



GLOBAL SOCIAL POLICY AT 25:

REFLECTIONS
AND
PROSPECTS

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1 Introduction

Paul Stubbs

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The book *Global Social Policy: International Organizations and the Future of Welfare* authored by Bob Deacon (with Michelle Hulse and Paul Stubbs) was published in 1997 [Deacon et al., 1997]. This was the first of Bob's three major works on the topic of global social policy, with *Global Social Policy and Governance* following in 2007, and *Global Social Policy in the Making: The Foundations of the Social Protection Floor* in 2013. Undertaking research as Director of the *Globalism and Social Policy Programme (GASPP)* and as founding editor of the journal *Global Social Policy*, Bob Deacon made a vital contribution to the study of global, transnational and regional social policy combining in-depth analyses of social rights, social regulation and social redistribution with a deep and unwavering commitment to building institutions and programmes for global social justice. His work sought to break down barriers between disciplines, notably between "social policy" and "development studies", between academia and advocacy, and between a focus on the overdeveloped North and West and the Global South.

His lifelong commitment, expressed in an interview with Rianne Mahon [Deacon and Mahon 2013, p. 206], was to challenge the hegemony of global neoliberalism and its obsession with reducing social spending and increasing the role of the private sector. Nothing less than a fundamental restructuring of global social governance was needed if anything even remotely resembling a socially just globalisation was to be achieved. The balance between global action and regional social policies became one of the puzzles that Bob grappled with in his later work driven, perhaps, by a sense that regional associations may be better vehicles for progressive social policies or, perhaps, a steppingstone towards truly global programmes in the future. The suggestion that regional groupings may be more able to develop forms of co-operation and transnational solidarity is important, emphasizing South-South co-operation and the need for political alliances rather than externally imposed technical fixes.

Bob Deacon's death, on 1 October 2017, took away a committed scholar and advocate. In the spirit of Bob's work, a virtual workshop was held on 18 January 2023¹, bringing together scholars, activists and those working in international organizations, to take stock of the field of global social policy 25 years after Bob's first book on the topic appeared. What were some of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach that Bob pioneered? What are the key issues in global social policy today, both as a research field and in terms of struggles for social justice? What themes are emerging and deserve greater attention in the future? What follows are the contributions of those who were invited to take part in the virtual roundtable. The order in which the contributions appear here has no real logic – they can be read in any order although some are, quite clearly, in dialogue with each other. All the texts show the importance of the framework Bob Deacon provided and the need to think and act politically in the face of an unequal world and the interlocking crises of care, the environment, migration, and poverty.

Jimi O. Adesina's contribution addresses the danger of policy coloniality when international actors go beyond their norm-setting role, and the need to build national, and sub-national, capacity for transformative social policy. Noemi Lendvai-Bainton focuses on three challenges to global social policy: language, the political, and marginality, and emphasizes the need to challenge the "one-way diffusionism" of Western-centric knowledge and practice. Rianne Mahon concentrates her attention on the care economy, as the site of an assemblage of gendered, racialised and class-based oppressions, tracing the transformative potential of a number of initiatives including, but going beyond, key supranational organizations. Isabel Ortiz adopts a long-term historical perspective tracing the nature of global social policies in different conjunctures. In the aftermath of the financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, a new global social contract is more needed than ever, linking human rights, high social standards and improved public services, funded through global taxation. In a similar vein, Francine Mestrum traces social policy discourses over time contrasting the approaches of the World Bank and the ILO and calling for a new international economic order and a social commons based on emancipation, solidarity and social policy for all. Fiona Williams makes a strong call for "reparative justice" as a claim that brings together diverse struggles and campaigns around racial and care injustices and environmental destruction and re-emphasizes the need for an intersectional approach. Shahra Razavi addresses the need for social policy transformation in the aftermath of crises and the problems caused by the continued skewing of priorities by powerful elites who hold structural power. Focusing on developments since the "Global Social Protection Floor" initiative, the subject of Bob's last book [Deacon, 2013], she assesses the prospects for greater coherence in financing and policy and the possibility of a global governance architecture that anticipates crises and

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmpEvhDOUhc>

manages transitions and is not merely reactive. It is our hope that these interventions will be read, and disseminated, by activists, advocates, policy makers, and researchers around the world and that they will contribute to a continuing dialogue about the need for global social justice.

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2 Global Social Policy and Policy Sovereignty: Norms-setting, Policy Coloniality and Beyond

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Introduction

For more than two decades, Bob Deacon was a prime mover of the effort to shift the attention of social policy research and advocacy communities from national to international actors whose efforts impact the social regulation of globalisation. Deacon et al. (1997) was a significant intervention in mapping out this new branch of Social Policy research. Deacon's focus was on global *redistribution, regulation*, and the specification of *social rights* and *provisioning* (Deacon, 2007). In this sense, Deacon has mapped the focus on global actors as a distinct domain of social policy research, separate from *comparative social policy* research.

In this short piece, I argue that in the process of driving a focus on global institutions and actors that impact social policy and the prevailing idea that globalisation has diminished the policymaking capacity of states and national and sub-national levels, little attention has been paid to the problem of policy sovereignty at the national and sub-national level, something that remains important for countries of the Global South. In this regard, I argue that we need to make a distinction between social policy making by international organisations as norm-setting and the problem of policy coloniality (or, more appropriately, *policy neo-colonialism*). This has implications for deliberative governance at the national and sub-national level amid the crisis of what Mkandawire (1999; 2006) referred to as "choiceless democracies." Policy autonomy allows for creativity in social policy making more attuned to the local conditions than the single-issue orientation of international actors in the global social policy process. Finally, I argue for transcending the overinflation of the *protective task* of social policy and a broader vision encapsulated in the *Transformative*

Social Policy framework. This is important in linking social policy with the developmental imperative, especially in the African context.

Global Social Policy and Policy Sovereignty

Following an initial period of work on regional social policy, particularly the changing social policy landscape in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Bob Deacon pivoted towards a focus on global international organisations and actors that have implications for the social governance of globalisation. The launch of the Anglo-Finnish *Globalism and Social Policy Programme* in 1997 and the publication of Deacon et al. [1997] marked Deacon's sustained effort to map out the *Global Social Policy* domain of social policy research. The journal *Global Social Policy* was launched in 2001 [Deacon & Stubbs, 2013]. Deacon went on to produce a body of work that sought to map out the concerns of Global Social Policy [GSP] [Deacon et al., 1997; Deacon, 2007; 2013a; 2013b; and Deacon & Stubbs, 2013]. Concerned with the social governance of globalisation, Deacon specified the domain of GSP as the supranational regime of *redistribution, regulation, and social rights [provisioning]* as articulated by international organisations, international NGOs, and related actors. The dividing line between the actors, Deacon et al. [1997, p. 19] colourfully put it "as to whether the supranational interveners are on the side of the civilizing angels or the global imperialist gangsters." Those advancing the global neoliberal project would fall into the category of the latter, while those concerned—as Deacon was—with advancing progressive social reform of redistribution, regulation, and advancing social rights would be in the class of "civilising angels."

Deacon's detailed recording of the minutiae policy making efforts at the supranational level is a rich, eloquent, and indelible contribution to Social Policy scholarship and advocacy. However, I would like to highlight two concerns with the genre. The first concerns the need to further specify two ends of the continuum in the implications of global social policy making. On the one hand, global social policy making as *norm-setting* which permits national and sub-national policy autonomy. On the other hand, there is global policy making that takes the form of *policy coloniality* [or, more appropriately, *neo-colonialism*] which, at its worst, obliterates the space for policy autonomy at the national level. Understood as a continuum, there is no easy division between 'civilising angels' and 'imperialist gangsters' in the ways multilateral and bilateral organisations make aggressive pushes for their preferred policy options. International social policy epistemic communities work with these organisations in the aggressive play on "policy merchandising" [Adesina, 2020; Ouma & Adesina, 2019; 2021]. Like the World Bank, some United Nations and European bilateral agencies have

aggressively pushed for segregated cash transfer schemes in the African context, and local policymakers have been successfully converted to embracing these policies. The adequacy level of the payments falls far short of what Deacon would have advanced as progressive or defined as meaningful social rights. The pursuit of such relentless *policy coloniality* contrasts with international policies framed largely as *norms-setting*, which can serve to inform national policy making with the accent on voluntary adoption and domestication of the conventions that frame them. The International Labour Organisation's conventions are examples of such a space for the voluntary adoption of policy prescriptions with global reach.

A related concern is national policy sovereignty itself. Often in making the legitimate case for supranational social policy making, Deacon was dismissive of national-level social policy making. Concerned with globalisation and the claims of its erosion of the policy making space for nation-states, those who concede specific policies to countries or social agents concerned were confronted with the argument that "somebody has to be concerned with the nuts and bolts of institutional social policy" (Deacon, 2007, p. 190). Rightly so, but why is that the sole prerogative of supranational actors? The paradox is that those advancing policy coloniality operate based on the self-allocated right to make policy for others. At the national level—where most policies affect people directly and where policy making should be part of the process of deliberative governance—the closing of the policy space is part of what Mkandawire (1999; 2006) referred to as "the making of choiceless democracies." The result is the subversion of deliberative governance in national contexts. Much of policy making turns on engagements between international actors and targeted local policy makers. Many of the domestic actors in these advocacy networks and epistemic communities are unconnected with local social movements. Most are in NGOs funded and directed by the same global actors that prescribe the policies being advanced.

Yet, apart from the World Bank—which has appropriated for itself the right to dispense policies in every domain—most multilateral agencies are single-issue bodies with a tendency to operate in policy silos. On the other hand, national-level policy making must be inherently multi-domain and multi-disciplinary, linking concerns of well-being with those of productivity, health, education, and the like. Local policy making, both national and sub-national, in the context of national policy contestations and affinity with cultural nuances, often produce policies that are more creative and have a broader vision of human well-being.

Local policy innovations for enhancing human well-being implemented against the grain of international policy advocacy range from *Girinka* in Rwanda, farming support schemes in Zambia and Malawi, and the agrarian policy implemented in Meles Zenawi's Ethiopia. They

combine the activation of the protective task of social policy with those of production. This contrasts with the over-emphasis on the social protection task of social policy that frames much of the prevailing global policy advocacy, even that which takes the mantle of being progressive.

Towards a Wider Vision of Social Policy

We agree with Deacon on the project of a progressive social policy agenda. But this is a project that must be anchored on country-level policy sovereignty in the context of a wider vision of social policy and a broader set of policy instruments. In the African context, such a project must be anchored in a developmental imperative that is ecologically responsible and gender sensitive. It offers a pathway to linking social policy and development concerns. A starting point is the acknowledgement of the multiple tasks of social policy—those of protection, production, redistribution, social reproduction, and social cohesion—without undermining the intrinsic values of social policy. In making social policy work in tandem with economic policy, we would advocate for undergirding norms of solidarity and equality. Social policy takes on a transformative role regarding the economy, social relations, and social institutions, in which the different tasks are activated without an over-emphasis on any one task. Indeed, most social policy instruments can be tapped for multiple tasks simultaneously. This is what the Transformative Social Policy framework offers.

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3 Labouring the Burden of Language, Politics and Marginality in Global Social Policy

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I think if Bob Deacon would be alive today, he would be proudly gazing over the field of global social policy and would note the plurality, diversity and inclusivity of the scholarship and its relentless commitment to do better and do more. Bob had a crystal-clear vision of the need to foster new conversations and intellectual encounters between different actors, knowledge brokers, policy spinners, students, service users, vulnerable groups and all parts of the broad social policy epistemic community. Bob Deacon's (Deacon et al., 1997; Deacon, 2013) analytical and political focus on the three Rs, [Redistribution, Regulation and Rights], and perhaps even more so, his later addition of two further Rs [Relationality and Resource Consciousness], and Fiona Williams' (2021) sixth R—Reparation—remain absolutely central to global social policy as a field and point us towards a global social justice agenda more broadly. He was also committed to redrawing the global map of social policy and giving voice, recognition and representation to regions, geographies, and countries that were totally invisible before. Bob understood that the challenge was to map and interrogate the emerging multi-scalar, multi-level, and intersectional spaces in which social policy is made and remade in a rapidly changing socio-economic and socio-political context. Bob's key agenda from early on was to pursue the pluralisation of social policy debates by attending to regional dynamics, looking beyond Europe and the Global North and challenging and decentring Eurocentric and western centric assumptions within these wider debates. What followed was an incredibly rich literature emerging from East Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, China, India, Eastern Europe, small islands, fragile states, and non-states. No small thing.

Global social policy has achieved a lot. Its 25-year history has seen a vibrant, geographically diverse, and plural scholarship emerging, one that has built important bridges between

academics, practitioners and policy makers, and advanced knowledge, practice and politics across a wide range of topics. An impressive number of books, journals, and journal articles, policy briefs, films, videos, blogs, and polemics have emerged. Perhaps even more importantly, a new generation of policy experts, policy makers, consultants, academics, activists, and brokers have been socialised, trained, professionalised, and organised within the broad field. Some amazing, globally prominent, and respected scholars have emerged [as this collection showcases] and new university study programmes have been developed all over the world. These achievements are impressive even when benchmarked against similarly aged disciplines such as ‘global public policy’.

Here I would like to briefly highlight three key contemporary challenges to global social policy as a field: that of language, the political, and marginality. In terms of ‘language’ and translation, global social policy should be proud for opening up the global discussion to many other languages than that of the hegemonic global English. The mushrooming of global social policy discussions in German, French, Spanish, Slavic languages, Chinese, and many more, offers an important pluralising platform that highlights important differences in tone, emphasis, and focus in terms of capturing the complex socio-political and socio-cultural issues at hand. Bob’s emphasis on Relationality has to include linguistic relationality, in which dominant theoretical or policy concepts do not reside exclusively in “global English” or “policy English” [Lendvai-Bainton, 2018], as a “homolingual address” [Sakai, 1997], but originate, persist and speak in other languages, words, and imaginaries [Bainton & Lendvai, 2013].

Global social policy as a field should develop and work with theoretical concepts and policy ideas that are incomprehensible in English. We should have key concepts borrowed from languages such as Japanese, Polish, Argentinian, Swahili, and keep them in their original linguistic form to unsettle Global English. This linguistic plurality and radical equality would then in turn be able to challenge the “one-way diffusionism” of our world where the flow of everything is from the west to the rest [Clarke et al., 2015]. We need radically better linguistic visibility of the margins, and we need to decentre our theoretical and epistemological perspectives through linguistic plurality. Let’s imagine a truly multilingual register for concepts such as “austerity”, “neoliberalism”, “commons”, “basic income”, “inclusion”, “work” or “care”. This would require an extensive commitment to translation as an everyday practice, both in the sense of linguistic translation as well political translation. Linguistic plurality and extensive translation will have the capacity to radically alter our knowledge production, no doubt for the better. But we also need to be vigilant about the rapid change in language around the “social” and “welfare” in the context of rising authoritarianism, nationalism and populism around the globe. The quiet, but profound, brutalisation of language in many different parts of the world, serve as warnings about

how we are able, allowed or encouraged to speak about the “social” and the devastation of racial, demeaning, stigmatising, discriminating, dehumanising tendencies that we are witnessing nowadays [Lorey, 2022; Stubbs, 2022; Fraser, 2022]. I remain very concerned about the brutal social imaginaries that new authoritarianism has brought about.

The second challenge is the “political”. We have lived through decades of depoliticisation, either through “technocratic” governance, “global” governance, or more recently, through “populist” governance. The political is in disarray, the “techno-legal order” is, paradoxically, both dominant and fading away, and this has a profound impact on a field that is so centred around welfare states and the social [Brown, 2019; Mbembe, 2019]. We need a much more radical agenda for global social justice at a time when we are witnessing the erasure and decoupling of social, ecological and human rights, the delegitimation of redistribution and regulation, and a demeaning contestation of recognition. Walls are going up; borders, both physical and symbolic, are mushrooming, violence in all of its forms is tangible, and the possibilities for solidarities are weakening. We need an intellectual agenda that insists on the need to re-politicise the six Rs. We need a field that talks directly to both visible and invisible hierarchies, takes decolonisation seriously and engages with race, racism and white supremacy as a core agenda. We need new vocabularies and theoretical perspectives to understand the implications of the crisis of the political and its impact on all things social.

Finally, my third challenge is marginality. Marginality here refers to the relentless and persistent marginalisation of social policy and global social policy, both as an academic discipline or field, as well as a policy practice, against other fields and policies, such as economics, political science, political economy, and the like. This marginality has been deeply institutionalised both in academia as well as in the policy world. We need more collaboration in terms of developing counter-strategies, rolling out forms of support, and offering platforms for sharing that are able to bear the personal, professional and intellectual toll of marginality. Marginality is not an easy place to exist, it comes with burden, struggle, rejection, which all need labouring over. We need strategies to look after each other, to unburden, to converse, in solidarity. As we brace ourselves against difficult and dangerous times, we will need Bob’s endless energies, ambition and strategy to live on and help the field to grow.

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4 Gender Inequality and the Care Economy

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Following somewhat loosely the ASID (agency, structure, institutions, discourse) method proposed by Bob Deacon and Paul Stubbs (2013), I want to focus on gender inequality as a structure deeply intertwined with class and race-ethnicity, and the “care economy” as a potentially transformative discourse, one prominently backed by the ILO and UN Women. Briefly put, the care economy involves all those who need and those who provide care, paid and unpaid. It, thus, includes the entire range of health and education services, as well as unpaid work in households and the community.

As the ILO’s recent research into why progress in tackling gender inequality has been so slow found, “the data, research, analyses and surveys all led back to care work” (International Labour Office, 2018, p. 6) – i.e., the gendered and racialised unequal division of care work and its undervaluation. Transformative change is possible, but it requires the four Rs² (somewhat different from Deacon’s original three): *recognition* of its value, *reduction* via investment in care-relevant infrastructure, *redistribution* between men and women and among households, community and the state, and *reward* via equitable pay and working conditions.

The “discovery” of the care economy certainly draws on early work of feminist scholars like Marilyn Waring (1989) making visible unpaid work in the household, Joan Tronto (1993) [ethics of care], Jane Jenson (1997) [care and welfare regimes], and Nancy Folbre’s (2006) “high road” strategy for the care sector through consumer-worker alliances. The global or transnational dimensions of care have been highlighted by feminist scholarship on care and migration, pointing to the emergence of global care chains (Williams, 2010).³

² The ILO would make this five Rs to include representation, which is important to give voice to care workers and care recipients.

³ On care chains see, *inter alia*, Hochschild (2000).

However, the care economy has become part of global policy discourse largely through the work of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) [an early mover through the important 2007 study, *The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context*, led by Shahra Razavi] and subsequently through the Sustainable Development Goals, notably Goal 5. As a result of transnational advocacy by feminists [Gabizon, 2016], Target 5A of Goal 5 calls for the recognition of the value of unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family. The UN Secretary General's Common Agenda advocates large-scale investment in the care economy as critical to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The care economy figures centrally in UN Women's *Progress of the World's Women 2015: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*,⁴ various ILO documents, notably *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Work*⁵, the 2022 International Labour Conference's call for *Global Action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis*⁶, as well as both IOs' work in the field. These voices have been further amplified with the formation of the Global Alliance for Care in 2021 as a result of the initiative of the Mexican National Institute for Women [InMujeres] and UN Women. The Alliance brings together international organisations like the ILO, international NGOs like Oxfam and national governments with feminist profiles in advocating for investment in the care economy.

As Esquivel and Kaufmann [2017] noted, the concept of the care economy has found particularly fertile ground in the Latin America and Caribbean region where, for more than a decade, the triennial Regional Conferences on the Integration of Women into Economic and Social Development have been elaborating the concept of care as a fundamental human right. At its 2022 meeting, it expanded the concept to the *care society*, thus including a critique of the extractivist model of growth that has predominated in the region in its argument for care as the sector that can drive a transformative recovery with equality and sustainability [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2021]. At the national scale, Costa Rica and Uruguay have gone the furthest towards making care a fundamental pillar of social and economic policy but care is also enshrined in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia and the concept has also been picked up at the local scale. In 2017, Mexico City made care a fundamental right and took on responsibility for the organisation of a universal, accessible, and quality care system. More recently, Bogotá has instituted a *Sistema Distrital de Cuidado* – a system of care blocks concentrating existing and new services for care workers, people requiring care and care workers' families within

⁴ View the Report at: <http://progress.unwomen.org>

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang--en/index.htm

⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/digitalguides/en-gb/story/globalcall>

a walking distance of 20-30 minutes.⁷ While the product of local feminist advocacy, the program's international partners include UN Women, The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the ILO, ECLAC and the Open Society Fund. The program has attracted international attention not only in the region but beyond, drawing visitors such as the Council of Urban Initiatives (a joint effort by UN-Habitat, University College London and the London School of Economics and Political Sciences).

COVID-19 has certainly helped to make the importance of the care economy visible not only in Latin America but across the globe. In this sense, the pandemic might represent an opportunity for transformative change. However, will it win out over austerity as advocated by the International Monetary Fund, against the rise of right-wing populism, and the reassertion of the insatiable demand for more military spending? In other words, we are still in the situation Bob Deacon described in 2007, one where "powerful states [notably the USA], powerful organisations [such as the IMF] and even powerful disciplines [economics] contend with other powerful states [...], other powerful organisations [such as the ILO], and other disciplines [such as social and political science] are engaged in a war of position regarding the content of global social policy" (Deacon, 2007, p. 16). The care economy is championed by the latter, including feminist scholars, feminist IOs, like UN Women, transnational women's organisations and feminist movements, but the opposing forces remain in a strong position.

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⁷ See, *inter alia*, Scruggs (2022).

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5 Global Social Policy in Perspective

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This text presents a brief overview of global social policies since the early 20th century in order to gain perspective to see the way forward. Historically, all empires had some transnational social policies; for example, during the French Revolution, the National Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789, by which “men are born and remain free and equal in rights” that implied the abolition of slavery across all French colonies. It was a wild dream, soon to be dismantled (slavery was reintroduced in 1802), however it was the seed for future social progress. Thanks to political pressure from activists (the “abolitionists”), European empires followed with Abolition Acts that emancipated all slaves in their colonies.

1920s- : A strong process of global social policy started after the First World War and the Russian Revolution, with the International Labor Standards⁸ [ILS] agreed at the International Labour Organization [ILO]. The ILO’s founders recognized in 1919 that the global economy needed social rules to ensure that economic progress would go hand in hand with social justice, prosperity and peace for all. Since then, governments, federated employers and trade unions at the ILO have adopted 189 Conventions, 205 Recommendations and 6 Protocols covering a broad range of work issues, such as occupational safety and health, wages, working time, employment policy and promotion, vocational guidance and training, skills development, including specific categories of workers, labor administration and inspection, maternity protection and social security, indigenous and tribal people, and migrant workers.⁹

⁸ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12000:0::NO::P12000_INSTRUMENT_SORT:4

⁹ Bob Deacon (2013) recorded the “making” of one of the latest ILS, Recommendation 202 on social protection floors in 2012.

The idea of international social standards was originated by activist trade unionists, academics and lawyers. Workers had been organizing at the national level since the mid-19th century, realizing they could only fight inhuman working conditions by banding together. The International Working Men's Association was formed in 1864 and the International Secretariat of Trade Union Centers in 1901, to advance the condition of workers globally. In 1906, the first international convention was adopted at a conference in Berne. It prohibited the use of white phosphorus in the manufacture of matches because of the harmful effects, and it was adopted by as many as 41 states or colonies (Rodgers et al., 2009). Activists' efforts paid off with this initial global social policy that inspired the future work of the ILO.

International standards are progressive and highly transformative. ILSs raise national welfare by setting minimum international levels of protections that must be translated into corresponding domestic laws. For example, eliminating child labor, the use of damaging chemicals in factories, ensuring medical care or adequate pensions. When an ILS is adopted, new national laws complying with the ILS have to be enacted, improving people's conditions and raising living standards.

1940s–1970s: After the horrors of the Second World War, the world entered a period of sustained economic and social reconstruction. The US Marshall Plan financed the reconstruction of Western Europe, and the Soviet Union that of Eastern Europe. In 1945, the United Nations (UN) was established by countries around the world to maintain peace and promote the well-being of the peoples of the world through international cooperation. The World Health Organization (WHO), a specialized agency of the UN responsible for international health policies, was created in 1948. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1945, to lead international policies to eradicate hunger and improve food security. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was also born in 1945 and in 1946 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), to mention a few organizations of the UN system. A large number of global social policies have been generated at the UN, always democratically.

First and foremost, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁰ was approved by the world's countries in 1948. This generated another set of international standards beyond the ILS, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and The Convention on Persons with Disabilities (2008).

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

In the 1950s and 1960s, developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East gained independence from the European colonial powers.¹¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights inspired many of the new national Constitutions, that guaranteed the right to education, health and social security of their citizens. The new States started building universal public social policies. UN agencies supported the establishment of the new administrations with technical assistance and some (limited) funding in all sectors, from agriculture to water supply.

The new governments needed resources for social and economic development. The idea of a “Marshall Plan for the South” came from civil society organizations (CSOs) and won official support from European governments in the late 1950s. It was adopted in 1960 by all countries at the UN General Assembly which decreed that 1 percent of the GNP of rich countries should be devoted to aiding the South.¹² Development aid never reached this target; additionally, there were notorious accountability problems in terms of what was included under aid expenditures. In 1970, it was agreed at the UN that 0.7 percent of rich countries’ GNP was to be given in aid, excluding commercial loans and military expenditures—though this target has not yet been achieved.

1980s: Northern private banks had massively lent to developing country governments, until 1982, when the debt crisis imploded as interest rates rose and commodity prices fell. The solution came to be known as the “Washington Consensus”, a regressive set of policies that mandated harsh structural adjustments to pay back external debt, requiring painful austerity cuts to public expenditures including health, education, social security and other social policies. Corporate and personal income taxes were reduced “to support economic growth”, another regressive policy, depriving governments of revenues and keeping states minimal. Critics argue that the structural programs’ primary purpose was to protect banks from Northern countries, at huge social cost. As a result, poverty, inequality and social indicators worsened across the developing world, pushing leaders like President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania to ask: “Must we starve our children to pay our debts?”

The international financial institutions (IFIs), including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the regional development banks,¹³ started dismantling development policies that took decades to build, privatizing and commercializing pensions and social services, deregulating labor laws, and cutting social budgets—even at a time

¹¹ Most of Latin America became independent of Spain a century earlier.

¹² This remains an ideal among reformers; today, Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs argues that poverty could be eradicated with only 1 percent of the combined GDP of donor countries.

¹³ For a description of main agencies of current global social policies, see Kaasch and Martens (2015).

when the HIV/AIDS epidemic and Ebola outbreaks were spreading. In some developing countries, national social security institutions were closed down.

Many denounced this, including Bob Deacon, Michelle Hulse and Paul Stubbs [1997] in their seminal work on the globalization of social policy, demonstrating that national social policy was increasingly determined by unaccountable international organizations like the IFIs. The UN demanded an “adjustment with a human face” [Jolly et al., 1987]. In 1990, the UN Development Program launched the first Human Development Report, measuring global progress towards advancing human wellbeing, with dismal results. In 1995 at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen, governments reached a new consensus on the need to put people at the center of development, that eventually lead to the UN Millennium Development Goals [MDGs].¹⁴ There was an intense fight between the UN and the IFIs, with the UN supporting development goals, progress towards human rights and the ILS, and the IFIs implementing “needed adjustment reforms”. But Northern countries backed the IFIs to proceed with the Washington Consensus, and left the UN with limited resources.

1990s–2000s: The 1980s were the so-called “lost decade of development”, a title equally applicable to the 1990s. By this time, it had become clear to anyone that the Washington Consensus was socially unsustainable. To compensate, the IFIs started introducing small safety nets [targeted at a fraction of the poor, for cost savings], while in parallel continuing to erode wages and welfare for the majority, dismantling universal social policies, privatizing or using market mechanisms for public services, contracting social expenditures and deregulating labor protections all the while forgiving taxes to wealthy individuals and corporations.¹⁵ The addition of minimal social safety nets is the so-called “Washington Consensus Plus” – the most prevalent global social policy in recent times.

Inequalities grew within and between countries. With regards to poverty, according to the World Bank, the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day declined globally from \$1.9 billion in 1981 to \$1.4 billion in 2005. However, this decline was largely due to rapid growth, employment and universal health in China, a country that did not follow neoliberal

¹⁴ The eight UN MDGs, approved by the 189 UN member states, committed countries to halve extreme poverty rates, halt the spread of HIV/AIDS/malaria/TB, improve maternal health and other targets to be accomplished by 2015. The method of this global social policy is similar to the European Union’s open method of coordination [created in the 1990s], by which countries agree on a target and its measurement but each government has the freedom to achieve it as they see fit. The MDGs were important social targets, though critics point that much more was needed to reflect the countries’ original consensus at the World Summit for Social Development, e.g. why not eradicate poverty completely? Why improvements only to maternal health and HIV/AIDS/malaria/TB, instead of providing universal health services [Fukuda-Parr, 2017]? <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

¹⁵ See Mkandawire [2005], Ortiz and Cummins [2019].

Washington Consensus-type policies.¹⁶ The absolute number of people living in poverty actually went up during this period in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Northern Africa, as well as Central Asia.

Progressive global social policies were much needed, but in view of limited progress at the international level, governments turned to regional social policies as a second-best option [Deacon et al., 2010]. For example, while there were a few international initiatives to control the spread of vector-borne and other diseases, including some privately funded such as the Gates Global Fund, these proved largely insufficient. In the case of Thailand, which had achieved nearly universal health coverage in 2001 in less than two years in spite of Washington Consensus policies, the Thai population still suffered from malaria and other diseases as mosquitoes know no borders and entered from poorer neighboring countries. Regional health policies were needed to avert cross-border transmission. Regional social policies covered areas such as cross-border redistribution mechanisms (e.g., regional social funds/food banks, health policies), regulation (e.g., common labor standards and migration policies, education exchanges/recognition of academic diplomas), and rights (e.g., sub-regional charters of human and social rights¹⁷).

2010–2020: The 2007–2008 global financial crisis (this time, a crisis generated by Northern banks) led to the renewal of the same “Washington Consensus Plus” global policies from 2010 onwards. After the \$10 trillion bailout of the financial sector—the largest in history—and two short years of necessary fiscal stimuli, governments’ coffers were drained and people had to pay the price. Development aid fell, especially to the poorest countries. Austerity cuts (now called “fiscal consolidation”) became the “new normal” [Ortiz and Cummins, 2019], prescribed by the IMF to both Northern and Southern countries. This global policy again had devastating negative social impacts. From 2010–2019, billions of lives were upended by reduced pensions and social protection benefits, cuts to programs for women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, informal workers, and ethnic minorities. There were fewer and lower paid teachers, health and local civil servants and reduced employment security for workers, as labour regulations were dismantled. These all combined with lower subsidies and higher prices due to consumption taxes, which

¹⁶ Between 1998 and 2007 the Chinese government introduced different schemes to achieve universal health coverage for all Chinese citizens, and between 2009–2013 achieved near universal pension coverage, covering about 800 million people in record time, an unprecedented historical achievement. For those interested, see the ILO volume [2018] *100 Years of Social Protection: The road to universal social protection systems and floors*.

¹⁷ For example, frustrated with the lack of progress of a number of international conventions, Latin American countries approved their own Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons (1994), the Ibero-American Convention on Youth Rights (2005) and others.

further reduced disposable income following the significant job losses caused by a drop in economic activity.

However, there are two different social policy trends worth mentioning in this period. First, a number of governments that had previously privatized water supplies, pensions, public transport and postal services, began to renationalize public services. This was due to the poor performance of the private sector as evidenced by reduced services, higher user fees leading to affordability issues, regulatory capture, collusions leading to monopoly profits, declines in investment and other negative social impacts.¹⁸ Hence, a significant number of countries started rebuilding public pensions and services.

Second came new developments in global social policies. Building on the MDGs, in 2015 the UN member states unanimously adopted a new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals¹⁹ (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. These commit countries to new, more ambitious, goals such as universal education, health and social protection, decent jobs for all, ending all discrimination against women, ending hunger and reducing inequalities. Even the World Bank changed: in 2000, the World Bank adopted Universal Education; in 2013, Universal Health Coverage; and in 2015, Universal Social Protection. The SDGs, approved by all world countries, reflect these universal principles.

2020: An unexpected event paralyzed the world. The SARS-CoV-2 virus quickly spread across all parts of the globe, overwhelming public health systems, which were already overburdened, underfunded and understaffed after a decade of harsh austerity cuts and unprepared to deal with a pandemic. At the time of writing, 6.9 million people have officially been reported dead, but estimates suggest 17.2 million deaths from COVID-19. After vaccines were produced with billions of dollars of public support, western pharmaceutical companies were allowed to sell vaccines with high profit prices, making them unaffordable for most developing countries – a global social policy failure, leaving most people in developing countries unvaccinated. Further, as lockdowns were imposed to slow the spread of the virus, the global economy fell into the worst recession in 75 years, causing income losses and hardship for billions of people.

¹⁸ During the last 15 years, there have been 235 cases of water re-nationalization (or “remunicipalization”), for example in France, the United States, Spain, Germany and Argentina; perhaps the most known case was Paris [2010] water re-municipalization, which improved delivery and reduced water prices by 8 percent. With regards to pensions, since the 1980s debt crisis, 30 countries privatized their public mandatory pensions [14 in Latin America, 14 in Eastern Europe, 2 in Africa], but a majority of them, 18 countries, have reversed pension privatization and rebuilt public pensions systems, such as Argentina [2008], Bolivia [2009], Hungary [2010], Poland [2011], and Kazakhstan [2013] [Ortiz et al., 2018] due to, among other reasons, the high costs of private pension systems, low coverage rates and low pension benefits.

¹⁹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

The high levels of expenditures needed to cope with COVID-19 pandemic and the multiple crises since 2020 have left governments with growing fiscal deficits and indebtedness. Starting in 2021, this has [again!] initiated a global drive toward austerity cuts, affecting 85 percent of the world population in 2023, at a time when the needs of people and economies are at their greatest, and despite all the evidence of negative social impacts from earlier decades. There is no need for populations to endure these endless adjustment reforms. There are alternatives: instead of cutting public expenditures, governments can increase revenues to finance a people-centered recovery, and make further progress towards human rights and the SDGs.²⁰

Civil society did not stand idle. CSOs and unions reacted by protesting austerity cuts and the unfair system of global governance since the 1980s (O'Brien, 2000). National protests have increased over the last decade, from the Arab Spring to the "yellow vests". People have demonstrated over many grievances, such as civil rights, jobs, pensions, public services, lack of real democracy, and frustration with the low accountability of politicians to citizens. However, there are fewer protests over global issues (Ortiz et al., 2022). Funding for CSOs has severely diminished, unions have been weakened by decades of deregulation and an increasing number of governments are repressing freedom of expression and association. It is important to strengthen the voices of activists working for peaceful progressive alternatives, uniting and federating internationally as the unions did in the 19th century.

Today, the world's extreme inequalities should make us question the current development model (development for whom?), which has accrued mostly to the wealthy, and focus on redistributive global social policies to reduce inequalities within and between countries. A global social contract is urgently needed: anchored in human rights, with higher social standards and better public services, to ensure universal coverage with adequate benefits in education, health, social security or social protection and other public services. This requires increased public funds and development aid, including a global tax system to finance global and national social policies – corporations, banks and billionaires must pay adequate taxes. A renewed multilateralism is fundamental, at a time when the UN is defunded and weakened, while its mission is very much alive.

²⁰ There are at least nine financing alternatives to support national and global social policies, available even in the poorest countries: [1] increasing progressive tax revenues (e.g. on corporate profits, financial activities, wealth, property, natural resources, digital services), [2] restructuring/eliminating sovereign debt, [3] eradicating illicit financial flows (e.g. illegal money laundering, tax evasion), [4] increasing social security contributions and coverage, including adequate employers contributions and formalizing workers in the informal economy with decent contracts, [5] using fiscal and foreign exchange reserves, [6] re-allocating public expenditures (e.g. Costa Rica and Thailand used military expenditures to achieve universal health), [7] adopting more accommodating macroeconomic frameworks, [8] lobbying for development aid and transfers, and [9] new Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) allocations, without creating more debt or conditionalities (Ortiz et al., 2019).

Over the last century, global social policies have driven major advances. Slavery has been abolished, labor and human rights recognized, billions have improved their living conditions. However, progress is highly unequal. Unfair policy choices in recent decades have given 83 percent of global income to the richest 20 percent of the world's population and left only 1 percent to the poorest 20 percent. This does not need to be the case, global and national social policies, together with progressive and employment generating economic policies, can create a fairer world and bring prosperity to all.

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6 All People Need Protection: Towards Global Social Justice

Francine Mestrum

Global Social Justice

“To be path creating in international institutions, it is first of all necessary to change the discourse,” stated Bob Deacon in his last book [Deacon, 2013]. I could not agree more. My knowledge is limited to discourses on global social policies and I honestly think it is far easier to examine these discourses than it is to research what comes from them in reality. While it may not always be easy to separate where the discourse ends and the practice begins, certainly at the global level, I do think that the origins of current discourses on welfare and social protection are easy to date. However, we should be very careful with words, because social protection today does not mean the same as social protection a century or even half a century ago. I think this is a very important trap to avoid in research on global social policy. So, allow me to just mention a couple of milestones in the long history of Global Social Policies.

A major milestone obviously is the creation of the ILO in 1919, important as such and particularly important because of the statement in the preamble of its constitution: lasting peace is not possible without social justice. Let us not forget that the ILO did not fall out of the sky but was prepared by various international conferences at the end of the 19th century, on working conditions, on unemployment, and on accident and sickness insurance. This was not only because of the miserable living conditions of the working class, but also because of globalisation and international competitiveness. When the ILO was founded, the belief was that global competitiveness of companies should not be paid for by workers. It is important to never forget this. Another milestone was the awareness of the need for social policies in the post-Second World War period and for development policies in the post-colonial period. Heinz Arndt [1987] brilliantly described the “decade of social development” in the 1970s as well as the search for a “unified approach” at the UN, trying to integrate

economic and social development into one single concept. Unfortunately, it was never accepted.

There were two different but both major milestones in 1990. The World Bank with its first World Development Report on “poverty” and the UNDP with its “human development report”. UNDP’s report was very clear: countries without social policies stood far behind socialist and social democratic countries with social policies in terms of human development, that is literacy and life expectancy. Growth, according to UNDP, should not be the only objective to be pursued. However, that message was totally in line with the World Bank proposal to start working on poverty reduction policies. Nevertheless, this is where a major and very sad bifurcation took place.

In the second half of the 1990s I was working on my doctoral thesis, researching into the international discourse on poverty. I believed, as most people did at that moment, that the World Bank had developed a social consciousness after a decade of structural adjustment and austerity. However, as I advanced in my analysis of its documents, I had to change my perspective. What the World Bank was proposing was to abandon social protection and welfare state policies and to replace them with poverty reduction policies. Its new focus was not a correction of its previous neoliberal policies, but the centrepiece of them. In that same movement, national development was sacrificed on the altar of globalisation. While the ILO at that moment was rather weak, it did gather more strength in the following decades, with its decent work agenda, its fundamental principles and rights at work, its report on a fair globalisation, its declaration on social justice and, in 2012, its important recommendation on the social protection floors.

Today, the World Bank again talks of social protection, but as has been confirmed by a lot of research in recent years, this is not the social protection of the past. It is a neoliberal policy for targeting the poor, based on growth and private markets, even if, together with the ILO, there is a [false] discourse on universalism. This concept, as well, has different meanings. Let me conclude with three remarks that might help to develop further thinking on global social policies.

One, when talking about global social policies, we should always have in mind this important difference between the World Bank and the ILO: caring for the poor (World Bank) or caring for all people (ILO). In other words, improving livelihoods for the poor or preparing for another world. No one is born poor, people are made poor. It is absurd, I think, to first produce poverty and then act as if one was fighting poverty. We know this does not work. Secondly, we are living in very dangerous times, with shifting geopolitical relationships, the threat of climate change and growing extreme right-wing and even fascist movements. Social

justice is crucial in all three of these threats to avoid wars, fascism and global destruction. Thirdly, what we read at the World Bank is a moral discourse, coupled to economic concerns. Poverty reduction and its “social protection” have become strategic tools for legitimizing Bretton Woods policies. This problem will never be solved if we do not reflect on a new economic order of the world and on better universal policies for welfare and well-being, which means common values and a lot of diversity in their practical implementation. I prefer to speak of social commons, the result of a political decision to care for one another, involving citizens and re-defining the State and its responsibilities. The concepts I want to promote for this are emancipation, solidarity and universalism for the protection of all people, societies and all life²¹.

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²¹ More ideas are to be found at www.globalsocialjustice.info, www.socialcommons.eu and www.globalsocialprotectioncharter.eu.

7 Decolonising Knowledge and Reparative Justice: A Further 'R' for Global Social Policy

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The book *Global Social Policy* written by Bob Deacon with Michelle Hulse and Paul Stubbs [Deacon, 1997] was the precursor to the journal of the same name which followed in 2001. In welcoming readers to the first issue of the journal, Bob Deacon noted its distinctive development of the discipline of social policy by “serving the cause of social justice *within and between countries*” [Deacon, 2001, p. 5, my emphasis]. Social policy was understood as shaping “social redistribution, social regulation and social rights” [ibid.]. The transnational and global mechanisms, modes and movements of these three ‘Rs’ – redistribution, regulation and rights – became central to Deacon’s subsequent analyses of global social policy.

Fast forward over the next decade to the book *Transformations in Global and Regional Social Policies* [Kaasch & Stubbs, 2014]. This was originally presented as a Festschrift to Bob Deacon when he retired in 2013. In the final chapter Bob Deacon engages with his interlocutors and agrees that the three normative ‘Rs’ of global social policy are insufficient to cope with the crises of contemporary global capitalism. To account for the global crises of care and of climate change he proposes two further Rs – Relationality and Resource Consciousness. He is less specific when it comes to geopolitical inequalities—which underpin climate change and care—and their imperialist, extractivist and racist histories [and presents]. What he does acknowledge is that a more profoundly transformative set of policy alternatives is necessary [Deacon, 2014, pp. 203–206]. In this brief contribution I suggest that now, a second decade later, a combination of crises, mobilisations around them, and new knowledge presents a further ‘R’ which marks out one way of framing “social justice within and between countries”. This is *Reparation* or, more specifically, *reparative justice*.

In recent work I have argued that, of the multiple and intersecting global crises that currently amplify poverty and global and social inequalities, there are three that particularly challenge the basis upon which social policies and welfare states have been constituted [Williams, 2021]. These three are the intersecting global crises of care, of climate change, and of racial justice, all of which threaten future sustainability and solidarity. This is not to ignore the financial crises that beset global capitalism which, along with neo-liberalism, are generally taken as the drivers of global and social inequalities [Seymour, 2014; Olafsson et al., 2019]. Rather it is to say that financialised capitalism and neoliberalism are important but insufficient to generate an understanding of the overwhelming gendered, racialised and geopolitical dimensions of widening social and global inequalities. Nor does it attend to the specifics of climate change which intersects with these inequalities. If we are concerned to look for transformative ways of framing policy alternatives, then it is here, in the resistance to these crises, that we can find new knowledges, politics and practices. Thus, global, transnational and national movements and campaigns—such as Extinction Rebellion, Wretched of the Earth, *Buen Vivir*, Black Lives Matter, campaigns against gender-based violence, for the recognition of care work, for the rights of migrant workers, along with new thinking and practices around them—contribute to extending the parameters of our understanding of what social policy, or a future eco-social commons [Francine Mestrum], needs to address.

New thinking and practices around the ethics of care, ecological justice, racial justice and decoloniality have profound implications for what principles may underpin an eco-social commons. For a start, they would be based upon the *relationality* of our being and our *interdependence* as its living enactment underpinned by the principle of human flourishing. This would require a new economic model that places human and planetary flourishing at its centre. Furthermore, this interdependence is marked by different sets of obligations:

- first, relationships are planetary in the geographical sense of *global* interdependence;
- second, relationships are *planetary* in the sense of an interdependence between humans and the eco-system which extends to non-human beings and living organisms;
- third, these interdependencies summon up *intergenerational* obligations to safeguard future generations who will inherit the planet;
- fourth, they invoke the dehumanized racial and other suffering of *past generations*, which signify material and moral obligations towards reparation.

I want to elaborate here on this fourth principle of interdependent material and moral obligations to the dehumanised racial and other suffering of past generations and apply it to social policy past and present. This will illustrate how decolonising knowledge and making material reparations—which have entered the public domain particularly through the Black Lives Matter mobilisation after the death of George Floyd in 2020 and also through climate justice activism—have important implications for social policy as knowledge and policy.

My example starts with path-breaking research by Gurinder Bhambra (2022). This establishes the integral part that imperialism and colonialism played in the development and, more precisely, *the funding* of the British welfare state over the course of the twentieth century. She provides a forensic account of the deeply regressive forms of taxation inflicted upon colonised populations as a “normal” part of colonial rule whose revenues were then rendered to the British state. These forms of extraction were as dire in effect as the extraction of raw material and labour in not only contributing to poverty and famine in India but also in withholding mitigation support for such devastation. Over half of the income available to the British state in the late nineteenth century came from labour, taxes and resources of the empire. While Irish-British fiscal relations had served to establish the practice of extracting from the periphery to subsidise the centre, the funding of British wars through colonised taxation (and soldiers) provided a template for extracting taxation to subsidise early twentieth century welfare reforms for the domestic population and thus relieve *their* tax burden. Focusing on India (later India and Pakistan), Bhambra unfolds the profound asymmetry of these “relations of extraction” and how they were compounded by unequal “relations of redistribution”. This was the failure of early welfare reforms—and continued in the post-war welfare state—to enact any form of redistributive measures to the Indian population that was heavily taxed and whose taxation helped support the British welfare state.

Bhambra’s analysis reframes the issue of redistribution for social policy by extending the parameters to the imperial state and British fiscal governance to its colonies and colonial subjects thereby forcing us to look again at *funding sources* and mechanisms, collective reciprocity and the taken-for-granted boundaries of redistribution. In addition, it raises the question of inequalities in the colonial and racial divisions of welfare *over time*, and what that means for reparation in the present.

The logic, as well as tragic irony, of British imperialism is that it set social, political and cultural external and internal boundaries which served, in different ways at different times, to exclude colonised subjects of colour from access to welfare provision while their labour, lives and countries underwrote the nation-building projects of warfare and welfare (Semmel, 1960; Williams, 1989; Shilliam, 2018). My work employs Bhambra’s decolonising

frame to examine extraction through the expropriation and exploitation of care labour in the British welfare state from the colonies, ex-colonies and the poorer regions over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries [Williams, 2022]. From this I surmise that, in the context of the global crisis of care and the histories of care labour, migrant care work may present a suitable case for reparative policies.

Let me first briefly explain what I mean by the global crisis of care or, more precisely, of care and social reproduction. It is in the imperative for profits to be extracted from people's labour that capitalism exerts intense pressure on, and endangers, the capacity of people to care for others. Without financial and practical support for care labour, this pressure is intensified. While the effects of this crisis are different for different women in different countries and regions, they are nevertheless characterised by two key dynamics:

- the *devaluation of care*. This is its longstanding invisibility as women's work either unpaid or low paid *plus* its subordination to paid work and to productivism, whether paid or unpaid. This is not just about gender alone: it is also bound up with inequalities in class, caste, race, and migration of care providers; and disability, class and age for those receiving care support.
- The second is the *depletion of care*, that is, the failure to provide the resources that give people the capacity to care and to be cared for – material resources, time, support, space, and so on. This has been exacerbated by changing demographics, austerity and neo-liberalism.

Both these dynamics were intensified during the global pandemic of 2020. They are also both bound up in the exploitation of the female care labour of migrant colonial subjects in the post-war period and of care labour of migrant workers from poorer regions in the twenty-first century. While Britain has a particular colonial history, these developments, especially of migrant care labour, have similarities across the wealthier regions.

In post-war Britain, women workers from the colonies and ex-colonies were recruited to work as nurses and carers in the health service yet their access to welfare services was routinely questioned or denied. Without their work, the jobs would have to have been filled by British married women which was at odds with the ideology of the time of women as mothers and housewives. The new migrants contributed not only to the construction of the welfare state but to the social reproduction of the white male breadwinner family at a cost to [a depletion of] their own family lives. No attempt was made to support their own responsibilities for care and children were often left behind with relatives. Indeed, a

pathological discourse of Black families developed that identified them as failing mothers precisely because of their contribution as workers [Carby, 1982; Williams, 1989].

Some half a century later, the new normative ideal in western welfare states is of a dual earner family. By the 1990s, domestic service for professional dual-earner families increasingly became the norm. By the turn of the century ageing societies, declining fertility, and relatively unchanged gendered care responsibilities have combined with political imperatives to keep care costs down and created a demand for low-cost care labour. It is migrant women from the poorer regions, often educated and skilled and under pressure as main breadwinners, who are meeting this demand in many, if not most, countries of the developed world [Williams, 2021]. Once again, these workers provide cost effective solutions to securing the family norms and care needs in their countries of destination, while their countries of origin experience a depletion in care.

The multiple, historical and intersecting inequalities and injustices that migrant care work reproduces raises important questions about how to tackle them. There have been important struggles such as those realised in ILO's Convention 189, "Decent Work for Domestic Workers", and those of international migration groups which look to improving migrants' citizenship and family reunion rights. However, transforming geopolitical inequalities of care needs to go further. Migrant care work lies at the intersection of global, regional and national failures in migration governance and a global care crisis in which extractivist productivism of contemporary racial and patriarchal capitalism has devalued and depleted the capacity of people and their societies to provide care. This is where reparative justice as a frame can begin to be useful. As Klein and Fouksman explain: "Recognition and redress through reparations are important for acknowledging not just past wrongs, but the way these wrongs underpin contemporary inequalities" [Klein & Fouksman, 2021].

Reparative justice can build on the sorts of developments in transnational health work in which the WHO has set ethical codes and principles of transnational reciprocity, for example, preventing poaching of health workers and guaranteeing free training and support for returning doctors and nurses. This begins to provide a route towards thinking about material redistribution. However, rather than framing such policies as aid it would be framed as reparation for past and present extraction and exploitation of care resources. Insofar as the COVID-19 pandemic has also implicated migrant care workers, then proposals for decolonising human rights in global public health are also part of such a development. These involve ensuring equality in access to vaccines, holding both states and corporations to account, and moving beyond the current ineffective and neo-colonial charitable forms of vaccine donation to the Global South [Sekalala et al., 2021].

Reparation, therefore, needs to be added to Deacon's three Rs of redistribution, regulation, and rights. However, drawing on a different philosophical tradition of Rs [Fraser, 2003], which takes into account the mobilisation for claims around care, climate change, and racial justice, I would then add Reparation to Redistribution, Recognition and Representation. Indeed, Reparation is a prime example of where Redistribution beyond national boundaries meets Recognition of past injustices, and the need for Representation of those currently affected. Further, reparative justice serves as a coalitional concept, that is to say, a conceptual claim that brings together struggles and campaigns around racial and care injustices, as well as for ecological justice. Though different in their cases for reparation, they have in common the recall to past injustice and its continuation today. Reparation thus forces us to rethink what is meant by universal distributive justice and the borders in which its calls are made.

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8 In Search of New Pathways for Social Development in a Post-Crisis World

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It is often said that a silver lining of the pandemic we have lived through over the past three years is that it powerfully revealed the deep-seated inequalities in the world, both within and across countries, the social protection gaps, and the urgency of building universal social protection systems. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic and other unfolding crises have made the case for universal social protection more compelling than ever before, putting the spotlight on the need to identify financing options for extending social protection, and in so doing help rebuild a frayed social contract. As such, many have referred to the pandemic as a wake-up call. To be sure, there are huge challenges in closing the yawning gaps in social protection: making sure that everyone has coverage regardless of their employment status, not just for one or two contingencies but for the full range of risks that they face across their lives; that the protection they receive is adequate, meaning that it allows life in health and dignity; that the system is ready for co-variate shocks, especially in the context of the climate crisis and structural transformations; and that it is adequately and equitably financed. The post-pandemic world, we were told, was to be about “building forward better”.

However, even if the IMF committed itself to social spending floors in 2019 [International Monetary Fund, 2019] and its Managing Director urged countries in January 2021 to “spend as much as you can and then spend a little bit more” [Reuters, 2021], today the dangers of post-pandemic austerity—one that is more premature and severe than the one that followed the 2008 global financial crisis—are being felt across the world. This means that the “high road” [International Labour Organization, 2021] for building universal social protection systems seen as so critical in the light of the painful lessons of COVID-19, is now being bypassed as country after country succumbs to austerity and falls back on *ad hoc* and fragmented “safety nets” in the face of growing grievances and cost-of-living protests [Hossain & Hallock, 2022]. So, as Bob Deacon would have asked, to what extent does this

context of multiple crises provide an opportunity to change course – to move away from the economic doctrines and policies that promoted patterns of market-led development that have systematically reinforced vulnerability and inequality? Have these interlocking crises seriously wounded the dominant neoliberal paradigm [Deacon, 2012]?

First, the prospects for social transformation in the wake of a crisis are heavily dependent on certain paths of pre-crisis structural change [Utting, Razavi, & Varghese Buchholz, 2012]. For example, financialization, which has continued unabated, the rush to privatization and “public-private partnerships”, extensive labour market informality and livelihood insecurity along with the declining influence of organized labour, which are even more endemic today, curtail what governments see as the options available to them in the social and labour market policy arenas. In addition to these aspects of “structural power”, elites—those well connected to finance capital and financial institutions—have shown a remarkable capacity to shape the post-crisis recovery process through the framing of common-sense understandings of crisis and crisis response. This means that very selective and partial explanations of what is going wrong end up framing public and policy debates. It also means that proposed solutions may well serve to transfer risks and costs to the weakest social groups and to developing countries.

In this vein, we hear theorized parallels between the stagflationary conditions of the 1970s and today’s conditions, when in fact, nominal wage growth is not keeping up with inflation. In fact, as the latest issue of ILO’s *Global Wage Report 2022-23* showed, real wages are stagnating or declining, ruling out a wage-price spiral as the inflationary lubricant. The report estimates that global monthly wages fell in real terms to minus 0.9 percent in the first half of 2022—the first time in the twenty-first century that real wage growth has been negative—while the gap between productivity growth and wage growth continues to widen with productivity growth outstripping wage growth by 12.6 percentage points [International Labour Organization, 2022]. The global labour income share was on a declining trend in the decades preceding the COVID-19 crisis. However, “decades of falling [real] minimum wages, erosion of once strong labour market institutions, and failure to revive social dialogue on a larger scale have prevented labour from participating more fully and equitably in the benefits of economic growth” [ILO, 2023, p. 16]. Employment recovery from the COVID-19 crisis has been driven mainly by informal employment, which increased in the pandemic period.

It is not far-fetched to say that both income inequality and poverty will continue to rise if the purchasing power of the lowest paid is not maintained. ILO analysis suggests that there is scope in many countries for increasing wages, facilitated by social dialogue, without fear of generating a wage-price inflationary spiral. In the absence of such adjustments,

access to food will continue to be compromised – particularly for low-income households, which spend the bulk of their incomes on food. World Bank evidence already shows that stunting and wasting in children, and anaemia in pregnant women, are increasing as families struggle to get sufficient nutrition in their diets [The World Bank, 2023]. Social protection is a powerful tool to help households face life-cycle risks and the systemic shocks intensified by the cost-of-living crisis. There is a growing international consensus about the importance of social protection which provided a lifeline for many households and businesses during the pandemic. However, a number of challenges present themselves when it comes to social protection playing its part.

First, more than half of the global population, over 4 billion people, the overwhelming majority of whom are working in the informal economy, do not have access to social protection at all, let alone adequate and comprehensive social protection as called for by international social security standards [International Labour Organization, 2021]. Many workers, especially those at the lower end of the pay scale, are still insufficiently protected, even in high-income countries. A recently published ILO report on the value of essential work zoomed in on the situation of key workers such as workers in food systems, the care sector, transport, retail and sanitation. Using data from 90 countries, it showed that only two-thirds of workers with permanent contracts and only one-third of workers on temporary contracts have access to pensions or sick leave. Coverage of self-employed workers is even lower: for a sample of 16 mostly low- and middle-income countries, the average coverage rate of employees was 39 percent, but less than 10 percent in the case of self-employed workers [International Labour Organization, 2023]. This underlines the point that “essential workers” need more than applause; they need adequate labour and social protection.

Second, even when covered, the adequacy of social protection benefits presents another source of concern, especially in the current cost of living crisis. Our research shows that more than half of all social protection schemes for which we have data do not have a mechanism to adjust the benefit level to the consumer price index and/or to wages. This means that the real value of the benefits these schemes provide cannot keep up with inflation. It is, thus, of utmost importance that countries without an indexation rule in place follow the adjustments principles enshrined in international social security standards which can help maintain the purchasing power of benefits.

A third factor to underline is that narrowly-targeted “safety nets” continue to be given pride-of-place in the repertoire of options proposed by international financial institutions, sometimes as the sweetener to the bitter pill of fiscal austerity. There is a significant body of literature analysing whether social protection systems that target benefits to people

with low incomes produce better redistributive outcomes than those grounded in universal approaches. The majority of studies find that levels of inequality are lower in countries with universal approaches.²² One explanation for this outcome, as Bob Deacon would have reminded us, is that more universalistic approaches are better able to mobilize support from the general public across all income levels and that, as a result, social protection budgets are larger in countries with universal approaches. Furthermore, targeted schemes that seek to reach the poorest, especially when proxy means testing is used, can produce significant exclusions while increasing the opacity and complexity of procedures and creating additional barriers that beneficiaries have to navigate. Moving from strictly targeted, means-tested benefits to categorical or universal schemes also reduces administrative costs.

Having said this, it would be misleading to assume that there was no place for means-tested schemes within a broader universal system. In countries where universality is the norm, means-tested social assistance schemes play a secondary residual role (as is the case in many high-income countries) to support individuals who, for some reason, fall through the cracks. In practice, this requires that the social protection system is legally anchored and public authorities take responsibility for their administration, including by ensuring that those who are eligible for the benefits have a right to receive them when needed by making the financial resources available and by establishing effective complaints and redress mechanisms. This is a far cry from temporary safety nets that are neither safe nor rights-based, providing unpredictable benefits to a sub-set of the population, while leaving many other vulnerable groups without coverage.

Last, but certainly not least, ILO calculations show that to achieve at least a social protection floor, developing countries would need to invest an additional 3.8 percent of their GDP on average in their national social protection systems. The additional investment needed is much higher in the case of low-income countries (15.9 percent of their GDP) (Durán-Valverde et al., 2020). This means that countries need to proactively mobilize resources to build and strengthen their social protection systems – using a mix of taxes and social security contributions that are equitable and fair. This needs to be placed in its proper context, however. Today, more than 50 developing countries are experiencing severe debt problems, through no fault of their own. Twenty-five countries paid more than 20 percent of government revenue in servicing external debt last year. As a recent Oxfam report put it, “for the IMF, even if the cause of a country’s bankruptcy is international, the solutions are primarily to be found nationally – in austerity” (Oxfam, 2023). Is the multilateral system

²² For a review of the issues around targeting and universalism see Razavi, Behrendt, Nesterenko, Orton, Bista, Chaves, Schwarzer, Stern-Plaza and Wodsak (2022).

able to move beyond this kind of methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) to find global solutions to global problems?

There are big questions about the agility of the multilateral system to rise to the challenge of deteriorating financial and socio-economic conditions in many countries. Despite strong advocacy from the highest level of the UN, with the United Nations Secretary-General referring to the “morally bankrupt global financial system”, the performance on the issuance of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), debt restructuring, Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), and the representativeness of international financial institutions (and their accountability to their full membership) has thus far been slow and piecemeal – out of kilter with the magnitude and urgency of the challenges that developing countries are facing. There are glimmers of hope, however.

It is encouraging that the UNSG’s *Financing for Sustainable Development Report* (United Nations, 2023), issued in April 2023 with contributions from a wide range of UN agencies, calls for an urgently needed set of improvements in global development finance, including the need to evolve the scale and mission of public development banks, to scale up and accelerate the channeling of special drawing rights (SDRs) to countries in need, to rewrite international tax norms, especially for taxing digitalized and globalized business and digital assets. A course adjustment is also being called for in the design and ambition of the Common Framework on Debt Treatment. The upshot is that, without a massive scale-up of affordable financing, including long-term affordable financing, many developing countries are at risk of falling into a vicious cycle of weak growth, unsustainable debt, and fiscal austerity which will be both costly and self-defeating.²³

At the same time, a number of UN agencies are coalescing around a common agenda for socioeconomic recovery that is focused on the creation of decent jobs, especially in the care and green economies, universal social protection and just transitions. This new initiative—*The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions*²⁴—brings together the whole of the multilateral system to create an enabling global environment to take us from reacting to crisis upon crisis, to pro-actively anticipating and equitably managing the different transitions that are pending – environmental, social and economic.

One of its key enablers is to improve coherence between policy and financing priorities of countries. To support this, work under the Global Accelerator will include the development of detailed financing frameworks. These frameworks will include domestic and external funding streams, allowing countries to meet the high level of ambition for their reforms in

²³ See also Gallagher and Kozul-Wright (2022).

²⁴ <https://www.unglobalaccelerator.org/>

real-time, while at the same time bringing closer together the real economy and the global financial architecture, essentially countering austerity and seeking to engage the IFIs and enlist their support for delivering on the promises of the SDGs.

I think Bob Deacon would have been at least curious, if not excited, about these incipient developments.

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