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# The gendered character of welfare:

## Reconsidering vulnerability and violence in South Africa

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### **Abstract**

The system of social grants introduced in South Africa after 1994 was widely celebrated in social policy circles for its unconditional nature. Scholars like James Ferguson saw this development as the birth of a new model of welfare, tending towards a Universal Basic Income Grant (UBIG). Yet this did not ultimately happen. The African National Congress (ANC) was worried that universal, unconditional welfare would produce widespread dependency. We argue that the ANC's approach to welfare assumed that the economy was potentially fast-growing and would absorb labour across types of employment and levels of skill. Male 'breadwinners' were thus exempted from post-apartheid welfare instruments because they were believed to be, actually or at least potentially, gainfully employed. We argue that such an assumption was largely inconsistent with the way that the South African economy had been developing from the 1970s, a tendency observed and analysed by scholars at the time, especially those closest to the ANC itself. They had noticed that mass unemployment was becoming a permanent feature of the South African economy and predicted that it would remain so after the end of apartheid. This analysis proved prescient, with the number of unemployed people of legal working age reaching well over 15 million in 2020. This suggests that in designing welfare instruments the post-apartheid government paid little heed to economic trends. It further lends credence to the argument that the contemporary social grants system is largely an extension and expansion of Smuts-era arrangements carried forward into the apartheid period.

## Introduction

Poverty, inequality and mass structural unemployment are among the main challenges facing South Africa. Their persistence represents a social tragedy as well as a threat to democracy. Under non-racial democracy the situation has worsened, lending credibility to populist and authoritarian tendencies in South African politics.

Poverty persisted in South Africa after 1994 because economic growth was neither rapid enough nor sufficiently absorptive to create work for low skilled, unemployed men and women (Seekings & Natrass, 2015). Though democracy saw the expansion of the black middle class and brought significant improvements in the living standards of many South Africans, most of the benefits of economic growth went to the richer part of the population. Despite this, the ANC in government has resisted efforts to introduce a UBIG. This approach has apparently shifted in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic, though this change of heart may well be driven more by electoral concerns than by a sincere commitment to unconditional welfare instruments. The reason, we argue here, is that since 1994 the ANC has been attached to an idea of “labour” and a corresponding concept of the “social” rooted in traditionalist notions of the gendered division of labour. This is why unemployed men are excluded from the system of social grants. The UBIG unsettles this idea of the ‘social’ by delinking welfare from normative conceptions of the social structure.

We argue further that the notion of “labour” and of the “social” underpinning the modern system is inconsistent with the ANC’s own analysis of the political economy of South Africa, especially as it was articulated in the party’s own theory of National Democratic Revolution (NDR). In particular, we argue that the social grant system is based on an inadequate reckoning with structural unemployment in South Africa. We conclude by proposing that the UBIG is a welfare instrument more appropriate to South African conditions than the current system of grants.

## **Redefining the South African welfare state**

In 1994 the ANC government inherited a state that from a social policy perspective was exceptional in Africa, in its reach but also, unexpectedly, in its generosity (Hassim, 2006; Seekings & Natrass, 2015).

In South Africa, as in other African settler colonies, in matters of social policy two government systems were established. For whites, a version of the Beveridgian “social” was developed. Black South Africans participated in this scheme, though on unequal terms. The South African welfare state represented, that is, a bizarre reconciliation of the British welfare model with apartheid policy, where the distinction between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor was mainly, but not exclusively, marked by race (Hassim, 2006). Historically, able bodied individuals belonged to the latter group. African exclusion from welfare was justified on the grounds that “people accustomed to modern lifestyles and consumption patterns had greater need of social protection than those in rural subsistence agriculture who were not proletarianized and would therefore should be presumed to be better placed to meet traditional subsistence needs” (Van der Berg, 1997: 486).

Black South Africans were however included in a few social support programmes. In particular, the extension of key social benefits from 1944 has to be regarded as of enduring significance and is testament to the reforming spirit of the last Smuts administration. “While some such gains were reversed by the reactionary triumph of the Nationalist Party in 1948, the Nationalist Party never abolished non-contributory old age pensions and disability grants, a fact that would come to be highly significant for post independence development” (Ferguson, 2015: 76). A racially unequal system of pensions and grants was deracialised and benefits were equalised in the years just before the official end of apartheid in 1994.

Early on the post-apartheid government embraced the concept of developmental social welfare. A key element of the social plan was the creation of employment, emphasizing public works programmes.

Several factors determined the direction of welfare reforms. Of crucial importance was ANC ideology. “The ANC placed high value on labor as the central model of social incorporation, and on the “workers” as the figuration of those to whom the government must answer” (Ferguson, 2015: 9). However, bearing in mind the new realities where ever more of the population looked to government as a direct provider, and where the labour market was chronically unfavourable, “service delivery” became a new slogan. Increasingly, black South Africans sought their “liberation” through direct state provision of such goods as housing, electricity, water, sanitation and social services (Ferguson, 2015: 9). In this context, a patchwork of older social assistance programmes was the starting point for the development of an institutional apparatus that would enable the new state to provide highly visible and very effective support.

Though it had similarities, South African social welfare did not amount to universal, unconditional cash transfer.

The element at the heart of the “development revolution from the Global South”, that South Africa was part of, was the unconditional cash transfer. Similar transfers were first tried in Brazil and Mexico (Hanlon, Barrientos & Hulme, 2010). Though it had similarities, South African social welfare did not amount to universal, unconditional cash transfer.

South African interest in the basic income grant started in the late 1990s. Much of the momentum came from civil society organizations, notably churches and trade unions. In 2001 twelve organizations formed a basic income grant coalition. The BIG coalition argued strongly for the introduction of a basic income grant, emphasizing human rights and mustering economic and social arguments in its support (Matisonn & Seekings, 2002). It advocated a basic income that would not be means tested, that was inflation indexed and that would be extended to all citizens regardless of their age. It would be financed through new taxes. It looked to many that South Africa and the southern African region was on the cusp of a welfare revolution that would “sweep the globe” (Ferguson, 2015).

The South African Government appointed the Taylor Committee to investigate a comprehensive system of social security for the country. The Committee’s report was published in April 2002 and it offered a strong case for the introduction of basic income grants. It recommended the introduction of a universal and unconditional basic income grant set at R100 per month. The cost of the scheme was estimated at 4% of GDP. However, the Taylor Committee reported that “conditions for an immediate implementation of a basic income grant do not exist. In particular there is a need to first put in place appropriate capacity and institutional arrangements to ensure effective implementation”. Regarding resources needed to fund this new programme, it was argued that “there is evidence of sufficient fiscal capacity for improved social sector spending without adverse macroeconomic impact”. The Committee also proposed:

- Reforms to help the unemployed
- A move towards a national health insurance system to cover medical expenses
- Reform of contributory retirement provisions
- Abolishing the means test for non contributory old age pensions
- Establishing a national savings scheme to which low wage workers could contribute voluntarily (Department of Social Development, 2002).

Reactions to the findings and recommendations of the Committee were negative.

The Cabinet did not take a position on the Report and its main recommendations. What government did do, however, was expand its social assistance programmes, in part, argue Matisonn and Seekings, to ward off calls for the basic income grant (Matisonn & Seekings, 2002).

Despite, moreover, the strong emphasis on work and job creation, South Africa never developed a comprehensive system of social insurance. Employers were not legally bound to contribute to social insurance schemes. "South Africa had what might be called a 'semi-social insurance' system, that is, a system that combined elements of market provision and socialization" (Seekings & Natrass, 2015: 141). The one established branch of social insurance was unemployment insurance, organized through the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). Formal sector employees, including domestic and seasonal workers, were required to contribute to UIF. UIF provided short term unemployment insurance for relatively privileged workers and entirely omitted the overwhelming majority of the unemployed.

Mass unemployment remains stubbornly high and young black men in much of the country see slim and declining prospects of finding a formal sector job (Noble, Ntshongwana & Surrender, 2008). The systems inherited by the postapartheid state make few provisions for people who are poor despite being healthy and of working age. Social grants targeting the poor had and still have the potential to become basic income grants, though for this to happen, a different understanding of the labour market in South Africa has to come to the fore in policy circles. In particular, the South African government has to recognise that mass unemployment is structural and not temporary. As we will see in the next section, such an awareness has long been present in South African scholarship, especially amongst scholars closest to the ANC itself.

## **The "surprise" of mass, structural unemployment**

From at least 1969 the ANC portrayed the struggle against apartheid as a national democratic enterprise. The expression was not descriptive, but analytical in that it posited for the first time a relationship between two otherwise separate phenomena, white racism and domination and capitalist development.

Through the 1970s and 1980s the precise relationship between capitalist exploitation and racist domination was the main focus of a generation of 'radical' South African scholars (see Chipkin: 2007, pp. 73 – 85). In the South African context, the analytical break-through came in the form of a periodization of apartheid in relation to earlier policies of segregation. Harold Wolpe famously argued that segregation provided the political structure when pre-capitalist modes of production

served to subsidize the costs of labour in the capitalist sector. As reserve economies collapsed, however, apartheid emerged as the specific South African mechanism for maintaining a high rate of capitalist exploitation just as conditions for reproducing cheap labor disintegrated (Wolpe: 1972: 432-433).

Through the 1970s and 1980s, however, liberal scholars learnt some of the tricks of Marxist historiography and now offered their own periodization. They argued that from the 1970s capitalist development had become increasingly constrained by apartheid practices. Racist domination and capitalist exploitation, rather than working “hand in glove” had become mutually opposed. In 1980 Charles Simkins speculated that the “most promising line of attack on African unemployment involves the abolition of labour and residence controls” (Simkins, 1980: 69). By the early 2000s this perspective had become dominant.

The withdrawal of apartheid era restrictions, however, did not see unemployment come down. Apart from a very brief period after 1994 the situation worsened. Altman notes her surprise: “Alongside renewed GDP growth in the 1990s was an expectation that jobs would be created. Instead unemployment has risen” (Altman, 2002: 169). By the beginning of the millennium, a quarter of the South African labour-force was not simply *not* employed. It was hardly economically active at all.

Growing unemployment in the decade after 1994, however, was not a symptom of a moribund economy, nor was it a result of “jobless growth”.

The paradox of intensifying unemployment under conditions of economic growth is easier to understand from a macro-economic perspective. Essentially, two processes were at work during the late apartheid period. The first was structural in that there was a shift in output from the primary sectors towards the service sectors. The second was technological in that mechanization in production as well as the revolution in micro-electronics saw a decline in labour: capital ratios (Bhorat; Altman; Kingdom & Knight). The ANC government inherited an economy that drew in high-skilled workers, whilst it pushed out those in lower-end, menial jobs. These tendencies were aggravated by the sluggish economic growth from 1994 and especially after the financial crisis. Essentially, the South African economy was developing in such a way that large population cohorts were *unemployable* (Bhorat, 2003: 17-22).

As we have seen, however, the social welfare system in South Africa, largely an extension of apartheid-era provisions, presupposes full or, at least, high employment. There are no instruments that provide for long-term unemployed men, especially those in the age-group 15-24 or those over 50, where unemployment is concentrated. Moreover, there are no welfare provisions for the millions of South African men who are not economically active.

This situation would have been bad enough if, from a policy perspective, it was largely unexpected, or, at least, if it was largely unforeseen at the time of the design of the post-apartheid welfare system. The problem is that mass, systemic unemployment was anticipated, especially by those scholars closest to the ANC itself.

In 1977 Martin Legassick and Duncan Innes published “Capital Restructuring in South Africa after Apartheid” in the journal *African Affairs*. The essay was largely a response to the work of Merle Lipton and the details need not concern us, other than to note an important theoretical development. Whereas Lipton was concerned to show that after the Second World War relations between capital and apartheid were loosening and even becoming fraught, Legassick and Innes changed direction. Their focus was not on racist domination and its importance for securing cheap labour, but on the growing immiseration of Africans. They were concerned, that is, with growing unemployment: “[L]evels of existing African unemployment are *not* simply to be seen as the product of the current recession in the economy but have been *endemic* and *increasing* through-out the period of South Africa’s fastest economic growth” (Legassick & Innes, 1977: 451).

From the 1960s, they argued, the availability of agricultural land in Bantustan areas was in decline to the extent that fewer and fewer people could survive as subsistence farmers. A process of proletarianization was under way, shunting hundreds of thousands of Africans into densely settled rural villages. Contrary to Posel, who argued that apart from a few years in the 1960s influx control was largely a failure on its own terms, Charles Simkins showed that in fact it had been responsible for very substantial displacement of Africans away from (white) urban and rural areas into the Bantustans. “This tendency to urban concentration of employment,” he noted, “[creates] a discrepancy between where people want to be and where the South African state would have them live” (Simkins, 1980: 19). Where Simkins saw an anomaly, Legassick and Innes saw necessity. Crammed into “closer settlements” unemployed Africans served as the “industrial reserve army of South African capitalism” (Legassick & Innes, 1977: 453). Mass, structural unemployment was replacing race domination as the primary means of reproducing cheap African labour power.<sup>1</sup> To this argument, Legassick and Innes added another. If unemployment in the Bantustans was driven by proleterianisation, unemployment in “white” areas was further driven by the replacement or reduction of workers by machines (*mechanisation*) in South African factories, mines and farms.

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<sup>1</sup> As an aside, it was not only liberal scholars like Lipton who perceived the consequences of this changing relationship between race and class. Marxists associated with the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) did too. They argued that the nationalist struggle against apartheid was no longer aligned to the struggle of the working class to end exploitation. The working class was, essentially, alone.



By the late 1980s two dominant explanations vied to explain mass unemployment. In the first, apartheid restrictions, driven by racist political considerations, kept Africans out of white areas where the main nodes of economic activity were located. Faced with a shortage of labour, South African firms and farms mechanised. The competing explanation was that rapid capital intensification saw the mechanisation of production resulting in what Simkins called “technological unemployment” (Simkins, 1980: 60). The first explanation privileged political considerations. The second sought an explanation in the “dynamic of capital accumulation” itself (Legassick and Innes, 1977: 26). In 1980, Simkins suggested, there was not enough evidence to decide either way. Nonetheless, we have seen that Simkins himself was hopeful that the abolition of apartheid restrictions on African labour and residence would begin to reduce unemployment (Simkins, 1980: 69).

In the 1990s this view became dominant. It was widely assumed that when freed from apartheid restraints and international sanctions growth prospects would be good. The most pressing challenges to economic freedom lay in the racial transformation of ownership and control of businesses (through black economic empowerment (BEE) and affirmative action) and protection of workers from grossly exploitative labour practices. Hence the coupling in the 1990s of BEE regulations and affirmative action with the Labour Relations Act. At the time of the global economic crisis policy-makers in the Zuma administration made similar assumptions.

ANC-aligned scholars had already in the 1970s started pointing to another feature of the South African economy. It was starting to fail, not simply for political reasons like sanctions, strikes and resistance. Apartheid-era industrialisation was based on a notion of autarchy informed by economic nationalism. Various instruments, including tariffs and tax incentives were put in place to encourage import substitution, or what is called today “localisation”. Yet the South African market was not large enough to sustain large-scale manufacturing. The policy would only have worked if South Africa could have become an exporter of manufactured goods, especially to the mass consumer markets of Europe and North America. By the 1980s, however, the strategy was working only in a few industrial zones located in homelands like the Transkei, where Taiwanese and European firms could evade GATT quotas on “European” and “Taiwanese” goods entering the US market. They were exported as “made in the Transkei” or more usually as “made in South Africa”. More generally, though, South African products were simply not competitive in the face of an accelerating Chinese economy.

The failure of industrialisation goes a long way to explain the shift in the 1990s towards financial services, producing a South African economy, as we saw above, that seeks out high-skilled workers while condemning those with poor educational outcomes to permanent under- or unemployment.

From the perspective of social policy it is clear that by the 1990s the issue of mass, structural unemployment should have firmly been on the agenda. Given the country's economic trajectory it was simply not possible to start from the latent or overt assumption of full or near-full employment amongst Africans and African breadwinners. Yet, as we have seen, this is precisely what post-apartheid welfare instruments did, with one gendered qualification. ANC policy makers assumed the economic vulnerability of women, while they saw no need to protect men. In other words, they did not consider a universal welfare intervention.

## **The structural vulnerability of African men**

A study by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011) shows that societies with large income differentials tend to have poorer health, lower life expectancy and higher rates of infant mortality, mental illness, illicit drug use and obesity. Greater inequality also damages social relationships, produces more violence and negatively affects the level of trust. Social solidarity is weaker.

The persistence of inequality is heavily dependent on labour market dynamics, especially as they reproduce racial and gender inequities. By the early 1990s structural changes in the sectoral composition of the South African economy were becoming evident, leading to changes in sectoral distribution of employment.

In general, the South African labor market draws in skilled and high-skilled workers while simultaneously excluding those with basic skills. We might call this a model of *exclusive inclusion*. The very high correlation between race and poor skills means that the vast majority of those condemned to permanent under- or unemployment are Black Africans. This vicious cycle was not broken or even much interrupted after 1994 because of the widespread failures of post-apartheid education policy and practice. South Africa's model of "exclusive inclusion" serves to produce and reproduce some of the glaring social features of apartheid, obscured slightly by the growth of a black middle class. It also gives a specific gender profile to the under- or unemployed, though not one that is well appreciated.

While the absolute number of unemployed women is higher than that of men, Borat noted that between 1995 and 2002 there was high growth in female employment, with 40% of new female job seekers finding work as opposed to only 19% of men. Conversely, male unemployment rose by an equivalent of 33% during this period while female unemployment grew at the much slower rate of below 18%. Although Borat passes over these figures without drawing any conclusions they are, in fact, consistent with historical patterns. Pundy Pillay has shown that the percentage of women in the labour force increased in the period after the Second World War from less than

20% to more than 30% in 1980 (Pillay, 1985: 23). Even more astonishing is that from the 1960s women were increasingly well represented in those economic sectors that later experienced rapid job growth and were poorly represented in those sectors that later declined or stagnated. When these sectors accelerated in the post-apartheid period women were well placed to advance in these spaces.

Taken together, mass under- and unemployment are key structural features of the South African economy, which affect Africans most severely. Furthermore, sectoral changes in the composition of the economy from the 1990s (themselves reflective of longer historical patterns), render African men especially vulnerable to unemployment. Yet it is precisely this last group of people that are not properly catered for by welfare instruments or not catered for at all.

Without wanting to imply any straightforward causalities, the unfavourable economic outlook described above creates fertile ground for gender based violence to flourish. According to a report by Statistics South Africa, in 2016/17, 250 out of every 100 000 women were victims of sexual offences, mainly rape. This figure is among the highest in the world (Stats SA, 2018: 8).

There are number of factors, cultural, social, religious and economic, at different levels of the society, that are driving gender based violence in South Africa despite the country's progressive policies and legislative framework. High levels of gender based violence are usually interpreted through the lens of the imbalance of power between men and women, with patriarchy held to be the main enabler. Frequently, it is argued that policies and practices that promote gender equality and that have seen the social and economic advance of women offend patriarchal sensibilities. According to mainstream interpretations, gender-based violence is a mechanism through which men try to reinforce their power and authority in intimate and/or household relationships.

There is much to recommend this argument. It does not capture the full story, however, especially when it ignores the ways in which "hegemonic masculinity" or "masculinities" in general are formed in a country like South Africa with extremely unfavorable social and economic conditions (Ouzgane & Morell, 2005).

The notion of masculinity infers that there are "many different, culturally sanctioned ways of being a man; not one universal masculinity" (Morell, 2006: 14). Morrell considers the transition of young men into manhood as the "time when rights are conferred on them and when their role elicits respect" (Ibid., p.16). It is this transition that feminists regard with concern, for the conferral of rights usually comes at the expense of women and children. Becoming men often sees boys, also acting under peer pressure, mobilising their sexuality and power over girls and women (Ibid., p.16). Morell is more sanguine than most feminists about this transition, however. He sees

in it the possibility of producing “men who are more responsible, more tolerant, and more supportive of gender equality” (Ibid, p. 17). The idea of a transition from boyhood to manhood resting on a conferral of rights (and responsibilities) raises a useful question. What happens if the transition fails or is unsuccessful?

A major representation of African manhood in the 1950s was that of child carer, before it was dropped in favour of the image of the worker (and in the 1980s that of the political activist). For our purposes, the transition to these forms of manhood are profoundly unsettled by mass, structural unemployment, which 1) undermines the ability of men to discharge the responsibilities associated with certain rights and 2) ultimately calls into question whether the ‘rights’ of manhood are conferred at all (by partners, peers, parents and so on).

In South Africa high male unemployment and lack of income coincides with welfare support to young and aged women *qua* child-carers. There is no equivalent support to men *qua* fathers. It is unambiguous testament to the gender stereotypes at work in the current model: women are caregivers and men are providers. In the face of high unemployment men of all ages, especially young men amongst whom unemployment is particularly pronounced, are frequently dependent financially on the women in their lives. For many this reversal of roles cuts deep into their sense of the proper order of things while also compounding their anxiety about their own place in the world.

Most studies on gender and gender relations in the Third World necessarily examine issues of poverty, lack of economic development and the spread of HIV/AIDS and emphasize the subordination of women and the power of men. The possibility that men could be disempowered is not explored, however. The dominant framework is that men have been the “winners” and women the “losers” in the process of socioeconomic change during the past century (Silbersmidht, 2005). Yet Silbersmidht’s research in East Africa suggests something different. Economic growth there has also come with high unemployment, which erodes men’s ability to be breadwinners and accentuates their sense of disempowerment. Lack of access to earning opportunities has made men’s role as heads of household and breadwinners precarious.

Although patriarchal power is still postulated on the overall subordination of women and dominance of men, deteriorating material conditions have seriously undermined the normative order of patriarchy. What is needed is a perspective that considers how unemployment undermines the material underpinning of masculine power.

With many men reduced to “figureheads” in households, their authority has come under threat and so too their self-esteem. “Patriarchy does not mean that men have only privileges. A patriarch has many responsibilities. The irony of the patriarchal system resides precisely in the fact that

male authority has a material base, while male responsibility is normatively constituted. This has made men's roles and identities confusing and contradictory and many men express feelings of helplessness, inadequacy and lack of self-esteem" (Silbershmidt, 2005: 195).

In the South African context, mass, structural unemployment, which is growing faster for men than for women, makes it extremely difficult for many men to fulfill their own expectations about their roles in intimate relationships, in the family and in wider society. Frequently, it means that men live as a disappointment to themselves and to their communities. It is likely that this material and situated take on masculinity goes further in explaining gender-based violence than an overly generic focus on 'toxic' masculinities does. It is likely that violence arises in the struggle over the conferral or not of the rights of manhood. It does suggest, moreover, that addressing the material crisis of multiple South African masculinities is a potentially important way of reducing gender violence. The introduction of a UBIG may be a key intervention in this regard.

## **Dreaming BIG: The case for introduction of the Basic Income Grant**

Over the past twenty years even developed welfare states have been struggling to provide basic security to their citizens. "There is much more systematic economic insecurity today than in the heyday of welfare states that operated on the basis of closed economies, steady technological change and industrial employment" (Standing, 2017: 89). Most of the new social risks are related to the very nature of the economy in which more people are in and out of temporary, part-time and casual jobs whilst also doing a lot of unpaid work outside fixed hours and workplaces. Thus existing social security schemes are failing to reach a growing number of people who cannot build up adequate contributory records. Reforms to social protection systems over the past two decades have intensified rather than mitigated insecurity, magnifying uncertainty and reducing resilience. The shift to means-testing, behaviour-testing, sanctions and delays increases exposure to uncertainty. There is growing pressure from welfare recipients to integrate back into the labour market. At the same time, increasingly, jobs being generated in much of the world, including even rich industrialised countries, are not a reliable route out of poverty.

In this context, the idea of a UBIG is currently receiving attention all around the world. A universal basic income is seen as a potential remedy for social and economic concerns in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, with renewed force since the onset of the Covid-19 crisis. The proposal is not new: since the early twentieth century, basic income and similar progressive policies have managed to attract support from all around the world and from across the political spectrum, with, however, little or no influence on legislation (Widerquist, 2019).

Basic income grants aim to ensure or to improve the economic security of individuals by guaranteeing the provision of cash resources (Murrey & Pateman, 2012). Such grants comprise a modest amount of money paid unconditionally, regularly and automatically to all citizens/residents of a country (Standing, 2017).

As discussed, where the grant has been introduced it has proved an effective, transparent and direct way of reducing poverty, inequality and income insecurity (Standing, 2017). Furthermore, it does so without stigmatising its recipients, making intrusive and often degrading procedures redundant. There is no need, for example, to distinguish between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor.

Probably the most controversial element of the basic income grant is its unconditionality. The fact that it does not require means testing and does not seek to impose any spending or behavioral conditions, triggers opposition from across the political spectrum. Widespread unease with unconditionality is, among other things, closely linked to an underlying mistrust of people, especially of poor people and their choices. Too often it is presumed that poor people are responsible for their precarious position, that they are stupid, irrational and incapable of making good decisions. The experience of cash transfer programmes and basic income pilots proves the opposite, however. The money is usually spent on “private goods” such as food and the support of children, healthcare and schooling (Ferguson, 2015; Standing, 2017; Haarman & Haarman, 2012).

Means-testing is generally regarded as morally superior to universal provision. It is also deemed largely effective. Even if such systems were administratively flawless, however, they tend to undermine social solidarity, creating distinctions between “us” and “them” that contribute to the stigmatization and social exclusion of welfare recipients. Moreover, applying means-tests entails high costs for administrators and especially for claimants, who often need to undergo intrusive and often humiliating tests. Furthermore, for means testing to work smoothly, well-designed and efficient institutions have to be in place (Standing, 2017; Mkandawire, 2005): “Most of the administrative constraints on targeting apply in both poor and rich countries but are invariably compounded in the poor countries where most people’s resources of livelihood are in the informal sector, people’s ‘visibility’ to the state is low, and the state’s overall capacity is low” (Mkandawire, 2005: 9). In South Africa, for example, the Department of Social Development is unable to administer social grants itself or even through the agency established precisely for this purpose, for a long time relying on a private company to perform this task. The introduction of a basic income grant would not require a sophisticated institutional infrastructure; on the contrary, it would reduce the need for documentation. All that would be required is for the claimant to have a valid identification document (Ferguson, 2015).

## Conclusion

The system of social grants introduced in South Africa after 1994 was widely celebrated in social policy circles for its unconditional nature. Cash payments are made to eligible mothers with children and to pensioners, with no strings attached. Scholars like James Ferguson saw in this development the birth of a new model of welfare, one tending towards a universal basic income grant. We have seen, however, that unconditional social grants never matured into a basic income grant; the momentum stalled. Male and female 'breadwinners' were thus excepted from post-apartheid welfare instruments because they were believed to be gainfully employed or, at least, potentially gainfully employed. Unemployed persons only receive protection in the form of a temporary insurance benefit. Social protection only extends to those who are financially vulnerable and who care for children. We saw, however, that only women are regarded as potential childcarers and only women, therefore, are eligible for the child-support grant. In this way, men, both unemployed men and men with children, are excluded from any long-term form of social protection.

In the second part of this essay, we argued that the assumption of full or near-full employment was largely inconsistent with the analysis of the South African economy and labour force emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, especially amongst scholars and activists closest to the ANC itself. They had noticed that mass unemployment was becoming a permanent characteristic of the South African economy and predicted that it would be a key feature of the South African economy after the end of apartheid as well. This analysis proved to be prescient, with the number of people of legal working age not in employment reaching well over 15 million in 2020. This suggests that the design of welfare instruments by post-apartheid governments have paid little heed to economic trends.

We have seen too that mass, structural unemployment is also gendered, though not in the way commonly believed. While the absolute number of economically inactive women is slightly higher than men, since 1994 the South African economy has seen the rapid growth of employment opportunities for women. In the context of generalized, growing unemployment, the rate of female unemployment has been much lower than the rate for men. We have argued, furthermore, that economic inactivity makes it difficult, if not impossible for many men to fulfill their role as 'providers' or 'breadwinners'. This constitutes a deep crisis of identity or personality for many men who expect and are expected to play this role. In the face of growing female autonomy and/or financial independence, this crisis often expresses itself violently.

Finally, we have argued that a UBIG is the most appropriate measure in this context, not simply

because it is right or just, but because it responds more precisely to the nature of the South African economy as it really is. This requires that we think differently about welfare in relation to economic planning. Mass unemployment is not simply a consequence of inadequate or skewed economic growth. It is likely that millions of South Africans are largely unemployable. Economic modelling must include easing routes of entry into the informal economy or of injecting capital and resources into an economy of the economically inactive. The UBIG is well positioned to perform both functions. As a final remark, a universal grant may be the basis for creating a genuine solidarity economy in South Africa with benefits, in particular, to civil society. If wealthy and middle-class recipients can be encouraged to donate their benefit rather than keep it for themselves, civil society organizations could potentially be the beneficiaries of a new solidarity economy, rather than relying on philanthropy.



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