *not* a theoretically derived "line" but, as he put it, "a certain empiricism," an approach that would be devoted less to critique than to experimentation. The whole field of social policy, he suggested, should be treated as "a vast experimental field, in such a way as to decide which taps need turning, which bolts need to be loosened here or there, to get the desired change." The goal, in his account, was less to arrive at a desired and known end state than, as he put it, "to increase the experiments wherever possible" (1988, 165).

What this implies is a form of politics that has less to do with critique and denunciation than with experimentation and assessment. If we are indeed to arrive at viable Left "arts of government," we will need to be

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open to the unexpected, ready to "increase the experiments wherever possible," and attentive to the ways that new conditions may be opening up new possibilities for politics and policy alike.

Where does such a politics lead? This book's conclusion briefly reviews a range of interesting and politically promising current "experiments" (institutional and intellectual), but this is nothing more than a beginning of what must be a long process of analysis, assessment, and reimagination involving a range of interested actors. In fact, there can be no deductive answer to the question of where distributive politics is going. Instead, this book is animated by Foucault's experimental and empirical sensibility, and by the conviction that a politics adequate to the times must be more than a set of normative certainties that one brings to bear on an issue. It must be a process of discovery and invention.

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