One Hundred Years of Social Protection

The Changing Social Question in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa

Edited by
Lutz Leisering

**Global Dynamics
of Social Policy**
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Global Dynamics of Social Policy

About the Series

The intervention of states in fields such as health, social security and work, dates back to the nineteenth century, and became more dynamic over time. Imperial Prussia, a social policy pioneer, first showcased its progress at the Paris World Fair in 1900: the Prussian exhibit drew large crowds eager to find out more about state pensions. Clearly, social policy had become a matter of great interest to states and citizens alike.

Other nations soon embarked on implementing discrete social policies, thus turning the twentieth century into a time of remarkable welfare state expansion. The end of World War II marked a new departure, as an increasing number of countries outside the Western hemisphere began to introduce social policy measures. States not only copied established forms of welfare, but often developed measures sui-generis to meet their specific needs. While episodes of policy retrenchment and ruptures can be observed over time, recent developments point to an expansion of social policies in low-to-upper-middle-income countries of the Global South. Social policy has thus become a global phenomenon.

It is generally accepted that the state is responsible for welfare and that domestic politics and ideas have been a primary driver of its expansion. However, in an increasingly interconnected world, social policy is implemented at the national-level but influenced by international developments and relations. It is shaped by trade, migration, war, and colonialism. Just as people travel, policy ideas follow. These factors merit scholarly attention and demand interdisciplinary collaboration to generate new insights into the global dimension of social policy.

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The series is published in memory of Stephan Leibfried to whom our research on state and social policy at the CRC is indebted in countless ways.

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Lutz Leisering
Editor

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ZiF

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Citizens of Western and Northern Europe and some Commonwealth countries tend to take the idea of the welfare state for granted, as an essential part of a good society. In global politics, declarations and campaigns of international organisations abound with terms like "social rights", "inclusiveness", and "universal social protection", suggesting that the world is about to become a welfare state. However, the situation in the Global South and many other countries is very different, and it is an open question if substantial public welfare will ever become a principle of a global society.

The future of public welfare institutions in the world is likely to be shaped by non-Western countries. However, we do not know in what ways: will Western ideas and models spread or will indigenous concepts of the "social" create new institutional pathways? Will social issues be subordinated to other societal concerns and other ways of integrating societies, such as economic growth, nationalism, or religion? In short, we do not know to what degree and in what ways the "social question" will matter in the world to come. Social protection by itself is not a "sexy" subject, but a range of old and new global challenges—such as climate change, pandemics, migration, and precarious work—are demonstrating the need for livelihood protection all around the world. While we do not know the future, we can ascertain how the Global South has addressed social issues in the past. This is the subject of this volume, which derives

from the Research Group "Understanding Southern Welfare", which I convened together with Ulrike Davy, a colleague from the law department of my university, at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) at Bielefeld University, Northern Germany.

The volume starts with the assumption that Southern countries have their own social policy histories, external influences from foreign powers notwithstanding, and that these histories are under-researched. We need to know more about these histories—the agents, their ideas, interests, activities, and structural constraints—to "understand" Southern welfare. The volume delves into the national histories of social protections since their beginnings around 1920. When we applied for funding, we said that we would start in the 1940s, but during our research, we realised that we would need to go back to the 1920s.

To understand Southern welfare policies and avoid Eurocentrism, we give domestic actors a voice by analysing contemporary political documents. In theoretical terms, we have developed a new approach to analysing social protection, which focuses not just on welfare programmes or outcomes, but on the fundamental ideas and concepts that underlie social protection policies, as articulated by Southern actors. We assume that welfare programmes are only the visible surface; they are underpinned, less visibly, by a range of ideas—values, beliefs, perceptions, and images relating to social problems, welfare institutions, statehood, and society. The Research Group, therefore, sought to investigate the ideational foundations of Southern social protection. This kind of research has not been done before.

I owe the idea of an ideational approach to my teacher Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, the doyen of the German sociology of social policy, who, despite his age, attended a preparatory conference. Kaufmann is one of the few thinkers who has developed a genuinely sociological theory of the welfare state in the institutionalist Weberian tradition, which contrasts with the dominant political economy tradition rooted in Marxism. Kaufmann's concept of the welfare state as a cultural phenomenon has inspired me. Focusing the Group's analysis on ideas was a daring undertaking, and I am happy that the members of the Research Group not only could relate to this approach but also took it up in their research. I was not sure if the approach would work out, especially since the volume is

not about the role of ideas in selected social reforms or selected periods of time (which would be interesting enough), but about ideas in the evolution of social protection over 100 years. I hope that the readers of this volume will see the yields of an ideational and pluralist approach to studying social protection.

When planning the Research Group, we decided not to choose area specialists from Western countries as group members (and contributors to this volume), but to recruit colleagues from the countries under investigation or scholars who have roots in them. This approach was demanding—we experienced difficulties finding appropriate researchers from these countries.

One reason for the renewed interest in Southern welfare programmes is the rise, since the 2000s, of so-called social cash transfer programmes for the poor in most countries in the Global South. These programmes provide a modicum of social protection to large sections of Southern populations who had previously been excluded. In an earlier research project, FLOOR, I undertook a comprehensive study of social cash transfers, including the construction of a dataset that covers all Southern countries (see www.floorcash.org). Ulrike Davy and Benjamin Davy (the latter from TU Dortmund University) had led the law group and the land policy group, respectively, in FLOOR. After FLOOR, we felt the need to investigate select countries in greater depth. This led us to the idea of case studies focused on middle-income countries since they might shape the global future of public welfare. The literature has analysed middle-income countries mostly in economic terms—as "emerging markets" or liable to a "middle-income trap"—or in political terms—as new democracies or authoritarian regimes—but much less in regard to public welfare policies. We chose Brazil, India, China, and South Africa because they represent different continents, political regimes, paths of economic growth, and cultures.

This volume is not the result of just one conference. Rather, the contributors mostly worked together as members of the Research Group "Understanding Southern Welfare" over five years, beginning with preparatory conferences 2014–2016, continuing as fellows in residence at the ZiF (March to July 2018), and concluding with a final conference in 2019. The ZiF provided both the venue and funds for our conferences

and the research in residence. Ulrike Davy and I had written the funding application together with Benjamin Davy. Unfortunately, Ben had to drop out in 2017 for reasons beyond his control.

The Research Group had two subgroups: the law group led by Ulrike Davy and the social science group led by me and from which this volume flows. The social science group included sociologists, political scientists, global and comparative historians, and a political economist. Originally, there was a third group, the land group, which we had to disband when Benjamin Davy left, but the issue of land kept cropping up in the research process. Gabriel Ondetti and Sony Pellissery switched from the land group to the social science group. Gabriel's contribution to the volume focuses on land issues, and Sony has published separately on land issues (see footnote).

I am indebted to the fellows in the law group. We learnt a great deal from the legal approach to social policy, including the emphasis on constitutions, courts, and human rights. The law fellows included Albert Chen Hun-yee (University of Hong Kong), Octavio Luiz Motta Ferraz (Kings College, London), Letlhokwa George Mpedi (University of Johannesburg), Sarbani Sen (O.P. Jindal Global University, New Delhi), and Ulrike Davy as convenor.

The ZiF is Germany's first Institute for Advanced Study, founded in 1968, and provides a wonderfully secluded space for scholarship (https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(en)/ZiF/index.html). The Institute is situated at the edge of a forest, in a purpose-built building with a modernist 1960s' architecture, and includes apartments for the fellows and their families. The ZiF provides a broad range of services that make scholars' stays as productive and pleasant as possible.

Research groups at the ZiF are interdisciplinary, and this Research Group was also very international. For me and the fellows, it was a most rewarding experience of scholarly exchange and learning—social science is truly global. I am grateful to the fellows—the contributors to this volume—for engaging in this common experience. The ties between the fellows are leading to further scholarly cooperation.

The Research Group was very active. During the residence period, we had a weekly *Jour Fixe*, which included discussions on pertinent publications, guest lectures, and presentations by the fellows. We also invited

external scholars from abroad to our preparatory conferences and workshops, as well as colleagues from other research centres at Bielefeld University, such as the Center for InterAmerican Studies and the Institute for World Society Studies. Fellows gave lectures at the University. The Research Group also made a trip to the Federal Social Court in Kassel, Germany. At the ZiF, we also had exchanges with another research group that investigated global labour markets.

The Research Group organised a series of conferences and workshops, which included invited external speakers, whom we thank for their contributions, which supported the Group's work: Workshop "Understanding Southern Welfare—the B(R)ICS Countries", convened by Ulrike Davy, Lutz Leisering, and Benjamin Davy, 24–26 November 2014 (external speakers: Sandra Liebenberg, South Africa; Niraja Gopal Jayal, India; Marcus André Melo, Brazil; Yitu Yang, China; André van der Walt and Sue-Mari Viljoen, South Africa; Augusto Zimmermann, Brazil; and James Midgley, USA); Workshop "Social policies in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Southern Welfare", convened by Ulrike Davy, Lutz Leisering, and Benjamin Davy, 23–25 November 2015 (external speakers: Marcus André Melo, Brazil; Shitong Qiao, Hong Kong; Andries du Toit, South Africa; and Vivek Nenmini Dileep, India); Workshop "Towards Understanding Southern Welfare: Preparatory Workshop for the ZiF Research Group", convened by Ulrike Davy, Lutz Leisering, and Benjamin Davy, 5–7 December 2016 (external speaker: Prerna Singh, USA/India); Seminar (law group) "Social Policies in Brazil, India, China and South Africa, Past and Present—Perspectives from Law", convened by Ulrike Davy, Albert Chen, Octavio Ferraz, Letlhokwa George Mpedi, and Sarbani Sen, 3–4 April 2018 (external speaker with a social science background: Frances Lund, South Africa); Workshop (social science group) "Hundred Years of Social Security in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa—the Rise of Social Ideas and Policies, 1920–2020", convened by Lutz Leisering, 12–13 July 2018; Workshop (law group) "Social Rights and Values in Middle-Income Countries—Brazil, India, China, and South Africa in Comparison", 16–17 July 2018; Closing Conference of the Zif Research Group "Understanding Southern Welfare—Social Policies in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa", convened by Ulrike Davy and Lutz Leisering,

11–12 July 2019 (external speakers: Kinglun Ngok, China; Ravi Ahuja, Germany; Leila Patel, South Africa; Sonia Fleury, Brazil; Sarah Cook, Australia; Eberhard Eichenhofer, Germany; and Göran Therborn, UK); Workshop (social science group) "Social Policy in Low and Middle-Income Countries: Perspectives of Comparative Research", convened by Lutz Leisering, 13 July 2019. Maria Virginia Lorena Ossio Bustillos coordinated all events.

The chapters in this volume are all original, except for the chapter on India (Chap. 5) by Ravi Ahuja, who joined the group at a late stage and contributed a revised and shortened version of an earlier article. In addition to this volume, the fellows of the social science subgroup of the Research Group have also produced a number of articles,[1] and the law group is editing their own volume.

Large-scale research endeavours incur many debts. First of all, I thank the ZiF and its staff for enabling this Research Group and providing a tremendously supportive environment for the fellows. The staff was extremely committed to serving the needs of the fellows, and the Centre's financial and non-financial support was generous and unbureaucratic. I particularly thank Nesrin Ak, Thomas Balls-Thies, Daniela Brinkmann, Hans-Jürgen Brinkmann, Andreas Hellwig-Sellin, Marina Hoffmann, Mary Kastner, Britta Padberg, Katharina Peters, Marc Schalenberg, Claudia Schumacher and her team, Claudia Schunck, Mo Tschache, Trixi Valentin, and others at the ZiF.

I am also deeply indebted to Maria Virginia Lorena Ossio Bustillos, who served as coordinator of the Research Group. Lorena contributed to the Group's work both as a scholar, providing her legal expertise and Latin American experience to the Group, and as an impeccable Group

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organiser who was unceasing in her engagement. She also provided invaluable efforts furthering the social relationships within the Group and with the ZiF staff.

I also thank Benjamin Davy, who has been an inspiration due to his creative, non-mainstream thinking. He also forged links with colleagues from land-use studies and provided insight into land as a crucial dimension of social welfare that no longer figures in the collective memory of European social policy but plays a major role in Southern countries.

I also thank Prerna Singh, who attended a preparatory conference. Although she could not join the Research Group for personal reasons, her sharp insights were important to the Group's work. I also thank Johannes Schmidt and André Kieserling from the Luhmann project at my university for tracing quotes by Niklas Luhmann in Luhmann's vast writings.

I also thank Cansu Erdoğan and Timotheus Brunotte, who acted as efficient and committed editorial assistants. My former secretary Else Lück also supported the work, as did Tobias Böger and Kerem Öktem. I am also indebted to my wife Maria, who hopes that this is the last book I did.

I thank Aad Blok, Executive Editor of the International Review of Social History, for allowing me to use a revised and shortened version of an article by Ravi Ahuja for this volume.

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Bielefeld, Germany   Lutz Leisering
May 2020

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Lena Lavinas is Professor of Welfare Economics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Institute of Economics. She is a member of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. As of late, she has been working on the impact of financialized capitalism on welfare regimes. Her topics of interest include healthcare and the links between private and public provision, the financialization of college education, the prevalence of monetary transfers over provisions in kind and the collateralization of social policy. She wrote the book *The Takeover of Social Policy by Financialization. The Brazilian Paradox* (Palgrave 2017). Journals in which her articles have appeared include the *New Left Review*, *Development and Change*, *Latin American Perspective*, *New Political Economy*, and the *International Social Security Review*.

Lutz Leisering is Professor Emeritus of Social Policy in the Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany, and founding member of the Institute for World Society Studies. He holds a PhD (econ.) from the London School of Economics, and Diploma (MPhil) in sociology from Bielefeld University and in mathematics from Bonn University. He has done research on social policy in Europe and the Global South, especially on old-age security, social assistance, international organizations, and the global diffusion of ideas. His articles have appeared in leading social policy and sociology journals, including *Journal of Social Policy*, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *Global Social Policy*, and *Journal of International Relations and Development*. He has published monographs with Cambridge University Press (1999) and Oxford University Press (2019, *The Global Rise of Social Cash Transfers*) and has edited a five-volume work on German social policy (Springer 2013). He is a national and international policy adviser and member of the Executive Board of HelpAge Germany.

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Sony Pellissery is a professor and Director of the Institute of Public Policy, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru. He is a public policy specialist with special interest in distributive justice across a broad range of issues. After his doctoral degree from Oxford University, he served as an associate professor at the Institute of Rural Management, Anand. In 2009 he won the India Social Science Research award for his academic contributions. His monograph *The Politics of Social Protection in Rural India* (2009) investigates the limits of policies to reach the poorest sections where social forces constrain the state. His articles have appeared, among others, in *Journal of Social Policy*, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, *Gender and Development*, *Journal of Social Quality*, and *Social Policy and Society*.

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Marianne S. Ulriksen is an associate professor at the University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Department of Political Science and Public Management, and the Danish Centre for Welfare Studies (DaWS). She is affiliated to the Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA), University of Johannesburg, as a senior research fellow. Ulriksen's research areas include comparative politics, political economy of welfare policy development, social protection, social justice, poverty and inequality, resource mobilization and taxation, and state-citizens relations. Her research work focuses on Southern and Eastern Africa. Her articles have appeared in top journals like *World Development*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Global Social Policy*, *Development Policy Review*, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, and *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*.

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Part I

Introduction

1

Social Protection in the Global South: An Ideational and Historical Approach

Lutz Leisering

Towards a New Approach to Analysing Social Policy in the Global South[1]

The centres of gravity in the world are shifting. Some of the countries formerly referred to as developing or Third World countries are emerging as global players in terms of their share of the global economy, world population, and international political power. These shifts are changing the face of global society in many ways. As regards social welfare, we[2] cannot simply expect that the Northern concept of the "welfare state" will "travel" to the Global South. Gough and Therborn (2010: 711) posit

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[1] I thank Sony Pellissery, Jeremy Seekings, Marianne Ulriksen, and Timotheus Brunotte for comments on an earlier draft. I am also indebted to Tobias Böger and Shih-Jiunn Shi for advice. Timotheus Brunotte helped to collect the data on the four countries.

[2] "We" in the introduction refers to views discussed and shared by the contributors of the volume, whereas "I" refers to the author's views and arguments.

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that the "developmental paths of European welfare states are not likely to be repeated" elsewhere. Some writers even question the possible spread of formal social protection programmes in the South on cultural grounds (Rieger and Leibfried 2004; Walker and Wong 1996). The global future of public welfare will be shaped by the Global South. At present, the majority of the population in the South lack formal social protection. What ideas and institutional models of public welfare are developing in the Global South?

"If we want to know where to go, we have to know where we came from" (Kaufmann 2012: 1). Accordingly, this volume investigates the evolution of social protection ideas and policies in four key middle-income countries—Brazil, China, India, and South Africa—from the 1920s to the present day. We seek to trace the formative ideas and models that have inspired key actors in these four countries and defined institutional paths in order to "understand" Southern welfare. We begin with the early twentieth century, because, as we argue, the history of social policy in the South had already started before World War II (Midgley 1984: 1). In all four countries, intellectuals debated the use of social insurance as a "modern" kind of social welfare as early as the 1920s, and the first social legislation was passed.

The post-war welfare state in Europe was part of the rise of "democratic welfare capitalism"—the mixed or "hyphenated society" (Marshall 1981a). Today, these countries spend 20–35 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on monetary transfers and social services. In the Global South, other developments prevailed during those decades, such as struggles for political and/or economic independence, decolonialisation, nation-building, and "development". State-provided social protection mostly took a back seat, and state social spending has continued to be low through the present day, making up regional averages of 5–13 per cent of GDP with outliers around 2 and 20 per cent. Only selected groups were covered. However, since the late 1990s, social protection policy has moved higher up on the agendas of many Southern governments and international development organisations. Social cash transfers to the poor mushroomed in the South in the 2000s and 2010s and provided a modicum of social protection to sections of the population that had previously been excluded. Brazil, China, and South Africa

all pioneered social cash transfer programmes (Barrientos 2013; Leisering 2019), and the Indian Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has also received much attention in the global development community.

These recent developments have been much discussed in global political and scholarly arenas, but the early history of social policy in the Global South is only beginning to be researched—unlike the evolution of the Northern welfare state, which scholars have comprehensively analysed both in empirical and theoretical terms (comparative studies include Rimlinger 1971; Flora and Heidenheimer 1981; Alber 1982; Lindert 2004a, b). A whole continent of early social policy in the Global South awaits discovery.

This volume contributes to the filling of three research gaps by adopting a *historical, ideational, and source-based approach*.

First, although research on formal social protection programmes and policies in the South has cropped up since the mid-2000s, this literature has a *presentist* bias, focusing on changes since the 1990s and even more on changes since the 2000s, when "social protection"—a term which tends to supersede the older term "social security"—became a new paradigm for development policy (Holzmann et al. 2003). The global social policy literature barely takes notice of the small but growing body of research on Southern social policy during colonial and early post-colonial times.[3] Similarly, in the historical memory of Southern societies and general historical studies of the South, social policy does not normally figure in a major way. To understand and explain Southern welfare policies, therefore, this volume pursues a *historical* approach that traces the development of social protection ideas and policies in the four middle-income countries back to the 1920s.

The historical perspective implies attention to timing, critical junctures, founding moments, and historical "paths" (Mahoney and Thelen 2015). Lustick (1996) warns against a possible bias created when social

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[3] However, see Midgley and Piachaud (2011), Seekings (2007a, b, 2011, 2013, 2016), Lewis and Lloyd-Sherlock (2009), Lindner (2014), Hu and Manning (2010), and Schmitt et al. (2015) (the latter two on the global history of social insurance), Schmitt (2015) on colonies, Collier and Messick (1975) on the historical sequences of social security adoption worldwide, Hort and Kuhnle (2000) on adoption sequences in Southeast Asia. See also the pioneering study by Midgley (1984).

scientists draw selectively on extant historiographical studies. Social scientists have to be careful, especially if there is a rich and long tradition of historiographical studies in the field under investigation rather than an undisputed "historical record" (Lustick 1996: 615). However, in the field of social protection, such tradition is absent, and the contributors to this volume themselves act as historians. In fact, two of the contributors are historians (Hu and Ahuja), and the author of two other chapters (Seekings) has a record of primary source-based historical studies.

Historical and comparative small n research (i.e. with few cases) has "played a central role in driving the agenda of research on welfare states" (Amenta and Hicks 2010: 118) and seems promising also for the South. Concentrating on a few cases enables in-depth primary research, and the comparative and historical perspectives may also contribute to theorising social policy by revealing the varieties of social policies. Even in research on the Global North, comparative qualitative historical studies are rare, especially comprehensive studies of welfare states rather than particular programmes (Rimlinger 1971, Pinker 1979, de Swaan 1988, Kaufmann 2013a; partially quantitative: Flora and Alber 1981).

Second, in the Weberian tradition, this volume focuses on the *ideas* that underpin social policies. While most policy studies centre on the interests of and struggles between actors, such as political parties, business, and workers, and analyse, for example, corporatism, cross-class alliances, political settlements (for the Global South, see Lavers and Hickey 2016), and political alignments (Haggard and Kaufman 2008), we examine the ideas that underlie social policies and, from a constructivist point of view, even co-define interests. By "ideas" we not only and not even primarily mean broad ideologies and values, such as liberalism, social democracy, or social justice, but complex, multi-layered configurations of ideas that encompass broad ideas as well as more specific normative and cognitive ideas: beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, theories, and images relating to welfare institutions, social problems, statehood, and visions of society. In the Introduction, I develop a multi-layered model of social ideas—the "onion skin model"—which has the *social question* as the pivot. Raising the "social question" means that a society recognises social issues in a generalised way as a key concern of society to be addressed by

the state, linked to a call for political remedies. The underlying assumption is that the state is responsible for individual welfare.

By focusing on ideas, the volume also seeks to contribute to a *theory* of "social policy in development contexts" (UNRISD 2001; Gough et al. 2004), which is a desideratum (for a call for theory, see, e.g. Surender 2013: 29). Most studies on global social policy are reports by or for international organisations or case studies, and/or have a descriptive character and practical concerns or are interspersed with advocacy.

This introduction tackles the theorisation of Southern welfare in four steps (next four sections): (a) I start by sketching out a methodological framework, a constructivist sociology of knowledge approach, which brings in ideas in a constitutive way akin to constructivist and discursive institutionalism. The next three steps relate to substantive theorisation. (b) I discuss four basic strategies for theorising Southern welfare, and I opt for starting from Northern welfare state theories to be modified for a globally applicable theory. (c) I draw on the rich tradition of explanatory theories of Northern welfare state development and specify modifications. (d) Eventually, I develop a new, multi-layered model of social ideas, visualised as an onion with layers—therefore called the "onion skin model". The model combines elements from the (small) tradition of ideational welfare state theories.

Third, the volume goes back to historical *sources*, that is, to original documents like parliamentary records and manifestos that reflect the views of contemporary actors. The idea is to give a voice to domestic elites and social movements, rather than imposing preconceived concepts from Northern welfare state research on Southern societies. This volume's authors come from the countries under investigation or have roots in them, which helps the authors to read and contextualise contemporary documents. Such contributions are significant because systematic recourse to documents is not widespread in the social policy literature.

We assume that over the last hundred years, social policy, by and large, has expanded in many Southern countries and, sometimes linked, gained prominence on the agendas of international organisations. We seek to trace and partially explain this process in our four countries. Our general *research question* is: What changes in ideas among elites and the citizenry

underpinned—or inhibited—the rise of social protection policies? When did basic "social" categories and terms like "social problems" and "social security" emerge? What contestations accompanied the evolution of social protection? More specifically we inquire:

- Was a "social question" raised, that is, did social issues become a key concern for state and society? How was the social question posed, that is, what was defined as the overarching problem that social policy should tackle?
- What other concerns, like independence, nation-building, or economic development, competed with, eclipsed, or propelled the social question?
- What institutional models of social protection were advanced?
- What notions of the state prevailed in public discourses?
- Did external ideas—from other countries or international organisations—impact domestic policies?

The concluding chapter of the volume discusses the findings of the country-centric chapters in comparative and theoretical terms.

We chose Brazil, China, India, and South Africa because in all four countries public welfare programmes have expanded since the 1990s (Tillin and Duckett 2017; India the least), and they cover all non-European continents except Australia and the Pacific. The history of the four countries includes democratic, semi-democratic, and authoritarian regimes. Surprisingly, scholars have rarely analysed social policy in the four countries comparatively, and not with a focus on ideas or from a historical perspective. Tillin and Duckett (2017) focus on politics, OECD (2010), Rodgers (2013), and Fakier and Ehmke (2014) on employment-related issues, and practical concerns for "extending social security" drove the study by the International Social Security Association (ISSA 2013). This volume is closest to Midgley and Piachaud (2013) who focus on institutions (of social protection). Their volume provides valuable descriptions of the institutional arrangements for social protection in the four countries, including broad contexts and history. They do not take the spread of social protection for granted (Piachaud and Midgley 2013: 276f.) and address the challenge of aligning welfare goals with

economic and other goals (Midgley 2013: 17–20). They also address ideas, via policy goals. While all this has an affinity to the approach taken in our volume, Midgley and Piachaud's research is not conceived as a source-based and theory-driven study of ideas.

The volume by Breman et al. (2019a) addresses the social question in selected countries from all world regions, including our four countries, but is primarily concerned with objective socio-economic conditions rather than the ways that politics and society articulated these conditions as the social question. The focus is on labour issues and class actors. In this Marxist approach, ideas only figure in broad terms as class-related ideologies, especially neoliberalism and social democracy. Breman et al. (2019b: 245, 249) diagnose a recent global "return of the social question" which, however, as they argue, powerful global actors currently seek to limit and prevent.

Why *social protection*? In Global North countries, social protection is the key focus of the welfare state and accounts for the bulk of social spending: income maintenance and health are the biggest items. Almost everyone is covered, and social protection has increasingly shaped people's lives in these countries. But in many countries of the Global South, social protection is thin.

We chose the term "social protection" for the title of this volume because there is not one overarching term that was used throughout the last hundred years and in all countries, and, furthermore, "social protection" has come to complement or even replace the term social security in international debates since around the year 2000. "Social security" is the older term, but was not used throughout the world and past either. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the original champion of the concept of "social security", switched to using "social protection" in the second edition of its "World Social Protection Report" (ILO 2017). Not using the term "social security" in our title also avoids references to US usage, which is largely restricted to old-age security.

The meaning of the term "social security" varies between authors, as does the meaning of "social protection". "Social protection" often covers (contributory) social insurance, non-contributory provisions and allowances, social assistance, and labour rights, whereas authors tend to more narrowly define "social security" as mainly social insurance and social

assistance. "Social security" is a term with a considerable history, encapsulating much of the history of social policy (Petersen and Béland 2014: 298). If and how the term "social security" emerged and how it was defined is part of the studies presented in this volume. In the concluding chapter of this volume, I will discuss the term and idea of social security in greater detail. The volume focuses on what nowadays is mostly viewed as "social security"; labour rights that relate to the workplace and to collective action are mostly excluded. Health is included regarding entitlements to medical services, through social insurance, but not regarding the provision of services.

The Introduction focuses on theorising, in four steps as explained above (next four sections). After the theoretical sections, there is a section that provides basic data on the history, the international context, and the socio-economic condition of the four countries. The Introduction concludes with a section that summarises the volume's chapters.

Ideas: A Constructivist Sociology of Knowledge Approach

"Interests (material and ideal), not ideas, directly determine people's actions. But: the 'world views' created by 'ideas' have, like a switchboard operator, often set the future course according to which the dynamics of interests have conditioned action" (Max Weber, translated by Ryan DeLaney; in Lepsius 2017: 23).[4] In this famous quote, Max Weber identifies interests and ideas as the key forces of social action but places a special emphasis on ideas. Ideas provide legitimacy for interests and mobilise people. Yet more fundamentally, ideas may even co-constitute—shape, define, and redefine—interests in the first place. In this sense, the contributions to this volume do not aim to provide histories of ideas as such. Rather, they are about ideas that matter in politics and how they matter.

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[4] German original: "Interessen (materielle und ideelle), nicht: Ideen, beherrschen unmittelbar das Handeln der Menschen. Aber: die ‚Weltbilder', welche durch ‚Ideen' geschaffen wurden, haben sehr oft als Weichensteller die Bahnen bestimmt, in denen die Dynamik der Interessen das Handeln fortbewegte" (Weber 1978: 252).

To grasp the impact of ideas, an in-depth analysis of ideas is required. Lepsius (2017: 23–25, 33), a major Weber scholar, writes on Weber:

> "His body of work is pervaded with the effort to analyze the intertwining of interests and ideas … ideas need to be unfolded in their cognitive structure in order to recognize the relevance for action contained within the ideas' characteristics… . Only when this is done can their actual importance for the actions of individuals and collectives and for institutionalization processes be identified. As long as ideas are described in general terms and their internal structure is not determined, their consequences for social action also cannot be exactly specified, and social behavior cannot be attributed to them… . this agenda does not imply an idealistic philosophy of history… . the focus here is on the empirically demonstrable attribution of social phenomena to cultural elements… . Interests and ideas … describe two analytical perspectives … [that] must be viewed in their complementarity."

Accordingly, our theoretical aim is to model the cognitive structure of the ideas that constitute the field of social policy. To this end, I have developed a multi-layered ideational model, the "onion skin model", which is reflected in the chapters of this volume.

References to ideas are common in the Northern *welfare state literature*, especially normative approaches that define social policy through values such as equality, solidarity, social justice, or security. Political economy approaches also take into account ideas by distinguishing class-based ideologies—liberalism, conservatism, social democracy—that are viewed as characterising different welfare regimes with social democracy as the hallmark of fully fledged welfare statism (Esping-Andersen 1990). In comparative empirical research, these ideologies figure as the doctrines of the political parties in power. Values and ideologies obviously matter in social policy development, but it is more specific ideas that shape policies and the problems addressed by them. In the research on developed welfare states, the social construction of the problems addressed is mostly taken for granted and left unexplored like the definition of the social risks that social protection programmes address (explicitly so, e.g. by Baldwin 1990: 12, FN 10). However, in a historical analysis of the rise of social policy, we need to trace when and how such categories were constructed in the first place.

The ideational or discursive turn in *policy analysis* has also drawn attention to ideas[5] but mostly refers to ideas in particular policy processes, like explaining the introduction of a certain welfare programme, rather than to the ideational foundations of social policy in the history of a country. However, we can use Hall's (1993) concepts of "policy paradigms" and "paradigm shifts" to detect more far-reaching ideational changes in policies. *Development economics* is more interested in issues of finance and policy implementation than in ideas. When ideas are systematically addressed, this is done by way of normative theory, which discusses, for example, how poverty should be defined and social justice be conceived and what financial allocation is optimal (e.g. Barrientos 2013), rather than investigating the ideas held by actors. However, social policy is not only about financial flows, redistribution, and administration but also about ideas and social recognition (Kaufmann 2012: 251, 255–256; 2015: 12–18).

Our analysis of ideas is based on five assumptions.

First, ideas matter for social policy. Ideas may imbue actors with a purpose beyond simple considerations of utility and material interests. "Whenever affective orientations can be collectively mobilised towards certain ideas, as recently happened with regard to peace and environmental concerns or female emancipation, there is a chance for new, powerful elements of normative culture" (Kaufmann 1991: 23; transl. L.L.).

Second, whereas recent ideational approaches in policy research mostly take ideas as a distinct factor besides other factors (Fischer 2003; overview von Gliszczynski 2015: ch. 1), exerting influence only under certain circumstances of, for example, instability and crisis (Blyth 2002; Béland 2009; Campbell 2002), we adopt a *constructivist* sociology of knowledge approach based on the assumption that ideas and knowledge pervade politics and thereby co-constitute interests, institutions, and policies (Nullmeier 2003). The challenge, therefore, is to analyse how contemporary actors constructed interests, institutions, and policies. The constructivist perspective also helps us avoid Eurocentrism.

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[5] Ideational approaches to policy research emerged in the North in the 1990s. For a discussion, see von Gliszczynski (2015: 8–13), for proponents see V.A. Schmidt (2008, "discursive institutionalism") and Béland (2009). Early proponents include Heclo (1974, see especially 305–306) and Hall (1993).

Third, from the perspective of interpretive sociology, we emphasise that ideas are subject to *interpretations* by actors, with interpretations varying across time and space. In this way, we extend the constructivist approach to apply to ideas. For example, basic ideas like human rights, "development", "inclusion", and "poverty" can be interpreted in very different ways, leading to different policies.

Fourth, the focus on "ideas" is not only about the broad ideologies and values that are at the forefront of social policy debates but also about more *specific* normative and cognitive categories that constitute policy-making and institution building. Substantial social policy is predicated on the emergence of specific "social" categories or "social knowledge" in politics and society (Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1996). Pereira and Bertholini (2017), for example, find that the belief in "social inclusion" cuts across political ideologies in post-1988 Brazil. The historical rise of social protection relies on the formation of "social" concepts that relate to social problems, such as poverty or disability, to ideational models of welfare programmes like "social security" or "social insurance", or to statehood. Epistemic communities, political parties, and social policy communities may entrench the emerging social categories in policymaking. We can conceptualise the influx of "social" concepts and categories as a "socialisation" of politics (Leisering 2019: 325f.). Socialisation may include the rise of new ideas and actors as well as a social specification of older and more general ideas (like Christian thought or Confucianism) and actors.

Fifth, the ideas articulated early on in a country's development may create a *path* for future development. This is why ideas matter beyond single policy acts and why a historical-ideational approach can help us to understand present-day social policy. Ideas—especially how the "social question" is articulated early on—shape institution building in the field of public welfare (Kaufmann 2013a: 32f.). For instance, defining the social question as the workers' question is likely to lead to the introduction of employment-based contributory social insurance programmes as the mainstay of a country's social protection arrangement as it did in nineteenth-century Germany under Bismarck. Through epistemic and policy communities that operate as the bearers of ideas, social ideas may acquire a degree of relative autonomy and independent dynamics.

Path-dependent development does not mean determination, but, instead, indicates the social costs of changing an institutional path. A path may be transformed, for example, by a new interpretation of the idea that defines the path, such as the idea of "social insurance".

All in all, our approach incorporates elements from historical, discursive, and constructivist institutionalism (Peters 2012; for historical institutionalism in social policy research see Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1996).

There is a vast literature that focuses on causes and effects of welfare states, but only a few scholars have investigated the nature of the welfare state as an ideational and cultural project.[6] The ideational and cultural strand of welfare state research is part of the pluralist Weberian-Durkheimian tradition, which conceives of social policy as a response to broad processes of modernisation rather than merely a response to capitalism, as assumed in the Marxist and political economy traditions (see the analysis of theoretical approaches by Alber 1982: 73–88 and Pinker 1971: ch. 1). From a pluralist angle, a broad range of ideas beyond class-based ideologies come into view. The pluralist tradition represents an almost-forgotten, mostly sociological approach to the study of the welfare state and has been eclipsed by political economy approaches. The ideational approach in this volume builds on the pluralist strand of research.

Assuming that the spread of public welfare is predicated on far-reaching changes in collective mindsets, the pluralist authors take a historical approach to welfare state analysis. Thomas Humphrey Marshall (1950) analyses the rise of the idea and institutions of equality in the wake of state-building, focusing on social rights and their societal requisites, which includes a "welfare consciousness" among citizens and elites (Marshall 1981b: 89) and the formation of social professions. Although Marshall is the most frequently quoted theorist of the welfare state, it is

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[6] For the UK, see Marshall (1950, 1981a, b) and Pinker (1979); for the United States, see Janowitz (1976) and Heclo (1995); for the Netherlands, de Swaan (1988) and van Kersbergen (1995); for Germany, Kaufmann (1991, 1997, 2013a, 2012), Nullmeier (2000), Zacher (2013), and Achinger (1979, first published 1958); for India, see Singh (2015a, b); and for social anthropology and Southeast Asia, see von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann (1994). Lessenich (2003) and Béland and Petersen (2014) explore basic concepts of the welfare state and of social policy, respectively. John W. Meyer's (2009) neo-institutionalist theory of world society posits the existence of a "world culture" that took off in the 1940s and includes ideas of social progress, a growing awareness of social problems, and statehood.

rarely acknowledged that his work follows a constructivist methodology, which differs from mainstream research (see the reconstruction in Leisering 2019: 51–56).

Abram de Swaan (1988) analyses the rise of a "social conscience" in Western societies and related new configurations of knowledge among citizens and elites, such as professionalisation and the "proto-professionalisation" of the citizens. Franz-Xaver Kaufmann (2015) conceives of the welfare state as a demanding and historically unlikely "cultural idea"[7] imbued with national "intellectual traditions", even "autonomous cosmologies… It begins with the terms that are used and the associations they bear, carries over into different fundamental notions about the relationship between state and society, and culminates in different social policy ideals and the articulation of the problems these entail" (Kaufmann 2013a: 33).

In this cultural sense, Kaufmann (2013c: 31) classifies the United States as "capitalism" rather than a "welfare state". Robert Pinker (1979) argues that the notions of social obligations among citizens precede the notion of rights and do not necessarily support state-provided welfare. It is the "subtle interplay of loyalties which characterize people's notions of welfare obligation and entitlement" (Pinker 1979: 10), and allegiance to the state is only one of several nested socio-spatial loyalties, which include family, local community, and international community.

Strategies for Theorising Southern Welfare

Studies on formal social security in the South are relatively recent. Well into the 1990s, development scholars equated "social security" in the South with informal relationships between kin and within small communities (e.g. Lachenmann 1997). The bulk of the research on state-led welfare was case studies, often of a descriptive nature (however, see Midgley 1984 and von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann

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[7] For cultural theories of social policy, see also Pfau-Effinger (2005, 2009), Ullrich (2003), and van Oorschot et al. (2008). For religious roots see van Kersbergen (1995), van Kersbergen and Manow (2009), and Rieger and Leibfried (2004) on Confucianism.

1994). Other studies focused on subsistence production as a livelihood (Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Entwicklungssoziologen 1979) or interpreted work in the informal sector of the economy as a "quest for security" (Evers et al. 1983). Anthropological studies of developing countries used to focus on informal relationships and livelihoods rather than new, formal welfare institutions.[8] Macro theories relevant to the study of development—post-colonial theories, cultural studies, theories of economic growth, and theories of global capitalism—help to contextualise social policy but arguably are too broad to explain specific policies and institution building.[9] At the same time, research on Northern welfare states had almost completely neglected countries in the Global South until the 2000s. Pioneering comparative studies include Gough et al. (2004) and Haggard and Kaufman (2008).

What theories, then, are appropriate for analysing "social policy in development contexts"? We can distinguish *four strategies for theory building:* drawing on "old" (extant) theories, designing new ones, adapting old theories to make them applicable to the Global South, and producing a generalised theory that applies to both North and South.

The first strategy would mean simply applying theories and conceptual instruments familiar from research on Northern welfare states to the South—"testing old theories in new surroundings" (Kangas 2012: 73). Generally, moving to a new field of investigation (here: the South) does not necessarily entail constructing new theories. The same factors could be relevant but the values could be different, such as minor industrialisation or a weak role for trade unions. By definition, developing a "theory" is ascertaining general patterns that shed light on diverse cases. Using Northern-based theories, however, might entail a Euro-centric bias that produces a negative perspective on Southern welfare, such as pointing out the "underdevelopment" of social welfare or the absence of ideas about the future among Southern citizens and, therefore, of the idea of social security (for a critique see von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 1994).

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[8] However, see the legal anthropologists von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann (1994)'s early study questioning the distinction between formal and informal welfare.

[9] Yet, see Lavinas (2017 and 2018) who relates the recent rise of social cash transfers to changes in global capitalism, especially the financialisation of social relationships.

The second strategy argues for designing new concepts and theoretical tools from scratch, tailored to development contexts. Yet, it is not plausible that the broad repertoire of concepts and theories on social policy that Northern welfare state research has produced since the 1970s should be entirely irrelevant to the study of formal welfare in the South, since basic institutions, like social insurance and social assistance, are similar, at least formally.

The third strategy occupies an intermediate position between applying old theories and inventing new ones. The idea is to start from "old" concepts from Northern research and strip them of their Northern origins by adapting and re-specifying them in view of Southern conditions, as Gough (2008) explored and Böger and Leisering (2020) implemented in a case study.

The fourth strategy would also start from Northern concepts but, rather than adapting them to the South, would aim at creating a general theory of social policy that covers both North and South—a global theory of social policy. This would mean not surrendering but qualifying the ingrained distinction between the North and South. In a broader sense, Midgley (2017: 201–204) calls for a "one world perspective". A generalised (global) approach would refer to *general* categories of social protection that we can expect to matter in most countries (see von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 1994), such as "social" contingencies (like widowhood or ill-health), related regulations (embedded in social relationships, like family life and community, or under specialised agencies, such as grain stores or hospitals), and collective agents (like family, kin, tribes, and states). Such a conceptual model does not presuppose the specific institutions, ideas, and societal contexts that have characterised the historical (Northern and Western) European experience of welfare statism.[10] We can re-specify this kind of generalised model for either Southern or Northern conditions or, for that matter, to any country under investigation, whether Northern or Southern. This volume pursues the fourth strategy, which I develop in the next sections.

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[10] For a discussion of the pioneers of a generalised North-South theory of social policy (Ian Gough, Jeremy Seekings, and Franz and Kebeet von Benda-Beckmann), see Leisering (2019: 28–32).

Explanatory Theories of Social Policy

The most common approach to analysing social policy in Northern welfare state research is *political economy*, which Esping-Andersen (1990) exemplifies. Students of political economy centre their analysis on the capital and labour divide and conceive of social policy as a response to structural problems in formal labour markets under capitalism, politically driven by class-based actors and the grand, nineteenth-century European ideologies—liberalism, conservatism, and social democracy. The Power Resources Approach, in particular (re-stated by Korpi 2006), focuses on the struggles between employers and the labour movement and related political parties. These theorists define the purpose of social policy as "decommodification", that is, relieving workers from the pressure to sell their labour in the labour market (Esping-Andersen 1990). Social policy creates "forms of existence outside the labour market" (Offe 1984: 94) by which workers can survive if they are unemployed, sick, or old, through unemployment benefit, sick pay, and old-age pensions. Some scholars have applied a political economy approach to the comparative study of Southern countries, for example, classifying Southern welfare regimes using Esping-Andersen's typology of liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare state regimes (e.g. Barrientos 2009).

Yet, key concepts of the classical political economy approach are of limited use in the South. Esping-Andersen's concept of decommodification presupposes wholesale commodification of labour, but labour in the South is predominantly informal, and the division between capital and labour is not as dominant as in the North. In many Southern countries, labour movements look different or play a lesser role than ethnic or religious movements (for India, see Singh 2015a, b). Moreover, the great ideologies of nineteenth-century Europe that define political party lines (liberalism, conservatism, and social democracy) are absent or take on different shapes in the South. The decommodification index (Esping-Andersen 1990) and the similar generosity index (Scruggs 2007), which measure the quality of entitlements to social security benefits, make little sense if Southern politics does not address some of the key risks that the indices cover, or if programmes that cover certain risks exclude the

majority of the population, especially the rural population, migrant workers, or persons in the informal urban labour sector. Moreover, clientelism and clan rule may eclipse formal political institutions and legal entitlements.

Tillin and Duckett (2017), in their theoretical framework for the study of social policy in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa, also qualify the power of explanatory factors common in political economy, such as political parties and ideologies, organised labour, and economic globalisation. Instead they draw attention to domestic political factors like political leaders and policy entrepreneurs, ideas, federalism, courts, and the perceived quality of government.

Nevertheless, political economy approaches in the broader sense, which emphasise the impact of economic structures on politics, have contributed to the study of Southern welfare, especially for middle-income countries (Haggard and Kaufman 2008; Huber and Stephens 2012 for Latin America; Mares and Carnes 2009; Rudra 2007). Rudra (2007) analyses varieties of decommodification in the South, while Mares and Carnes (2009) examine the impact of authoritarian governments. Haggard and Kaufman (2008) highlight "production regimes", "growth models", and "critical realignments" that denote changes in the configuration of power resources. Ulriksen (2012) draws attention to the role of taxation, and Lavinas (2017, 2018) emphasises the impact of the financialisation of global capitalism on domestic welfare politics. Gough's global approach builds on Esping-Andersen's concept of "welfare regime" but generalises the concept by stripping it of political economy features (Wood and Gough 2006; Abu Sharkh and Gough 2010).

Including, but going beyond political economy, Northern research has produced a comprehensive explanatory model of the emergence and expansion of the Northern welfare states—the *orthodox model* (Gough 2008: 5; for early integrated models see Gough 1979, Flora and Alber 1981, Alber 1982, Uusitalo 1984, and Huber et al. 1993). The orthodox model summarises and integrates the explanatory factors used in the literature, even though few authors make full use of all factors. According to the comprehensive model, three main groups of factors account for welfare state development:

- Industrialisation, urbanisation, and other socio-economic changes (for short: *Industrialisation*), which create social problems but also supply the means to tackle them. The earliest studies focused on these factors, often referred to as the "logic of industrialisation" approach.
- The political mobilisation of interests (for short: *Interests*) like labour movements, conservative elites, and left-wing political parties, which determine if and how social problems actually elicit responses.
- The structure of political institutions (for short: *Institutions*), above all democracy, federalism, electoral systems, and the separation of powers, which channel the articulation of interests.

This is the "Three Is" model, which includes the components: Industrialisation, Interests, and Institutions.

In a seminal, but rarely exploited meta-theoretical article, Gough (2008) discusses the need for revising the orthodox explanatory model in view of developmental contexts in the Global South. For each of the three groups of factors—Industrialisation, Interests, and Institutions—Gough discusses the potential differences between the North and South, and he adds two more groups of factors, namely Ideas and International Influences, which we can expect to particularly matter in the South. This results in a model with five groups of factors that Gough terms the "Five Is" (Fig. 1.1).

The Five-Is model illustrates the complex multi-causality of social policy (for an application of Gough's model to social pensions see Böger and Leisering 2020). The breadth of the groups of factors and the factors within each group may seem unsatisfactory because the model does not offer a simple answer to the question of what drives welfare state development. This is a key message of the Five-Is model: grand theories that centre on one key factor like global capitalism or post-colonialism—"primacy theories" (Luhmann 1997: 571; transl. L.L.)—are of little avail when attempting to explain social policy (Alber 1982: 201). Instead, a "combination of structural factors, interest-based mobilisation, political institutions, and policy discourses has determined patterns of social policy development… Social policy… [is]… embedded in structural, political, and institutional contexts" (Gough 2008: 63). The Five-Is model
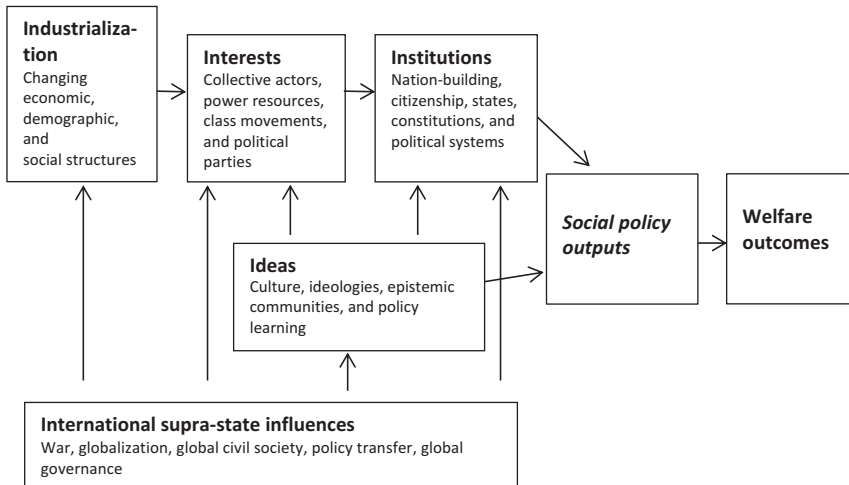
Fig. 1.1 A simple model of social policymaking (the "Five Is"). (*Source*: Gough 2008: 44)

implies that a range of demanding requisites must be met in order for a comprehensive social policy arrangement to emerge.

This volume focuses on the ideational requisites (Ideas), in interaction with the other four Is. I argue that ideas are no less relevant than socio-economic power relationships (Interests) and political regimes (Institutions) and that ideas co-constitute the other "Is", following a constructivist methodology. A recent example of the way that ideas co-constitute interests is the emergence of new, individualised theories of economic development and the agency of the poor during the 1990s (von Gliszczynski 2015; von Gliszczynski and Leisering 2016). The new concepts make an economic case for social cash transfers to the poor by identifying the poor as agents of development and economic growth and conceiving of transfers to the poor as economic investment: "growth through redistribution" (von Gliszczynski 2015: 84–85). Previously, the poor had predominantly been seen as mere victims and as unable to use cash rationally.

The fifth "I", "International Influences", includes ideas. International influences were significant in the history of Northern social policy right

from the beginning in the late nineteenth century but are particularly important in the Global South. When Southern social policy began to emerge, Northern countries had already established welfare states that Southern countries could observe and use as models. As early as the 1920s, some Chinese and Indian intellectuals identified the Northern model of social insurance as an instance of modernity that they could use to overcome the "backwardness" of their own countries, although others were critical of ILO models (Seekings 2008a). Southern policymakers considered diverse Northern programmes as models (for China see Hu 2015, 2016; Leisering et al. 2017) in the light of their scarcity of domestic legal and administrative expertise. Moreover, international organisations engage much more in domestic policies in Southern than Northern countries. In global discourses, social policy principles have been articulated since the "welfare internationalism" of the 1940s (Kaufmann 2012: ch. 4). In particular, the UN has championed human rights, and, since the 1990s, international organisations have increasingly turned to social issues (see Deacon et al. 1997: 3) and influenced domestic social policies worldwide.

When analysing the historical rise of social security policies in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa since the 1920s, we need to treat the Five Is as evolving social forces. The research question then is: have "social" Interests, Institutions, Ideas, and International Influences evolved at all, and, if so, when, based on what ideas, and with what impact.

Conceptualising Social Policy Ideas: A Multi-layered Model[11]

In order to follow Max Weber's ideational methodology depicted above, we need to trace the cognitive structure of ideas that constitute social policies. The model of the ideational structure of social policy that I present in this section differs from common conceptualisations in two respects. First, I use highly *generalised* concepts and categories that do not presuppose any specific social value or norm, in line with the fourth

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[11] This section draws on Leisering (2019: 34–46).
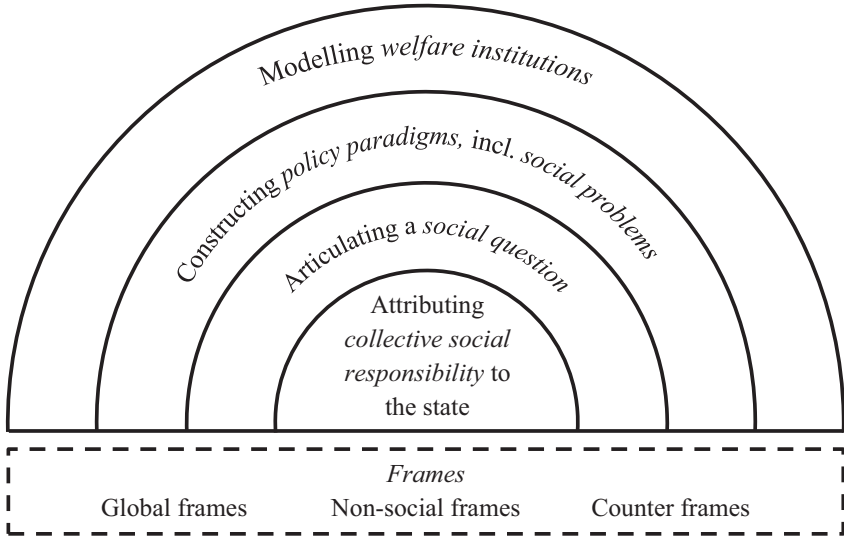
Fig. 1.2 The ideational fabric of social policy—the onion skin model. (*Source*: The author)

strategy for theorising social policy that I described above. Second, rather than naming single, broad ideas, like values or ideologies, I conceive of a complex *multi-layered* fabric of social ideas.[12]

I conceive of four layers, ranging from the concrete to the abstract: models of welfare institutions; policy paradigms, including social problem definitions; social questions; and collective social responsibility. Frames are a fifth, outer layer or a cross-cutting dimension. The model can be visualised as an *onion* with several layers (Fig. 1.2).[13]

The four dimensions highlight the challenges that any country faces when seeking to establish substantial social protection policies and institutions in a sustainable way: devising models for welfare institutions;

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[12] For scattered multi-level ideational approaches to social policy, see Marshall (1981b: 96–98), Ullrich (2003), Pfau-Effinger (2005, 2009), Kaufmann (2015), Hall (1993), Nullmeier (2006: 296f.); for development contexts (and more generally), see von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann (1994: 19–23) and Lavers and Hickey (2016); for global social policy, see von Gliszczynski (2015: 22f.).

[13] For an earlier version, see Leisering (2019: 34).

identifying, selecting, and constructing social conditions as "social problems"; raising a broad "social question" to direct public attention to social issues; and attributing to the state and other collectivities an explicit social responsibility for the well-being of all citizens. The task of empirical analysis is to ascertain if and how each layer is realised in a country. The model leaves open which social problems the state seeks to address and what broader "social question" it articulates, which welfare institutions tackle particular social problems, and what kind of "social" responsibility the state assumes. This allows for diversity between, but also within, the North and South.

The four layers signify four connected but relatively independent dimensions of variation between different countries. Few states establish all four layers completely—these states could be called "welfare states" in a cultural sense. From a comparative perspective, two countries may differ in some layers, while resembling each other in other layers. Moreover, Southern countries may be influenced by general Northern or global ideas (bottom layers), but may set up welfare institutions (top layer) of their own making or even do without institutionalisation (decoupling). This is also true in reverse: countries may receive models for welfare institutions from other countries or international organisations but may place them in a different normative context (social question, policy paradigm) particular to that country.

This multi-layer model is anchored in the tradition of the pluralist, Weberian sociology of the welfare state depicted above. In particular, we can identify all four layers in the work of Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, even if uncombined, and we can even reconstruct the four layers from Thomas Humphrey Marshall's work.[14] The layers also figure separately in the writings of some other authors. We can find the term "responsibility" in the social policy literature (e.g. in Gough et al. 2004: 30), but it is not normally developed as an analytic concept. Girvetz (1968) introduced collective social responsibility as the most abstract layer of the social, which Kaufmann (1997) then took up and explored as the hallmark of the welfare state. The concept of the social question is systematically addressed by Kaufmann (2013a: 32–33), Heclo (1995), Pankoke (1970), and

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[14] See Leisering (2019: 37, FN 13) for Kaufmann, and Leisering (2019: 51–56) for Marshall.

Castel (2003) from a historical perspective, and in global terms by Kreckel (2008), Faist (2009), Breman and van der Linden (2014), and Breman et al. (2019a). The term "policy paradigm" stems from policy analysis (Hall 1993), and the social definition of social problems, which is a part of a policy paradigm, draws on social problems theory (Schetsche 1996). The concept of frames is common in policy analysis and social analysis more generally (van Hulst and Yanow 2016).

Each of the four layers of political commitments has its own political arena, political actors, and ideational logic. The most abstract layer, the assumption of *collective social responsibility*, in particular, refers to states, which continue to be decisive actors in global social policy. UN human rights declarations explicitly address states as the agents in charge of implementing human rights. The concept of the state's collective social responsibility contrasts with clientelism and patrimonialism as modes of governance that do not reflect a universalistic and rights-based sense of welfare responsibility. A commitment to "the social" may be articulated in a country's constitution through "social" clauses and by ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR; UN 1966), and other human rights documents. Constitutional assemblies, courts, legal scholars, politicians, and (sometimes) the citizenry have a hand in these processes. The assumption of collective social responsibility, if it exists, is rooted in the (national) "societal community", which Talcott Parsons (1969: 11–12, 253) sees as "the focus of solidarity or mutual loyalty".

The *social question*, as I defined in the first section, is the pivot of the onion skin model. The social question relates to issues of social cohesion and the integration of society. It asks "how to hold society together amid vast destabilizing change" (Heclo 1995: 675). Similarly, Castel holds that "the 'Social Question' is a fundamental aporia, through which a society experiences the enigma of its own cohesion and tries to forestall the dangers of its disintegration" (2003: xix f.). Social policy is not only about redistribution but also, at least as important but often neglected, about the social recognition of social groups and issues. In a sociological sense, the social question relates to both redistribution and recognition. By expressing social recognition, social policy addresses sociocultural aspects

of societal integration that redistributive policies do not address (Kaufmann 2012: 21–23). The concept of the social question emerged in the 1830s and 1840s in France and Germany (Castel 2003: xx; Kaufmann 2013b: 32). "Poverty, inequality, and social injustice are ancient plagues of humankind. But they emerged as a 'social question' rather late, in a context of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution—the former by putting inequality and human rights on the agenda…, and the latter by producing poverty and misery by wage labor" (Therborn 2019: ix).

The workers' question in nineteenth-century Europe referred to labour rights—the labour question. Labour rights include individual rights, the right to collective action, and the right to monetary support in case of employment-related risks, but the latter moved to centre stage only after World War II, as "social security", which extends beyond employment-related risks. In agrarian societies, the land question is likely to become a significant social question. The three social questions—land, labour, and social risks more generally—may interact or compete with each other. International organisations' global definitions of a social question may also influence domestic social questions. For example, around 2000, poverty became the number one social question in global social politics (Noël 2006; Hulme 2015). A comparative analysis of nationally defined social questions can distinguish welfare states on sociocultural grounds, as an alternative to classifications based on a political economy point of view. For Europe, Kaufmann (2013a, c) distinguishes between the workers' question, which has historically shaped the German welfare state, the poverty question (UK), the family question (France), and the inequality question (Sweden).

The social question may be eclipsed or even counteracted by other societal questions, especially the national question, a concern for economic growth and development, or religion. However, other questions can also support and reinforce the social question, for example, when social protection is viewed as a productive force to promote economic growth or when social policies are designed to strengthen national unity, as under Bismarck in Imperial Germany, 1883–1889, in the wake of German unification in 1871 (for China see Shi 2017).

The other societal questions often act as *frames* of social protection. Social policy by itself mostly enjoys only a limited legitimacy and needs

more powerful normative underpinnings within larger constituencies. References to the collective—economic, political, and social—utility of social policy beyond individual welfare were major drivers of the rise of social policy in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe (Kaufmann 2012: 278–283). Frames in this sense include references to "non-social" issues, especially economic and, more recently, ecological challenges, and transnational principles that international organisations have advanced, above all human rights (which are global frames). The recognition of international organisations and donors as knowledge actors rests on their claims to represent universal, world cultural values and ideas (Meyer 2009: 186). We call frames that compete with or even counteract social policies "counter frames".

A First Glimpse of the Four Countries: Basic Social, Political, and Economic Data

Few studies compare Brazil, India, China, and South Africa in social and cultural (rather than economic) terms, but drawing on scattered literature, we can sketch a first comparative picture of the four countries.

In *economic* terms, all four countries have recently experienced massive growth. The "average annual increase in GDP in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) exceeded 8 per cent in the 2000s, significantly higher than the average of 2.6 per cent in developed countries and the global average of 4.1 per cent over the same period" (ISSA 2013: 13).

While the economic rise of the four countries is widely known, it is less well known that the four countries, except for India, are currently among the leaders in *social protection* in the Global South (see Table 1.1, section "Social protection"). Going back in history, our four countries adopted *social insurance* programmes later than many Northern countries, but they were often earlier adopters (than Northern countries) if related to GDP or demographic ageing at the time of adoption (for the demographic ageing see Lindert 2004a: 218). However, as the country chapters show, the early programmes only applied to small privileged groups and implementation was weak (Midgley 1984: 117). Collier and Messick

Table 1.1 Comparing the four countries: society, state, and social welfare (*Source*: The author)

	Brazil	India	China	South Africa
Society				
Historical global context[a]	Settler society	Colony	Externally induced modernisation [Confucianism]	Settler society
Religion	Catholicism	Hinduism	./.	Protestantism
State				
Independence	1822	1947	Republic (1911–1949); People's Republic (one-party rule)	1910
Political regimes	Alternating military dictatorships and democracies	Colonial rule (British Raj until 1947); democracy and federalism		Racialised democracy (until 1990–1993); democracy
Welfare regime				
Gough[b] (data on 1990, 2000, 2010)	Proto-welfare state	Failing informal security regime (high illiteracy)	Successful informal security regime	Failing informal security regime (high morbidity)
Seekings (2008b, 2013) (data around 2000)	Strongly workerist	Weakly pauperist	Minimalist[c]	Mixed workerist-pauperist
Social protection				
Coverage (2015 for pensions, 2010 for health)[d]	Very high (pensions: 78%; health: 100%)	Very low (pensions: 24%; health: 13%)	Very high (pensions: 100%; health: 97%)	Very high (pensions: 93%; health: 100%)
Inclusiveness of basic income protections (2012/2013)[e]	Maximum inclusiveness (mixed categorical/non-categorical)	Moderate inclusiveness (categorical)	Maximum inclusiveness (non-categorical)	High inclusiveness (categorical)

Pioneering flagship model of social cash transfers (1990s/2000s)[f]	*Bolsa Família* (since 2003; was *Bolsa Escola* [1995 regional and 2001 national]): conditional cash transfers for mothers	[Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005): public employment programme]	Minimum Living Standard Scheme (*Di Bao*, since 1993 regional, 1999 national urban, 2007 rural): general social assistance	Social pensions (1928/1944) and child grants (expanded from 1998 onwards)
World cultural links				
Ratification of ILO Convention 102[g]	2009	Not ratified	Not ratified	Not ratified
Ratification of ICESCR[h]	1992	1979	2001	2015

[a]Therborn (1995: 5–7; after J. Armstrong)

[b]Abu Sharkh and Gough (2010) and Karmann (2017)

[c]Since the 2010s: mixed workerist-pauperist

[d]Öktem (2020). Pension coverage refers to the proportion of people above the legal retirement age who receive old-age pensions (actual coverage). Health coverage refers to the share of the population that has free or insurance-based access to health care services (legal coverage). South Africa: data for 2009/10

[e]Legal coverage of social cash transfers (Leisering 2019; Weible 2016)

[f]Barrientos (2013) and Leisering (2019)

[g]Concerning Minimum Standards of Social Security (adopted 1952, in force 1955). Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO::P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312247 (9 March 2020)

[h]International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN 1966), adopted 1966, in force 1976. Retrieved from https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&clang=_en (9 March 2020)

(1975) distinguish four global waves of first adoptions of social insurance up to 1960: 1883–1891, 1892–1901, 1908–1922, and 1923–1960 (no adoptions between 1901 and 1908). Roughly speaking, adoptions in Europe happened during the first, second, and third periods, making their way from Northern to Southern Europe; adoptions in Latin America and former British colonies occurred in the third (including Brazil and South Africa) and fourth periods; and adoptions in the Middle East and Asia occurred in the fourth period (including China, but excluding Japan, whose adoption took place in the third).

The picture of the overall *welfare regime* in the four countries (Table 1.1, section "Welfare regime") is more variegated and less impressive than the data on social protection in the Table, which only refers to basic income protection and coverage and disregards benefit levels, welfare outcomes, and dimensions like morbidity and literacy. Gough et al. (2004), Abu Sharkh and Gough (2010), and Wood and Gough (2006) generalise Esping-Andersen's concept of "welfare regime" to simply "regime" and distinguish between three global types of regimes: "welfare state regimes" as Esping-Andersen originally conceived of Northern welfare states, "informal security regimes", and "insecurity regimes". The assumption is that security is a meaningful category not only for welfare states ("social security") but also in development contexts (similarly von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 1994), and that informal (non-state) agencies have a bigger share in generating security in developing countries. The studies by Gough, which include Eastern European countries, name around fifteen "proto-welfare state regimes", including Brazil, that are countries bordering on becoming Northern welfare state-like regimes. From 1990 to 2010, the proto-welfare state regimes have been relatively stable (for 2010 see Karmann's 2017 re-analysis and update of Abu Sharkh and Gough's study).

Seekings (2008b, 2012, 2013) applies the nineteenth-century European distinction of policy for workers versus policy for the poor to the Global South, distinguishing between workerist welfare regimes (that rely on employment-based social insurance for formal workers) and pauperist welfare regimes (that rely on poor relief or, later on, on means-tested social assistance programmes, including social pensions) in the early and mid-twentieth century. In addition, Seekings describes

land-based agrarian regimes, and "minimalist" regimes that lack a clear orientation towards either workers or the poor and spend less than average on both. By the end of the twentieth century, Seekings posits a decline in agrarian regimes and a recasting and expansion of pauperist regimes as citizen-based social security regimes, founded on social cash transfers. According to Seekings, our four countries fall into distinct types (see Table 1.1, section "Welfare regime", second line).

The *political regimes* (see Table 1.1, section "State") differ between the four countries, and all four underwent marked changes during the twentieth century. Regarding national independence, only China was formally never dependent, except limited territories.

The four countries differ considerably concerning their historical links to the world society (Table 1.1, section "Society"). India was a colony, while South Africa and Brazil were not simply colonised, but also settled, through waves of immigration by farmers, workers, and slaves. The four countries also represent distinct world religions, which give us a first clue to the country's chances for public social welfare. Roman Catholicism has an affinity for state welfare (as has Islam; Lindert 2004a: 219), whereas Protestantism comes in pro- and anti-welfare state varieties (van Kersbergen and Manow 2009). Confucianism, a *Weltanschauung* rather than a religion, is seen by some as adverse to extended public welfare (Rieger and Leibfried 2004).

All four countries had weak formal links to global "social" norms *(world society links)* after World War II and forged them rather late (Table 1.1, section "World cultural links").

All four countries experienced considerable economic growth over the last hundred years (Fig. 1.3), but India and China stagnated for a very long period of time, 1920 to c. 1980. South Africa was in the lead until 1980, but was surpassed by Brazil thereafter. China skyrocketed in the 2000s, while India like China started to grow in the 1980s, but at a much lower pace. All four countries experienced a massive upturn in the 1990s and 2000s, but growth rates abated in the 2010s.

Over the last three decades, social progress has been massive in all four countries (Table 1.2), but they started from exceedingly low levels regarding life expectancy at birth, literacy, and poverty. India scores lowest, followed by South Africa. By and large, advancement has been
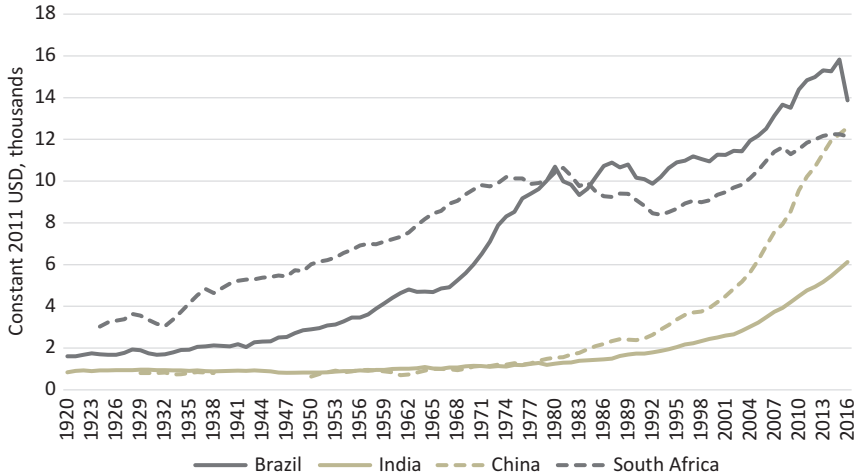
Fig. 1.3   Real GDP per capita in 2011 USD in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa. (*Source*: The author, data from Maddison Project Database, version 2018; Bolt et al. 2018)

continuous, but the curve of life expectancy in South Africa reflects the HIV-created bulge in the 1990s and 2000s. China has caught up and nowadays surpasses the other three countries, while Brazil has fallen behind in relative terms. The figures only give a rough picture, since they were reported by the countries themselves.

Despite economic growth and social betterment, all four countries are riddled with excessive inequality of incomes, with South Africa as the most extreme case (Fig. 1.4). Inequality has increased massively since 1980—the cost of economic growth. All four countries are "large uneven developers" (Frazier 2011: 90). Moreover, the social organisation of labour, especially the vast informal labour and the low participation of women in the labour force, above all in India (Table 1.3), differs sharply from most countries of the Global North. Inequality, informal labour, and the position of women are major challenges and limitations to social policy. The high share of rural workers also raises issues of social protection. Industrial employment has risen in India and China, but deindustrialisation and the rise of the service economy already show in the recent figures, except for India.

Table 1.2 Basic social indicators for Brazil, India, China, and South Africa

Extreme poverty (1.90 USD a day, 2011 purchasing power parity; in percentage of population)

	1993	1996	2005	2011	2014	2016
Brazil	19.9	14.2	8.6	4.7	2.7	3.9
India	45.9	–	38.2[a]	21.2	–	–
China	56.6	41.7	18.5	7.9	1.4	0.5
South Africa	31.7	36.6	26.1	16.5[b]	18.9	–

Literacy (in per cent of people aged 15+)

	1980	1990	2000	2006	2011	2018
Brazil	74.6	–	86.4	89.6	91.4	93.2
India	40.8[c]	48.2[d]	61.0[e]	62.8	69.3	74.4
China	65.5[f]	77.8	90.9	–	95.1[g]	96.8
South Africa	76.2	–	–	88.7[h]	93.1	87.0[i]

Life expectancy at birth

	1965	1975	1985	1995	2005	2017
Brazil	56.6	60.9	64.4	68.3	71.9	75.5
India	44.5	51.0	55.8	60.3	64.5	69.2
China	49.5	63.9	68.5	69.9	73.0	76.5
South Africa	50.3	55.4	60.9	61.6	53.4	63.5

Source: The author, data from World Bank (n.d.), World Development Indicators
[a]2004
[b]2010
[c]1981
[d]1991
[e]2001
[f]1982
[g]2010
[h]2007
[i]2017

In response to the social problems arising from industrialisation, urbanisation, dislocation, and other social processes, all four countries took social policy measures. Social spending is a rough measure of social effort. Differences in social spending between the four countries (Fig. 1.5) roughly correspond to the differences in real per capita GDP between the countries (as shown in Fig. 1.3), with two exceptions. Brazil is a big social spender, much more ahead of South Africa than its real per capita GDP would suggest. This might be partially explained by the share of social insurance in Brazil. The second exception is China, which ranks relatively low in social spending as compared to its high ranking in real per capita GDP. Since China has considerably expanded the coverage of social
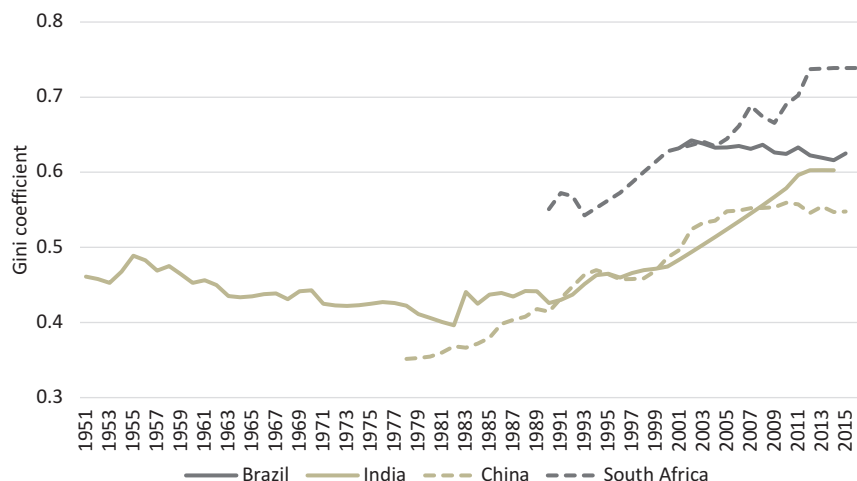
Fig. 1.4 Gini index of income in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa. (*Source*: The author, data from Alvaredo et al. n.d., World Inequality Database)

Table 1.3 Basic labour indicators for Brazil, India, China, and South Africa

Employment in industry (in percentage of total employment)				
	1991	2000	2010	2019
Brazil	23.3	21.9	22.5	19.8
India	15.7	16.3	21.8	25.6
China	21.4	22.5	28.7	28.2
South Africa	28.7	27.3	24.4	22.9
Informal employment (in per cent of total non-agricultural employment)				
	2000	2009	2013	2018
Brazil	–	42.0	37.0	–
India	–	75.3[a]	74.8[b]	80.3
China	–	–	–	–
South Africa	53.8	33.4	32.4	35.2
Female labour force participation (in percentage of the female population aged 15–64)				
	1990	2000	2010	2019
Brazil	44.8	53.9	58.6	60.7
India	31.8	31.9	27.1	24.7
China	79.4	76.8	69.6	68.7
South Africa	45.4	52.4	48.3	53.5

Source: The author, data from ILO (n.d.), ILOSTAT database, estimates
[a]2010
[b]2012
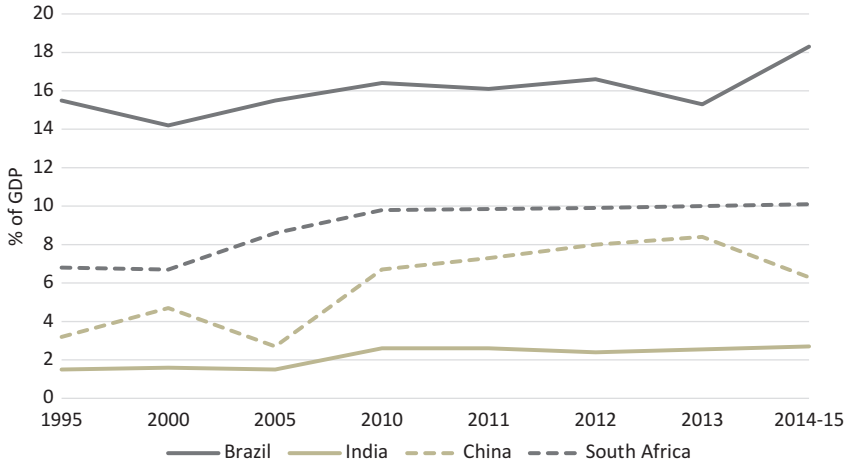
Fig. 1.5   Public social protection expenditure (in % of GDP) in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa. (*Source*: The author, data from ILO 2017: 397–404, Table B.16; for definitions and data sources see ILO 2017: 199–209, Annex II)

protection during the 2000s and early 2010s, low spending might indicate low benefit levels and patchy implementation. India ranks lowest, as on most other accounts. This suggests that there is little political effort to address the widespread poverty and destitution in the country. However, the overall trend in social spending is upwards in all four countries. In China, the increase is not linear, seemingly reflecting the swings in social protection policies analysed in Chap. 3 of this volume.

Social problems abounded in all four countries, and over the last hundred years, the Brazilian and the South African economies increasingly provided resources to tackle them. In India and China, real economic growth started as late as the 1980s. Economic performance relates to the factor bundle "Industrialisation" in Gough's explanatory model of welfare state development, the Five Is model, as outlined above. In 1920, all countries started from a roughly similar low economic level, except South Africa which had a per capita GDP that was double India's and China's per capita GDP (Fig. 1.3). The question is if, when, and how the countries addressed their social problems. Regarding politics and polity (factor bundles "Interests" and "Institutions" in Gough's Five Is model), all

countries were to experience considerable upheaval, including war, civil war, foreign oppression, struggle for independence, revolution, and authoritarian rule, all of which may eclipse—or fuel—"social" concerns. The chapters in this volume bring in the factor bundle "Ideas" (and International Influences) from Gough's Five Is model, conceptualised as a complex configuration, the onion skin model.

The Chapters

The volume has two chapters on each country, except South Africa, for which there are three chapters.

China is the only socialist country among the four countries, at least since 1949. The two chapters on China by Hu Aiqun and Shi Shih-Jiunn (Chaps. 2 and 3) focus on the years 1912–1949 and 1978–2020, the People's Republic of China's reform era. Both chapters address the years 1949–1978, but in less detail, because they have been much researched earlier.

Hu Aiqun argues that the thirty years before 1949 were formative years that provided the foundations for social legislation after 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded and the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan. The decades before 1949 witnessed the public emergence of "social" issues in intellectual debates, bills, acts, and public language, including the concept of "social security". The quest for stability by a society torn apart by economic backwardness, foreign oppression, and social divisions provided the context for the rise of the social question. Chinese elites turned to a range of Western social ideas to "save the nation" in the face of imperialism. Some actors adopted communism, whereas reformist intellectuals espoused organic concepts of society that led to a concern for stability and harmony. In the 1930s, the Nationalist Party in government reinterpreted Confucianism as part of its state ideology to answer the need for stability. During the Sino-Japanese war, Chinese elites were attracted to the contemporary global idea of universal social security, and this fuelled developments in social security. Although Western ideas played an important role, Chinese elites emphasised China's "special situation".

Shi Shih-Jiunn analyses the changing semantics of social policy in China as an indicator of changing policies. He argues that social policy in China was not just socialist in an egalitarian sense but has been subject to considerable swings regarding institutional design, concepts, terms, and frames, and that the swings ensued from the Communist Party's legitimacy problems. These systemic concerns rather than those for individual rights shaped social policy. Accordingly, Shi reconstructs four recent phases of development in China: under socialism (1949–1978) the social question was seen to be resolved in the institutions of socialist production, and social protection programmes centred on urban workers. The reform years after 1978 witnessed the advent of the social question, first through the "socialisation" of social welfare (transferring social responsibility from the state to non-state agencies) and "GDPism" from 1978 to 2000. From 2000 to 2012, the state massively expanded social protection under the flag of "social security", "inclusive growth", and "social management". Since the authoritarian turn in 2012, social protection is understood as "social governance", including using surveillance systems rather than supporting individual rights and civil society activity, in order to achieve national greatness ("Chinese Dream").

The first chapter on *India* by Sony Pellissery (Chap. 4) takes a broad view, covering the last hundred years of social policies against the background of India's history and culture. The second chapter on India by Ravi Ahuja (Chap. 5) focuses more specifically on issues of labour protections in late colonial India.

Sony Pellissery's main argument is that in India the social question has been stifled until the present day. The idea of the state's universalistic concern for the individual welfare of all members of society never materialised. Rather, narrow and particularistic versions of the social question prevailed, which related to scheduled castes and tribes, poverty, and hunger. Caste-based social identity rather than citizenship informed calls for extending social protections. Pellissery names several reasons for this. After independence in 1947, other concerns, especially nation-building and economic development, crowded out the social question. Several visions of society competed with each other (those of Gandhi, Nehru, and Ambedkar), but only Ambedkar's vision reflected a (weak) notion of the social question. The broader background includes traditional

Hinduism, which culturally denies equality and is tangible in the caste system. There has been a strong move towards political and legal equality, but this has been of little avail in the face of vast socio-economic inequality. From the late-twentieth century, social issues have become stronger but mostly in a particularistic and populist vein.

Ravi Ahuja aligns with Pellissery's finding of a weak social question in India. Up to the present day, India has never come even near to institutionalising social protection as a part of citizenship. Through an in-depth analysis of a limited time period, Ahuja draws a variegated picture of social ideas and legislation. Legislation was passed as early as the 1910s, passage continued during the interwar years, and reached a peak from 1946 to 1952, with the Employees' Social Insurance Act of 1948 as its core. The intimations of a social question were limited: it only concerned labour (the labour question) and only formal workers, resulting in "minoritarian labour welfare". Social legislation was generally patchy, applied only to select industries and types of workers, and included many exceptions. Moreover, there was a massive decoupling between legislation and implementation. At the same time, Ahuja also demonstrates that there were repeated calls to extend the coverage of social rights and to turn social rights into a "birthright". However, this "horizon of expectation" never materialised. External ideas from the ILO and the UK made themselves felt but mostly only influenced political language. Ahuja, a labour historian, also argues that the distinction between formal and informal labour was not a given economic distinction but was co-created by social law.

The chapters on South Africa and Brazil relate to settler societies. The three chapters on *South Africa* investigate pre-*apartheid* South Africa (1910–1948), *apartheid* South Africa (1948–1990), and the post-*apartheid* years.

In the chapter on pre-*apartheid* South Africa (Chap. 6), *Jeremy Seekings* finds a remarkable expansion in the state's social protection that started in the 1920s. By 1948, a "nascent welfare state" had emerged, a kind of liberal welfare regime. The contours of the social question became visible with the rise in the usage of comprehensive terms like "social policy" (1934) and "social security" (1942). The social question was racialised throughout this period: the "poor white problem" was the state's key

concern. To secure the whites' morals and behaviours, the social question included concern for deviant behaviours to be addressed through social work and institutional care. Moreover, there was a decoupling between legislation and implementation. Seekings argues that beyond the general racist fabric of South African politics, we need to trace specific ideas and cultural factors to explain the development of social protection policies. South African politics and society developed a range of ideas to justify their models of society and resultant social policies. These ideas were in flux, and pro as well as antisocial policy views were advanced. Afrikaner nationalists were ambivalent about social policy, whereas neo-Calvinists opposed state-provided social protections. Key ideas of the time included the whites' superior "civilisation", which gave rise to a racial hierarchy, and the "native question" that eclipsed (and shaped) the social question, Reformed Protestantism, especially neo-Calvinism, and the quest for modernising society.

Marianne Ulriksen's chapter on *apartheid* South Africa (Chap. 7) shares Seekings' assumption that ideas matter under a racist regime. The "poor white problem" of the pre-*apartheid* period became part of the wider "civilised workers' question", by which the government sought to secure racial purity, framed by the idea of "separate development" for different races. The civilised workers' question reflected the uneasy intersection of race and class in South Africa that gave the labour question a unique nature. There was little change in the design of welfare programmes (old-age pensions) throughout this period. However, the conceptions of racial relationships and collective social responsibility changed. The state's social responsibility was racially graded since the beginning, but in this era, the state further divided it through the creation of separate "homelands" for the non-white population, under the new frame "independent nations". Only towards the end of the period did more universalistic notions of social responsibility emerge under pressure from anti-regime activists and global protests. Ulriksen draws on contemporary documents, as the other contributors do, but she also makes use of qualitative content analysis.

Jeremy Seekings' second chapter, on post-*apartheid* South Africa (Chap. 8), investigates the changes in the social question after 1994. He focuses on the key reformer of the 2000s, Zola Skweyiya, who was Minister of

Social Development from 1999 to 2009. Remarkably, the state did not extend social protections during the 1990s, the advent of democracy notwithstanding. Yet, the 2000s witnessed a substantial expansion under Skweyiya. Seekings argues that the social question was significantly reformulated as an issue of dignity. This reframing went beyond economic developmentalism and labourism, both of which narrowed the social question to the concerns of formal workers. Besides dignity, the social question was also phrased in terms of rights, with the courts assuming an important role in implementing and discussing the social question. Skweyiya embodied a paternalistic conservatism that linked developmentalism with broader social concerns for the poor and the dignity of all citizens. Still, the social question remained limited, providing only partial legitimisation for a welfare state. Although social protections were imagined as universal, practically, they were mainly for formal workers, and social cash transfers were only for groups seen as deserving. Attitudes in South African politics about social issues remained ambivalent, especially those of the members of the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), which remained labourist. The ANC's developmentalism also checked the extension of social protections. The social question was also eclipsed by a concern for political and civil rights rather than social rights. Seekings also demonstrates that social protection ideas and policies cut across the regime change of 1994. Yet, the legacy of *apartheid* also fuelled calls for dignity and universal rights that were conducive to expanding social protection.

Lena Lavinas' chapter (Chap. 9) depicts *Brazil's* rich history of ideas, political actions, legislation, and changes in political regime but also the structural limitations of social protections until the present day. Contributory social insurance began in the 1920s, laying the foundation for later expansion and shaping social protection since. Lavinas identifies five social questions over the past hundred years: people's needs were at the origins of the first massive mobilisation at the turn of the twentieth century; the labour question was at the centre of political struggles from the 1920s, but the land question also lingered from the 1950s onward. The more general social question—social protection for all citizens including the poor—only became significant after 1988, under democracy, when a comprehensive social security system was introduced, with contributory pensions, labour-related benefits, anti-poverty targeted

benefits, and universal health coverage. More recently, the social question has been reframed by claims of inclusiveness. The Citizen Constitution of 1988 played a major role in advancing social legislation. However, the discrepancy between talk and action, legislation and implementation (decoupling), was massive. Brazil underwent several extreme political regime changes; yet social policies have increased under both democracy and dictatorship. Under the first period of dictatorship (Vargas, 1930–1945), social policy was instrumentalised as a means of social control through state-organised labour relations while denying civil rights. During the second period of dictatorship (1964–1985), social protection was modernised. After 1988, social security remained largely underfinanced. The overall arrangement of social protection remains fragmented and selective. The deep social and racial cleavages in Brazilian society remain a major challenge.

Gabriel Ondetti's chapter (Chap. 10) on Brazil is the only chapter in the volume that focuses on the land question or, as it is mostly referred to in Brazil, the "agrarian question". Brazil has one of the most unequal distributions of land in the world, which has been a major factor in politics and society. Ondetti shows that the three big social questions—in historical order: the land question, the labour or workers question, and the broader social question comprising social protection—may exist in parallel, may compete, or may relieve each other. For example, the introduction of rural pensions in 1971 and conditional social cash transfers in the 2000s diverted attention from the land question. Ondetti depicts the broad range of ideas that shaped the social question including doctrines like reformism, communism, labourism, left Catholicism, legal doctrines, and, more recently, environmentalism. Economic interests and ideas could be pro or contra land reform. Legal ideas were the earliest: the lawyer Duguit conceived of a "social function of property" in 1911, which was taken up in political debates later, as were Torres' ideas of 1914 on land reforms. External ideas also mattered: Duguit was French; socially focused European constitutions influenced the constitutions of 1934 and 1946; and the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) shaped left Catholicism. Ondetti depicts the range of instruments used or designed for land policies and concludes that a far-reaching response to the land question—a thorough redistribution of land—never materialised, not even under recent leftist governments.

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Part II

China

2

The Early Rise of Social Security in China: Ideas and Reforms, 1911–1949

Aiqun Hu

Introduction: The Early Rise of Social Ideas and Policies

Republican Era (1911–1949) was a time of upheaval in Chinese history, but it is less well known that it was also the beginning of the rise in ideas and policies on social security. Social security in China is mostly understood as beginning in the post-1949 era, after the Chinese revolution, with the rise of the People's Republic of China and the retreat of the Guomindang (GMD, the Chinese Nationalist Party or Kuomintang) government to Taiwan. This chapter argues that substantial social security ideas and policies had already made their appearance during the Republican years prior to 1949.

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The term "social security" first appeared in the 1935 US Social Security Act. International organisations officially used it in the early 1940s, and it gained wide usage after the Second World War. Social security, a major type of social policy—defined as state actions via legislation and administration to solve social problems—refers to a combination of social insurance and social assistance or any government programmes providing cash and in-kind benefits to those with inadequate income.

In China, "social security" as an imported term emerged in official documents in 1945. Throughout China's long imperial history, Chinese people mainly relied on the family, clan and neighbourhood for their social security needs. China's imperial state, however, provided temporary famine relief (*huangzheng*) after disasters and regular poor relief for individuals labelled as "widowers, widows, orphans, elderly without children, and the infirm (*guangua gudu fei*)"[1]. In the 1900s (the last decade of the Qing rule), the Qing Dynasty set up vagrant workhouses as a new type of poor relief, which soon disintegrated after the fall of the Qing in 1911. The succeeding Republic of China, in its first two chaotic decades under the Beijing government (1911–1927), was able to restore some of the poorhouses and workhouses, as well as issue factory and labour protection laws. In the two decades of GMD rule (1927–1949), the GMD government developed social security ideas and policies, including relief homes and labour insurance in the 1930s, as well as social relief and social insurance in the 1940s.

Historical studies on Republican China were conventionally very critical of the GMD government and attributed its defeat by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to corruption, incompetency, and factionalism (Eastman 1984). Recently, revisionist scholarship has treated the GMD government more favourably, concentrating not only on what it achieved in extremely tough circumstances but also on the significance of its achievements for the succeeding People's Republic (Wakeman and Edmonds 2000). In terms of social welfare broadly defined, however, studies predominantly focus on relief for refugees, victims of famines,

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[1] Elderly men without wives were widowers (*guang*), elderly women without husbands were widows (*gua*), elderly people without sons were *du*, children without fathers were orphans (*gu*), and disabled persons were the infirm (*fei*).

and the poor (MacKinnon 2008; Chen 2012), and they barely pay attention to social insurance and social security (except Hu 2015; Ma 2012, 2014). Some scholars in social sciences have explored the ideational aspects of China's social welfare but treat the ideas as an independent factor (Leung and Nann 1995). In other words, these studies tend to conceive of ideational factors in social policymaking in terms of broad ideas (Hu 2012; Shi 2017; Breman et al. 2019) and neglect more specific ideas, like "social security" or "social questions", and the interactive and formative role of ideas.

The present study attempts to fill this research gap by applying Lutz Leisering's "onion skin model" of social policy ideas (Leisering 2019, chapter 2, 21–63, and chapter 9, 327–330; see also the introduction to this volume). Based on theories of the constructivist sociology of knowledge, this model creatively treats ideas as a multi-layered system that not only interacts with but also co-defines other structural factors. According to this model, social policy ideas consist of four layers plus frames on top of the layers. From the most abstract to the most concrete, each of the four layers is collective social responsibility, social question, social problems, and welfare institutions, and on top of these four layers, there exist "frames" such as "discourses on nation building, development, economy, or world cultural principles, or any other frames" (*ibid.,* 34–35).

According to Leisering, the collective social responsibility layer refers to the state's recognition and assumption of its social responsibility, which is often written in a country's constitution. The social question layer is a generalised recognition of social problems that require state policy remedies. The social problems layer refers to the process of labelling, defining, and theorising social problems and seeking policy remedies. The welfare institutions layer refers to the state's adoption of certain welfare institutions, such as social assistance and social insurance as a response to perceived social problems. Policy frames are broader ideas that can legitimise or negate the adoption of certain social policies (*ibid.,* 327–330).

As an empirical study applying Leisering's ideational model, this chapter reveals that China saw an early rise in social security ideas and institutions in the first half of the twentieth century, which include certain continuities across the 1949 divide between the nationalist and communist regimes. Western imperialism, along with domestic developments,

led to unprecedented social upheavals in China, which provoked Chinese intellectuals and officials alike to constantly seek a way out to "save the nation" (Zanasi 2006; Fung 2010). These Chinese elites turned to Western social ideas, especially sociological knowledge, to identify social problems and seek relevant social policies to tackle these social problems in the early decades of the twentieth century, especially in the interwar era of the 1920s and 1930s. With the breakout of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the above-mentioned trends were strengthened during the war. In the early 1940s, Chinese elites were attracted to the emerging global idea of universal social security, which led to a significant and intensified period of social policy development in China. This had policy significance for post-war social security programmes, mainly in Taiwan, but also in China in the 1950s.

Although Western social ideas played an important role, this study argues that Republican China, especially the GMD state, emphasised collectivistic rather than individualist notions of social problems and social policy that fit the perceived special Chinese situation, which was viewed as a mixture of such factors as an agrarian society, backward production, an unorganised society that could not prevent foreign oppression, and a deep-rooted tradition of Confucianism as well as Western imperialism. Overall, this study contends that in the entire Republican era, especially under the GMD regime, the social question remained strong, but social policy to respond to the social question was treated as a crucial part of state building based on a combination of reinterpreted Confucianism and Western social ideas. Thus, social policy emphasised not only productivism but also social order and harmony, with the ultimate purpose of advancing China's national interests and achieving wealth, power, and glory for China.

It is helpful to trace the evolution of the official terms used to discuss social security in Republican China, as this ideational study is related to the literature on the conceptual history of social policy (Rodgers 1998; Kettunen and Petersen 2011; Kaufmann 2013; Béland and Petersen 2014). In the last decade of the Qing dynasty, the government maintained the imperial poorhouses or *yangji yuan* (nurture-relief homes) for "those unable to work". The government also established *xiyisuo* (workhouses) for vagrants and petty criminals, and a new type of poorhouse,

jiaoyang yuan (teaching-nurture homes), for "unruly people". These workhouses and poorhouses continued to exist under the Beijing government (1911–1927) but in a disintegrated state (Chen 2012). In Republican China in the 1920s, the Beijing government called for "social insurance" in response to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) request, while the CCP-led labour movement demanded for "social insurance" (Hu 2015).

In the first decade of the GMD's rule (1927–1937), a single "relief home" (*jiuji yuan*) incorporated the functions of all sorts of previous poorhouses and workhouses, while "labour insurance" appeared in the 1931 Constitution. In addition, the term "social relief" referred to a broad range of poor relief, labour insurance, and other types of social welfare in the 1930s, while "social insurance" appeared in scholarly discussions in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s, the GMD state used such terms as "social welfare" and "social insurance", while "social security" began to emerge in official usage in 1945. Furthermore, the content of the term "social relief" in the 1940s shrank to refer to social assistance only as "social insurance" became officially recognised. The CCP also used similar terms, such as social relief, labour insurance, social insurance, and labour protection laws in its documents for areas under its control.

This chapter is divided into five parts. Part one introduces pre-Republican China's state relief with a focus on the ideational transition from Confucian benevolence to Western disciplined labour as the baseline for ensuing discussions. Part two analyses the rise of social problems in China and the accompanying Chinese Marxist and non-Marxist concepts, explaining these social problems, mainly in the 1920s. Part three discusses the GMD state's social policy in its first decade (1927–1937), especially poor relief and labour insurance, and argues that the GMD state's social policy, as part of its state-building efforts, emphasised productivist and collectivistic notions of social problems and social policy. Part four focuses on the GMD state's wartime social policy (1937–1945). It argues that the Allied forces' emerging concept of universal social security had a profound impact on the GMD state's social security, but Chinese elites emphasised China's special situation when designing China's social security (both social relief and social insurance) policies.

Part five concerns itself with the institutionalisation of social security in the post-war era and explores the implications of the GMD state's social security on that of the People's Republic. Meanwhile, parts three to five consider the years under GMD rule, including discussions of social security in the CCP-controlled areas. Finally, the conclusion highlights the major findings.

Social Security in Imperial China: From Benevolence to Disciplined Labour

Imperial China, largely a unitary state system for over 2000 years, began to provide emergency famine relief during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE—220 CE) and regular poor relief during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), with the majority of people dependent on their families, kin groups, and neighbourhoods for social security. Some scholars even argued for an earlier origin of state famine relief, for example, one scholar contends that the Zhou rulers (1046–256 BCE) established well-managed granaries for famine relief, and granaries existed even in the Xia Dynasty of the sixteenth century BCE (Wang 2002: 153–154). The reason for the early recognition of state responsibility for providing social relief is closely related to China's long-lasting and deeply rooted Confucianism. Confucianism, together with Daoism and Legalism, took shape during the three centuries proceeding the Qin state's unification of China in 221 BCE. These early intellectual schools focused on restoring the social and political order, as centuries of warfare had caused great suffering, chaos and confusion, following the disintegration of the Western Zhou (1045–771 BCE).

  Confucianism, however, was established as the state ideology during the Han Dynasty in 136 BCE and was restored during the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) as neo-Confucianism, which incorporated many philosophical ideas from Buddhism in the twelfth century. Confucianism thus remained as the state ideology for the rest of Chinese imperial rule and emphasised the value of benevolence (*ren*), benevolent government (*renzheng*), familism, and harmony. In terms of familism, the family was

regarded as a prototype of the state: the family was a mini-state, and the state was an enlarged family. The emperor as the son of heaven was the father of his subjects; thus, the emperor should take care of the well-being of his sons or his subjects (Leung and Nann 1995). Therefore, state relief was regarded as necessary emperor and state benevolence.

In any case, the Han Dynasty established ever-normal granaries (*chang-ping cang*). These granaries not only aimed to stabilise market grain prices at a "normal" level, which led to the term "ever-normal" but also distributed grains to famine victims in times of disaster. By the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907 CE), the state not only inherited the ever-normal granaries but also set up charity granaries (*yi cang*) and community granaries (*she cang*). The government organised charity granaries and collected taxes or donations of grain to redistribute to the poor in times of famine and other disasters, while villages organised and managed community granaries, which collected and distributed grains to the poor for relief purposes. This granary system remained the main state measure for famine and disaster relief throughout imperial history (Will and Wong 1991).

Furthermore, the Chinese imperial state began to provide medical and material relief to the poor during the Tang Dynasty. India-originated Buddhism became so influential that the Tang Dynasty launched a suppression of it in 845 CE and took over the Buddhist medical relief institutions (Cai 2003: 37). These medical relief institutions survived into the succeeding Song Dynasty, which also opened up other types of relief institutions to provide material support to the poor (Wang 2007: 234). The Song poor relief, according to recent scholarship, represented the highest level of development of social policy in Chinese imperial history, surpassing the levels of the succeeding Ming and Qing Dynasties (Sun and Bi 2018; Zhang 2017).

Nonetheless, the succeeding imperial dynasties inherited the poorhouses, which were grouped into four types by the mid-nineteenth century: nurture-relief homes (*yang-ji yuan*), universal-relief halls (*pu-ji tang*), soup kitchens (*zhou chang*), and vagrants' shelters (*qi-liu suo*). The emperors decreed these poorhouses, which local governments then managed. Local revenue financed the nurture-relief homes and admitted those within the local administration's jurisdiction. They provided food,

winter clothes and money to the inmates. Unlike the nurture-relief homes, the universal-relief halls did not have stable financial sources because they relied on government subsidies and private donations and investment. As shown by the name, these halls did not have local residency requirements; they not only provided food, winter clothes, and money but also included soup kitchens and other facilities to provide cold water in the summer and warm ginger soup in the winter (Zhang 2012).

After the mid-nineteenth century, however, the Qing government's famine and poor relief declined, as the Qing dynasty's central financial situation rapidly deteriorated due to both internal crisis and Western imperialism. This situation not only provided an opportunity for non-governmental and non-family-based charities operated by local gentries to play an increasingly important role in social relief in this period (Liang 1997) but also inspired Chinese elites to reform the existing poorhouses based on the "positive" methods used by Western missionaries to manage their charities in China.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Western missionaries operated schools and charities to facilitate their missionary activities in China. The Chinese elites viewed the Westerners' methods for running their charities as "positive" because these charities not only provided material support but also taught children how to read and write and the skills they needed for future employment. The elites thus began to introduce these positive methods to reform the declining poorhouses. For instance, the vagrants' shelters, which originally only provided food, clothing, and medicine, began to provide job training to the inmates. The Shanghai vagrants' shelter was one of the first to do so in 1879. The Tianjin *guangrentang* (a comprehensive charitable institution), which was established in 1878 and followed the model of missionary hospitals, included workshops that required homeless inmates to work (Huang 2011; Wang 2008).

In the 1900s, the above-mentioned trends continued as the Qing government launched new policies, a set of comprehensive political and economic reform measures. Among these reforms was the establishment of handicraft and industrial training centres (*gong-yi ju*) as part of the policy to develop industry, which coincided with Qing Dynasty's penal system reforms, which established workhouses (*xi-yi suo*) based on Japanese

models. While the training centres gradually declined due to lack of funding, workhouses were widely set up for both criminals and vagrants. The first workhouses included the 1904 Tianjian Criminal Workhouse, the 1905 Tianjin Vagrant Workhouse, and the 1906 Beijing Capital Workhouse for both criminals and non-criminals. Meanwhile, new types of poorhouses (*jiaoyang yuan*) were established as reformatories for convicts, and the centuries-old poorhouses, such as universal-relief halls (*pu-ji tang*), were converted into "indoor institutions that required labour in exchange for relief" (Chen 2012: 31).

This shift from the centuries-old state relief system based on Confucian benevolence and Buddhist kindness to Western-style workhouses and poorhouses based on "compulsory labour in exchange for relief" demonstrates the influence of Western social ideas and institutions on China's social relief ideas and institutions.

The Rise of the Social Question: Non-Marxist Versus Marxist Concepts, 1900–1920s

In the early twentieth century, the terms "social problems" and "social policy" emerged in China shortly after the introduction of Western sociology into China, along with socialism and, later, Marxism. By the 1920s, Chinese mainstream intellectuals mainly consisted of returned students, first from Japan, then from Europe, and the USA. Among them were China's early sociologists, who were trained in the classical sociological tradition for which Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), and Emily Durkheim (1858–1917) advocated. Meanwhile, Marxism became very influential following the 1917 Russian Revolution, the 1919 May Fourth movement and the establishment of the CCP in 1921. Thus, the 1920s saw the emergence of both non-Marxist and Marxist concepts of social problems and social questions.

Sociology was first introduced into China in 1895 when Yan Fu described Spencer's sociological studies together with Darwin's theory of evolution in his article *On the Origin of Strength* (*yuan qiang*). In this article, Yan Fu describes how Spencer established sociology as a science of

society, his basic sociological principles, subject-matter, and research methods (Ding 1988: 86–87). In 1903, Yan Fu translated Spencer's most influential book *The Study of Sociology* (1874), the first book with "sociology" in its title. Spencer was the single most influential sociologist in the late nineteenth century; he inherited the conceptions of society and sociology from Comte while adding his evolutionary framework to the new discipline. For Spencer, society was an organic whole, and sociology was "a holistic, naturalistic, and evolutionary science of society" (Breslau 2007: 40). Spencer's evolutionary sociological ideas had a profound impact on Chinese intellectuals and sociologists in the early twentieth century.

Marxism came to China at the turn of the twentieth century, however, in the name of socialism. In the beginning, socialism was often refuted as radical, inhuman, and unsuitable for China and, thus, had little influence in intellectual circles. It was not until after the 1919 May Fourth Movement, and even after the establishment of the CCP in 1921, that Marxism began to become increasingly influential, as a small group of Communist theorists disseminated Marxism, especially Leninism. These early Marxists, like Qu Qiubai and Shi Fuliang, taught at Shanghai University (1923–1927), the only higher institution that taught such courses because it was controlled by the nascent Communists. When teaching, they adopted Marxist books as their major textbooks, such as Bukharin's *Historical Materialism* (1921) and Lenin's *Imperialism* (1917) (Chiang 2001).

In the 1920s, China's mainstream intellectuals, some of whom became GMD party members, and Marxists began to debate China's "social problems". These contemporary writings included the term "social problems" in their titles, and not only discussed "social problems" in general but also analysed specific social problems regarding family, women, vagrancy, poverty, and labour. The debates focused on: what is society? What are social problems? What is or are China's most important social problem or problems? What are the causes of China's social problems? And what are solutions to China's social problems?

Almost all Republican non-Marxist intellectuals accepted the classical sociological idea of "society as a social organism" (Tsin 1997, 1999; Culp 2017). They also viewed "social problems" as a social disease threatening

social order. But Republican intellectuals disagreed on the most important social problems in China and their solutions. That is, in the 1920s, sociologists and many other intellectuals agreed that poverty was the most pressing issue, while Marxists argued that the labour question was the most important, and Nationalist leader Sun Yat-sen focused on the land question as the most fundamental. Mainstream intellectuals, including Nationalist leaders, advocated for social policy while refuting social revolution and class struggle, for which only Marxists advocated.

One of the earliest scholarly books on social problems was written by Tao Menghe, a representative of China's early sociologists, professor, and chair of the Sociology Department of Beijing University in the 1920s. Tao published his 1924 book titled *Social Problems (shehui wenti)* as a textbook for senior high school students. Tao defined a "society" as "an organic collection of individuals" and "social problems" as "the diseases of a society" that hindered humans' collective lives (Tao 1924: 15). Tao criticised Marxist explanations for social problems as relying on a single factor (the economy) and discussed the natural, biological, demographic, psychological, economic and historical factors that cause "social problems". Tao then identified "poverty" as the fundamental and central social problem in China (*ibid.,* 174–175). Tao applied his multi-factor explanation to rank the importance of these factors for contributing to poverty, natural and political were the most important, familial factors were very influential, and only after those factors were under control could economic and labour conditions be addressed, and they were not the only ones. As Tao put it, "if people had the ability to control nature, if political integrity could be achieved, and if new economic organisations could be developed, then economic and labour conditions might be the most important causes of poverty", he continued, "we should not think that they are the only causes for poverty" (*ibid.,* 165). Tao discussed poor relief as temporary solutions and social reforms as fundamental solutions to poverty.

On the other hand, China's early socialists and communists, such as Li Dazhao, Chen Duxiu, Qu Qiubai, and Shi Fuliang argued for Marxist explanations of social problems, which Tao criticised. Shi Fuliang taught a course on Social Problems at Shanghai University. Based on his translated book *Outlines of Social Problems* (1929), we can discern the content

of his course. As he made it clear, his book was a translation of the work of Japanese socialist intellectual Hitoshi Yamakawa (1880–1958), a leader in establishing the Japanese Communist Party in 1922. The book gives a Marxist analysis of the social question, which he regarded as the labour question, a product of capitalism. In the preface, Shi put it directly, "The labour question, which is at the centre of all social problems, is the product of capitalist contradictions. The solution to capitalist contradictions is socialism" (Shi 1929: 2). In this book and his 1930 book on social problems, however, Shi did not particularly discuss China's social problems (Shi 1930).

However, GMD labour leaders and sociologists discussed China's labour question using non-Marxist concepts. Ma Chaojun (1885–1977), who studied political economy at Meiji University in Japan and served as the head of the Labour Bureau of the Nationalist state in 1927, pointed out in his 1926 book *China's Labour Question* that the labour question was the most important social question in the world, but it was not the time for Chinese labourers to fight capitalists yet, as there were not any capitalists in China due to China's inadequate production. Ma criticised those calling for "labourers to rise up to fight capitalists" as being "ignorant of the time and circumstance" (1926: 3). His solution to China's labour question was to provide labour protection measures rather than class struggles as promoted by the communists.

Chen Da, a most accomplished sociologist on China's labour question, expressed similar views in his 1929 *China's Labour Question*; as he put it, "in our country, this (labour) question is simpler than that of the West, but it will become more complicated with the development of China's industry. So it is necessary to study China's labour question without any delay" (Chen 1929: 2). Chen also proposed that developing welfare institutions, such as compulsory insurance, was the fundamental solution to the labour question.

Most of the sociologists and early Marxists, who were still at the stage of absorbing Western ideas, which were industry and urban oriented, did not pay enough attention to the land question as well as related peasant

problems until the 1930s.[2] However, Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the GMD and the Republic of China, insisted that the land question should be China's biggest social question as demonstrated in his lectures on people's livelihood in 1924. In these lectures, Sun refuted Marxism and criticised Marxist class struggle as "inverting causes and effects" and argued that China's social question should be solved by "equalising land rights" and "regulating capital", which meant preventing large landlords from controlling key industries. Sun continued to argue that, because of China's poverty and insufficient industrial production, China should develop its national capital and revive industrial production (Sun 1924, Lectures I and II).

The ruling Beijing government, although unstable and short lived, did respond to these social problems. In 1915, it inherited and continued its support for the Qing Dynasty's workhouses by issuing *Regulations on Vagrant Workhouses* (*youmin xiyisuo*) "to nurture young homeless people and reform juvenile delinquents (aged 8–16 years) so that they have the general knowledge and basic skills to make a living" (Yue 2006: 227–228). For the labour question, the Beijing government, under the pressures of the CCP-led labour movement, the GMD's Southern Regime, and the ILO, issued its Provisional Factory Regulations in 1923 (revised in 1927) and the Factory Inspections Regulations in 1927. The two factory regulations and the factory inspections regulations, however, were not implemented because the GMD government soon replaced the Beijing government (Hu 2015).

The GMD State's Social Policy: State-building, Productivism, and Collectivism, 1927–1937

Upon ascending to power, the GMD state started its state-building process, which claimed to follow Sun Yat-sen's legacy, notably his three peoples' principles and his three-stage process of revolution (from military rule through political tutelage to constitutional government). In 1929,

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[2] However, Mao Zedong, the would-be founder of the People's Republic, was a notable exception and carried out several surveys on peasant issues in the 1920s.

the GMD state claimed to enter the political tutelage stage, in which the GMD had the highest power in the political system and would guide state affairs. By the early 1930s, a five-sector government, or a five-yuan system, was established, following the American model (Myers 2000; Strauss 2000). By 1935, Jiang Jieshi (known in Western countries as Chiang Kai-shek) became the indisputable leader after winning over local warlords, driving the CCP out of its Jiangxi base and defeating his political competitors.

Under the GMD's one-party rule, the dynamic and tolerant political environment of the 1910s and 1920s changed dramatically. The GMD state was explicitly against Marxist class struggle as well as the individualism of capitalist society. It promoted an "inclusivist and co-optive strategy" to incorporate all those who could be co-opted because of the GMD's belief in "the organic unity of the Chinese people" and its fear of open division (Strauss 2000: 90). This strategy was the result of incorporating Confucianism into the party-state's ideology and learning from the West, including fascism. Fascism was only viewed as a way of restoring China: the GMD state was not fascist in nature but an authoritarian and military dictatorship (Wakeman 2000; Clinton 2017; Tsui 2019).

In the field of social policy, the GMD state immediately responded to the social problems widely discussed in the 1920s. To solve the poverty problem, it issued a series of regulations affecting poor relief organisations and private charities, with the dual purposes of providing welfare and social control. By 1935, these regulations consolidated existing poorhouses and workhouses within an administrative jurisdiction into a single relief home and brought private charities under the state's control (Cai 2003: 254–261). In response to the labour question, the GMD state drafted the famous Labour Code Draft in 1929, which did not become law but served as the model for a series of labour protection laws issued in the early 1930s and a labour insurance bill that was not issued because of the breakout of the Second Sino-Japanese war. The GMD state's social policy was outlined in its 1931 Provisional Constitution in chapter four, which covered the "national livelihood" (*guomin shengji*). While the relief homes functioned to some degree—although not always fulfilling their stated purposes—the labour laws basically were never put into practice. This was mainly due to the fact that these laws copied the contents of

Western laws, which surpassed the financial and administrative abilities of the Chinese state. Rhetorically, Sun Yat-sen's three peoples' principles, especially people's livelihood, guided the GMD state's policy for poor relief and labour protection. In reality, the immediate purpose of these policies was to root out communist influence (Ma 1927).

Productivist approaches adopted in 1927 greatly influenced the GMD state's social policy, which had its roots in Sun Yat-sen's people's livelihood principle. In 1924, Sun Yat-sen ultimately "identified an increase in national production as the central solution to the social problem" (Zanasi 2006: 70). The GMD state pursued Sun's productivism to guarantee people's livelihood, which, in turn, reinforced the state's belief in "compulsory labour in exchange for relief". Due to the GMD state's productivism, officials and sociologists alike frequently criticised China's traditional poor relief as passive and as producing paupers. In his 1935 book on China's poverty, Ke Xiangfeng identified that the result of China's traditional relief policy was "a society full of beggars, even professional beggars, and dependent poor" (Ke 1935: 325–326). As a correction to China's traditional relief policy, the GMD state claimed that its poor relief provided active relief through compulsory labour to help recipients become independent and turn them from consumers into producers.

Collectivist notions of society and social problems also influenced the GMD state's social policy. Following the introduction of Spencer's works, Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) was translated into Chinese in 1924 and methodologically defined sociology as an independent and positivist social science. In 1935, in the midst of the GMD state's revitalisation of Confucianism, Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) was translated into Chinese. This book presented Durkheim's main concern for how to maintain social order through "mechanical solidarity" in "primitive societies" and through "organic solidarity" in advanced industrial societies, as well as his concern for the transition from primitive to industrial societies, which, he argued, might lead to major crises and anomie that was pathological to modern society.

Durkheim's two books were well received. According to Sun Benwen, arguably the most important official sociologist in the Republican era, Durkheim's two books were the most important sources of China's

"synthesis school" of sociology, which was very influential in this time period (Sun 1948 [2011]: 270). Sun identified himself with this school in 1948, whereas before he had been well known for his emphasis on cultural factors (*ibid.,* 276–279). It is not difficult to understand why China's official sociologists received Durkheim's works so well. Durkheim's concerns with the transition from a traditional to a modern society agreed with China's situation, as the GMD state engaged in modernising China. In addition, Durkheim's notion of "society as a social organism", which emphasised that society had a common purpose that transcended those of individuals, and it would impose that common purpose on its individual members, fit in squarely with China's Confucianism, which was being revived under GMD rule. Thus, the GMD state could take advantage of this notion to justify the party's authoritative rule over society.

Sociologist Zhu Yisong, one of the leading scholars of the synthesis school, wrote about introductory sociology as well as social problems and social policy. His 1933 *Social Policy* was one of a very few books that discussed China's social policy in the 1930s; although there were several books published with the term "social policy" in their titles, they were either Chinese translations of foreign works or merely introductions of foreign social policies. The notion of a social organism inspired Zhu's book, and he argued that the purpose of social policy was to increase order, peace, and harmony. Zhu's arguments were in agreement with the GMD state's official ideology.

In *Social Policy*, Zhu treated society as a system which had both harmonising and conflicting interests and defined social problems as "problems that have threatened the order, peace, and happiness of society" (1933: 4). He argued for adopting a social policy that could increase the interests of a society or state (labelled as harmonising interests) and decrease the interests of groups or individuals (labelled as conflicting interests). As Zhu put it, social policy's purpose is "to coordinate all sorts of interests so that groups and individuals can realise their interests under a single social system" (*ibid.*, 6). He continued that, "a society thus achieved is a democratic society", and "such a society will be full of happiness, people will be friendly with one another, and such a society will become a closely connected organism, in which there will be no room for a philosophy of hatred" (*ibid.*). Finally, Zhu argued that in such a society

Marxism would naturally lose its attraction for workers, peasants and young people: as he put it, "when the soil becomes unsuitable, Marxists will not harvest anything even if they disseminate the seeds" (*ibid.*).

While the GMD determined to uproot the CCP's influence, the CCP survived in rural areas. However, the communist-controlled Shanghai University closed in 1927, Qu Qiubai, a CCP leader, was executed, and Shi Fuliang was expelled and his translations of Marxism were banned. Nonetheless, the CCP established 15 bases in rural areas from 1928 to 1934. The Soviet Union strongly influenced the policies of the CCP's Central Committee by appointing its leaders. In February 1930, the Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern helped the CCP Central Committee draft five laws on land, labour, economic policy, the red army, and organisation of the Soviets, respectively, which were the basis for the Outline of the Constitution, Land Law, Labour Code, and Resolution on Economic Policies all issued in 1931. These laws attempted to establish a political regime modelled on the Soviet socialist system (Yu 1995: 45–46).

The Labour Code was applied to all workers in all sorts of enterprises, imitating the Soviet Labour Code of the 1920s in all aspects. It stipulated an eight-hour workday, a series of paid public holidays that totalled 175 days per year, a high level of wages and welfare, and a set of comprehensive social insurance benefits (*ibid.*, 90–99). However, implementation of the Labour Code was a failure. By spring 1933, the Labour Code caused the shutdown of many small enterprises and, thus, unemployment of workers, due to the unrealistic benefits mentioned earlier (Zhang and Sun 2011). As a result, half a year later, the CCP issued a revised Labour Code on 15 October 1933, which made it more flexible in terms of working hours and other labour conditions to suit local situations (Yu 1995: 338–356). However, the new Labour Code could not be fully applied because the CCP was driven out of its bases and began the Long March to Northwest China on 16 October 1934.

Wartime Social Policy: Universal Social Security and China's "Special Situation" (1937–1945)

The outbreak of war with Japan did not change the features of the GMD state's social policy, which continued to be part of the nation-building process, embodied collectivist notions of social problems and attempted to promote production. On the other hand, however, the Atlantic powers introduced the idea of universal social security, which greatly attracted Chinese elites in social policymaking, although they continued to emphasise China's special situation.

The war made the refugee issue an unprecedented national crisis, which led to the establishment of the National Relief Commission (NRC) in 1938, an emergency organisation to deal with the refugee crisis. Meanwhile, the war provoked the GMD state to tighten its monitoring of mass mobilisation, and the GMD party consequently established the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1939.

However, in 1940, with the war at a stalemate, the Social Affairs Ministry was transferred to the Executive Yuan, which served as the state council and thus the highest administrative agency. The ministry not only retained its former responsibilities but also took over other social duties from the Interior Ministry, the Industries Ministry, the Economic Ministry, and the NRC. Accordingly, the ministry was made up of three subordinate departments for social welfare, social movements, and cooperative affairs, respectively. The social welfare department included six divisions and one bureau, each of which was, respectively, in charge of social insurance, labour welfare, social services, job centres, social relief, children's welfare, and factory inspections (Qin 1983b, vol. 97: 14–28).

The 1940s were a decade of "welfare internationalism" (Kaufmann 2012, chapter 4, 94–130). The term "social security" began to appear in international documents in the early 1940s. In August 1941, the Atlantic Charter referred to "the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing for all improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security". In 1942, the ILO, at its Montreal office, published *Approaches to Social Security: An International Survey,* which promoted the idea of coordinating and integrating existing

social insurance and means-tested social assistance programmes into a single national scheme, as exemplified by the New Zealand system (ILO 1942). In November 1942, Britain published the Beveridge Report, titled *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, which embodied similar ideas as those of the ILO 1942 Survey. The Beveridge Report proposed a thorough plan for the government to address the five giants identified by the report: want, disease, idleness, ignorance and squalor. What the report proposed was a single national flat-rate social insurance system, which was universal in its population coverage and comprehensive in its covered social risks in order to provide a national minimum safety net via flat-rate benefits and contributions. More importantly, the Beveridge Report committed to three larger objectives, which were full employment, family allowances, and a general revenue-financed National Health Service system free for the entire population.

If the ILO's 1942 survey did not draw immediate attention, the Beveridge Report had an immediate impact on circulating the idea of a universal social security scheme and the post-war ideals advocated for in both the ILO survey and the Beveridge Report. The Beveridge Report became a milestone in the history of the development of the post-war welfare state. As Rodgers commented, "of all the welfare state programs and platforms that were to follow, none was to match its influence or the electricity of its reception" (1998: 489). As a result, the USA passed the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill in 1943 and Canada published its Marsh Plan in 1943. In 1944, India, supported by two ILO experts, considered issuing an Indian Beveridge Plan based on the Adarkar draft of a health insurance programme (Kumar 2003). The ILO further reinforced the ideas embodied in its 1942 survey and the 1942 Beveridge Report at its 1944 Philadelphia Conference, which recognised the ILO's obligation to advance global programmes that would achieve full employment, a basic income, and comprehensive medical care. In terms of social security, the Conference Declaration called for extending social security measures to provide not only a basic income but also a comprehensive medical care to all who were in need (Johnston 1970). China was not exempt from this global trend of emerging universal social security policies, especially under the leadership of the newly consolidated Ministry of Social Affairs

staffed with Euro-American-trained sociologists and other social scientists (Hu and Manning 2010; Hu 2015; Ma 2012, 2014).

The Ministry of Social Affairs began to extensively recruit China's sociologists. Gu Zhenggang, the Social Affairs Minister during the ministry's existence (1939–1949),[3] studied at Berlin University from 1922 to 1925 and returned to China in 1926 as a GMD party member. In 1931, Gu became a Deputy Minister for the Interior Ministry, then the Social Affairs Minister in 1939. Under his leadership, the Social Affairs Ministry appointed sociologists Xie Zhengfu and Zhang Hongjun as the head of the Social Welfare Department from 1942 to 1944 and from 1944 to 1949, respectively.

Furthermore, the ministry invited Chinese sociologists to participate in every step of the ministry's work on social policy formation from the initial policy design through drafting legislation to assessing policy implementation. For instance, many sociologists attended a series of important conferences the ministry held from January 1941 to the end of 1942 (Qin 1983b, vol. 97). In 1942, based on the ministry's suggestions, sociologists from universities in the Chengdu region established a research committee on social relief, and the ministry's Research Office began to edit a book series on social administration written by Chinese sociologists (Ke 1943: 1). By 1944, universities began to add sociology departments and opened courses on social administration and social affairs (Yan 2010: 261–262). The ministry also recruited university graduates and dispatched outstanding ones to study social policy in the USA and Europe.

As a result of the ministry's intensive efforts, the Social Relief Law was promulgated in 1943. Compared with its forerunner—the 1928 Regulations on Local Relief Homes—this law significantly enlarged its target groups and improved the benefit levels, a result of learning from worldwide trends. As the ministry put it in its explanation of the social welfare bill, "according to the implications of the Grand Unity (*Da Tong*) in the *Books of Rites* on relief principles and in reference to various countries' relief administration trends, we have drafted this social relief bill"

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[3] In 1949, the Social Affairs Ministry was abolished and its major responsibilities were incorporated into the Interior Ministry under its Social Affairs Department, and Gu Zhenggang became the Minister of the Interior Ministry in 1950.

(Yue 2006: 236). According to the ministry, the bill adopted four major ideas embodied in worldwide trends. First, it assumed the idea of state responsibility and abandoned former ideas of benevolence and kindness in providing social relief. This means that it is the state's responsibility rather than the state's mercy and grace to provide social relief. Second, accordingly, relief methods should transition from passive, post-event material assistance only to preventive and positive relief to help people become independent, useful instead of useless, and producers instead of consumers. Third, coverage should be extended from "the poor, old and weak, and disabled and sick" (*pinqiong laoruo canji*) to the entire population, including pregnant women, children, the physically disabled, and labourers, as well as citizens in such situations as renting a home, contributing to economic cooperatives, and providing for family consumption. Benefits should cover all types of contingencies. As the ministry put it, "all countries around the world have provided their peoples with all sorts of benefits from birth to death". Fourth, with the expansion of coverage and circumstances, the state should take responsibility and also greatly encourage people and organisations to operate private relief organisations (*ibid.*, 236–238).

The passage of this social relief law also reflected changes in attitudes towards poverty. As early as the turn of the century, eradicating poverty was linked to China's national survival. By the 1920s, Chinese elites largely emphasised the personal flaws of the poor and blamed them for their poverty, and criminalised vagrants and other poor. In the 1930s, sociologists, like Ke Xiangfeng, differentiated "pauperism" from "poverty": pauperism was defined as "dependency on others who were not naturally or legally responsible" for them (1935: 10). This implies that poverty rather than pauperism should be socially supported. It was in the 1940s during the war that intellectuals began to emphasise that "poverty is not a crime", and laziness was not the source of poverty but, instead, social factors, such as the war, caused many diligent and frugal people to experience poverty (Zhou 1944).

From its inception, the ministry recognised the novelty and importance of social insurance in solving social problems that industrialisation created and maintaining social order. It planned to set up a Social Insurance Bureau in the near future. It viewed drafting social insurance

bills as one of its major tasks: for that purpose, it collected and translated a series of social insurance laws from Euro-American countries and the Soviet Union. By 1943, the ministry had already drafted a series of social insurance bills, and a Chinese translation of the Beveridge Report reached the Ministry in 1943, leading to wide-ranging discussions of its major ideas by the ministry's experts and the desire to draft China's own Beveridge plan in 1944 (Ma 2012: 337–344). Although no social insurance laws were enacted during the war, the ministry chose the district of Ziliujin in Northern Sichuan to experiment with social insurance funds for salt miners. In 1943, it had established about ten insurance societies in ten counties, covering around 50,000 workers altogether.

Overall, although "world trends" played an important role in the GMD state's wartime social policy formation, Chinese intellectuals and officials emphasised China's inherent social ideas and China's own situation, as demonstrated by a 1943 GMD Propaganda Department document on wartime social administration. This document first stated that China's inherent ideal society was harmonised, and then it discussed major features of China's social administration as compared to those of Euro-American countries. This shows the GMD state's continued rhetoric reliance on Confucianism while learning from the West.

According to this document, we can summarise the major features of China's social administration as follows. First of all, as the purpose of China's state-building was to realise the three peoples' principles, the party-state needed to train the masses to achieve national independence. Second, while Western countries were industrialised and their living standards were relatively high, China was still primarily agricultural and all socio-economic levels of society suffered from low living standards, especially when China was at war. Therefore, although Western countries' social administration programmes focused on redistribution, China's social administration should aim to improve industrial production. Third, while Western countries had class conflict caused by capital, China had no classes at all. As a result, while Western countries' social policies targeted workers to reduce class conflict, China's social policies needed to target the entire population to prevent the emergence of classes (Qin 1983a, vol. 96: 15–49).

In 1944, in his article "Several Principles of Social Administration from the Last Three Years", the Social Affairs Minister Gu Zhenggang analysed the issue of what kind of social policies China should adopt. In this article, Gu mentioned that China's social administration's biggest task was to solve China's social problems and complete its social reconstruction. Whereas there were three kinds of global social policies—capitalist, socialist, and fascist—he recommended that China should adopt the three peoples' social policy because of China's state ideology, social needs, and social problems. As Gu put it, "we should know that state ideology and social needs are the two conditions that determine the types of social policies of any country. The three peoples' principles are our country's supreme ideology and principles, and our country's social problems have their own nature. Therefore, our social policy must be based on the three peoples' principles" (Qin 1983c, vol. 99: 1–3).

Upon the outbreak of the war, the GMD and CCP formed a second united front, and the CCP abandoned "its policies of armed revolt, sovietisation, and forcible confiscation of landlords' land" (Van Slyke 1967: 92–93). With the war's stalemate in late 1939 and 1940, the united front became fragile due to both military and ideological conflicts. In response, in January 1940, Mao Zedong published his essay "On New Democracy", arguing for the establishment of a new democratic republic that would be a proletarian-led, multi-class coalition regime in transition to a socialist regime (Mao 1940). In other words, the essay emphasised class coordination between national capitalists and the working class as well as a transition to a socialist regime in the future.

Accordingly, in late 1940 and 1941, the CCP promoted a wartime labour policy that abandoned its previous radical labour policy (Central Committee 1985, vol. 3: 42). The *Labour Policy Outline* provided concrete measures for major aspects of labour policy. The *Labour Policy Outline* pointed out that "social insurance should be set up as contingencies for sickness and death"; however, "if there are difficulties in setting up social insurance, regulations on benefits for workers' injuries, accidents, and deaths should be provided" (*ibid.,* 52–54).

During the rectification campaign of 1942 and 1943, the CCP further criticised the radical labour movement as subjective, which "blindly applied the set of measures suitable in industrial urban areas to the

wartime base areas", and was described as "rural, economically backward, repeatedly attacked by enemies, and characteristic of the new democratic economy and politics" (Tang et al. 2002: 537–539). Thus, production, rather than improving workers' livelihoods, was stressed, especially after Mao's 1943 call "to organise up", which led to another round of large-scale production campaigns (Mao 1991: 933).

As a result of implementing the wartime labour policy that emphasised class coordination and increased production, social insurance disappeared in all labour protections and collective contract regulations issued by administrators in major bases from 1941 to 1944 (*ibid.,* 75–119). In contrast, we recall that social insurance was part of the 1930s Labour Code, and, as late as 1940, public enterprises in a major base area offered labour insurance funds to provide benefits to workers' families in the event of sickness, death, or injury (*Xinhua Daily,* 1 May 1941, in *ibid.,* 149). Yet, wartime regulations provided labour compensation rather than social insurance benefits.

Post-war Development: Establishing Social Security Institutions, 1945–1978

In May 1945, at its Sixth National Congress, the GMD adopted its famous four principal social policies, including the National Health Programme, Labour Programme, Agrarian Programme and Preliminary Facilities for a Post-war Social Security Programme (Chinese Ministry of Information 1947). The post-war social security programme was brand new, and the 1942 British Beveridge Report and the ILO's post-war reconstruction plan greatly influenced it. It used the term "social security" in its title and pointed out that, "the main tasks of a postwar social security programme shall be vocational guidance, social insurance, and social relief"; and "social insurance" referred to a comprehensive social insurance programme, its financial sources, and principles for determining benefits (*ibid.,* 52). In 1946, the GMD state approved "Implementing Measures to Establish Preliminary Facilities for a Postwar Social Security Programme", which provided a strategy and specific agenda for setting up

social insurance programmes (Chen 1984: 368). Meanwhile, the 1947 Constitution provided "social security".

In 1946, the GMD government was able to set up a Preparation Department to establish the Central Social Insurance Bureau under the Ministry of Social Affairs. This Preparation Department drafted Principles for Social Insurance Laws (*shehui baoxianfa yuanze*), which was passed by the National government's state conference in 1947 and became the first social insurance law in modern China. The explanation of the 1947 Principles made clear reference to the British National Insurance Act of 1946, and the ILO's publications, such as the ILO's 1942 *Approaches to Social Security*, and many other contemporaneous foreign laws and materials (Nanjing Archives 1947). In 1948, China not only participated in the drafting of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also ratified the declaration, which included social security as a major human right. The GMD took over the workhouses and poorhouses in areas Japan previously occupied. With hyperinflation, the collapse of the economy, and the deterioration of the refugee situation, poverty-related problems became even more challenging, although the GMD state continued to stress positive relief and labour productivity.

On the eve of victory in the Second Sino-Japanese War, the CCP claimed to continue its wartime new democratic labour policy and called for a social insurance programme. As Mao Zedong contended in his 1945 report "On Coalition Government", the government would adopt social insurance, eight- to ten-hour workdays and unemployment relief to protect workers' interests (Mao 1945). As a result, from 1945 to 1948, various bases adopted labour protection regulations that included a section on "labour insurance" or "social insurance" (Zhou et al. 2002: 326–347). As the CCP took over more and more cities from the GMD, they called for a meeting of trade unions from all liberalised areas in 1948, which turned into the Sixth National Labour Conference. Labour insurance for public enterprises became a major issue at the conference because the number of state enterprises had increased. Thus, the Resolution of the Conference states that "places with large concentrations of industrial workers can initiate labour insurance programmes" (All-China Trade Union 1957: 373). Shortly after the Sixth Labour Conference concluded, in December 1948, the Northeast Region adopted a labour

insurance programme, which was based on the Soviet model of social insurance.

In 1949, the People's Republic was officially established in October, and, upon its defeat, the GMD central government retreated to Taiwan in December. Shortly thereafter, in 1950, Taiwan adopted a labour insurance programme at the provincial level, while China adopted its labour insurance model at the national level in 1951. Both labour insurance systems were continuations of the GMD and CCP's pre-1949 efforts to provide social insurance (Hu 2015, 2016). The fate of each system, however, contrasted greatly in the following decades, until the early 1980s when China entered a new era. By 1952, Taiwan's labour insurance programme had rapidly extended to all enterprises with more than ten workers, while in the 1950s separate labour insurance schemes were established for the self-employed, fishermen, and sugar employees. In 1958, all these existing systems were incorporated into a single labour insurance system (Hu 2015). In contrast, China's labour insurance scheme only applied to enterprises with 100 workers or more, and the system's operation deteriorated during the Great Leap (1958–1960) and broke down completely during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976).

In both China and Taiwan, government employees and military servicemen received privileged social benefits either in the form of social insurance as in Taiwan or from the state's budget as in China. By the 1980s, only farmers, housewives, and other unemployed populations were excluded from the existing social insurance system in Taiwan, but in China, a much larger population remained without coverage as "state paternalism" was "practiced on the principle of exclusivity" (Lee 2019: 59). In Taiwan, the 1943 social relief law was in effect until 1980, and, in China, the government provided both emergency and social relief to urban residents.

Furthermore, China implemented a separate social security system for peasants due to the urban-rural divide. This divide materialised as a result of the household registration system that the government developed in the 1950s, which classified the population into rural and urban residents and made it extremely hard for rural residents (peasants) to become urban residents. In the countryside, the state inherited the emergency relief system and set up a system for the *wubaohu* (households similar to the

historical *guangua gudu fei*) in which local rural collectives rather than the government provided them with the basics like food, clothing, and housing. The state provided free public education and organised rural health cooperatives for all rural residents through the local People's Communes (for China's Commune welfare programme, see Dillon 2015). Both systems were globally recognised and highly praised. This rural system has undergone great changes since 1978, when China officially entered the reform and opening-era (Shi, Chap. 3 of this book).

Conclusion: Ideas and Reforms

This chapter analysed the rise of social security ideas and policies in China in the first half of the twentieth century using Leisering's "onion skin model" of social policy ideas (see the summary in Table 2.1). It first discussed China's imperial state relief policies and demonstrated the influence of Western missionaries and Western poor relief on China's relief system from the late nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century. It then analysed the rise of social problems and the social question in China in the 1920s, and the accompanying debates between China's mainstream non-Marxist intellectuals and early Marxists at a time when the political environment remained tolerant before the GMD came to power and suppressed Marxism and liberalism. Parts three to five examined the GMD state's social security policies during its reign from 1928 to 1949 and argued that its social policy was regarded as part of its state-building processes and it adopted collectivistic notions of social problems and social policy that emphasised production rather than redistribution and individual rights. In particular, part four explored the wartime social policy, including the impact of universal social security ideas on the GMD state's social policy. Parts three to five also introduced the CCP's social security policies in the areas that it controlled.

Several ideational points are worth highlighting. First, this chapter revealed that there was an early rise in social security ideas and institutions in China in the first decades of the twentieth century, although these ideas often did not become bills, bills often did not become legislation, and related laws were often not implemented due to China's weak

Table 2.1 Social protection in Republican China: changing ideas and policies

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social question and social ideas	Broader ideational frames and contexts	External ideas and models	Key actors	Policies, legislation and programmes
1911–1927	Fall of the Qing and the Early Republic	Vagrant, poverty, land, and labour questions	Nationalism, liberalism, conservativism, and socialism	Positivist thinking, workhouses (Japan), and social insurance (ILO)	Warlord-dominated governments	Vagrant workhouses (1915), factories (1923, 1927), and factory inspections (1927)
1927–1937	First (Nanjing) decade of GMD rule	Poverty, land, and labour questions	Nation-building, productivism, collectivism, modernisation, and China's inherent ideas	Public assistance (West) and social insurance (ILO)	GMD government (vs. CCP in its rural soviets)	Relief homes (1928), private charities (1930s), a series of labour protection laws (1930s), and factory acts (1933)

1937–1945	The Second Sino-Japanese War	Refugee, labour, and healthcare issues	Nation-building, productivism, and China's inherent ideas in the context of the War	Universal social security (Beveridge Plan)	GMD government (vs. CCP in its controlled areas)	Social relief (1943) and employees' welfare (1943)
1945–1949	Civil war between GMD and CCP	Labour, agrarian, national health, and social security questions	Post-war reconstruction against the backdrop of the Chinese Civil War	The national health insurance policy and post-war social security policy	GMD government (vs. CCP in its controlled areas)	Four principal social policies on workers, peasants, national health, and social security (1945), and principles for social insurance laws (1947)

central state during this turbulent time. The early 1940s, however, began to see intensified social policy development in China, partially due to the great impact of the Allied powers' universal social security ideas on China. The result was the issuance of a series of social security laws and decrees, including the Social Relief Law in 1943, the Employee's Welfare Law in 1943, and the Principles of Social Insurance Laws in 1947. In addition, the GMD party issued the Four Principal Social Policies in 1945, which included the first policy with the term "social security" in its title. This, in turn, paved the way for "social security" to be written into the 1947 Constitution. Unlike most of the laws in previous decades, the two laws on social relief and employees' welfare were not only implemented but also had a significant impact (together with the 1947 Principles) on Taiwan's social security throughout the post-war era.

Second, the above-mentioned two laws from 1943 also had an impact on Communist China's social security policies in the sense that China carried on the enduring tradition of state emergency relief and continued some social relief and employee's welfare practices in the 1950s. It thus partially agreed with the recent literature, arguing there were ideological and practice continuities across the 1949 divide between the GMD and CCP regimes. However, this chapter insisted that the GMD state's social security policy was the direct source of Taiwan's social security programme in the post-war era, whereas Communist China's social security model originated in the areas it controlled before 1949 and emulated the Soviet models as shown by pertinent discussions throughout this chapter.

Third, in Republican China, almost all non-Marxists, who remained the mainstream intellectuals, accepted the organic concept of society promulgated in the classic sociological tradition of Comte, Spencer and Durkheim, which viewed "social problems" as social diseases that threaten the social order. The organic concepts of society led to a concern for stability and harmony in society, and this concern was reinforced under the GMD rule in the 1930s when Confucianism was incorporated into the party-state's ideology. By abandoning Marxist notions of class struggle and radical revolution, as well as suppressing liberal notions of individual rights, the GMD state adopted collectivist notions of social policy, which emphasised economic growth and increasing production.

Fourth, although external ideas played an important role in China's social security policy as discussed earlier, Chinese elites emphasised China's special situation when debating and designing China's social policy. The GMD state recruited many Western-trained sociologists to its social administration as advisors and officials, especially after the Ministry of Social Affairs was established in the 1940s. While these intellectuals and officials paid close attention to global trends, they consistently argued that China's social problems had their own causes and forms, which were different from those of the West, and China had its own state ideology, which was different from foreign ones. Thus, they continued, China should not adopt any existing foreign social policies (neither Soviet, capitalist, nor fascist), but its own social policy based on China's special situation, which was officially labelled as the three peoples' social policy.

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3

Social Security: The Career of a Contested Social Idea in China During the Reform Era, 1978–2020

Shih-Jiunn Shi

Introduction: The Rise of the Idea of "Social Security" in China

In the history of the People's Republic of China, social welfare is a domain that has witnessed dramatic institutional changes. In various phases of economic development, the state established or restructured social security systems in a rather radical way: from the overwhelming state predominance in the socialist period (1949–1978), to the retreat of public responsibility at the beginning of the reform era (1978–2000), and, finally, to the recent return of the state that seems to be successively reclaiming its authority over other societal sectors and organisations. The inconsistency of welfare reform logic from period to period compelled the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to craft delicate ideas to justify each policy change. One prime example is the notion of "social security",

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which did not exist in socialist China until years after the CCP launched its "reform and openness" (*gaige kaifang*) policy in 1978. Initially borrowed from the policy materials of international organisations, "social security" has been gaining recognition in both official documents and domestic academic articles as the way to characterise the state's collective commitment to individual well-being and the corresponding institutional arrangements the state has made to honour this pledge.

The rise of the idea of "social security" in Chinese social policy has received scant scholarly attention. Indeed, most of the studies on this topic take this idea for granted without exploring its conspicuous emergence in the reform era. Even those accounts that reference Chinese culture generally suggest the impact of traditional familialism or community relief on the minimal role of the state but leave the question of why, and in what ways, new social policy ideas sprout unanswered (e.g. Chen 1996; Wong 1998; Twohey 1999). This is surprising given that the instrumental role semantics (or to use a more pejorative term, *propaganda*) has played in the CCP's rule. Since its foundation in 1921, the party has mastered the discursive skills necessary to frame political and social situations in specific ways, as well as to enable mass mobilisation in its favour. Unveiling particular semantic contexts is the key to grasping the development of various policy fields, such as social welfare. The present study seeks to fill this gap by tracing ideational developments in these related fields. I argue that the career of the term "social security" and its variants neatly reflects the *zeitgeist* of social policy of the reform era, especially with respect to the relations of the state to other societal sectors (markets, social organisations, and others). The latter aspect is crucial but also problematic, given the monopolistic nature of CCP's authoritarian rule. The consequence is a trajectory of somewhat elusive, if not contradictory, understandings of "social security" in the reform era.

It is important to note that the chronological sequence of various ideas analysed below by no means presumes a linear evolution or ideational continuity of the "social security" concept, rather the aim is to outline how, and in what ways, pertinent social welfare ideas arise and undergo semantic changes—at times intersecting with or even at odds with one another—in the Chinese context. To some extent, the coexistence of occasionally   inconsistent   ideas   helps   mitigate   the   potential

contradictions that would otherwise undermine the legitimacy of the government's reform efforts. The first section offers a historical background of socialist welfare ideas from 1949 to 1978. The following sections then outline the early idea of welfare "socialisation", the subsequent début of the concept of "social security", and its recent reinterpretation as "social governance". The final section summarises the chapter's findings and reflects on their implications for social policy in contemporary China.

Socialist Welfare Ideas, 1949–1978: Urban Labour Insurance Versus Rural Residual Welfare

When founding the People's Republic in 1949 after the civil war, the CCP laid out a blueprint to build a socialist system that would uphold its ideological supremacy *vis-à-vis* capitalism. In the Cold War era, the Soviet model of urban development with a focus on heavy industry set the precedent for the new Chinese nation to follow and emulate, leading to what Selden (1988: 11) termed "mobilisational collectivism" both in urban and rural regions and, ultimately, class struggle, mass mobilisation, collectivisation of the economy, elimination of market mechanisms, and equal distribution. The state-owned enterprises (SOE) in conjunction with the *danwei* (work unit) system and the people's communes became two distinctive pillars of the Chinese socialist model.

Urban Welfare

Urban welfare rested on SOE welfare programmes. Workers' benefits, including comprehensive, non-contributory, and fully fledged welfare benefits, stemmed entirely from the work units to which workers belonged. Given the vanguard role of workers in socialist ideology, the government established a full employment system (the iron rice bowl),[1] coupled with a comprehensive system of labour-related social benefits

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[1] A Chinese term denoting secure livelihood.

and guaranteed low-price food supply (Dixon 1981; Leung and Nann 1995; Lü and Perry 1997). Urban welfare featured high employment, generous benefits, and low nominal wages. Underpinning the urban system was labour insurance that covered such risks as old age, sickness, work injury, and maternity (in addition to unemployment since 1986). Each SOE was responsible for the financial expense of the insurance programmes for its employees: 3 per cent of total enterprise wages flowed into a collective fund for labour insurance. The trade union in each enterprise organised contribution collection under the umbrella of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which represented party-affiliated worker organisations. In the case of specific SOEs' financial difficulties, the state claimed final responsibility for the SOEs' contribution liabilities using tax revenue. Since all SOEs belonged to the state, management bore little concern for the operation's profits or losses, nor did the enterprise's performance have any impact on employees' welfare benefits.

A central element of urban social policy was labour insurance (*laodong baoxian*): an urban-centred and labour-first idea. The year 1952 saw the promulgation of *Labour Insurance Regulation of the People's Republic of China*, which laid the foundation of the urban welfare programmes. While the term "labour" revealed the employment basis of social welfare programmes and urban workers' privileged access to public benefits *vis-à-vis* other social classes (e.g. rural peasants), "insurance" defined the state's commitment to preventing social risks for this specific group (Dillon 2015). To achieve the goal of industrialising with a focus on heavy industry, the state's monopoly over crop prices in the pricing and marketing of agricultural products transferred rural economic resources to the urban sector.[2] In a time when China remained an underdeveloped economy and peasants made up the majority (80 per cent) of the population, the establishment of labour insurance appeared premature but revealed the CCP's ardent zeal for industrialisation.

One characteristic defining the labour insurance programme in the socialist era was the absence of unemployment insurance because joblessness was considered a pathology of the capitalist economy that would

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[2] Total resources directed in this way is estimated at over 600 billion yuan (Lin et al. 2000: 149).

(and should) not exist in socialism. Indeed, the architecture of the labour insurance programme strengthened the image of the state caring for citizens from the cradle to the grave. The underlying social contract between the state and urban workers assured the former's responsibility for employment security in exchange for the latter's lifelong devotion. The *danwei* became the organisational interface between the state and urban workers, undertaking care-taking responsibilities for their employees. For urban workers, affiliation to the *danwei* entailed economic resources in exchange for labour, political power through rankings in the organisation hierarchy, and symbolic esteem socially (Cheng and Selden 1997; Lü and Perry 1997). By the same token, urban social assistance programmes have remained largely rudimentary because poverty was an unusual incident that only occurred in the case of physical and mental disabilities or loss of family support. Aside from these two rare misfortunes, the labour insurance programme virtually covered all workplace risks and secured the urban livelihood.

Rural Welfare

The socialist institutional framework of resource allocation in favour of urban workers operated at an enormous price, largely paid by the majority of the rural population. Owing to the rigid system of household registration (*hukou*) that prohibited peasants from freely moving around and choosing their residence, peasants often stayed trapped in the People's Communes, which granted meagre public benefits, and the land and families were the mainstays of social provision.[3] In this respect, the tacit understanding between the state and peasants brought the principle of self-reliance to the fore. Unlike the situations covered by urban labour insurance, this pronounced residualism left little room for any active state involvement in rural social protection programmes. Within the People's Communes, the main programme, "five-guarantees" (*wubao*), provided care for people in need, particularly frail elderly people, persons with

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[3] The residualist ideology underpinning the relationship between the state and peasants also reflects a moral economy, albeit a much more limited one compared to its urban counterpart.

disabilities, and young orphans who could expect no support from other sources. Originally consisting of food, fuel, clothing, education, and burial, the *wubao* programme was decentralised. The number of benefits and the eligibility criteria depended on local financial resources, leading to a considerable variation among the communes.

The cooperative health system (*nongcun hezuo yiliao*) established in the 1950s constituted the second pillar of rural welfare. Originating from the voluntary self-aid medical care system in some regions, this programme saw nationwide implementation during the 1960s (Bloom and Fang 2003; Liu 2004). It provided affordable, basic medical care for rural residents, promoted primary medical knowledge, and took sanitary measures such as vaccination. This health programme operated on the premiums collected from the communes' collective welfare funds. Together with *wubao*, rural welfare in the socialist era featured a strong decentralised structure in terms of finance and administration. Each locality was responsible for its own social provisions.

With the introduction of the *hukou* system, Chinese society was *de facto* divided into two separate worlds of social citizenship, that is, an employment-based, comprehensive social insurance system for urban residents and a community-based, residual social assistance system for rural inhabitants. This dualisation highlighted the stratification of social benefits based on the *hukou* status difference (urban vs. rural) and pronounced administrative decentralisation. Even during the turbulent period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when political tumult paralysed the central government, local implementation of the urban and rural welfare systems remained partially intact. The institutional legacy of the Maoist era has lingered for a long time even after economic reforms began.

The Ideational Turn in the Course of Economic Reforms, 1978–2000: "Socialisation" of Welfare

Starting from our national circumstances, socialisation of social welfare adopts the multi-channel forms of state, collective, and individual provision to forge ahead with the joint development of multiple-ownership of

the welfare institutions. ("Opinions on accelerating the socialisation of social welfare" issued by the State Council, no. 19, February 2000)

The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978 marked the start of the reform process. Unique for this event was the official revision of the collectivist approaches of the Maoist era, with the conclusion that the introduction of market mechanisms along with a reduction of state intervention in economic spheres should be the key to reviving the moribund socialist economy. In 1979, the second session of the Fifth National People's Congress ratified the party-state's resolutions, with the overall goal of realising four modernisations in industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defence. The bold moves under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping ushered in the "reform and openness" era that tremendously increased the national wealth in the following decades.

SOE Reform and Its Effects

These ambitious plans could not succeed without overhauling the conventional, socialist welfare edifice. Urban SOEs first won discretion to retain a certain percentage of their profits for investment, welfare provisions, and bonuses. The SOEs' autonomy gained further authorisation in 1984 when the government launched various management responsibility system experiments to allow room for independent decision-making of enterprises. These efforts led to a concrete policy in 1988 when the National People's Congress passed the "Law of state-owned industrial enterprises of the PRC" to allow SOEs to operate at the managers' own discretion. However, the efforts to separate SOEs from the trammel of the planned economy inevitably triggered a massive dismissal of their redundant labour force. In tandem with the loss of jobs was the erosion of generous welfare benefits meant to unchain SOEs from the severe burden of welfare liabilities for employees. The consequence was large-scale job loss and a suspension of pension payments to retirees.

The dismissal of the redundant labour force created a new impoverished group whose needs posed a huge challenge for the existing social

security system (Chan 1998; Smyth 1998, 1999; Whyte 1999). What characterised the unemployment protection of the post-socialist transition was the unique *xiagang* system—literally off-the-post—which prescribed SOEs to pay those laid-off a certain amount of monthly allowance despite their status as inactive. Due to the lack of a real unemployment benefits system, as is the case in a capitalist society, *xiagang* created a peculiar relationship between the laid-off workers and their enterprises in which the former temporarily left their positions but remained "employed" by the SOEs. This semantic invention allowed room for the CCP to avoid confronting the awkward question of why a socialist economy, in which unemployment should not exist at all, now witnessed a surge of laid-off workers.

However, the transitional *xiagang* arrangement hardly appeased the laid-off workers because many SOEs failed to honour their financial obligations. Payment deferral or even default resulted in hardship for the people concerned. Worries about the waning of the *danwei* system went hand-in-hand with scepticism over the sustainability of the withering socialist welfare system (Chan and Chow 1992; Leung and Nann 1995; Wong and Macpherson 1995; Wong 1998; Lee 2000). Uneven welfare retrenchment in the work units also produced an age-based hierarchy: while older cohorts generally benefited greatly from the occupational welfare system, younger cohorts who joined the work units later were most susceptible to the cutbacks in welfare provisions. Conceivably, the SOE reforms made a painful process palpable to the urban workers involved, especially the late 1990s saw the peak of SOE mass dismissals, which numbered in the millions.

The restructuring of the SOEs and the heavy toll incurred could not proceed smoothly without the refurbishment of ideas. This particularly applied to the case of urban workers who used to stand for the supremacy of the socialist ideal *vis-à-vis* Western capitalism. The Chinese socialist economy rested on the tacit premise that the government would provide for workers' well-being in exchange for their lifelong devotion to the socialist fatherland. Now, the normative foundation of this moral economy crumbled with the retrenchment of urban welfare programmes—a moral crisis the CCP had to avert with an alternative justification for this

situation. Against this background, the conventional socialist ideas required novel elements to accommodate the new circumstances.

The reinvention of terms culminated in the "Opinions on accelerating the socialisation of social welfare" issued by the State Council (No. 19) in 2000, in which the central government explicitly addressed its goal to invite the joint participation of various societal sectors in welfare production. Noteworthy is the specific understanding of the term "socialisation" (*shehuihua*) and its Chinese characteristics during the reform era. Whilst Western readers may wonder if this notion signals a more public recognition of the state's responsibility to provide social necessities, its content points in the opposite direction both in rhetoric and reality. The "socialisation of social welfare" stands in sharp contrast to the conventional socialist mode of work unit provisioning (*danweihua*), in which the SOEs bore the majority of the burden of providing welfare services, and refers to the transfer of financial responsibilities to non-state agencies (here the enterprises and employees themselves) (Wong 1995). "Socialisation" in this regard entails a clear territorial distinction between the state and society, with the latter encompassing all those sectors outside of the state hierarchy. In a similar vein, "socialisation" touches upon service provision. Already in the mid-1980s, the Ministry of Civil Affairs adopted the slogan "Social welfare provided by society" (*shehui fuli shehui ban*)—in view of contracting fiscal capacity—to probe the possibility of community-level service arrangements. Echoing the term "socialisation", the idea behind the policy change suggested the state's attempt to delegate its omnipresent responsibilities.

Policy Reforms: Pensions and Healthcare

Nonetheless, behind the official euphoria for welfare pluralism (*fuli duoyuan zhuyi*) lay the reality of the state's outright retreat from all major welfare responsibilities for urban workers. In various policy domains, "socialisation" has come close to effectively meaning marketisation and privatisation. Pensions are one prime example: during the 1990s, reform efforts of this policy area centred on the introduction of a multi-pillar pension system. Inspired by advice from the World Bank (1994), the

State Council issued an announcement (*guanyu shenhua qiye zhigong yang-lao baoxian zhidu gaige de tongzhi*) stipulating that the programme would consist of a combination of basic social pension insurance, topped up by a personal account for individual workers (so-called *shehui tongchou yu geren zhanghu*). The establishment of individual accounts aimed to expand the funding base and reduce employers' contributions as well as provide incentives for employees to also contribute. All workers owned a personal fund account that was portable throughout their job career. The individual contribution rate was set at no more than three per cent of the individual's average wages for the previous year, which would then rise by 1 per cent every two years.

In many aspects, the reality of pension "socialisation" during that period was far from rosy. For one, many localities with SOEs in fundamental financial difficulties had to bear enormous pension liabilities in addition to the monthly allowances provided to spare workers who had been laid-off. Deferred payments or even defaults due to enterprise bankruptcy had become so widespread that they plagued the old-age security of many pensioners. The late 1990s witnessed the disgruntled urban pensioners' large-scale protests, which placed huge pressure on local governments who had to answer to these protesters' demands without jeopardising social stability. Moreover, the mixture of social pooling and individual accounts failed to fulfil its acclaimed promise to provide multi-pillar support for old-age security. Quite the contrary: due to the decentralised political structures and the lack of legal frameworks during the reform period, the central government had little leeway to enforce penalties for local non-compliance (Béland and Yu 2004; Frazier 2010; Shi 2011). The individual accounts were often empty because most of the contributions paid into them were unlawfully diverted to settling more urgent pension liabilities for current pensioners—instead of accumulating in the prescribed funds. Especially in places that traditionally had many SOEs, not least the Liaoning province, local labour departments (the main bodies of implementation) often found it difficult to coerce enterprises to make contributions, particularly those already struggling to survive.

To tackle these urgent issues, the central government implemented local-level experiments in 2000—starting with Liaoning—and subsided

the provincial governments in their efforts to liquidate the empty individual accounts. Financial challenges posed by the above period of pension "socialisation" did not recede until a decade later when the booming Chinese economy replenished the public purse with abundant tax revenue. Local governments won more fiscal leverage to resume payments to pensioners and *xiagang* workers. But even so, the problem of empty individual accounts still haunts the urban pension insurance programme up to today, mainly due to the increasing pace of population ageing that largely countervailed the dividends from strong public fiscal growth. The latest "China pension actuarial report 2019–2050" that the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS 2019) compiled estimated that, unless either institutional reforms took place in due course or enormous public subsidies chipped in, China's pension insurance programmes would begin to run deficits in 2035. In short, policy efforts to "socialise" pensions achieved the goal of limiting the state's responsibility at the expense of enterprises and individual workers.

In healthcare and education policies, the "socialisation" of welfare went even further. The programmatic reform of the urban healthcare system (alongside pension reform) began in the 1990s. The retreat of the state proceeded with a rise in private providers in the urban stationary health sector (marketisation). As public subsidies to hospitals declined, they could not help but turn to issuing more drug prescriptions for profit. The situation in rural areas also changed for the worse because the existing Rural Cooperative Healthcare programme broke down following the collapse of the People's Communes (Duckett 2011; Unger 2002). Marketisation has led to the exacerbation of social inequality by increasing the risk of poverty in case of illness. The "socialisation" of welfare also entailed uneven territorial politics: the central government imposed meritocratic mandates on local cadres, which prioritised performance evaluations based on economic growth over social redistribution in their jurisdictions. The lopsided emphasis on local economic growth (GDPism) led to low social expenditures and unequal welfare rights throughout the 1980s and 1990s, especially in fields that had large, local financial responsibilities (such as education and healthcare) (Shi 2012b; Béland et al. 2018). All of these problems put enormous pressure on the party-state, as illustrated by the new phrase "three big mountains" (*sanzuo dashan*) that

referred to the new social risks associated with healthcare, education, and housing. This term mirrored the extremely negative public perception of the economic reforms' marketisation consequences.[4]

The Emergence of the Idea of "Social Security" in the New Millennium: From GDPism to Inclusive Growth

> Social security is a human right and is defined as the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability throughout the life cycle. (International Labour Organisation 2017: 1)

The state's attempts to "socialise" their welfare responsibilities led to public discontent and social unrest. Against this background, a semantic turn began to take place in the late 1990s: the state largely shifted away from their initial touting of public-private welfare partnerships to a re-emphasis on the comprehensive public responsibility for social provisioning. Official documents boasted the ideas of "take humanity as basis" (*yiren weiben*) or "inclusive growth" (*baorongxing zengzhang*), which demonstrated the party-state's growing awareness that social policy was an essential tool for redressing the dire consequences of the economic reforms (Gong and Su 2010). A cognitive shift took place in tandem with this discursive change: while economic growth remained crucial, its sustainability would require social protections that would address the social misfortunes resulting from the ongoing market reforms. The idea of social security thus entailed the imperative to redress the results of the uneven stress on economic development by focusing on income redistribution and human well-being.

The reframing of overall social problems contributed to the "return" of the state's role in social provision. Alarmed by the widespread perception of social injustice resulting from the economic reforms, central government initiatives since 2000 have introduced new social policies covering

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[4] The slogan "Three big mountains" first appeared in Mao Zedong's revolutionary call to overturn China's three major obstacles: imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism.

almost all segments of the population while simultaneously granting special payment transfers to laggard inland regions in support of their social programmes. Further reform efforts have promoted the institutional integration of existing social insurance programmes (CDRF 2012; Shi 2012a). For example, in 2003, the central government played a direct role in the introduction of the New Rural Cooperative Medical System and, in 2007, the abolition of school fees and the introduction of universal health insurance coverage. In addition, in 2012, the government contributed to the instalment of the new social insurance programme for serious illnesses (Brown et al. 2009). In 2016, some local governments also launched their pilot, long-term care policy programmes.

It is interesting to note that the term "social security" (*shehui baozhang*) did not appear in mainland Chinese until the late 1980s when academics and welfare practitioners realised that the dire social consequences of the economic reforms would not be resolved unless the state initiated comprehensive social policy reforms. In addition, the term *shehui baozhang* denoted the collective responsibility of the state for providing a basic safety net for the people—in stark contrast to the notion of welfare socialisation that was dominant in the welfare reforms of the preceding period. This new idea referred to both the normative reframing of the state-market-society nexus (in which the state should resume its leadership role) and the institutional restructuring of the welfare system (which should include public social insurance, social assistance, and social service programmes to secure citizens' well-being).

Furthermore, international organisations' knowledge diffusion played a role. The ideational void left over by the Cultural Revolution prompted Chinese elites to search for new ideational elements appropriate for the new epoch. They found inspiration in the documents of renowned international organisations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Social Security Association (see Hu 2015; Liu and Leisering 2017). Whilst no evidence could specify the original authorship of the Chinese term *shehui baozhang*, its debut in 1986 in the Seventh Five-Year Plan signalled official recognition of the need to address social policy issues directly. This juncture witnessed the introduction of the first People's Republic unemployment insurance programme, an

unprecedented step in tackling the rising *xiagang* problem.[5] Later social insurance reforms also witnessed the involvement of international organisations.

To be sure, the early appearance of a new idea such as social security is certainly not equivalent to its immediate public popularity. The state's primary role in social policy expansion did not take shape until much later (the new millennium), owing to the even more acute challenges that arose out of the SOE reforms in the 1990s. In other words, the emergence of the concept of social security merely sowed a seed in intellectual (and official) minds but remained far from formal institutionalisation in public policy domains. For the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, the state's attempts to "socialise" social welfare prevailed, leaving little space for the realisation of the social security model. It was not until the late 1990s that one can observe the growing significance of the social security idea in Chinese social policy, both ideationally and institutionally. In academic literature and official discourses alike, the use of the term *shehui baozhang* mushroomed with a clear reference to the state's responsibility to establish a basic social safety net for the people. Characteristic of this understanding is the official interpretation as follows:

> Social security (*shehui baozhang*) is the cornerstone of the people's well-being. It is a vital socio-economic institution, including primarily social insurance, social assistance, social welfare, and charity activities… The Chinese government highly appreciates the construction of a social security system, in accommodation with the economic development level.
> (Chinese government's website at http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/ www.gov.cn/test/2012-04/20/content_2118401.htm, accessed 29 March 2020.)

The advent of the Hu-Wen era (2002–2012) introduced real, substantial change in terms of the state's reversal regarding "welfare socialisation" (see Howell and Duckett 2019). Under the rubrics of "take humanity as basis" and the "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*), the Hu-Wen

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[5] The insurance programme had the title "job-seeking insurance" (*daiye baoxian*) rather than "unemployment insurance" (*shiye baoxian*), which indicates the state's awkward handling of this social problem in a self-proclaimed socialist economy.

leadership sent an unequivocal message of the state's return to the social domain. Since 1998, there has been a quantum leap in social policy expansion in both urban and rural areas. Social policy expansion in terms of a fully fledged, basic layer of social security protections for all, especially for vulnerable population groups, such as farmers, migrant workers, unemployed workers, and the urban poor. One of the most essential efforts was the urban-rural harmonisation programme, which established new basic social pension and health insurance programmes to cover both urban and rural residents (Shi 2012a). At the same time, policies addressing the woes of transient populations also took shape: many localities granted migrant workers access to the urban worker social insurance programme, although many migrants remained reluctant to take advantage of this offer. The diverse designs of the disparate insurance programmes in the various regions often deterred insured migrants from transferring their entitlements when they moved. Meanwhile, the government achieved significant progress in improving rural livelihoods, notably with the introduction of the New Rural Cooperative Medical System in 2003, the abolishment of agricultural taxes in 2006, and the guarantee of nine years of free education for children the following year. Even in the residual social assistance environment, a modern programme "Minimum living-standard guarantee" (*zuidi shenghuo baozhang, dibao*) replaced the traditional *wubao* to become the major pillar of poor relief for urban (in 1999) and rural (in 2006) households in need (Leung and Xiao 2015; Gao 2017).

The term "social security" thus took a crucial turn both in rhetoric and in substance—away from the state's retreat in the "socialisation" sense to the acknowledgement of the state's comprehensive public responsibility for all citizens. Thanks to the solid state treasury funded in times of rapid economic growth, the Hu-Wen leadership trod an alternative path to social policy expansion. The CCP's Seventeenth National Congress's 2007 report expounded on the necessary components of social security:

> Social security is the cornerstone of social stability (*shehui wending*). It should be based on social insurance (*shehui baoxian*), social assistance (*shehui jiuzhu*), and social welfare (*shehui fuli*) with an emphasis on basic old-age security, basic healthcare, and a minimum livelihood guarantee

supplemented by charity activities and commercial insurance. We should accelerate our pace for establishing a unified social security service system.

(The People Net; http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/8198/6429195.html; accessed 12 August 2019)

However, it would be misleading to conceive of the recent policy advancements as constituting a generous social security system for all. What emerged from the renewed state endeavour was a welfare edifice with basic protections for all and ample room for stratified benefit levels to accommodate different occupational groups and regional diversity (Shi 2012b; Béland et al. 2018). The state explicitly envisioned that the new social security system would entail a basic pillar of social security with universal coverage and need-based entitlements (*guangfugai, dishuiping*) to which supplementary schemes could be established according to local circumstances (*duocengci*), while also securing the long-term financial sustainability of social security (*kechixu*). Given China's vast size and enormous regional diversity, social security as a leitmotif needed to ensure some leeway for decentralised governance, namely flexibility in institutional design and policy implementation. Understanding this feature is crucial to grasping the specifically Chinese version of social security, which implied that the state's responsibility was to provide basic security to all citizens but left room for the stratification of social benefits among different population groups *and* across the regions.

Moreover, the accentuation of social security for all should by no means disguise the state's intent to police the lives of its citizens. From the very beginning, the state conceived of social security as a useful tool for maintaining social stability (*weiwun*). While this type of social control is not foreign to social policies elsewhere, the official semantic context of the concept of "social security" reveals certain Chinese characteristics. Already in the Hu-Wen era, the concept of "social management" (*shehui guanli*) had burgeoned to underline the importance of administering society as an object. This idea originated in 1998 from a central government proposal to recognise social management as a central administrative function. Subsequently, in 2004, "innovating social management" (*chuangxin shehui guanli*) became a core concept for the fourth plenary

session of the Sixteenth CCP Congress. The session also coined the phrase "party leadership, government responsibility, societal cooperation, public participation" to describe key policy principles.[6] The term "social management" gained recognition in the Eleventh and the Twelfth Five-Year plans: one chapter specified it as a key government target (Pieke 2012). Subordinating social security to the state's overall governance goal of maintaining social stability has since taken root.

Social Security as "Social Governance", 2012–Present: From Regulatory Managerialism to Statist Control

The construction of a comprehensive social safety net in the new millennium takes on an ambivalent feature: on the one hand, it embodies the governmental response to various population groups' demands for more public, social provisions. On the other hand, underneath the pronounced expansion of social security lies the firm grip of the state over civil society. What is noteworthy about the idea of "social management" is its essence of regulatory managerialism that advances a new understanding of the mixed public-private welfare economy, somewhat akin to the Western notion of the "regulatory welfare state" (Shi 2017a; see Leisering 2011). This concept explicitly encourages the participation of non-state organisations (NGOs) in providing welfare support under the supervision of the CCP: the party-state establishes a regulatory framework that deploys non-state actors in provisioning social services. Inviting these social organisations into the service domains that the state conventionally dominated resulted from necessity because the state could no longer meet the growing public demand for social services. This situation is reminiscent of the "socialisation" idea delineated before and, yet, the state's "social management" appears even more ambitious in its attempt to ensure the incorporation of non-state organisations into the state's overall development vision. The Hu-Wen era witnessed a widening spectrum of civic

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[6] A shift towards social governance in China. *East Asia forum*, 9 September 2011, accessed on 15 January 2019 at http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2011/09/09/a-shift-toward-social-governance-in-china/.

participation under this doctrine (Spires 2011; Teets 2013). Even NGOs found their niche in various parts of Chinese society.

However, hope for a nascent civil society soon vanished after the advent of the fifth-generation Xi-Li leadership. With the slogan "Chinese Dream", Xi Jinping advocated for the grandiose resurgence of the Chinese nation under the CCP's command (Economy 2014; Shi 2017b). Underneath this overarching, strategic goal lay his endeavour to empower a new state that would assume a pre-emptive role in orchestrating all societal sectors' contributions to the Dream. A significant semantic shift took place from "social management" to "social governance" (*shehui zhili*). Though seemingly equivalent terms, the nuance between "social management" and "social governance" lies in the latter's broader goal: for the state to steer (even monitor) society from all sides. Hailed as the "Fifth modernisation" at the Third Plenum of the Eighteenth CCP Central Committee in 2013, the aim was to upgrade (modernise) the state's capacity for governing the nation.[7] In essence, "social governance" unravelled an explicit, technocratic vision of the party-state's *engineering* of society via rule by law (not *rule of law*!) under changing economic and social circumstances (Li 2018). "Social governance" had nothing to do with supporting the flourishing of civil society, as "social management" might still entail. Quite the contrary: it implied the circumscription of the state's range of civic participation and only by the monopolistic CCP rule. To fulfil this statist project, Xi adopted a much more draconian approach towards social organisations than his predecessors: lawyers engaging in human rights activism were arrested in a nationwide crackdown in 2015—all remain in jail today—followed by strict police regulation of foreign NGOs in 2017. Even businesses faced new limits after the government announced an ordinance requesting the insertion of CCP personnel into corporate management (*dangjian*), foreign companies included.

In social policy, Xi-Li leadership largely followed the expansionary direction of the Hu-Wen era, albeit in an instrumental fashion. In order

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[7] The term "Fifth modernisation" echoes the slogan "Four modernisations" (*sige xiandaihua*; refers to modernising industry, agriculture, national defence, and science) the then premier Zhou Enlai promulgated in the 1960s and the second-generation leader Deng Xiaoping re-emphasised in the late 1970s (see the above analysis on the "socialisation" of welfare).

to accelerate the pace of interregional development, "urbanisation" (*chengzhenhua*) took the lead as the guiding principle for social cohesion. In 2014, the *hukou* system experienced a fundamental overhaul that eliminated the urban-rural household registration barrier by granting peasants urban resident status should they work and live in middle- and small-sized cities for a certain period of time.[8] In addition, the central government requested that local cadres implement all necessary measures in a bid to eradicate (rather than alleviate) poverty by 2020—a temporal horizon the party-state outlined to make China a well-off, middle-range society (*xiaokang shehui*).

Consequently, the notion of social security experienced a fundamental shift during the Xi-Li era. It denoted a contributory means to building an auspicious society under the proclaimed socialist banner rather than an end to achieving social rights for the people *per se*. Since social security implementation falls within a range of administrative jurisdictions, citizens' access to social benefits is in danger of falling victim to arbitrary bureaucratic discretion. In other words, social governance is coercive in nature because it grants or withholds social rights based on the conduct of ordinary people, gauged by the official yardstick of "good citizenry". Indicative of this substantive change to the idea of social security was the introduction of the "social credit system" (*shehui xinyong tixi*) in 2015, which grades each citizen according to his/her conduct in daily life.[9] The omnipresence of surveillance, closed-circuit televisions (CCTVs) enables the government to track the behaviour of every person. The government limits or even denies those with low "citizen scores" access to common activities, such as purchasing train tickets or opening bank accounts. Some localities have gone even further and barred the children of those families who failed the credit test from attending local schools.[10] Above

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[8] Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee's "Opinions regarding the further deepening of *hukou*-reform" (*Renmin Ribao*, 1 July 2014). Local governments followed this directive by passing relevant reform measures in the following years. However, metropolises, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, kept in place strict barriers to resident status for newcomers.

[9] China "social credit": Beijing sets up huge system. *BBC News*, 26 October 2015. Accessed on 10 November 2019 at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-34592186

[10] A recent report by the agency of the "social credit system", the National Public Credit Information Centre, states that, in 2018 alone, the court declared around 12.8 million Chinese citizens "creditless". Information collected on 13 December 2019 from the central government website: http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/fuwu/2019-02/19/content_5366674.htm

all, migrant workers, who already suffer inferior social rights due to their secondary *hukou* status, have become an easy target of the new control measures. The Beijing government's use of the pejorative term "low-end population" (*diduan renkou*) in its expulsion of migrant workers from the suburban Daxing District in the winter of 2017 is a recent expression of explicit, official discrimination. The recent news release of the government's new plan to extend the application of the "social credit system" to foreign companies has aroused much anxiety amongst Western corporations who fear political censorship.

The recent initiation of the "social credit system" lays bare the fact that, although "social security" as an idea is taking shape in the reform era, the scope and extent of its social rights protection remain vulnerable to bureaucratic infringement. Whilst modern Western welfare states may also restrict or even withhold welfare rights, they mostly do so to immigrants with a more limited legal status (e.g. denizen, non-citizen, or asylum seeker) than citizens. This differentiation of citizenship in terms of status and rights entitlement corresponds to Lockwood (1996)'s description of "civic stratification", suggesting that access to, and the capacity to demand, citizenship rights critically depends on the possession of moral or material resources. In this vein, the Chinese case exemplifies the unequal nature of the "social credit system" in which the state bureaucracy wields considerable power in allocating limited resources based on an individual's merit or demerit *de jure*. The absence of any check on the bureaucracy's power (such as a free press or independent jurisprudence), to keep possible administrative abuse at bay, further erodes the statutory (and substantive) foundation of social citizenship rights.

Conclusion: Social Security in the Shadow of Hierarchy

The emergence of the concept of "social security" and its changing interpretations in the reform era testifies to the shifting contexts of collective perception of social questions and to changing state-society relations as a result of social policy reforms (for a summary see Table 3.1). In various phases of "reform and openness" policies, the party-state adopted

Table 3.1 Seventy years of social protection in China: changing ideas and policies

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social questions, social ideas, and problem groups	Broader ideational frames and contexts	External ideas and models	Key actors	Policies, legislation, and programmes
1949–1978	Socialist economy	The social question dormant and the urban worker has supremacy	The urban-rural divide in social welfare	Soviet model of industrialisation	Central leaders (Party, state)	Urban *danwei* versus rural people's communes
1978–2000	The "Four Modernisations", reform of state-owned enterprises, and lay-offs of urban workers	"Socialisation" of welfare	Delegation of welfare responsibilities to non-state sectors	Ideas of privatisation and marketisation	Central and local leaders (Party, state)	Urban pensions (1997) and healthcare (1998) Reforms
2000–2012	Rising poverty and social inequality	"Social Security"	State's resumption of its welfare responsibilities	The human right to social security (ratification of UN Social Covenant) and comprehensive social provision for all	Party, state bureaucracy, and civil society	Pension insurance for urban and rural residents (2003) and urban social assistance (*dibao* 1999, and rural 2006)
2013–2020	Rising authoritarian state	"Social governance"	The resurgence of the Chinese nation, "Chinese Dream", and the "well-off society"	The rejection of external (Western) models	Party and state bureaucracy	Social credit system (2020)

elaborate rhetorical devices to frame the contexts in which public responsibility for social provisioning experienced constant redefinition. Whilst an overall trend of social policy expansion has dominated since the new millennium—set in motion by the Hu-Wen leadership—the accentuation of the "social security" concept in the current Xi-Li era has undergone some nuanced but substantial changes. One crucial distinction lies in the role of social policy. Unlike his predecessors in the Hu-Wen era who associated "social security" with humanity-based social harmony, the current leader Xi Jinping seems resolute to place "social security" under the direction of a strong state (Shi 2017b). The changing interpretation of "social security" has led to different social policy models that at times swing between extremes: whilst the Soviet model dominated the socialist period, the "reform and openness" era witnessed aspirations to follow the examples of other countries, such as Chile's pension privatisation when Chinese welfare reforms focused on the "socialisation of welfare" or the ILO notion of social security for all when the states resumed responsibility for welfare (Hu, in this volume).

"Social security" is undergoing yet another significant change in content under the current leadership. In the name of the party-state's "Chinese Dream", "social security" must conform and subordinate itself, if necessary, to the national goal of China's rise on the global stage. Instead of serving as an end in itself, namely to protect the social rights of each citizen, "social security" is now part of the social governance framework that empowers the party-state's rule over society and individuals. The immediate consequence of this interpretation of "social security" is that it is vulnerable to bureaucratic infringement and thus is fragile. In addition to the alleged public responsibility for the people's well-being, "social security" is now charged with subduing civil society and individuals per the code of conduct that the state bureaucracy unilaterally defines.

To be sure, the social control innate to social policy is neither unique nor confined to China. The collective utilisation of social policy has been crucial for the historical rise of nation-building in the West. However, there welfare states have generated synergies between the individual and collective benefits (Kaufmann 2012: chapter 8), whilst in China, the collective interests of nationhood and social stability have often overridden

concerns for individual welfare rights. Moreover, bureaucratic control over citizens' behaviour in Western welfare states has proceeded within the rule of law, democracy, and a free civil society, a circumstance largely unknown in contemporary China. The authoritarian regime's unchecked grip has infringed on civil society and individuals on an unprecedented scale, leaving very little statutory space for any civic engagement and citizenship rights protection. Although the quantitative growth in social policies may point to the emergence of a Chinese welfare state, one must not overlook the background of an assertive Leviathan with an ever-expanding range of statecraft that encroaches on the core substance of the "social" ideas inherent in "social security", namely the individualist understandings of social protections and rights, beginning when the term first appeared in official semantics. The erosion of this normative foundation, which is present in the reform era of the 2000s, may well foreshadow the end of this progressive reform journey.

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Part III

India

4

Social Policy in India: One Hundred Years of the (Stifled) Social Question

Sony Pellissery

Introduction

What social policy is possible in a context in which the culture denies equality between citizens but at the same time the constitution guarantees it? To answer this central question, I describe the way the "stifling" mechanism acts on the idea of the "social" from the point of view of interests, institutions, and international influences. I use "stifling" to indicate "non-recognition", an idea Hegel originally developed

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(1807/1966) in his classic *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*[1] to show how unequal relations develop. Usage of this framework is in tandem with the idea that "the core of citizenship is about recognition, not about material levelling" (Davy et al. 2013: 6).

"Social" in Indian languages refers to "belonging to a community".[2] This is very close to the early meaning of "social" in Greek and Roman traditions, in which we find human cohabitation described as the Aristotelian *zoon politicon* and in Latin as *animal sociale* (see contestations of this translation in Arendt 1958 and Kaufmann 2013). However, the "community" of reference in Indian languages is not a "public" from which we could derive a Marshallian "universal citizenship" (also see Tönnies 1887/2001; Arendt 1958). Rather, citizens derive their identity through their community affiliations—religious, regional, and caste— which thus produces differentiated citizenship (Young 2000). That is why Jayal (2011) contends that citizenship in the Indian context is delinked from welfare. However, the English-language usage of "social policy", "social welfare", "social issues", or "social service" in political discourses, academic contexts, budgets, and administrative settings gets close to the ideas of anti-poverty policies and, thus, the idea of the "social" ("social question with distributive aims") as Heclo (1995) or Kaufmann (2012, 2013) elucidates. The problematique of this chapter is how the "social question" in this context has only feebly addressed "social inequality", which is the key causative factor requiring social policy intervention.

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[1] Hegel refers to one individual's realisation of conscious existence and the impossibility of the counterpart's self-consciousness. This imbalance is created through the former fulfilling a "desire for recognition" and the negation of the same by the latter. Hegel wrote about this process in a highly condensed fashion (229–240). However, subsequent scholars (Fanon 1967; Mannoni 1962; Kojève 1969; Gadamer 1976; and Honneth 2014) have interpreted and elaborated on this rich text. See a good summary of these interpretations in Bulhan (1985) and Fraser and Honneth (2003). Communication forms the crux of the defining relationship between two human beings. It is exactly because of this that "intersubjective recognition constitutes a necessary prerequisite for attaining self-consciousness" (Honneth 2014: 4). This is a radical departure from Kant, who argued that self-consciousness is the Self observing its own consciousness. Several scholars today have applied the idea of recognition in social policy contexts. Charles Taylor (1992) argued that the politics of recognition is at the heart of justice.

[2] The expressions in Sanskrit-root languages (for instance, the Hindi language uses *samajik*) and Dravidian-root languages (for instance, the Tamil language uses *samuha*) refer to "community".

This chapter is arranged in eight parts. Broadly, I aim to divide Indian history into different periods in which qualitative changes to the social question took place. In each of the historical settings, "stifling" of the social question took place in unique ways. In the first stage, the religious reforms addressed the social question in the context of culturally rooted inequality. In the second stage, the labour question in the context of the production process—particularly the Asiatic mode of production—is taken up. The third stage is the prioritising of political freedom over the "social question" in the context of anti-colonial movements. In the fourth period, the battle of ideas (on the social problem) between three prominent public intellectuals during the foundation of the republic is discussed. While these three public intellectuals had clear ideas on redistribution policies, their ideas on the identity question also shaped the valuation of social policies. The fifth and sixth periods referred to in the chapter analyse how two main identity categories in India (caste and religion) shaped the social question. The seventh part of the chapter discusses how prioritising economic development over the "social question" neglected addressing inequality. In the final section, I discuss how intellectual colonialism thrust the last nail in the coffin of the social question in India. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which the dominant social idea in each stage prevented the recognition of social inequality. These historical periods stifling the "social question" are inconsistent with the modernity that the nation-state wants to achieve and the functional aspirations of a heterogeneous population.

Religious Reforms as Social Reforms

To investigate the societal and cultural dimensions of the origins of the "social question" in India, one has to revisit the period 2000 years ago, because the rationalist challenge to authority systems (in this case religious systems) (comparable to the Enlightenment in Europe) began when the Buddha rejected God as well as the Hindu social order. Without a brief examination of this legacy, documenting the evolution of the "social question" in India would be incomplete.

Hindu social order and ancient Indian jurisprudence[3] symbiotically evolved together. The caste system's organisation of society formed the primary pillar of India's political economy:[4] "India has a unique social division: the (endogamous) caste system. *Caste is class at a primitive level of production, a religious method of forming social consciousness in such a manner that the primary producer is deprived of his surplus with the minimum of coercion*" (Kosambi 1954: 14; italics in original). Until 800 BCE, caste was not viewed as an institution of discrimination (or a "social problem" in the sense we understand today) since inter-dining and inter-marriage was possible. During the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age, pastoral-nomadic communities developed into four castes. Kosambi (1955: 42) explains this development as follows:

> The reason for caste stratification is the new productive basis, which had led to relations of production between groups, higher than in the tribal stage but with still primitive tools. Thus, we have a tenant of Brahminism for state policy that each caste and subcaste (*jati*), tribal district, guild, and even large family group had to be judged by its own particular laws, obviously because it was then a unit of production. Therefore, the state could not uniformise the juridical structure within groups, but only regulate transactions between groups.[5]

Religion was used to valorise some functions and devalue others. In other words, the actions of the highest caste (*Brahmins*), such as offering sacrifices, were most noble compared to the activities of the labouring caste (*Shudras*): "Brahminism had constructed the acts of tilling the land,

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[3] "India" as a nation-state is a recent construction as a result of colonisation and integration of several kingdoms. Prior to that, the expression used was "Hindustan", referring to the region near the Indus River. This had a geographic stretch roughly similar to that of South Asia today.

[4] Prominent academic works on caste have not taken the political economy approach seriously. The works of Max Weber and Louis Dumont (1966) emphasised the cultural dimensions of caste. In recent times, there is a renewed interest in examining the caste issue from this missing angle. Singh (2014) argues that underlying the issue of caste relations is property and land rights.

[5] Note that Kosambi uses the term "caste-class". B. R. Ambedkar and subsequent writers, for instance, Omvedt (2007), have emphasised that the caste system's origin is not "functional differentiation" as happened in the capitalist stage of European development. The caste system originated in the pre-capitalist mode of the production period. Ambedkar repeatedly maintained that caste is not "division of labour, but division of labourers".

removing a carcass from the village, skinning a carcass, and transforming hide into leather as filthy. In other words, the whole process of human intercourse with nature, land, plants, and animals in productive and creative modes was constructed as unclean" (Iliah 2007: 303). The untouchables or *dalits*, who did menial jobs, were kept outside of formal Hindu society.[6] This rigid caste structure, which prevented mobility, warranted a revolution.

Buddhism was that revolution in Aryan society circa 400 BCE. It began as a religious revolution and evolved into a social and political revolution (Ambedkar 1956/1987). It challenged the caste system, accepted members from the lower castes as priests (a role reserved for *Brahmins*, the highest caste, in Hinduism), and gave equal status to women. These were explicit challenges to the societal power structure. At the core of the Buddhist revolution was the principle of social equality. This was possible because of the reasoned rejection of God. King Ashoka (304–234 BCE) accepted these Buddhist ideas and put them into practice. As a result, the religious revolution became a social revolution and received the patronage of the state.

In response, Brahmanical forces solidified the caste system through much stricter laws that Manusmriti developed (Ambedkar 1956/1987), and the regime that succeeded King Ashoka persecuted Buddhists using the Manusmriti code of law (compiled between 200 BCE and 200 CE). The *dharmic* system codified during this period emphasised individuals' duties rather than rights, and it was considered the duty of every individual to work for the well-being of society (Sharma 1984).[7]

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[6] Several scholars (for instance, Galanter 1984) have documented how discrimination was institutionalised through the legal system, which I need not repeat here.

[7] Various Hindu scriptures even defined not only individuals' duties but also their mutual relations; for example, "Stri dharma paddhati" defines married women's duties and "Rajadharma" defines a king's duties. Similarly, the "Ashram-dharma" prescribes an individual's duties during various life stages, and, according to this, it is an individual's duty to look after one's family, which includes the elders, ancestors, progeny, and other members of the family who need protection (Kane 1941). The joint-family system that emerged out of this idea has always provided a sense of protection and security for the elderly and disabled.

The biggest assault on rationality is rejecting reason in favour of religious precepts:[8] "Hindus observed untouchability and caste not because they were inhuman or wrong-headed. They observed caste because they were deeply religious" (Ambedkar 1936: 68). Thus, the very social philosophy of Hinduism focuses neither on the individual nor on society, but on "Brahminic supermen" (Haragopal and Sukumar 2007).

There have been similar challenges to the Hindu social order from time to time, such as the development of Jainism (500 BCE) or Sikhism (1500 CE), which were revolutionary religions and offered a dignified life outside of the Hindu caste system. During the medieval period, Bhakti saints (such as Kabir and Nanak) preached social equality and castelessness. In the nineteenth century, there was an intellectual renaissance during which many reformers (some influenced by Western thoughts) advocated for liberation and the abandonment of class and caste distinctions (see Thapar 1966). Ambedkar and millions of *dalits* converted to Buddhism in 1956. In a nutshell, what appears to be religious reform or conversion is a response to the systemic inability to raise the "social question" of inequality. In a later part of the chapter, we examine how social policies have responded to inequality, particularly that arising from caste discrimination. However, before that, we need to examine other institutional frames that contributed to the ideational architecture of social policies.

"Asiatic" Stifling

Marx first raised the question of why the history of the East was the history of religion. He did not discover the characteristics of feudalism in his analysis of India and China. In what he called the Asiatic mode of production (AMP), he identified two central reasons for this: "The stationary nature of this part of Asia, despite all the aimless activity on the political surface, can be completely explained by two mutually supporting circumstances: 1. The *public works* system of the central government and, 2.

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[8] Ambedkar argues that the reason for the disappearance of Buddhism from India is Brahmanical persecution rather than Islamic invasion.

Alongside this, the entire Empire which, apart from a few large cities, is an agglomeration of *villages*, each with its own distinct organisation and each forming its own small world" (Marx 1853).[9]

Some scholars have challenged this self-sufficiency theory of village life (Srinivas and Shah 1960). However, there is a consensus that the village was the centre of the agrarian production system, and private property ownership was absent before the advent of the British empire. In *Grundrisse*, Marx (1858) further expanded on this idea: "a part of their surplus labour belongs to the higher community". This would tremendously change during British rule:

> The inordinate and unscrupulous greed of the East India Company caused gradual disintegration of these gram panchayats. The deliberate introduction of the Ryotwari system as against the village tenure system dealt a deathblow to the corporate life of the village republics. The centralisation of all executive and judicial powers in the hands of the British bureaucrats also deprived the village functionaries of their age-long powers and influence. (Agarwal 1946: 52)

This analysis has two implications for the term "social". First, as long as a surplus of labour served the British administration, the workers' question would remain dormant. Breman (1996) traces how the exploitation of *dalit* (outcast) labourers—the cultural conditions of whom I described in the previous section—intensified during British colonial rule. Marx (1853) himself commented that the Asiatic system created an unresisting human who was limited to a vegetative state; it "restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass".

Second, the breaking of the common property system meant that many citizens did not own property and, thus, penury was rampant (Pellissery and Biswas 2012). The origins of this deprivation go back to

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[9] Marx formed these views based on the works of François Bernier (1934) and documents from the British Empire. It is worth quoting one of the accounts of a governor of the Raj: "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindu, Pathan, Mughal, Maratha, Sikh, English, are masters in turn but the village communities remain the same" (Lord Metcalfe 1833: 470).

the historical circumstances described in this section. At the same time, it is important to distinguish between the notion of "feudalism" as understood in Europe and India when the emergence of the social is discussed in these different contexts. In the Indian context, caste as an institution prevented functional differentiation (the defining feature of modernity in Europe), and labour was never valued. Labouring was the duty of the lower strata in the societal hierarchy to those who occupied higher positions. The imagined organic unity of the society without functional differentiation stifled the emergence of the idea of the social.

However, colonial rule had the potential to change this. In several countries, colonial rule provided a historical break from the past and a move from a traditional society to a modern society. But, what happened in India?

Political Freedom over Social Justice

One of the foundational experiences of the Indian population coming together as a nation-state is their struggle for freedom, which lasted for about a century (1857–1947).[10] Did this struggle facilitate the rise of the "social question" so that all sections of society could come together against the colonial power? A section within the Congress party, which spearheaded the freedom struggle, argued that social reform (in a limited sense) must precede political reform. However, those who held the view that political reform and independence from the British was more important silenced the Social Reform Party. Ambedkar (1936: 28) analysed the reasons for this. He pointed out that the Social Reform Party was concerned with reforming the Hindu family and not wider concerns for the reorganisation of Hindu society:

> The Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindu family. It consisted mostly of enlightened high-caste Hindus who did not feel the necessity for agitating for the

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[10] The first organised revolt against the East India Company took place in 1857, after which the British crown directly took over the rule of India.

abolition of caste or had not the courage to agitate for it. They felt quite naturally a great urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages, etc., evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them. They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society. The battle that was fought centred round the question of the reform of the family. It did not relate to the social reform in the sense of the break-up of the caste system. It was never put in issue by the reformers. That is the reason why the Social Reform party lost.

Thus, the elitist nature of the freedom struggle and the fact that the writers of the constitution were English-speaking, Western-educated Indians were precedents to the suppression of important social questions.

The Drafting Committee Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar (1948) (who was from a low caste), strongly made this argument: "Democracy in India is only a top dressing, on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic". He further cautioned that if inequality was not reduced, the poorest sections of Indian society would undo the constitution and democracy itself. The Constitution of 1950 specifically recognised two social groups as hugely disadvantaged. These groups were: Scheduled (listed in the constitution) Castes or *dalits* (literally meaning "broken" people: outcasts from the Hindu caste system and, therefore, untouchables. Note that the Constitution of India does not abolish the caste system but abolishes discrimination based on caste, creed, and language) and Scheduled Tribes or *adivasis* (people who lived in the forests or indigenous people). Presently, *dalits* constitute 16.6 per cent of the Indian population and *adivasis* constitute 8.5 per cent.[11]

These groups remained loyal supporters of the Congress party until the 1970s when they realised that remaining within the Congress party system would not help them raise the question of inequality. Since the early 1980s, the Congress party system has withered, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and regional parties have reaped the advantages of this. However, the leaders of the Congress party were not unanimous in their

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[11] Various reports and studies (both by government agencies and civil society organisations) provide evidence of the discrimination against lower castes and *adivasis* in education, health, and access to public services, and an over-representation of these groups below the poverty line (for a synthesis of these reports, refer to World Bank 2011, which need not be repeated here).

"ideas" of the social and the policy recourse they should take. In the next section, we will discuss these tensions.

Three Ideas of the "Social" at the Founding Moment of India

Three distinct development models and interventions existed in early independent India. We can trace their origins to the ideological leanings of three social reformers and policymakers of the nascent nation in the late 1940s. First, Mahatma Gandhi, icon of the Indian independence struggle, emphasised the disorder of the markets and, therefore, the need to pursue development based on local resources. His concept of *swaraj* (which literally means "self-rule") was an ideal combination of political and economic freedom by giving political power to the people and providing for individual emancipation, particularly for the poorest of the poor. Second, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of the country, drew significant inspiration from Soviet planning models as well as capitalist advancements in Western Europe. He called for a development model that could combine both these approaches. His advocation for national development through public-sector industrialisation came in direct conflict with Gandhi's development model based on local resources. B. R. Ambedkar propounded a third development model: a social justice model for development. Coming from a historically excluded, lower-caste community, he emphasised "annihilation of the caste" for the success of social democracy.

All three of these influential leaders agreed on the urgency of the "social question". However, they differed significantly in their understanding of the "social" as well as the proper course of action that the state should take. Despite this, they agreed to put their differences aside (to build the nation-state), and all agreed to advance the "social". Chatterjee (2004: 36) captures this as the "antinomy between the homogenous national and the heterogeneous social". Let us look at the subtle differences between these three views, which is useful for understanding the underlying tension that required the stifling of the "social".

Ambedkar's ideas focused primarily on the question of *representation*. He disagreed with Gandhi that development should be centred around the village (Ambedkar felt that the "village was a den of ignorance and exploitation" from which *dalits* should escape).[12] In this dispute, he found an ally in Nehru who wanted to support industrialisation and urban progress. Fabian socialism[13] deeply influenced Nehru. This led him to create several state-owned, state-operated, and state-controlled means of production. Some of these sectors included steel, transportation, telecommunications, mining, and electricity generation. The government used permits, high tax rates, and rationing to regulate private activity, property rights, and entrepreneurship. To a great extent, the pre-1980s' Indian developmental model was the Fabian Society version of socialism. Ambedkar was decidedly supportive of urbanisation and industrialisation because they would increase mobility for *dalits* (as an economist, he believed that industrialisation was the only economic alternative to low-productivity agriculture). However, unlike Nehru, he stressed training and the reservation system (discussed in the next section in detail) for *dalits* to help them access new opportunities both in the workplace and in politics. He was against the Leftist strategy of striking. Compared to him, Nehru facilitated trade unions, on the one hand, and made truces with trade union leaders in order to avoid strikes, on the other.[14]

Gandhi, who explicitly withdrew from positions of power after independence, took strong exception to the Nehruvian industrialisation strategy,[15] as well as the strategy of state control. According to Gandhi, the state machinery would work against the emancipation and full realisation of the individual.

Gandhian economic philosophy was strongly rooted in "trusteeship" because John Ruskin's book Unto This Last had inspired him during his

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[12] Ambedkar's disagreement with Gandhi on the question of the political representation of marginalised classes also has important significance for this chapter. We will discuss this in the next section when we explore the effectiveness of the quota-based welfare system.

[13] The Fabian Society of Britain aimed to create a democratic socialism grounded on the principle of reforming the capitalism, rather than overthrowing the capitalism.

[14] I am grateful to Professor Babu Mathew for introducing this insight into Nehruvian strategy.

[15] Sanyal (2007: 155) compares the Gandhi-Nehru debate on industrialisation to that of the debate between Lenin and Narodniks in Russia and discusses the paradox of the initial victory of Nehru and Narodniks and contemporary disenchantment with such capital-intensive models.

studies in England. The idea of trusteeship also had origins in Indian scriptures and the belief that possessions are immoral and sinful.[16] Thus, Gandhi believed that only moral conduct could lead one to the truth, and he contended that morality could not be translated using the language of rights and obligations. It is this conception of a duty-bound individual that informs Gandhi's views on human rights. On two occasions (first to H. G. Wells in 1940 and later to Dr Julian Huxley, Director-General of UNESCO, in 1947), Gandhi emphasised that the discourse on human rights is erroneous, and instead, duties should be emphasised and the rights would follow.

In his aspiration to give autonomy to each individual, he advocated for decentralised governance structures and self-rule. Such a decentralised governance structure would coordinate different autonomous village units. Ambedkar disagreed with this proposal and, instead, wanted a strong state that would contain the social forces that perpetuated casteism. It is also important to remember that Ambedkar, who once created the Labour Party (and who also went on to become a labour minister), was responsible for introducing several classical measures of labour protection, such as "minimum wage" (enacted in 1948), maternity benefits, and limited working hours, to India. The most significant of Ambedkar's contributions was the emancipation of oppressed castes through the reservation system.

Did the Reservation System Achieve Its Goal?

One of the key commitments of the Constitution of India was to improve the welfare of marginalised groups—women, children, and oppressed castes. This commitment defined the social justice goals of the Constitution

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[16] The monist philosophies of ancient Indian religions had several written texts (the *Upanishads*) during 700–100 BCE that articulated this. Most popular among them is *Om*. "That (*Brahman*) is infinite, and this (universe) is infinite. The infinite proceeds from the infinite. (Then) taking the infinitude of the infinite (universe), it remains as the infinite (*Brahman*) alone" (*Brahadaranyaka Upanishad* 5.1.1). This classical text on monism was composed in 700 BCE. A later text (written in 100 BCE) describes moral principles more directly: "Whatever there is change in this ephemeral world, all that must be enveloped by the Lord. By this renunciation, support yourself. Do not covet the wealth of anyone" (Verse 1 from the *Isha Upanishad*).

of India and was operationalised through quota-based reservation policies. Over the years, this affirmative action strategy has defined the law of the land as well as shaped the political discussions on equality and social justice. However, what has been achieved?

The challenges to affirmative action in India were based on the criteria for inclusion in the reservation system. One argument was that economic criteria should be the only criteria for inclusion, and, therefore, only "backward groups" should receive the benefits of affirmative action. This position maintained that if any other criteria are used, the principle of "merit" would be sacrificed. However, others contested this view because caste-based discrimination is not merely economic. For example, despite being economically well off, one could experience social discrimination and, thus, barriers to both social and economic mobility. Ambedkar (1920) articulated this when he compared India to "a tower which had several storeys without a ladder or an entrance. One was to die in the storey in which one was born". Ambedkar argued that political representation with separate electorates was the ideal solution to this problem, but Gandhi opposed this. Gandhi argued that although he was from an upper caste, he could represent untouchables. They resolved this conflict through negotiations in the 1930s (known as the Poona Pact) and agreed to reserve seats for untouchables within the Hindu electorate. This model of representation has persisted till date.

Similar debates took place on the topic of untouchables' economic welfare. Nehru gave in to Ambedkar's arguments in practice but not in principle:

> frankly…I would like to put an end to such reservations as still remain. But again, speaking frankly, I realise that in the present state of affairs in India that would be not a desirable thing to do, that is to say, in regard to the Scheduled Castes. I try not to look at it from the religious minority, but rather in the sense of helping backward groups in the country.[17]

He based his position on his conviction that caste was a *division of labour* (Ambedkar's argument that caste was a *division of labourers*). On this,

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[17] Speech in the Constituent Assembly, 26 May 1949. Constituent Assembly on India Debates, Vol. VIII: 331.

Nehru agreed with Gandhi, and, finally, the Constitution of India did not abolish the caste system, only caste-based untouchability.

Eventually, the argument for affirmative action based only on economic measures was rejected, and 15 per cent jobs, educational opportunities, and political positions were reserved for scheduled castes and 7.5 per cent for *adivasis*. This was in proportion to the population break down of these groups. The creation of a "schedule" and listing communities who were eligible to benefit from these quotas has been controversial. More and more groups wanted inclusion in these lists. From time to time, this schedule has been revised, primarily as a function of electoral politics. However, the argument for affirmative action based on economic criteria has persisted, and a commission was appointed in 1979 to identify "socially or educationally backward classes". This commission prepared a list of communities who fit the new economic and social criteria. This new list consisted of 52 per cent of India's population. After intense political opposition from upper castes, the government reserved 27 per cent of the novel reservations for the newly identified "Other Backward Classes". Eventually, the Supreme Court decreed that reserved positions cannot exceed 50 per cent (*Indra Sawhney and others v. Union of India and others*, 1992).

Originally, when the constitution was written, the authors planned for reservations for oppressed castes to last only 50 years. However, the deep-rooted caste political system (mobilisation of castes on political lines to win elections) has made it nearly impossible to end any part of the affirmative action programme. Different types of groups' demands for reservations are increasing. In some states in India, quotas in particular employment categories have reached 75 per cent. Nationally, in 2019, an additional quota of 10 per cent was extended to economically weaker sections of the country in addition to the existing quotas outlined in the 124th Constitutional Amendment.

It is worth reflecting on how affirmative action has shaped ideas of the "social". There is no doubt that the material welfare of a large number of members of groups who benefit from affirmative action has increased. However, this has created a "creamy layer" within these oppressed groups and, eventually, divided members of these groups. This is clear based on the demand for sub-quotas" since some subgroups within these categories

have never benefited from affirmative action, even while other subgroups have repeatedly benefited (Ramavat 2018). Critics of reservation have also pointed out its inability to address the intersectionality of disadvantage (e.g., women from marginalised groups). Furthermore, job opportunities in the public sector have declined in the wake of liberalisation because several governmental industries were outsourced to the private sector.[18]

Even more interesting is the question of indigenous communities, which were recognised as "Scheduled Tribes". Internationally, India refused to recognise that India has an "indigenous" population since all Indians are historically from India (unlike in Canada, the USA, and Australia, where outsiders conquered and dispossessed local indigenous populations).[19] Although the government domestically recognised the presence of indigenous people by listing them in the schedule, it had limited impact on the ground in terms of this group's quality of life. Thus, the Dhebar Commission was appointed in 1960 to address this challenge. This commission recommended that the schedule list 52 communities as "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups" who require particular types and numbers of welfare interventions.[20] The quota approach has been less successful, since larger market interventions deprive people of livelihoods, compared to the state welfare system. For instance, Das and Padel (2010) demonstrated how the nexus between the state and mining companies displaced indigenous communities from traditional land, where the indigenous communities had control over and access to natural resources. Furthermore, providing welfare does not make up for their loss

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[18] In some sectors, there is a demand for quotas for private-sector jobs.

[19] India has refused to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries, because the concept of "indigenous peoples" is not relevant to India and there is no need for external cooperation or evaluation, including from the United Nations (UN), for tribal development programmes in India (full report on this is available in the report of the Joint Stakeholders submission on the situation of the rights of indigenous people in India for the third cycle of the Universal Period Review [UPR] of India, 27th Session of the Human Rights Council [Apr–May 2017]. The report is accessible here: https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/india/session_27_-_may_2017/js46_upr27_ind_e_main.pdf). It is also interesting to note that India has supported the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), 2007, which is a non-binding agreement.

[20] As of 2020, this number has increased to 75.

of land and resources, nor does it substantially improve their quality of life.

Most of the regional states in India and the union government have "social welfare departments" or "social justice departments". These departments have limited functions available to enforce the schemes designed for the two most disadvantaged communities—scheduled castes (*dalits*) and scheduled tribes (*adivasis*). This is indicative of the disconnect between the social and labour questions.

However, on a positive note, the reservation system recognised that the dominant communities had perpetuated historical injustices against these groups, which has tremendously energised localities where these scheduled groups were able to use legal recourse to end systems of injustice. This includes resisting violence, claiming rights to land, and demanding a proportionate share in welfare funds, cooperatives for economic enterprises, and other resources. These demands indicate these groups' increased representation in the polity. The effectiveness of political representation (compared to economic compensation through the quota system) is an indication that the "social question" is primarily political when it comes to questions of caste.

Democracy's Coexistence with Religion

As I explained in the first section of this chapter, the "social" was closely associated with the idea of community (including religion) in India. Thus, when the Republic of India adopted its modern constitution in 1950—although there were differences of opinion about the nature of the "social" (as explained in the preceding section)—there was wide agreement that social justice was a key principle of the Indian constitution. However, it was only in 1972 (through the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution of India)[21] that two key terms (socialist and secular) were added to the original terms: "sovereign", "democratic", and

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[21] The 42nd Amendment to the Constitution was passed during a turbulent time in India's democracy, namely during the Congress government and the then prime minister Indira Gandhi's state of Emergency (25 June 1975–21 March 1977). One of the amendment's key aims was to make parliamentary powers dominant over those of the Supreme Court (Austin 1999).

"republic" in the preamble[22] to the Indian constitution. How the single amendment added both "socialist" and "secular" shows the two terms' indivisible relationship in the Indian context.[23] Therefore, both the delay in introducing these two ideas and their implications when added deserve our attention.

Secularism as a concept is important for understanding the rule of law in India: all citizens irrespective of their religious faith are treated equally. This idea developed during the struggle for independence, when Pakistan became a Muslim state and India positioned itself as a secular state. However, the contradictions of this position were clear. Leaders of the independence struggle, such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gandhi, used Hindu texts and symbols to organise and bring people together against the British colonial rulers. Thus, the idea of secularism addresses the tense relationship between members of the majority religion (Hindus constituted about 85 per cent of the population) and members of minority religions. The Indian state does not have an official religion. Unlike the idea of secularism in Western constitutions (in which the separation of church and state is key), Indian secularism professes "pluralism" or the responsibility of the state to protect all religions and religious groups.

This advocacy of secularism has limited the social rights of citizens on matters of inheritance, maintenance, marriage, and divorce. Since the personal laws that govern individual conduct in these domains derive primarily from religious conventions and rules, very often there is a contradiction between state and personal laws. The contestation point of recent secular policies is whether to adopt a uniform civil code (spurning all personal religious-based laws) or not. This question primarily touches on gender (and family law) and, thus, has significance for social policy.

The Indian Constituent Assembly debated this question while framing the constitution and made uniform civil code an ideal to achieve in the

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[22] Although courts decide certain matters, the preamble of the constitution has a radiating effect on their interpretations of certain topics (Mathew et al. 2020).

[23] The Congress government was overthrown via a democratic process after the Emergency. Although the subsequent government (the Janata Party) proposed two amendments (the 43rd and 44th) to restore the constitution, they did not completely succeed. At the same time, the Congress Party in opposition underwent an internal reassessment at this point in time. Some leaders within the Congress Party fought for the modernisation, socialisation, and democratisation of the party (Johari 1973).

future. However, the question again publicly arose when a Muslim woman approached the court to grant her income maintenance from her husband, who had divorced her (after 43 years of married life and five children) per Muslim personal law.[24] The woman pleaded her case under the Code of Criminal Procedure, which applied to all Indians. In 1985, the Supreme Court of India upheld the decisions of a lower court and maintained that, irrespective of the personal laws, the husband is obliged to provide income maintenance under the Code of Criminal Procedure. This judgement caused an uproar. While human rights groups celebrated the judgement as a victory for the protection of women, Muslim communities saw it as a state attack on their identity and rights.

Along similar lines, questions related to the inheritance of property arose in 1986 among Christians. Among Kerala Christians, the personal law provided a woman with only one-fourth of share in her father's property, whereas the son got the majority share. The Supreme Court of India decided that the Indian Succession Act provided for equal shares for both son and daughter.[25] In another development in 2014, the Supreme Court decided that even though Muslim personal law prohibited the adoption of children, an Indian Muslim could legally adopt children. These cases have kept the discourse on whether to implement a uniform civil code alive. Paradoxically, in 2019, the Indian parliament dominated by the Hindu majoritarian party (Bharatiya Janata Party) made *talaq* (Islamic divorce) illegal, which progressive Muslim women had long demanded. While this move is viewed as a step towards a uniform civil code, it is also seen as an example of the majoritarian religion forcing its personal laws on minority religions. Several feminist groups have decried this as hypocrisy since the human rights of Hindu widows have not been addressed at all. In other words, the common denominator for a uniform civil code (if agreed to as a principle in a pluralist polity) should be women's welfare, not the standards of a majoritarian religion. Majoritarian standards (as in the case of a state religion) could be civil, but could also easily erode social rights.

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[24] Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum (1985 SCALE 767 = 1985 SCR 844 = 1985 SCC 556 = AIR 1985 SC 945).

[25] *Mrs Mary Roy Etc. Etc v. State of Kerala & Ors* on 24 February 1986, AIR 1011, 1986 SCR (1) 371.

Economic Development over the Social Question

Independent India's development plans were not meant to reduce inequality. Poverty alleviation was only added in the fifth development plan (the late 1970s). The history of two concrete poverty interventions (that of land redistribution and industrialisation policy) will prove this point. First is the question of land reform. As I show in section "Religious Reforms as Social Reforms" of this chapter, colonial rule created property inequality. For a nation that is committed to the constitutional principle of equality, the redistribution of assets is an important step. Several assessments on land reforms (Appu 1996; Jeyaranjan et al. 2010; Pellissery et al. 2017) show some land transfer from a small section of upper-caste landlords to the middle and lower castes but not to the outcasts (*dalits*). The idea of land reform primarily came from the Communist Party, and communist ideology emphasises the class rather than the caste question. This explains why land reform strategy was the least effective when it came to the redistribution of land to *dalits*.

Second, industrialisation as a strategy involved state protections for capitalists, unlike in Europe, where capitalists emerged as entrepreneurs through industrial investment. A handful of industrialists in Bombay prepared the "Bombay Plan", which would become the blueprint for national development over the next few decades under Nehru (Chibber 2003). Although the Bombay Plan was not socialist (Pellissery et al. 2020), Nehru believed that industrialisation was possible without the suffering that Europe experienced, in contrast to Gandhi, who believed that industrialisation was inherently a problem.

After the initial balancing of investment in small-scale and large-scale industries, the Indian planning process hugely favoured capital-intensive large industries. The strategy was to extract surplus from agriculture to support the development of industry. As Chakraborty (1987: 21) states, "it was necessary for agriculture to contribute to the building up of a modern industrial sector by providing cheap labour and also cheap food". Thus, the capital-good hypothesis (the state should invest in the creation of tangible property such as machine tools) and the wage-good

hypothesis (the state should invest in sectors where labour-intensive production will happen) simultaneously worked in India. Sanyal (2007: 167) argues that, although there was no surplus extraction, the very process of separating the means of labour from labour itself was sufficient to establish the process of primitive accumulation in early independent India.

India's development programmes were primarily "Five-Year Plans", inspired by the erstwhile socialist planning model of the Soviet Union. Sen (2017) considers the First Five-Year Plan (1951–56) not as a development plan but as a reconstruction of the economy that was completely damaged due to centuries of exploitation under British rule. The Second Plan (1956–61) began with an obligation to "increase the growth rate of the gross domestic product" by establishing publicly supported heavy industries. The emphasis of this plan was on rapid industrialisation and increasing the economy's savings rate. The Third and Fourth Plans were also designed to broadly focus on continuing the agenda set by the second plan.

Despite these different approaches, poverty still haunted the nation. Therefore, by the 1970s, the basic needs and poverty reduction approaches took centre stage. The Fifth Plan (1974–79) is considered an important milestone in the development trajectory of India because it is when the ideas of poverty alleviation entered the agenda of the planning process with the then prime minister Indira Gandhi coining the term *"Garibi hatao"* (eradicate poverty). Since then, all plans have attempted to balance economic development and welfare programmes. Later, the focus of development programmes shifted to industrial growth and boosting the national income.

To evaluate these development programmes from the "social question", we need to ask whether these plans recognised and addressed social inequality. At the outset, we can say that the reservation strategy addressed only "social inequality" since the constitution provided positive discrimination for "scheduled" populations (*dalits* and *adivasis*). However, this strategy actually created two classes of services in public institutions. Discrimination continued to prevail against socially ostracised groups. Two important arenas for social policy intervention—education and health care—have demonstrated the reality of the syndrome "services for the poor are poor services". Poor-quality services (for instance, teacher

and doctor absenteeism from schools and hospitals) have alienated people from accessing these services.

The third intervention most aptly demonstrates how economic development has stifled the social question. The key concern for the sovereign state of India after independence was how to feed its citizens and build a hunger-free nation. In other words, the material dimension of the social question was recognised as early as the 1940s. Food importation policies of the 1950s gave way to what is known as the Green Revolution in the 1960s, which was based on biotechnological inventions. Three interlinked policies were introduced in the mid-1960s consisting of (1) output-price policies including minimum support prices for farmers when grains are procured, (2) input-price subsidies, and (3) a public distribution system (PDS) to provide relatively low-cost food grains without harming the interests of the producers. This new agricultural strategy was largely successful in increasing production, which more than doubled, from 63 million tons in 1965 to 154 million tons in 1991, and drastically reduced the need for food grain imports (Suryanarayana 1995). These asset-focused policies were completely blind to the question of rural labour, which the *dalit* communities primarily provided (Siegel 2018). In other words, despite achieving food sufficiency, the outcome was deprivation amidst plenty.

The arguments developed hitherto in this section should not be construed as ignorance of the artificial distinction between the "social and economic" (Mkandawire 2001; Midgley and Tang 2001). Development interventions have ingeniously brought these two together. However, whether developmental interventions have addressed social inequality directly is an open question. In the Indian context, the empirical examination of expenditure data shows how infrastructural projects gained more attention than social inequality.

We can observe two broad types of spending in the public finance accounts relevant to social policy. First is development expenditure, which includes spending on agriculture and allied activities, rural development, special area programmes, irrigation and flood control, energy, industry and minerals, transport and communications, science and technology, and environment. Second is money spent on social services, which includes expenditures on education, sports, art and culture,

medical and public health, family welfare, water supply and sanitation, housing, welfare of historically deprived communities, labour and labour welfare, social security, nutrition, relief on account of natural calamities, and urban development.

As per the mandate of the Constitution of India, the majority of the social sectors fall under the domain of state governments, hence spending on their part is higher compared to the central government. Kaur et al. (2014) analysed the data available and concluded that state governments alone incur 80 per cent of government (both centre and state) expenditures on social services. The education and health services combined account for 60 per cent of the total social expenditures of state governments. Between 1990–91 and 2013–14, per capita social-sector spending recorded a threefold increase, of which education-sector spending increased by 2.7 and health-sector spending increased by 2.3 times. The majority of the increase in social-sector spending occurred after 2000. However, despite this increase, India still remains below the international standard of expenditure in the social sector.

Apart from social expenditure data, the confirmation of our argument of the ineffectiveness of developmental expenditures to address social inequality is the demand for community-specific funds. General expenditures on both development and social welfare neglected the most disadvantaged sections of society—*dalits* and *adivasis*. This led to the demand for special component plans. These plans argued that state government budgets should allocate spending in proportion to the population for the welfare of these populations. For instance, 15 per cent of the union budget should be earmarked for *dalits* since 15 per cent of the population are *dalits*.

This is an example of how the "social question" may be populistically responded to within the aggregate democratic framework (Young 2000). Solidarity ideals of the "social" are dismissed in favour of appeasing fragmented vote banks. The "social" is no longer a tool to increase and encourage dialogue with other communities and to gain "recognition". Rather, recognition is reduced to gaining access to state resources for material well-being.

Authoritarian Democracy Stifles the "Social" Question

The Hegelian tension of the citizen's two roles in the public sphere[26] is absent in Indian discourses due to the post-colonial process of nation-state creation that several South Asian countries witnessed. Thus, the "social question" was transplanted to consolidate the legitimacy of the rulers of the post-colonial states, rather than challenge them (as happened in post-revolutionary France and, generally, in Europe by raising the social question). This approach demobilised the possibility of raising the social question. The demobilisation of the power of the people coexisted with an authoritarian democracy that could and did stifle the "social" question.

An important aspect of South Asian and, specifically, Indian democracy is the authoritarian nature of the democratic leaders (Baxter 1985; Jalal 1995), especially the leaders of political parties (and thus national leaders). These parties appoint leaders based on their ascriptive identities, such as family lineage, membership in the aristocracy, or even descent from erstwhile feudal rulers (or provincial kings). The patronage these leaders provide to the local population enables them to win elections through the democratic process and to retain their positions of power.

This authoritarian democracy has had a crucial impact on the limits and opportunities for raising the social question within the polity, three aspects of which deserve specific attention within this chapter. The first implication of authoritarian democracy is the lack of responsiveness to the welfare question. Since elections are won on different criteria (e.g., patronage or religious identity), the indirect accountability model[27]

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[26] The two roles of a citizen are "as a citizen (*citoyen*) of the state and as a member (*bourgeois*) of civil society" (Kaufmann 2012: 63). Partha Chatterjee (2004: 38) dismisses the role of the *citoyen*—in which a citizen has rights. He does so because only a small elite who have access to the state apparatus could enforce these rights. The majority of citizens have to resort to politics to enforce their rights. Therefore, he proposes the concept of "political society" in a subaltern context.

[27] The indirect accountability model describes the ability of service recipients to demand services directly from service providers. Compared to this, the direct accountability model outlines the power of electors to hold the elected responsible through their ability to vote them out of power if they do not deliver services. Elected representatives indirectly influence bureaucrats to improve their services (World Bank 2004).

(World Bank 2004) fails. A political model that fails to generate a social question produces a large vacuum in society. Vibrant civil society voices in the form of non-governmental organisations (NGO) and media sources then fill this vacuum. In the late 1960s, there was a surge of these organisations, because political non-responsiveness to the poverty question was evident throughout the Congress Party's uninterrupted rule of over 20 years (Chandhoke 1995). The term NGO became identified with development agencies. Most NGOs operated as an extended arm of the government in remote areas of the country where bureaucracy had limited reach.[28] Their grassroots-level contacts made them more effective agencies for raising the social question in a contextualised manner.

A report in 2015 stated that India had 3.2 million registered NGOs: "Indians have more per capita NGOs than hospital beds" (Down to Earth 2005). The Central Statistical Organisation of India noted the existence of "four NGOs for every 1,000 people in urban areas and 2.3 NGOs for every 1,000 people in rural areas". This spectacular growth was largely due to funding from foreign countries, particularly from the Global North. Funding agencies found that the government was an inefficient agent of development and social service delivery, so they began to route resources directly through NGOs. However, the question that is relevant for this chapter is whether NGOs can raise the social question. An answer to that question becomes clear as we examine the second implication of authoritarian regimes for the social question in South Asia.

The second implication of authoritarian democracy is the capture of bureaucracy.[29] The bureaucracy (including the judiciary) fails to perform its role as a countervailing force to the legislative branch. The subordinated bureaucracy must serve the objectives of the elected politicians rather than the people. Thus, the direct model of accountability also fails. Elected   politicians   primarily   control   the   bureaucracy   through

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[28] As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, each village acted as an autonomous republic, treating those outside the moral community of the village as aliens (on the moral community of the village, please refer to Platteau [1990] for the debate on the distinction between the rational and moral peasant with reference to the implications for social security).

[29] The current Indian Administrative Service (IAS) is patterned after the former Indian Civil Service of British India (or ICSI). Apart from central government–appointed civil servants, who may serve in any part of the country, the regional state governments also appoint civil servants, who may serve in any part of the state.

appointments and transfers (Wade 1985). Furthermore, bureaucrats operate in constituencies, where politicians are elected on patronage grounds and require middlemen to fulfil their promises (Reddy and Haragopal 1985; Pellissery 2006). In other words, governance is, in fact, collusion between the politician and the bureaucrat. The key breeding ground for corruption is this collusion, which requires detailed elaboration later in this section. The second generation of NGOs resisted this arrangement. Especially after a brief spell of Emergency rule in the country (June 1975 to January 1977), several bureaucrats, disillusioned by the politicians, resigned and decided to work in the civil society space. The NGOs they worked for were not merely an extended arm of the government; instead, they encouraged citizens to challenge what the elected government was doing.

The third implication of authoritarian democracy for the social question is the paradoxical operation of "trust". Rothstein (2005) successfully demonstrates that trust is the cement of institutions to deal with the "social" problem. Authoritarian regimes roll out welfare programmes to perpetuate their patronage relationship with the electorate.[30] Thus, the patronage modality in the context of social cleavage destroys "system trust". Citizens trust individual politicians but not the political system. This paradoxical trust breeds corruption. The bribe that a citizen pays to a politician is viewed as a "gift" for the politician or bureaucrat's extra efforts (Pellissery and Bopaiah 2020). This is the fertile ground for the capture of the modern institutions by the traditional power sources.

All the three illnesses emanating from authoritarian democracy point out that, unless nurtured and adapted to the cultural settings, even the institution of democracy could be counter- productive to the "social".

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[30] As shown by Keefer and Khemani (2005) in the context of information asymmetry in developing countries, the public choice approach is optimal because it provides welfare only to the targeted population rather than to everyone. This could translate as politicians reaching out to their own voter blocs often organised as religious or social groups.

Ideational Stifling from International Regimes

Various scholars (including the author of this chapter), and prominently Ambedkar, have shown that the "social question" is not indigenous to Indian philosophy and religion. However, has borrowing ideas from elsewhere facilitated the raising of the social question in a meaningful manner in India? The most telling aspect of this question is the political responses to the question of inequality. India has witnessed the political mobilisation of both left-wing and right-wing ideologies. Both these political ideologies succumbed to Western notions of class, while the question of inequality is not addressed. The Indian variant of class-caste interplay (Pellissery et al. 2015) was neglected. Leftist political parties,[31] which rose to power in some of the states through the democratic process (including Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura) by championing the causes of the working class and poor, also completely ignored how caste creates inequality (Rajan 2003).[32] This disappointment with left-wing politics is why identity-based political parties emerged in the late 1970s. They were generally known as "samaj" (community or caste) or political parties that made the social question their core.

Failure to raise the contextualised social question is attributable to intellectual colonialism that persisted through the funded projects, evaluation schemes, and policy advocacies of international organisations, such as the World Bank, the WTO, and UNICEF. In the rest of this section, I examine, in detail, a case study[33] of the ways in which ILO operations in India distorted one of the social questions.

India, as a colony of Britain, was a founding member of the ILO. Yet, ILO conventions had very little impact on raising the "social question" and increasing labour welfare for Indian workers until independence. Tensions between the ILO and India became apparent on ratification of some conventions after independence. What requires our attention is the

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[31] It is also interesting to note that by the mid-1970s, leftist political parties were vertically split between "Communist Party Marxists" and "Communist Party of India", primarily on the degree to which they were dogmatic.

[32] Globally, this is similar to how leftist political groups have ignored the feminist question.

[33] The case study is primarily informed by the research work at Centre for Labour Studies at the Institute of Public Policy, Bangalore.

International Conventions on Forced Labour (C029 of 1930) and the Abolition of Forced Labour (C105 of 1957), among other international human rights instruments. India has ratified these conventions. However, in the 1940s, the Indian Constituent Assembly's discussion on forced labour was without any reference to the ILO convention of 1930.

The caste-based system of forced labour was endemic to Indian society and did not require debt as a form of coercion for its perpetuation. There was widespread recognition of this coercive system at the beginning of the process of consulting on and drafting the Indian constitution. The Constituent Assembly extensively discussed "*begar*", a then-prevalent form of forced labour, and, as a result, drafted and passed Article 23 of the 1950 Constitution of India, granting people a fundamental right not to be exploited through traffic in human beings, *begar*, and other forms of forced labour (with the exception of state-enforced public service, as long as it was imposed in a uniform, non-discriminatory manner).

After 25 years, through another unique law—the 1976 Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act—India prohibited a wide gamut of bonded labour practices. The bonded labour system was primarily based on the caste-based exploitation of lower scheduled castes and tribes by the upper castes.[34] Other legislative measures like the 1989 Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act provided a broad framework of legislative measures to challenge caste oppression.[35] These were in conjunction with measures for positive discrimination programmes (discussed extensively in an earlier section) in education and employment to address the systematic caste oppression in India.

There was a marked difference between the ILO's conceptualisation of "forced labour" and India's conceptualisation. Combined with their stance on slavery (including modern slavery), the ILO's definition imagined employers' (including the state as an employer) exploitation of

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[34] Evenforty-three years after the enactment of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, forced and bonded labour continue to be prevalent in India. As of 2018, the Ministry of Labour reported having earmarked money for the rehabilitation of 289,222 workers rescued from bonded labour. In the absence of disaggregated government statistics on bonded labour, this remains the most reliable authoritative figure.

[35] In the year 2013 alone, all over India, 39,327 crimes committed against *dalits* were reported. Out of these, 13,975 cases were registered under this law.

employees using "force". The Indian definition used the term "bonded labour system" to indicate that force emerged from the caste system rather than a transaction between two individuals.

These differing conceptualisations also gave rise to divergent strategies. The ILO emphasised the identification and rescue of individuals trapped in forced labour arrangements. In contrast, India emphasised the transformation of the polity by ending the bonded labour *system*. India also emphasised the rehabilitation of former bonded labourers by providing alternative livelihoods directly.

Furthermore, the ILO emphasised criminalising the use of forced labour. Criminalisation as a strategy to achieve social aims is antagonistic to the ideal of solidarity. This is specifically true when the perpetrators of forced labour, as they are in this context, are farmers on whom a labourer depends for a job in their community. Criminalisation creates a rupture in a community, affecting the possibility of employment for labourers. However, criminalisation is a continuation of the individualisation of social rights since 1993 and in tandem with the state's neoliberal strategy of retreating from positive action[36] (Davy 2013). This is the beginning of the era of providing for "social rights" in the form of material well-being while underplaying the need to uphold citizens' civil and political rights.

Conclusion

The central question this chapter aimed to address is the potential and possibility of social policy in contexts in which equality among citizens is culturally denied but at the same time constitutionally guaranteed. Unlike Breman et al. (2019), this chapter argued for the need to broaden the scope of analysis beyond Marxist class analysis when we considered the social question. This chapter demonstrated how effected reforms and changes—religious, social, economic, developmental, and political (see Table 4.1 for a summary)—were denied the full recognition of the

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[36] See Nussbaum's (2003) articulation of the difference between positive liberty in the Indian constitution and negative liberty in the American constitution.

Table 4.1 Social protection in India: changing ideas and policies

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social question, social ideas, problem groups	Broader ideational frames and context	External ideas and models	Policies, legislation and programmes
Before 1947 (pre-independence)	Aspirations for "modernity"; political freedom eclipses social question	Superstition and illnesses of traditional society; nascent labour question (minoritarian)	Freedom struggle against colonial oppression	British interests; ideas of Indian Renaissance from national reform leaders	Rudimentary social security for a minority of formal workers
1947–1972	Electoral democracy	(Weak) labour question (only formal workers)	Economic growth; nation-building	Models of economic growth, particularly from the Soviet Union and USA	Large public-sector undertakings to boost industrial growth and land development and irrigation schemes to support agriculture
1973–1991	Increasing inequality creates cracks in consensus-based politics and caste groups organise as political forces	"Socialism" and "Secularism" in the Constitution; expansion of decentralised governance	Development	NGOs, international development, and philanthropic organisations	Anti-poverty programmes (social assistance, public works, nutrition for women and children) at regional state levels

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social question, social ideas, problem groups	Broader ideational frames and context	External ideas and models	Policies, legislation and programmes
1991–present	Economic liberalisation and rise of business interests; social cleavage of middle classes—marginalised groups; and Hindu nationalism	Intensification of identity-based welfare claims; demand for flexible labour in industrial and urban centres disconnects job security and social security	Growth with a human face	World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) influence policies, more than other international NGOs, WHO, ILO, UNICEF, and UNDP	Explicit recognition of unorganised workers through national-level programmes of social assistance, health insurance, and food security; middle class moving to privatised social provisions

problem of inequality. In other words, the Indian polity has sidestepped the "social question" of group inequality during different historical phases.

This chapter has shown that prior to the formation of the modern Indian state, several attempts to raise the social question were thwarted as a result of a strong, socially held, religious philosophy and feudal control over the peasantry. The possibility of raising the social question was lost during the independence struggle since political priorities dominated. Similarly, after independence was won, against the background of nation-state construction, unity among the various leaders forced them to set aside their differences on "social" problems. By the time "social" issues were formally recognised as a state objective in the mid-1970s, the country had a divisive political scene. The middle class was solidifying, and the social question was beginning to be perceived as partisan. These series of historical efforts to stifle the "social question" are inconsistent with the modernity that the nation-state wants to achieve and the functional aspirations of a heterogeneous population.

If the "social" question in independent India had to be appropriately framed within a modernist frame, it should have been within a Hindu reformation frame, that is, a challenge to the internal contradictions of Hindu social philosophy in the light of the modernist values of the mid-twentieth century. Policies focusing on redistribution and representation have fallen short. A rediscovery of public sphere, where recognition is the core of moral economy, is essential to achieve this ideal (Table 4.1).

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5

Minoritarian Labour Welfare in India: The Case of the Employees' State Insurance Act of 1948

Ravi Ahuja

Welfare in India: Institutional Pillars and Social Contexts

Welfarism in postcolonial India, in its policies and institutional forms, has not been based on the universal human right to social security that was proclaimed in the centres of metropolitan capitalism in the period following World War II (Nullmeier and Kaufmann 2010; Pierson and Leimgruber 2010). In terms of enforceability, "welfare" never became an integral attribute of citizenship in postcolonial India (Goyal 2013). This

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This is a severely abridged version of my essay (Ahuja 2019a). The original article engages in much more detail with the historical contexts, both international and national, from which Indian labour welfarism emerged while this chapter confines itself mainly to the process of legislation and the key structural features of one key welfare law, the Employees' State Insurance Act of 1948. The following acronyms are used in the footnotes: BL = British Library; ILOrep = Monthly Report of the ILO India Branch Office; IOR = India Office Records; RCLI = Royal Commission on Labour in India; ToI = Times of India.

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blatant historical fact has facilitated the almost complete exclusion of India from the existing scholarship on global welfarism, which, until recently, has been largely confined to the North Atlantic rim.[1] This exclusion has appeared to be justified even to scholars of South Asian societies who often believe that international policy debates on welfare had largely bypassed India before the end of colonial rule and whose analyses of Indian social policy tend to begin with India's political independence in 1947 (Goyal 2013). However, key characteristics and global connections of India's postcolonial social policy become perceivable only if we turn to their—generally miserable—origins in the colonial period, under political conditions of a barely veiled despotism where the State was less exposed to democratic pressures and in less immediate need of legitimizing authority than most European polities.

The colonial Government of India survived, after all, with limited political damage, a chain of famines of genocidal proportions that stretched over the last three decades of the nineteenth century[2]—the very decades when foundations for the European "welfare state" were laid in response to growing labour movements (Kuhnle and Sander 2010). As late as in 1943, the lack of formal entitlements, or citizen rights, to social protection let the political cost appear bearable to the British authorities of millions of starvation deaths in Eastern India[3]—at a time when the introduction of a system of universal social protection seemed unavoidable on the British Isles even to conservatives. Nevertheless, the last seven decades of colonial rule, beginning with the Famine Codes of the 1880s, were arguably also the period when the foundations were laid for the pillars of Indian social policy as we know it, even though the edifice was fully erected and distinguishable in its present-day form only after the attainment of political independence in 1947. Three such pillars of social policy are distinguishable, which have borne the weight of

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[1] This is exemplified by paradigmatic studies such as Esping-Andersen (1990). The more recent Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State (Castles et al. 2010) does present a section on "Emerging Welfare States" that contains chapters on Latin America, East Asia, Eastern Europe and Russia, but still not on South Asia.

[2] There is now a rich historiography of famines in India that includes the important monographs by Bhatia (1991, 3rd ed) and Davis (2001).

[3] This has not been lost on either contemporaries or later scholars. See, for example, Nehru (1989: 496) (1st ed. 1946) and Sen (1981).

the—altogether limited—Indian welfarism unevenly, the proportions shifting over time.

The first of these pillars originated from older conceptions of *poor relief*. After the famine crises of the last third of the nineteenth century, these forms of social policy took the shape of targeted "workfare" programmes and, if politically unavoidable, of price controls on essential goods or of provisioning schemes (Brennan 1984). India's postcolonial and perpetually contentious food rationing systems, the more recent (if now increasingly hollowed out) "National Rural Employment Guarantee" or the "Midday Meal Schemes" for school children are important instances for this policy lineage (Mooji 1998; Amrith 2008; Siegel 2018). A second pillar consists in the establishment of *quotas* regulating the access of specific social groups to public employment and public goods (crucially, education). This pillar, too, originated in the colonial period but assumed growing importance after the end of British rule and particularly when movements of *Dalit* and "other backward" castes became more assertive in the 1980s (Assayag 2012: 451–455; Jaffrelot 2012: 470–476; Srivastava 2018).[4] This chapter is solely concerned with the third pillar, which made social welfare benefits *conditional on specific forms of employment*. Such policies followed the welfare logic established by the Bismarckian social insurance reforms of the 1880s in that they conceived of welfare entitlements not as a universal right inherent in citizen status, but as derived from legally defined types of employment status and thus as a special right (or, legal privilege) conferred on certain categories of employees.

If the historiography of Indian social policy is meagre in general, it is almost non-existent in regard to employment-based welfare schemes.[5] To many they would appear, in any case, as being of little consequence to the vast majority of India's wage-earning population. For 93 per cent of the Indian workforce are conventionally (and somewhat simplistically)

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[4] See also Chap. 4, in this book.

[5] Even the historian of Indian labour perhaps most sensitive to issues of social security assumed that state-born welfare schemes were largely irrelevant in colonial India, Das Gupta (1994: 612–620). The only colonial welfare laws that have attracted more serious historical analysis so far are the provincial Maternity Benefit Acts and, more particularly, that of Bombay (cf. Chhachi 1998; Srivastava 2018).

reckoned to be employed in the so-called informal sector and thus largely exempted from the ambit of labour law and employment-based welfarism. Even of the remaining 7 per cent about half are reported to be employed "informally" *within the "formal sector"* (Sanyal and Bhattacharyya 2009: 39). They are, in other words, employed by contractors or in other ways that permit to pay much lower wages, evade labour law and withhold employment benefits. Many critical scholars agree with apologists of neoliberalism that India's labour laws—including employment-based social security schemes—have been relevant only to a small proportion of the country's workforce and have hermetically sealed off a privileged labour aristocracy of formally employed workers from the vast informal labour economy.[6]

This seemingly uncontroversial line of argument needs to be interrogated, however. At issue is not whether massive social differences exist among India's workforce: the shrinking proportion of effectively tenured workers in public sector enterprises has undoubtedly very little in common, for instance, with the day labourers constituting the majority of India's enormous construction labour force. Rather the question is how to conceptualize this wide scope for differentiation among India's wage-earning people in terms of income, employment conditions, social status and economic security. Like Jan Breman (2013), I would plead for a dynamic, non-dualistic understanding of the phenomenon.[7] For harsh exclusionary practices and merciless competition between segments of the workforce operate within a structure of *graded informality*: rather than assuming a stationary dichotomy between formal and informal labour status, I propose to examine formalization and informalization *as processes* that are contingent, continuous and contentious. Boundaries and passages between the various segments of the workforce are, in other words, multiple and shifting; they are produced and reproduced through social conflicts and coalitions; and they possess *relative stability* only.

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[6] See, for example, Parry (2013: 45), where formal sector workers are characterized as a "complacently cocooned enclave of labour inhabiting a 'citadel' of state-sponsored privilege, progressively protected against incursions by workers from outside".

[7] Breman (2013; see esp. Chap. 1) has summed up and updated his argument, first presented in 1976 in a series of articles.

For labour and employment-based social security laws have played a major role not only in the definition of boundaries but also of *passages* between sharply differentiated segments of the workforce. This is not to play down the potency of structural boundaries, which has been reflected in all-too-real difficulties faced by trade unions in developing workable strategies encompassing all sections of the working classes based on a commonality of interest. But taking account also of the passages permits to perceive counter-tendencies, potentials for cross-sectional alliances and to make sense of the persistent demands of informally employed workers to be included in schemes like the Employees' State Insurance or the Provident Fund. If employment-based social security programmes thus have mattered not only to the fraction of the working classes covered by them explicitly but to wider sections of India's workforce, it is because they span, together with other labour laws, a horizon of expectation, define possibilities and help to formulate demands.

If we thus assume "(in)formalization" to be a dynamic, bidirectional, even reversible *process*, and that "formality" and "informality" are, accordingly, not to be understood as stable attributes of static and hermetically sealed "sectors" of the labour market, we need to reconstruct this process *historically*. We need to trace, in other words, the historical evolution of those patterns of segmentation within the workforce that came to be described from the 1970s onwards in many parts of the world with the adjectives "formal" and "informal". Law has served, as Prabhu Mohapatra's studies show, as a crucial regulatory technology for the separation of "formal" from "informal" modes of employment (Mohapatra 2005, 2012). A historical—as against a merely logical—reconstruction of this process of separation, a chronology of the intertwined processes of formalization and informalization is still lacking, however. As we begin to retrace this chronology, the middle of the twentieth century emerges as a key moment of these processes: almost all major pieces of legislation that have marked out the parameters of India's postcolonial regime of labour regulation up to the present day were passed during the six years from 1946 to 1952. These acts have regulated labour relations, industrial disputes procedures, trade union rights and also employment-based social benefits, including

the Employees' State Insurance and Provident Fund schemes mentioned already.[8]

Largely ignored by historians, this spate of legislation was, in the immediate political context of the post-war situation, a response of the outgoing colonial administration and their nationalist successors to the extreme political volatility encompassing India in general and to alarming levels of working-class unrest in particular (see Ahuja 2019b). But these changes also had a longer history, dating back to World War I at least, and were conditioned by larger and deeper international as well as India-level contexts: these are discussed more fully in the long version of this essay[9] and can here only be briefly alluded to. International debates on labour welfare did by no means bypass late colonial India: they provided the "language of welfare" that was used in political controversy and policymaking. Welfarist arguments were taken up both from the debates around the International Labour Organization (ILO) of which India was a founding member and from social policy developments in post–World War I Britain and other Euro-American nation states. Established formats of welfare legislation such as maternity benefit, workmen's compensation, sickness or old-age insurance were freely borrowed from these international contexts and from the memoranda of ILO councillors. In the same vein, British social policy experts such as John Henry Whitley or William Beveridge came to be involved in legislative processes in India.

While the *discursive and regulatory forms* of early welfarism in India were thus strongly shaped by these international contexts, the specific *regulatory content* (and particularly the strong exclusionary, minoritarian focus) of the emergent regime of labour welfarism was largely determined by India-level contestations between (a) the late colonial and, subsequently, the early postcolonial State, (b) British expatriate as well as Indian big business and (c) an expanding and politically plural labour movement. To cut a long story short, the State became increasingly involved in issues of "labour efficiency" and, therefore, of the social reproduction of the workforce during the World Wars both as a growing

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[8] For an overview, see International Labour Organization—ILO (1957).
[9] For a detailed discussion, see Ahuja (2019a), especially sections "The Employees' State Insurance Act: The Making of a Law" and "Repercussions: Graded Informality, a "birthright" Lost and a Horizon of Expectation".

industrial employer and as a consumer of strategic commodities; Indian industrialists, on their part, faced increasing international competition and temporary labour market bottlenecks, expanded into more capital-intensive sectors, all of which implied that influential sections of big business came to promote the "rationalization" of industrial labour processes and to acknowledge the importance of raising the living standards of at least sections of the workforce to reduce labour turnover and "absenteeism"; Indian labour movements not only proliferated massively since World War I and came to involve, especially since the 1940s, sections of the workforce even beyond large-scale industry, but they were also a field of contestation between various political forces with a marked presence of militant communist and socialist tendencies.

The historians' lack of interest in the origins of employment-based social security legislation thus points us towards a wider gap in the historiography of contemporary South Asian societies. The present essay approaches this gap from a specific and limited angle: it traces the prehistory and the making of one major piece of protective labour legislation, the Employees' State Insurance Act of 1948. This was a compulsory insurance scheme financed by contributions from employers, employees and the state, which was to provide workers employed in "permanent factories" with monetary benefits as well as medical services to protect them from the risks of sickness, childbirth and employment injury while regulating sickness leave also. In this essay, I confine myself to discussing the political and legislative process from which this piece of labour legislation emerged and how it both gave legal expression and contributed to an increasing differentiation among the industrial workforce along the lines that would later be described in terms of a "formal"-"informal" divide.

The chapter is organized as follows. The section "Early Industrial Welfare and the Debate on Welfare Legislation in Interwar India" traces early industrial welfare schemes at the company level and discusses why the reproduction of the industrial workforce emerged as a political issue at the all-India level during the interwar period. The following section "The Employees' State Insurance Act: The Making of a Law" traces the making of the Employees' State Insurance Act in the political field of forces of the transitional 1940s. The concluding section "Repercussions: Graded Informality, a 'Birthright' Lost and a Horizon of Expectation"

argues that the results of this process were contradictory: while the specific form of Indian health insurance contributed to a harsh segmentation of the working classes, and while the promise of welfare as a citizen's right remained unfulfilled, horizons of expectation were spanned simultaneously that continue to inform struggles for social equality.

Early Industrial Welfare and the Debate on Welfare Legislation in Interwar India

Before World War I, employers both British and Indian, colonial officials and large sections of the press agreed that India did not require protective labour legislation or a welfarism focused on industrial labour. Two lines of argument stood out, the first asserting that India's young industry could not afford expensive welfare measures if it was to compete internationally. A leading nationalist newspaper, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, formulated this position with admirable clarity in 1875: "A larger death rate amongst our operatives is far more preferable to the collapse of this rising industry. […] We can, after the manufactures are fully established, seek to protect the operatives".[10] The second line of argument insisted that labour welfare was largely irrelevant to India since the country had "as yet practically no factory population, such as exists in European countries" (Indian Factory Labour Commission 1908: 18). Factory work, the adherents of this latter view reasoned, was no more than a temporary occupation of and a supplementary source of income for a migratory workforce. The mill worker, it was held, was "essentially an agriculturalist": "His heart is in the country and not in his work" (Burnett-Hurst 1925: 60). Moreover, the workers' health was provided for by their rural families and other "traditional" village-based forms of mutual aid: "in most cases" the Indian Factory Labour Commission asserted in 1908, "he is secured against want by the joint family system" (p. 19) and an official report on the industrial city of Bombay concurred in 1923 that periodical visits to the home village had "a beneficial effect upon their health as reflected by

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[10] *Amrita Bazar Patrika,* 2 September 1875, quoted in Chandra (1966: 336).

weight and counteracts to a very large extent the effects of working and living conditions".[11]

Such opinions continued to be pronounced well into the postcolonial period, and cracks appeared, at first, in this hegemonic construct only in certain industrial sectors and for limited periods. Exceptions were capital-intensive industrial enterprises such as the Tata steel works, founded in 1907 and operational by 1912, where profits depended on the stable employment of a skilled workforce and where—as in the case of the railways and their extensive engineering workshops—strategic needs of the empire were at stake. Here welfare schemes, including housing and health services, were created even before World War I and expanded in the course of the 1920s (Lala 2006: 284; RCLI 1931a: 53–69 and passim). Other exceptions were observable even in India's more typical labour-intensive industries when severe bottlenecks of labour supply threatened to stifle industrial production for periods sufficiently long to affect capital returns. Bombay's cotton textile industry experienced such a bottleneck during the plague crisis of the late 1890s. This induced industrialists to look for devices restricting the mobility of the workforce—devices that included company-level welfare measures and, more particularly, housing programmes (cf. Sarkar 2018: 202–211). When the exigencies of the "Great War" dictated a greater British reliance on India's labour markets and industries, the cracks widened and the "welfare" of industrial labour emerged, for the first time, *as a political issue at the all-India level*. The Indian Industrial Commission (1916–1918) was appointed by the Government of India with no labour representative, while half of its members were Indian or British businessmen. Interestingly, the Commission moved cautiously away from the earlier consensus in its report: the lack of welfare facilities that addressed dismal health conditions among the industrial workforce was now identified as a competitive handicap since even the cheap wages of Indian workers could not make up, the Commission believed, for their alleged low "efficiency":

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[11] T. Maloney, *Report on Humidification in Indian Cotton Mills,* Delhi: Government of India Press, 1923, quoted in Burnett-Hurst (1925: 60, fn. 1).

> The conditions under which industrial operatives live and work in this country ought, if efficiency be aimed at, to approximate, as nearly as circumstances permit, to those of temperate climates. […] The problem, not only on moral grounds, but also for economic reasons, must be solved with the least avoidable delay, if the existing and future industries of India are to hold their own against the ever-growing competition, which will be still fiercer after the war. No industrial edifice can be permanent, which is built on such unsound foundations as those afforded by Indian labour under its present conditions. (Indian Industrial Commission 1918: 179f)

The recommendation of measures implying legal obligations on the part of employers was, however, carefully avoided. Even so, the argument of welfare as a precondition for "efficiency" stuck and was taken up time and again in the following years. Accordingly, in April 1922, a report published in *The Servant of India*, mouthpiece of an influential social reform society, summed up the rationale of India's first "Industrial Welfare Conference" as follows:

> Welfare work wherever conducted on right lines has been found to be a veritable boon to the worker and a sound business proposition to the employer. India cannot hope to compete successfully with other countries unless the present low level of efficiency of the Indian labour is considerably raised. (Kanekar 1922: 136)

Unprecedented levels of labour unrest and the emergence of numerous trade unions after the "Great War" added the desideratum of "social harmony" to that of "efficiency". This induced Gandhi, for instance, to offer a nativist justification for welfarism by developing during these years the idea of a paternalist "trusteeship" that employers were morally obliged to take upon themselves for the benefit of their employees (Chandavarkar 1998). During the interwar years, a growing minority of industrial employers came up with voluntary factory-level welfare schemes that addressed issues of social reproduction by providing for housing, crèches, educational facilities, subsidized grain shops, credit or dispensaries. These generally modest schemes often had a sharp disciplinary edge, as they sought to suppress the militancy and to reduce the horizontal mobility of core segments of the factory workforce. They were particularly prevalent

in areas with large concentrations of industrial employment such as the cotton textile metropolises of Bombay and Ahmedabad, where strikes and unionization were on the rise and where sizeable local labour markets enabled workers, at least in boom years, to shift to employers who offered better conditions (RCLI 1931b: 260f).[12]

A "social policy" in the sense of a legal regulation of the workforce's social reproduction based, in part, on statutory contributions by employers was resisted, however, on the whole successfully throughout the interwar period. As in other countries (Kuhnle and Sander 2010: 71–74) a "Workmen's Compensation Act" was the first piece of labour welfare legislation in colonial India. It was enacted in 1923 and put into force a year later. The divergence between European and Indian legislation was already perceivable, however, as the scope of workmen's compensation was defined much more narrowly than, for instance, in Britain. Small-scale industries and agriculture (including the sizeable quasi-industrial plantation complex) were expressly exempted from the law (Punekar 1950: 55). Numerous loopholes were created even with regard to labour market segments covered by it, which included initially not more than four million workers (ILO 1957: 95). Moreover, the implementation was left to district magistrates in general; even 20 years later, a special commissioner to adjudicate workmen's compensation cases had been appointed solely in Bombay, while in Bihar, Bengal and Madras, Labour Commissioners were charged with workmen's compensation as an additional duty (Punekar 1950: 73). As a result, the "Compensation Courts" appear to have sat in some of India's vast Provinces only twice a year (Health Survey and Development Committee 1946: 77). Even more importantly, adjudication could only begin after private negotiations between the injured worker and the employer had failed, which made it almost impossible for uncounselled workers to stake their compensation claims. The injured worker, it was observed, ran "the risk of losing his job on top of losing a limb, if he decides to fight a case" (Adarkar 1947: 14). Even when adjudication took place, after all, the actual payment of the

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[12] See also: *Bulletins of Indian Industries and Labour 63: "Sickness Insurance",* Government of India: New Delhi, 1937, p. 82 and Srivastava (2018).

awarded compensation was often not enforced (Lokanathan 1929: 107; Punekar 1950: 74).

When the economics professor and government councillor B.P. Adarkar submitted his "Report on Health Insurance for Industrial Workers" to the outgoing colonial dispensation in 1945, he recommended to scrap the Workmen's Compensation Act altogether. It was to be replaced by an integrated healthcare scheme, as the working of the former had been "far from satisfactory". He had very similar remarks for the other major item of interwar labour welfare legislation, that is, the Maternity Benefit Acts that had been passed in the majority of provinces after Bombay made a start in 1929 (Adarkar 1945: 10; s.a.: ILO 1957: 100f). The Report of the (Rege) Labour Investigation Committee similarly observed in 1946 that the

> main defects of maternity benefits legislation are that it is neither uniform nor universal, that there is no provision for free medical aid before, during or after confinement except in a few provinces […], and that there is no provision for preventing an employer from dismissing a woman worker on the first sign of pregnancy except in a few provinces.

The Report also stated that women workers had often been dismissed when the Acts were put in force and that employers continued to "show a preference for the employment of unmarried girls, widows and women past child-bearing age" (Labour Investigation Committee 1946: 57). In a circular letter to the provincial governments in May 1945, H.C. Prior, Secretary to the Government of India, concurred that the Workmen's Compensation and the Maternity Benefit Acts had "serious defects […] which cannot be removed except by means of an integral scheme of insurance".[13]

Even though employers resisted any legal obligation to pay for welfare measures as an interference with the freedom of labour contract, the demand for social security legislation became if anything more insistent from the late 1920s onwards. The report of the Royal Commission on

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[13] H.C. Prior, Secretary to the Government of India, to all Provincial Governments, 4 May 1945 ("Subject: Health Insurance Scheme"), BL: IOR/L/E/8/4948 ("Health Insurance for Industrial Workers, incl. Sickness Statistics").

Labour in India (RCLI), presented to the British Parliament in 1931, accepted the view that continuing circulatory migration between city and countryside distinguished Indian factory workers from their European counterparts, but refuted the conventional notion that the former were "essentially" peasants (RCLI 1931b: 11–13). They conceded that the "villages have hitherto provided a measure of insurance against the effects of the various changes which may reduce, interrupt or destroy the earning capacity of the worker" (p. 19). Yet, they added, this "measure of insurance" did not prevent workers even after short periods of illness from falling into debt and from finding themselves "destitute of resources, unable to take proper measures to restore [their] health and in difficulties regarding even the means of subsistence" (p. 265). The RCLI thus recommended the development, in due course, of a system of sickness insurance for industrial workers, funded by contributions from employers as well as employees (pp. 265–269). However, one of its members, N.M. Joshi, a prominent social reformer, legislator and trade union leader with close links to the ILO in Geneva, went beyond this Bismarck-style employment-based conception of social security: in February 1932, the consultative Committee of the Round Table Conference discussed (and promptly turned down with reference to "the peculiar conditions of India") his suggestion

> that the chapter on Fundamental Rights in the new Reformed Constitution for India should include a clause entitling every citizen to support from public funds, if no work could be found for him and to the provision, through a system of State insurance or otherwise, for maintenance during sickness, infirmity or old age and in the case of women for a reasonable period before and after confinement.[14]

The oppositional Indian National Congress, too, endorsed demands for social welfare: during the campaign for the provincial elections in 1936–1937, its manifesto promised "protection against the economic

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[14]ILOrep 3/1932, p. 65 (citing *The Hindu*, 1 March 1932). The Roundtable Conferences prepared the Government of India Act of 1935, which was the last quasi-constitutional legal framework of colonial rule before independence.

consequence of old-age, sickness and unemployment".[15] A National Planning Committee (NPC), instituted by the National Congress in the late 1930s, was chaired by the moderate socialist Jawaharlal Nehru, but it also included a strong posse of Indian businessmen. In 1940, the NPC resolved that "social security should be assured to all classes of workers" (National Planning Committee 1940: 60). More specifically, the NPC announced that "[a] system of compulsory and contributory social insurance for industrial workers should be established directly under the control of the State, to cover the risks of sickness and invalidity". This as well as other schemes were envisaged for independent India and to "be extended by stages, priority being given to particular classes of workers, with due regard to the relative urgency of their needs, facility of application, and to the ability of the community to provide for them" (p. 55). The NPC thus applied the globally circulating term "social security" to the Indian context as early as in 1940[16] but limited it, in the main, to labour welfare: it made entitlements to social benefits conditional, at least initially, on industrial employment and did not seek to establish them as a constitutional citizen's right. It thus chose to follow the RCLI's more restricted Bismarck-style approach rather than N.M. Joshi's universalism.

With the Indian National Congress assuming in 1937 the government of the majority of provinces, including Bombay with its sizeable industrial centres, the latter emerged as the main hub for the development of a nationalist labour policy. In their "Labour Programme" of August 1937, the Bombay government already dampened the expectations raised during the election campaign[17] and had their Labour Commissioner declare a few months later that "conditions do not at present exist in the Presidency for the successful operation of a scheme of sickness insurance as it is understood and worked in the United Kingdom or other foreign

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[15] "Industrial Reform in Presidency", *ToI,* 18 August 1937, p. 6.

[16] During the interwar period, the phrase "social security" had circulated in the Indian press with increasing frequency, especially after the US "Social Security Act" of 1935, but mainly with reference to international developments. From the beginning of the 1940s onwards, the term was applied to Indian contexts more regularly. For evidence, see, for instance, the digital archive of the Times of India. The quoted instance from the resolutions of the National Planning Committee in 1940 might be significant in this respect.

[17] "Industrial Reform in Presidency", *ToI,* 18 August 1937, p. 6.

countries". As preliminary, cautious steps, the government proposed to first generate the required statistics, to legally sanction three to four weeks of paid sick leave for industrial workers and to deduct part of the wages for this leave period in order to create a State-administered provident fund. These were seen as first steps towards a social insurance scheme that was to be restricted to industrial workers.[18]

The Employees' State Insurance Act: The Making of a Law

When the colonial government declared India's war entry in September 1939 without consulting the nationalist opposition, the provincial governments led by the Indian National Congress stepped down. In 1942, Nehru and other nationalist leaders were arrested, and the National Planning Committee ceased to function. The Congress' temporary exclusion from policy-making circles did not, however, cut short the debate on social insurance for industrial workers. Discussions between employers' spokesmen, trade unions and representatives of the Government of India on a compulsory sickness insurance continued during the early years of the war, and if they remained fruitless, this was justified now more often by a lack of funds rather than by asserting the undesirability or the irrelevance to India of such a scheme.[19]

This political impasse ended only in the latter half of 1942, when the colonial suppression of the nationalist Quit India Movement was in full swing and when the British War Cabinet discussed the expediency, under these circumstances, of a "more progressive social and industrial policy" in India.[20] The Government of India's new Labour Member B.R. Ambedkar, a towering leader of India's "untouchables", used this situation to suddenly announce a social insurance bill that would be

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[18] *Bombay Chronicle,* 15 November 1937, p. 8 ("Sickness Leave with Pay for Industrial Labour") and p. 6 ("An Essential Reform"); see also ILOrep 11/1937, pp. 18f.

[19] See, for example, ILOrep 1/1942, pp. 4–6 (special reports produced on the basis of participants' minutes and papers distributed at the 3rd Labour Ministers' Conference).

[20] BL: IOR/L/E/8/2527 Social Reform in India, 1942–1944. See also above.

introduced in the Legislative Assembly by spring 1943.[21] B.P. Adarkar was appointed by the Labour Ministry to develop a "Report on Health Insurance for Industrial Workers", which was submitted in the fall of 1944.[22] The Report drew upon various tentative schemes developed in the preceding years (Adarkar 1945: 14–16) but developed a concrete financial and administrative structure for the first time. It was vetted subsequently by ILO experts at the request of the Government of India and revised by Adarkar by July 1945.[23] The Workmen's State Insurance Bill was introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly towards the end of the following year and eventually passed as the Employees' State Insurance Act (ESI Act) in March 1948. It was to provide workers in perennial factories with more than ten employees with eight weeks of paid sick leave, monetary benefits in case of maternity, accident and invalidity, as well as medical benefits to be offered by special medical services that were to be created for the purpose.[24]

The law remained a dead letter for several years, however. The *Times of India* observed a year after the passing of the Act that while the ESI depended on the close cooperation of the Central Government, the Provincial Governments and of employers, "[a]ll the three are too preoccupied with their own problems to attend to the teething troubles of a child whom none consider as their own".[25] In 1951, the All-India Organisation of Industrial Employers, a body representing Indian big business, demanded a further postponement of its implementation and particularly of any raising of contributions from the employers since they considered the scheme "socially unjust" and even "disastrous" in its economic consequences, as it imposed "on industry a burden which it cannot bear".[26] Influential forces within the ruling Indian National Congress supported this stance: the government of the populous northern province

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[21] ILOrep 10/1942, p. 5 (cites *The Statesman,* 14 October 1942).

[22] ILOrep 10/1944, pp. 24f (cites "Unofficial Note issued by the Bureau of Public Information, Government of India", n.d.).

[23] ILOrep 7/1945, p. 18 (referring to *Indian Labour Gazette [hereafter: ILG]* 6/1945).

[24] *ILG* V/10 (April 1948), pp. 698–701; ILOrep 4/1948, pp. 90–93 (cites *The Statesman,* 2 and 3 April 1948).

[25] "Employees' State Insurance Corporation", *ToI,* 30 August 1949, p. 11.

[26] ILOrep 5/1951, pp. 16–18 (cites *Hindustan Times,* 17 May 1951).

of Uttar Pradesh had previously "signified their opposition to the scheme following a representation made to the Centre Government by certain employers at Kanpur"—the *Times of India's* commentator even feared that the project was about to be abandoned.[27] In 1952, Jawaharlal Nehru finally inaugurated a pilot scheme that was confined, however, to Delhi and the industrial city of Kanpur.[28] It was only in the course of the late 1950s that ESI coverage was rolled out more widely though considerable parts of the country still remained outside the remit of the Act. A full decade after the ESI Act had been passed by the Parliament of independent India, a "Study Group on Social Security" set up by the Ministry of Labour believed that of 2.2 million factory workers to which the law extended, a mere 1.3 million were actually covered by the mechanisms of implementation established by then (Study Group on Social Security 1958: 25).

The passing of the law had clearly not put a stop to the struggle over health insurance for workers—trench warfare over legislation now merely turned into an unending battle of attrition over its implementation. While these struggles over implementation require further research, we can here only discuss schematically four major lines of contestation that emerged already in the process of legislation in negotiations between business representatives, trade unionists and state officials. These were (a) the compulsory nature of the scheme, (b) its contributory character and the connected issue of financial liability, (c) its administrative structure as a *state* insurance and (d) the vexed question of scope.

Backed up by the 1944 Recommendation of the ILO, government officials and experts as well as trade union spokesmen agreed that sickness insurance for industrial workers had to be *compulsory* if it was to have any impact (Punekar 1950: 3,9; Adarkar 1945: 24).[29] This caused some discomfort in business circles and even among industrialists who admitted a certain need for an improvement of health services for industrial workers. At issue was not only that compulsory participation in a health insurance

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[27] "State Insurance Scheme. Employers' Opposition", *ToI,* 18 August 1950, p. 5; "A Sorry State", *ToI,* 20 September 1950, p. 6. See also: Albuquerque (1958: 108f).

[28] ILOrep 2/1952, pp. 94f (cites *The Statesman* and *National Herald*, 25 February 1952).

[29] See also *Trade Union Record,* IV/5–6 (1–2/1945: 38f).

scheme implied an obligation to contribute to it financially—an aspect we shall discuss instantly. Employers were also concerned that a compulsory scheme regulating, among other things, the employees' right to paid sickness leave brought the conditions of work or the modalities of the performance of the labour contract under the scrutiny of state officials. Employer spokesmen thus pointed out repeatedly that the issue of health insurance was directly connected to that of holidays with pay[30]—the scheme was thus not external to the labour relationship, but a mechanism that restricted the "freedom" of employers to fashion labour contracts as they pleased. In 1935, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce had flatly opposed any social insurance scheme based on compulsion, had suggested voluntary schemes at the company level according to a "model scheme" to be drawn up by government and had demanded that existing "adequate" arrangements should not be interfered with.[31] By 1943, when many employers recognized that a compulsory sickness insurance scheme could be forestalled for some time but not avoided altogether, the Bombay Chamber of Commerce still demanded that existing voluntary employer schemes should be allowed to continue, thus opening a route towards the exemption from legal obligation.[32] Trade unionists insisted, on their part, that "[e]xceptions in favour of any private factories will lead to unfair practices".[33] Adarkar, while recommending strictly regulated exceptions wherever employers had created satisfactory insurance schemes for their workforces, emphasized that such schemes were extremely rare: "The existing medical facilities in most places are no doubt extremely inadequate; even some of the so-called health insurance schemes are a mere parody of what they should be" (Adarkar 1945: 186). At the end of the day, employers could not prevent that the ESI Act defined health insurance as a compulsory scheme. The interdependence between

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[30] ILOrep 8/1940, pp. 35f (cites Circular no. 146, dated 8 August 1940, of the Employers' Association of Northern India in Kanpur); ILOrep 6/1943, p. 12 (citing Proceedings of Bombay Chamber of Commerce for May 1943).

[31] ILOrep 11/1935, p. 12 ("Abstract of Proceedings of the Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce for Sept. 1935").

[32] ILOrep 6/1943, p. 12 (excerpted from Proceedings of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, May 1943).

[33] "Memorandum submitted by the All-India Trade Union Congress…", *Trade Union Record,* IV/5–6 (January–February 1945), p. 39.

employment-based health insurance and the conditions of the performance of the labour contract was even brought forward openly by B.R. Ambedkar as an argument for the urgency of regulating employment conditions through the Standing Orders Act that was passed by the Central Legislative Assembly in 1946.[34]

The second line of contestation emerged over the *contributory character* of the ESI scheme and the connected issue of *financial liability*. From the early war years onwards, state officials and trade union representatives had agreed that the envisaged social insurance scheme needed to be based on contributions by employers and employees. Business spokesmen and trade unionists had, at the same time, concurred in the opinion that a financial contribution by the State was required.[35] Raising the threshold for the passing of an unwelcome law without having to contradict government openly was surely one of the tactical considerations that prompted employers to pursue this line. The War Government at the central level responded by taking the comfortable stand that if state subsidies were required, they would have to come from the provinces—predictably, the latter ruled this out altogether (Adarkar 1945: 164).[36] The Adarkar Report, in 1945, argued strongly for a financial contribution by the State, but it outlined two alternative models of funding, only one of which involved state subsidies (Adarkar 1945: 38–45, 105–109). The Report also advocated a state guarantee for the solvency of the social insurance scheme (Adarkar 1945: 63f)—a demand taken up by the Bombay Millowners' Association when the Bill was eventually under discussion in the Constituent Assembly, in order to protect the employers from financial liabilities.[37] As per the Act finally passed a year later, the Government of India undertook to cover two-thirds of the administration costs for the first five years, while the provinces were asked to finance one-third of the costs of the medical facilities that were to be established

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[34] "Fixing of Labour Conditions by Employers", *ToI,* 13 April 1946, p. 8.

[35] ILOrep 1/1942, pp. 4–6 (special reports on the 3rd Labour Ministers' Conference and the preceding meeting of the Labour Ministers with employer and worker representatives in January 1942).

[36] See also: "Health Insurance Plan for Workers. Provincial Govt.'s Attitude", *ToI,* 31 October 1944, p. 4.

[37] ILOrep 7/1947, pp. 28f (cites proceedings of the Committee of the Bombay Millowners' Association for January to March 1947).

for the provision of the medical benefits. An estimate calculated that, on this basis, employers were to contribute 60 per cent of the total ESI budget, while employees and the State were answerable for 20 per cent each (Punekar 1950: 194f). Again, the actual implementation of the Act created a rather different scenario: business advocates achieved a temporary exemption of companies from the payment of "maximum contributions",[38] and by the end of the 1950s, trade unions calculated that employees had, in fact, contributed significantly more to ESI funds than employers.[39] The state governments, on their part, renegotiated their share of expenses for the ESI scheme's medical services and succeeded in reducing it from one-third to one-quarter (Albuquerque 1958: 108f).

Since state contributions remained narrowly circumscribed, the operational costs of the ESI scheme were mainly borne by bipartite contributions from employers and employees. The *administrative structure*—the third line of contestation we need to take account of—assumed a strongly tripartite form, however, and came to be dominated by state officials: while employers' associations and trade unions were entitled to appoint their representatives, the administrative bodies in control of the ESI funds were controlled by government servants as were the special arbitration structures for ESI disputes (Albuquerque 1958: 108; Punekar 1950: 148–150, 158f). This was a major departure from the implementation structure of the Workmen's Compensation Act where the respective employer was in charge of payments to beneficiaries and where hurdles had been created intentionally, as we have seen earlier, to render recourse of claimants to legal adjudication more difficult. The state-centred administrative structure of the ESI was created with the explicit aim of preventing the malfunctions of the earlier Acts that were believed to be rooted in the principle of "employer liability": "for if the employer is saddled with the responsibility of compensation, he is bound to find ways of avoiding it" Adarkar 1947: 14, see also 11–17, 23, 1945: 12).

The fourth and even more defining line of contestation arose in regard to the issue of *scope*. When the debate grew more intensive in 1940, an

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[38] "Health Insurance Scheme. Central Act Likely to be Amended", *Bombay Chronicle,* 5 December 1950, p. 1; *Report of the Study Group on Social Security,* pp. 24f.

[39] *A Question to Trade Unions: On ESI, PF and Pension Schemes*, p. 107.

alliance of British and Indian industrialists demanded that a compulsory social insurance scheme, if it had to be created at all, was to have an extensive reach from the start. They insisted to include the Princely States—comprising almost one third of the subcontinent—to avoid unfair competitive advantages for industrialists operating from these territories.[40] For the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, this was an issue sufficiently important to justify the "postponement of the scheme for several years".[41] Sir Vithal Chandavarkar, spokesman of the Employers' Federation of India, even combined his appeal to the new government of independent India not to "scare away private enterprise" with the demand that the undue focus of labour legislation on industrial workers should be overcome and that its scope needed to be extended to agricultural workers. Ostensibly in the best interest of the working classes, such proposals seemed to have the main objective of derailing the project by raising the hurdles.[42] Adarkar envisaged a universal scheme in the long run, but recommended for the initial period a narrow focus on workers in perennial (i.e. non-seasonal) factories in three industrial sectors that had employed about 1.3 million workers in 1942: textiles, engineering, "minerals and metal" (i.e. the metallurgical and oil industries) (Adarkar 1945: 29, 159). This would have covered about 60 per cent of the factory workforce.[43] The All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) demanded a wider scope to include all employees of "organized industries", irrespective of occupation, whether working in factories or not, and including employees of seasonal factories (e.g. those processing agricultural produce like sugar) as

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[40] Adarkar quoted a resolution to this effect of a Joint Conference of the (expatriate British) Employers' Federation of India and the All-India Organisation of Industrial Employers (controlled by Indian big business interests) in September 1940 (Adarkar 1945: 164). See also: ILOrep 8/1940, p. 37 (summarizing a "Letter to the Superintendent of Industries, Delhi, sent by the Secretary, All-India Organisation of Industrial Employers, on 15-8-1940, copy of which was forwarded to this Office"). This line of reasoning was endorsed by the Bombay Millowners' Association and the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce. Cf. ILOrep 9/1940, p. 26 and ibid., 10/1940, p. 15.

[41] "Scheme for Sickness Insurance. 'Should be on All-India Basis'", *ToI,* 30 June 1943, p. 6. See also: ILOrep 6/1943, p. 12 (excerpted from Proceedings of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, May 1943).

[42] "Employers' Federation Pledge Support to Government", *Bombay Chronicle,* 20 December 1947, p. 3. See also ILOrep 7/1943, p. 12 (cites *Journal of the Indian Merchants' Chamber*, July 1943).

[43] ILOrep 10/1944, pp. 24f (cites "Unofficial Note issued by the Bureau of Public Information, Government of India", n.d.).

well as "[s]ome of the dependents".[44] Two ILO experts, Raghunath Rao and Maurice Stack, were assigned the task to revise the scheme and recommended to extend it to all factory workers in perennial factories.[45] This recommendation was incorporated into Adarkar's final report and subsequently in the Employees' State Insurance Act of 1948.[46]

Consequently, smaller manufacturing units, agricultural labour, including the workforce of India's sizeable quasi-industrial plantation economies, the enormous construction sector as well as miners and transport workers remained outside the remit of the ESI Act, though it allowed provincial governments to expand its scope. Nor were the workers' families initially covered by the health insurance. Furthermore, provincial governments were empowered to grant exemptions from the law to industries considered to be unable to contribute to the scheme. The provisions for the Act's implementation allowed for further exceptions even within the industries explicitly covered by the Act. Crucially, "the conditions of qualifying period for cash benefit exclude[d] casual workers", while unpaid apprentices were not granted protection because the Act applied to remunerated labour only (Punekar 1950: 84).

Repercussions: Graded Informality, a "Birthright" Lost and a Horizon of Expectation

While the ESI Act thus permitted a differentiation of employment conditions even on the same shop floor, it also contributed to a process of differential formalization that generated a pattern of graded entitlements in

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[44] "Memorandum submitted by the All-India Trade Union Congress …", *Trade Union Record,* IV/5–6 (January–February 1945), pp. 38, 40; see also: ILOrep 3/1945, pp. 24f.

[45] "Note on the Report prepared by Professor B.P. Adarkar on a Scheme of Health Insurance for Industrial Workers, by Mr. M. Stack and Mr. R. Rao of the International Labour Office", p. 3, BL: IOR/L/E/8/4948 ("Health Insurance for Industrial Workers, including Sickness Statistics").

[46] *ILG* V/10 (April 1948), pp. 698–701; ILOrep 4/1948, pp. 90–93 (referring to *The Statesman,* 2 and 3 April 1948). For a contemporary analysis of the Act in its final form, see confidential report by K.D. Jones, Labour Adviser to the High Commissioner for the UK in New Delhi, to Secretary, Ministry of Labour and National Service, Overseas Department, London, 18 May 1948, in: BL: IOR/L/E/8/6222.

the labour market and multiple rifts among the working classes as a whole. Certain sections of the workforce had, for instance, access to health facilities that were and would remain far superior to the ones provided by the ESI scheme—this was the case with the nationalised railways, which had generated their own medical services in the course of the 1920s, and it would hold true for new public sector enterprises of Nehruvian India.[47] Other and much larger sections of the industrial workforce were, at the same time, legally entitled only to a level of sickness and invalidity protection much inferior to that offered by the ESI. This becomes evident if we return to the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1923, which the ESI Act was to replace. In fact, it did so only for about a third of the six million workers that were entitled to workmen's compensation by the early 1950s. The incongruent remits of the two laws thus implied that the industrial workforce of postcolonial India was further divided into a minority segment entitled (by the ESI Act) to *pensions* in the event of work accidents and another segment, twice as large, entitled (by the Workmen's Compensation Act) to *lump sum payments*, which provided not only less security but were also more difficult to claim (ILO 1957: 95, 104; see also Punekar 1950: 54–57, 154–158).

This is only one of many similar instances, one element of a much larger phenomenon: multiple and overlapping central and provincial labour laws have defined the "workman", the "worker" or the "employee" and, accordingly, their remit in sharply diverging ways, while labour tribunals and courts of justice have added to the complexity of these definitions by way of conflicting interpretations (Karuna 2019).[48] The Employees' Provident Fund Act of 1952 applied, on its part, only to about half of the factory workers covered by the ESI Act of 1948 (Narasimhan 1953: 49). The incongruence of labour- and employment-based welfare laws in terms of scope thus generated a complex site of conflict that was to engage employers, trade unions, judges, government

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[47] RCLI, *Evidence,* Vol. VII, part 1: Railways, London: H.M.'s Stationary Office, 1931, pp. 53–69; Dilip Subramaniam, "'No Room for Class Struggle in These National Undertakings': Providing Social Welfare for Indian State Sector Industrial Workers (circa 1950–2000)," *MAS* 49 (2015), pp. 1526–1579.

[48] This issue will be examined more systematically elsewhere. For a perceptive exploration of conflicts over the legal status of "worker" and "employee" in South India see: Karuna (2019).

officials and various other social actors for the decades to come: legislation did not result in a formal/informal bifurcation of the workforce into two "sectors", but in an unstable, contested and to some extent malleable structure of graded (in)formality.

Despite its narrowly confined remit, postcolonial India's first Labour Minister, Jagjivan Ram, celebrated the ESI Act, when it was passed, as a breakthrough: "the tiny and tender sapling" would "in its own time, grow into a gigantic tree" and the scope of the scheme would be "extended gradually and steadily so that ultimately it becomes all-comprehensive".[49] Health Minister Rajkumari Amrit Kaur confirmed that the scheme was to be extended, in due course, to about 85 per cent of the population.[50] A propaganda film, released by the Government's Films Division in 1952, pronounced that the ESI scheme would be extended "until its benefits are available in every industrial section of our country, until not only our 2.5 million workers, but all employees, including our agriculturists, enjoy this, their birthright".[51] The choice of these words, read out in the King's English as the footage shifted from machine operators to ploughing farmers, was significant: "swaraj [self-governance] is my birthright" had been a rousing slogan in the independence struggle, associated with the militant nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Quoting this phrase elevated security from illness to the status of a fundamental right intrinsic to *citizenship* of independent India. The universalization of health insurance from an employment-based privilege to a citizen right was thus announced and explicitly married to the nation-building project. This official promise survived the bleak facts of implementation for quite some time. In 1965, when V.V. Giri's influential *Labour Problems in Indian Industry* was reprinted once again, the former Labour Minister and future President of India still characterized ESI as "a nucleus of a general social insurance scheme" (Giri 1965[1959]: 267; see also Albuquerque 1958: 108).

However, the universalization of health insurance turned out to be, as we know today, one of the unfulfilled promises of postcolonial

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[49] "Speech by the Minister of Labour, Jagjivan Ram, at the inaugural ceremony of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation", 6 October 1948, BL: IOR/L/E/8/6222 "The Employees' State Insurance Act 1948". See also: "'India Has Turned the Corner Now'", *ToI,* 7 October 1948, p. 3.

[50] ILOrep 4/1949, pp. 71f (citing *Hindustan Times,* 22 April 1949).

[51] Government of India, Films Division, "Dawn of Social Security" (1952).

citizenship and was postponed ad infinitum. As late as in 2013, a mere 3 per cent of India's almost half billion–strong workforce or less than half of the "organized sector" workers were entitled to often unsatisfactory ESI benefits (Duggal 2015: 19). Instead, the Employees' State Insurance Act came to be one of the key mechanisms for the separation of India's formal and informal labour economies into an embattled, segmented structure of graded entitlements. Despite the many references to Beveridge and Geneva, the guarantee of a national minimum standard did not diffuse to India in subsequent decades as the basis of a universalist welfare policy. Employment-based Indian welfarism remained robustly minoritarian, confined to a very small and mostly male section of those who built postcolonial India for wages. When consulted on the ESI scheme by the outgoing colonial government in 1945, William Beveridge had stated that "freedom from want [was] probably to be sought for the greater part of the Indian population" in a "different direction". This not only was prescient but also indicates that even liberal British reformers did not rule out, at the time, the *possibility* in India of social policies more far-reaching and comprehensive than those the postcolonial dispensation chose to accept as inheritance from their colonial and deeply conservative predecessors.[52]

Yet the lines, drawn by labour welfare laws of the 1940s and 1950s, should not be understood solely as borders breaking the workforce into a multiplicity of fragments but also as a horizon of expectation—a horizon that would remain out of reach for most workers but has been well in sight: it has created a language for the formulation of standards of "decent work" that are transgressively utopian as well as eminently carnal in their concreteness. They have thus endowed labour struggles with a moral edge and could even serve as blueprints for legislative initiatives for the protection of informally employed workers. A particularly striking case in point is the Dock Workers Act of 1948, which served as a template for mobilizations among the enormous and almost completely "informal" construction workforce for the establishment of welfare boards and for

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[52] W. Beveridge to D. Monteath, India Office, draft letter, 21 September 1945, BL: IOR/L/E/8/2903 "Social Security in India. Proposed Visit by Sir W. Beveridge".

the (no doubt severely diluted) Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act of 2008 (Dietrich 1992: 1970–1972; Agarwala 2013: 4, 47–49). Similarly, contract workers and employees of predominantly "informal sector" industries have for many years raised the demand for inclusion in "ESI"[53]—a demand that has signified not only the desire for protection against the existential risks and economic perils of sickness. For entering the remit of one of India's employment-based welfare laws—such as the ESI or the Provident Fund—also implied a formal acknowledgement of their employment status. This was no negligible achievement since certified employment status could serve as a legal basis for claiming further entitlements. Table 5.1. summarizes the analysis.

Employment-based social security schemes thus have mattered not only to the minority of the Indian workforce covered by them explicitly but to wider sections of the working classes, as they have defined possibilities, together with other labour laws, and have helped to formulate demands. While undeniably dividing wage earners according to graded entitlements, these schemes have simultaneously established a form for collective claims of workers against employers and a sense that the State bears an—if often shirked—duty to guarantee such claims. This sense of entitlement has made it difficult to do away altogether with the Employees' State Insurance and other labour welfare schemes despite three decades of largely unmitigated neoliberal policies in India. However, in a significant new development, the second Modi government introduced to the Indian parliament in late 2019 a "Social Security Code", which aims at "amalgamating" and "corporatizing" eight existing labour welfare schemes, including ESI, while simultaneously reducing compulsory contributions. It remains to be seen whether this new law will, in fact, do more than undermine the existing, doubtlessly minoritarian welfare schemes (mainly, as some trade union argue, by transforming legal entitlements

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[53] For a case concerning construction workers see "Road roko: police remove construction workers", *The Hindu,* 10 February 2011. For a case concerning powerloom workers see "Over 5,000 powerlooms fall silent in Chennimalai", *The Hindu,* 28 October 2007. For recent cases of contract workers demanding inclusion in the ESI, see, for example, "Workers rampage at DLF site, seek better work conditions", *The Hindu,* 22 July 2017; "Contract power staff on strike to seek service regularisation", *The Hindu,* 25 July 2018.

Table 5.1 Social protection in India, 1880s–2014: changing ideas and policies

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social question, social ideas and problem groups	Broader ideational frames and contexts	External ideas and models	Key actors	Policies, legislation and programmes
1880s–1910s	Consolidated colonial rule and emergence of nationalism	Priority: famine question Minor: women's and labour questions	Free trade imperialism, racism, and Malthusianism	Poor law	Colonial state; early nationalists	Priority: Famine Codes
1920s–1970s	Popular nationalism; social movements; World Wars; Great Depression; Independence; and economic planning	Priorities: labour question (in key sectors) and food security. Minor: poor relief; public health; and caste discrimination	Nationalism; etatism and planning; development; corporatism	Social insurance; tripartism; rationing systems; and citizen right to social security	Late colonial state; nationalism; postcolonial state; Indian big business; labour and other social movements	Priorities: minoritarian labour welfare; rationing system for basic goods; basic healthcare

(*continued*)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social question, social ideas and problem groups	Broader ideational frames and contexts	External ideas and models	Key actors	Policies, legislation and programmes
1980s–2014	Rise of new political formations (end of Congress dominance); "liberalization"; and increasing caste tensions	Priority: caste question; shifting to rural welfare towards the end Minor: declining labour welfare	Neoliberalism; critique of caste; Hindu nativism	Neoliberal "deregulation", towards the end: recurrence to "new deal" policies	Postcolonial state; regional forces; lower caste and Hindu nativist movements; Indian big business	Priorities: quota systems of social redistribution and workfare programme in rural areas

Note: (a) Notions of "social protection" have a much longer history in India than the one indicated in the "periods" of the Table, which refers merely to the emergence of codified social policies covering large parts of the subcontinent. (b) All periodizations must be provisional, given the unsatisfactory state of historical research, and tentative, given the simultaneity of contradictory tendencies. (c) The governments under Narendra Modi since 2014 appear to usher in a new phase when older welfare structures are dismantled and those supposed to take their place are not yet clearly discernible. The political and economic impact of the Covid 19 crisis seems to trigger a further informalisation of employment patterns thereby exacerbating the decay of employment-based social protection. However, no schematic representation is possible at present

into benefits to be doled out by the executive at their discretion) and achieve the proclaimed goal of expanding health services to larger parts of the workforce.[54]

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[54] See, for instance, "Code on Social Security 2019: Sharp division among trade unions over benefits to workers", *Business Today,* 13 December 2019, https://www.businesstoday.in/sectors/jobs/code-on-social-security-2019-rss-affiliated-bms-left-affiliated-citu-division-among-trade-unions-over-benefit-to-workers/story/391993.html; Rajat Mishra: "A Quick Look at the Social Security Bill 2019", *Outlook Money,* 21 December 2019, https://www.outlookindia.com/outlookmoney/talking-money/a-quick-look-at-the-social-security-bill-2019-4069.

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Part IV

South Africa

6

The Social Question in Pre-*apartheid* South Africa: Race, Religion and the State

Jeremy Seekings

Introduction

In South Africa, as across much of the world, the period between the 1910s and 1940s was one of extraordinary intellectual as well as social and political turmoil. Not only were societies being rapidly transformed through migration, urbanisation and industrialisation, but there were competing and conflicting visions of "modernity". Intellectuals, elites and ordinary people alike grappled with the shifting relationships between state and society, as states were "modernised", old social institutions (including churches) lost some of their authority and new social institutions (including trade unions) emerged. Social relations—of gender, class and race—were contested and reimagined.

In contrast to the democracies of Northwest Europe, however, contestation over the social question in South Africa did not entail simply struggles over the form of social citizenship, as the state assumed an expanded role in the social and economic inclusion of citizens. In

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Northwest Europe, social democracy emerged as a powerful ideology to address the social question, and existing conservative and liberal ideologies were reinvented. The working classes and the poor enjoyed considerable political power through the ballot box, strikes and the threat of direct action. Welfare states expanded, providing a considerable measure of social citizenship for all. This picture was reflected in South Africa with regard to one part of its population. But the majority of South Africa's population was excluded from social citizenship. The social question entailed exclusion as well as inclusion, with protracted debates and struggles over the boundaries of social citizenship—i.e. who is a social citizen—as well as the content and mechanisms of achieving it.

In some respects, South Africa was not unlike other parts of the world. In Latin America, most clearly, immigration, industrialisation and urbanisation defined the social question in terms of the inclusion of politically powerful groups—including the small, organised working class—while excluding the larger population of urban and rural poor. The dominant corporatist ideology framed this combination of inclusion and exclusion (see especially Malloy 1979; Huber and Stephens 2012). Social citizenship across much of Latin America—as in the southern states of the USA—was racialised. South Africa was distinctive, however, in the extent to which social citizenship was fundamentally rooted in the country's racial politics.

The Union of South Africa was established in 1910 as the outcome of protracted negotiations following the British defeat of independent Boer republics in the South African War (see glossary at the end of the chapter for an explanation of South African terms including "Boer" and "coloured"). The new Union comprised the two former British colonies (the Cape and Natal) together with the two former Boer republics (of the Orange Free State and Transvaal). The political settlement provided for a substantially independent white-supremacist state, notionally under British control, with limited rights for the "coloured" population, very limited rights for the "native" African majority and almost no rights at all for the small immigrant Indian population. (White) Afrikaners comprised a majority of the electorate, with the result that the Union had three former Boer generals as prime minister for its first thirty-eight years (Louis Botha, 1910–1919; Jan Smuts, 1919–1924 and 1939–1948;

J.B.M. [Barry] Hertzog, 1924–1939). The Union had a parliamentary system, with a prime minister accountable to a bicameral legislature. From 1910 to 1924, the government was run by the South African Party. The 1924 elections resulted in a "Pact Government" comprising the National (i.e. Afrikaner nationalist) Party and small Labour Party (linked to Labour Parties in Britain and Australia). The Pact Government disintegrated in 1933–1934, with most of the National Party joining the South African Party in a "Fusion Government", and then combining as the United Party. A minority of the National Party led by D.F. Malan remained independent, as the *Gesuiwerde* ("Purified") National Party. In 1939, many of the former National Party Members of Parliament (MPs) left the United Party over the issue of the Union's participation in the Second World War, joining with the *Gesuiwerde* National Party in a *Herenigde* (Reunited) National Party. In 1948, the National Party returned to government, with Malan as prime minister, and began to implement *apartheid* (see chapter by Ulriksen in this volume).

South African politics and society were defined primarily by white privilege. The white minority comprised approximately one-fifth of the population, including both farmers who had settled on the land and urban workers drawn to South Africa by the extraordinary industrialisation that followed the discovery of diamonds in the 1860s and gold in the 1880s. The African population was largely rural, divided between white-owned farms and the "reserves" set aside for "natives". Many African men worked at some point of their lives as migrant workers on the mines. Legislation restricted what work African people could do, where they lived and (above all) their political rights. Almost all white South Africans concurred that their hold on power should be preserved, but there was some disagreement over the flexibility of the boundaries of political (and, as we shall see, social) citizenship. There were also deep divisions among white South Africans over the division of power among them. An obvious cleavage divided Afrikaner nationalists from English-speaking South Africans as well as those Afrikaners who were reconciled with their loose incorporation into the British Empire. Class also divided the white population: Both English- and Afrikaans-speaking workers resented the extraordinarily wealthy mine owners (and their influence over the state). The commercialisation of agriculture also generated new class divisions:

Many Afrikaans-speaking farmers lived on the edge of poverty; many of these "poor whites" migrated to towns. Without skills, they were unable to compete with either skilled white workers or unskilled African workers. The Labour Party, Afrikaner nationalist parties, communists, syndicalists and anarchists competed for the support of white workers. In 1922, white mineworkers on the Witwatersrand rose in violent rebellion (the Rand Revolt) before being suppressed brutally by the army and air force (Krikler 2005; Simons and Simons 1969; Greenberg 1980; O'Meara 1983; van der Walt 2011).

In this context, demands for policy reforms were understood in very diverse ways. There was little or no discussion of the "social question" per se, nor any consensus—even within white politics—over which of several other, interrelated "questions" was most pressing. The "native question" was clearly of great importance: Should African people, or some African people, be included in any way in a common society? If not, how should they be excluded? But there were other pressing "questions" also. The "poor white question" attracted considerable attention, not least because poverty among white people undermined the racial hierarchy and white solidarity. There was also a "labour" or "worker question" in that many (white) workers asserted their "rights" in relation to their (white) employers and some contemplated alternatives to capitalism. There was also the question of women's rights, not only to the vote but also to control over many other aspects of their lives.

For many (but certainly not all) white South Africans, the state was an attractive vehicle for tackling these questions in self-consciously modernist ways. The post-1910 South African state accumulated considerable infrastructural power: In the collection and use of statistics, fiscal capacity (including especially income taxes), strategic interventions in infrastructural and industrial development, the regulation of wages and employment, and with respect to the regulation of the family and the amelioration of poverty, all administered through a professionalised bureaucracy (Seekings 2016; Freund 2019). The South African state contrasted sharply with the "paper leviathans" of Latin America (Centeno and Ferraro 2013). Some white South Africans had grave reservations about this modern state. Some liberals welcomed many aspects of state support for business but were wary of what they saw as overreach. Neither

anarchism nor syndicalism enjoyed as much support in South Africa as in some Latin American cities in the early twentieth century, but South African socialists and communists also had mixed feelings about a modern state that seemed to be closely tied to capitalist elites. More importantly, the powerful "Reformed" Protestant churches (including the largest, the Dutch Reformed Church, known by its Afrikaans initials as the NGK) included a variety of conservatives anxious to retain important roles for the churches. Whilst the NGK had long embraced a missionary role that encouraged charity, it also saw itself as a *volkskerk* (people's church), referring to the Afrikaner *volk*. In the late 1930s the NGK became more ambivalent about the state, in part through the spreading influence of the neo-Calvinist ideology associated with the Dutch theologian (and politician) Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper's theology revolved around the idea that different spheres of life (including the family) were all divinely sovereign, providing a new and powerful justification for restricting the scope of the state. The African population was unsurprisingly even more ambivalent about the role of the state, which they experienced as more repressive than progressive.

The result between the 1920s and 1940s was a gradual deployment of state power to address the "native", "poor white", labour and other (social) "questions", but the expansion of the state was shaped by the ambivalence and opposition of important sections of the white population. The battle lines in these contested reforms were often surprising, not least because Afrikaner nationalism was torn between modernisers who sought to use the state (including Hendrik Verwoerd, who was later to become the key architect of *apartheid* in the 1950s and 1960s) and NGK-linked opponents of state power. This shifting division within Afrikaner nationalism was to be especially important for social welfare policy. The result, by 1948 (when the National Party, by then committed to the *apartheid* project, was elected back into office), was a welfare state that had significant reach in terms of social assistance programmes and the regulation of the family (and delinquency) but not with respect to social insurance.

This chapter charts policy reforms and identifies the underlying understandings and motivations of key reformers (and their opponents) in three broad periods: The period of the Pact Governments from 1924 to 1933; the period of the Fusion or United Party governments from

1933/34 until the outbreak of war in 1939; and the period during and immediately after the war, also under United Party governments but with growing opposition from an opposition National Party radicalised in part by new religious beliefs.

Whilst the conditions framing debates in South Africa might have been unique, the South African participants in these debates were immersed in global networks of ideas. At every point, South African debates were informed by ideas and models from elsewhere. The South African state followed the British lead in using commissions of inquiry to investigate possible policy reforms. These commissions typically collated a mass of information on policies elsewhere in the world (and generally summarised these in their reports). When, in the late 1920s, the Pienaar Commission investigated welfare policy reforms, it drew heavily on information provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO), as well as information from Britain and elsewhere. Several members of the commission visited the ILO in Geneva, attended one of the ILO's annual International Labour Conferences and visited various European capitals in order to collect additional information. In addition, many prominent South Africans studied abroad. Prime Ministers Smuts and Hertzog studied in Cambridge (1892–1894) and Amsterdam (1888–1892), respectively. Others who played important roles in policy debates included Jan Hofmeyr (Oxford, 1913–1916), E.G. Malherbe (New York, the early 1920s) and Hendrik Verwoerd (mostly in Germany, 1926–1928). Individual Members of Parliament (MPs), trade unionists and academics travelled and had contacts elsewhere in the world, especially in Australia and New Zealand. For all these reasons, innovative foreign reforms and proposals had immediate and wide impact within South Africa. In the early 1940s, as we shall see, reforms in New Zealand and the proposals set out in the Beveridge Report in Britain framed South African debates. American ideas about social casework also had a strong influence. Not all foreign ideas strengthened reforms, however. Many Afrikaner nationalist theologians studied at the neo-Calvinist Free University in Amsterdam, founded by Kuyper.

Securing the Racial Hierarchy, 1924–1933: State, Church and the "Poor White Problem"

Prior to 1924 the state's involvement in social regulation and provision expanded slowly but remained very limited. The South African Party governments in office from 1910 to 1924 were broadly pro-business. The state provided modest poor relief, almost entirely for "poor whites", supplementing the charitable work of churches (Bottomley 1990; Butler 2017). Compensation was introduced for the (white) victims of industrial accidents. The 1913 Children's Protection Act—based on British legislation from 1908—provided for the state to place (white) children in need of care in institutions and for state subsidies to both these residential institutions and churches or other child welfare societies that oversaw other children in need of care. In 1921, pensions were provided to (mostly white) mothers (as well as stepmothers and grandmothers) who had been widowed or abandoned by their husbands, to reduce the need to place destitute children in residential institutions (Du Toit 2018; Chanock 2001). Reformatories and industrial schools were also established for (mostly white) boys and girls (Chisholm 1990).

These reforms were racialised in intent. White families organised around Christian marriage were seen as a bulwark against the degeneration of the white population. It was when white men disregarded their obligations to their wives and children that children were neglected, dropped out of school and thus rendered unfit to compete for jobs against coloured or African people. Flawed families meant that girls risked sliding into prostitution, and poor white men and women risked sinking into "a demoralising and corrupt intercourse with non-Europeans", as a parliamentary committee put it. The 1913 Children's Protection Act thus sought to maintain the "boundaries of whiteness" (Chanock 2001: 205–209). Under the 1913 and 1921 Acts, it was hard for coloured children or their mothers to access benefits and almost impossible for African children or their mothers to do so. Sexual "impropriety"—typically across racial lines—was the main reason for white girls being placed in institutions (Chisholm 1990). The protection of the white family—and hence

white supremacy—required intensified segregation to limit mixing between white and non-white children.

Reforms accelerated under the Pact Government elected in 1924. The Pact Government comprised the National Party, based in poor rural areas, and the ostensibly socialist Labour Party, whose core support was among skilled urban workers. These parties had broadly antagonistic relationships with the mining companies and other large businesses. The National and Labour Parties had campaigned on platforms for tackling both the "poor white problem" and the excessive profits of mining capitalists. Solving the poor white problem meant protecting unskilled white workers (and their dependents, in both rural and urban areas) who lacked the skills required for skilled employment and were unable to compete for unskilled work with cheaper African labour. The National and Labour parties had accused the then governing South African Party of jeopardising the future of white South Africans "as a civilised people" and pandering to "big financial" interests. The National Party was unashamedly racist. The Labour Party comprised both unabashed racists and socialists who felt uncomfortable with explicit racial discrimination but were opposed to the exploitation of "cheap labour".

In office, the Pact Government sought to deepen racial segregation, not only keeping white and African people apart but also protecting poor white people from competition from African people. The colour bar in employment was strengthened, and parastatals (especially the railways) were instructed to employ unskilled white workers. Subsidies were extended for white farmers, especially on smaller or family farms. The Labour Party secured regulatory institutions that protected workers' wages (along the lines of policies in Australia). In 1926, the Pact Government appointed the Pienaar Commission (chaired by a senior National Party MP, P.J. Pienaar) to examine a comprehensive system of social insurance and assistance. In its first Report, in 1927, the commission recommended the introduction of means-tested old-age and invalidity pensions. But African men and women were excluded, and coloured pensioners were to receive lower benefits than white pensioners. Legislation was passed in 1928, and the first pensions were paid in 1929 (Seekings 2007).

The most important factor behind the expansion of public provision and care was the imperative—for the National Party—of protecting its "poor white" supporters against *gelykstelling* (social levelling) and the risk of becoming subordinate to or intermingling with African people. Old-age pensions constituted one cornerstone of the segregationist policies through which the Pact Government sought to raise all-white people to "civilised" standards of living, above, rather than below or alongside, the "native" (African) population. The racial hierarchy had to be maintained. As one National Party Member of Parliament (MP) put it, the "poor white" problem

> is a question which not only concerns the poor; it affects the whole white civilisation of this country. It confronts us with the question whether we, the descendants of the staunch old pioneers, will maintain their civilisation and hand it over to our children. … It may be asked whether there is poverty only in South Africa and whether other countries do not suffer from the same thing. There are poor people everywhere, but the circumstances in South Africa are unique. In Europe poverty has proved a great breeding place for Socialism and Bolshevism. If grievances arise there it is simply an economic matter. In this country, however, there is a small number of whites against the natives, a few civilised people against uncivilised hordes, and for that reason it is so important that not a single white person should be allowed to go under.[1]

These beliefs were not confined to the National Party. In 1933, the first woman elected to Parliament, Leila Reitz, was a member of the South African Party. Reitz, who was active in the emerging field of social work, emphasised in her maiden parliamentary speech that poor (white) families "constitute a danger to the moral life of this country, a danger to themselves, a danger to our social order, our national character, and, in the end, a danger to our white civilization itself". Poor (white) people must be "lifted" up to save "our white civilization".[2] For most MPs, in most if not all parties, white people were the guardians and agents of modernity in the face of the threats posed by the African majority.

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[1] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 12 August 1924, col. 429–32 (Stals).
[2] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 5 June 1933, col. 294–5 (Reitz).

The NGK played a central role in the Afrikaner nationalist movement and National Party in particular. D.F. Malan was a dominee (priest) in the NGK prior to becoming editor of the influential newspaper *Die Burger*, provincial leader of the National Party, minister in the Pact Government and then national leader in 1934. Malan himself came out of the missionary tradition within the NGK that sought to recruit African people (into racially segregated branches of the NGK) and was even supportive of charity towards the African population as well as white population. In the 1920s and 1930s, Malan—and the NGK, more broadly—came to perceive African people as more of a threat to poor whites, warranting more systematic exclusion and discrimination (Elphick 2012; Koorts 2014).

Whilst the NGK and National Party became increasingly resolute over the exclusion of African people, they also worried about the transfer of responsibilities from church to state. Sections of the NGK and National Party pushed for amendments to the Old Age Pensions Act. The Carnegie Commission into the "poor white problem", established by the NGK not the state, called in its 1932 report for social welfare functions to be shifted back to churches and families. Financial support to the poor should be reduced because it encouraged "dependency". Interventions should address instead the "weak traits" of the poor, including improvidence, thriftlessness, dishonesty and indolence. The NGK succeeded in partially rolling back the old-age pension in the early 1930s by giving officials much more discretion in taking into account the capacity of kin. But modernisers in the National Party (led by Verwoerd) and state fought back. MPs from various parties demanded the expansion of the pension programme, citing cases of deserving constituents who had been denied pensions despite the lack of familial support. "I very much favour the principle that children should provide for their parents", one MP declared, "but … we can go too far in that direction".[3] Public provision continued to expand (see Seekings 2008).

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[3] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 8 June 1933, col. 543–4.

The Institutionalisation of "Social Policy" Under the Fusion Governments, 1933–1939

In 1933–1934, economic crisis precipitated the collapse of the Pact Government. A new coalition, comprising most of the National Party together with the South African Party, formed the Fusion Government, and the parties proceeded to merge as the United Party. The basis of the Fusion Government—and United Party—was the concession by Smuts's South African Party to Hertzog's National Party to deepen racial segregation. The Fusion Government was, politically, a very illiberal administration, although it included prominent liberals in some positions (including, especially, Jan Hofmeyr as minister with responsibility for education, public health [until 1936] and social welfare [from 1936]). In the face of economic crisis and fuelled by improved public revenues (swelled through taxes on the gold mines), ministers expanded existing programmes, including public works programmes, for unemployed white men, subsidies for white farmers (devastated by drought) and poor relief for other poor whites—and then moved towards more innovative government interventions.

In 1934 MPs began for the first time to refer to "social policy" to describe favourably policies to address poverty. A newly elected South African Party MP proposed a motion calling for a "broad social policy" to address the inequities and hardships associated with unemployment. Hofmeyr referred to "the social policy of the Government". Another minister described the introduction of a limited contributory unemployment insurance programme as a component of South Africa's developing "social legislation".[4]

MPs from different parties insisted on the need to relax constraints on the award of old-age pensions to elderly white men and women. "The older people who are not assisted by their children must be the definite care of the Government", asserted one MP.[5] A senior MP in the National Party—now in opposition—demanded "security" for the poor man and

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[4] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 27 February 1934, col. 826–57 (Wadley); 17 April 1934, col. 2299 (Hofmeyr); 17 April 1935, col. 5191–2 (Fourie).

[5] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 27 February 1934, col. 851–3.

worker: "To-day we have the position that, in order to get an old age pension, a poor man has to prove that he has no children from whom he can get anything, and who earn sufficient. That is a wrong and humiliating position".[6] In 1937 the government relaxed some of its restrictions on old-age pensions and lowered the age of eligibility for women from 65 to 60. Between November 1936 and November 1939, the number of white old-age pensioners rose by 55 percent and total expenditure on old-age pensions almost doubled. A series of committees recommended reforms to policies on blind people, children, health insurance and poor relief.

The new "social policies" were institutionalised within a dedicated office for Social Welfare, initially part of the former Department of Labour (renamed the Department of Labour and Social Welfare) then in a new, stand-alone Department of Social Welfare. The new department's approach was, in its understanding of poverty, conservative. In his first report, the new secretary for Social Welfare explained that his department focused on "cultural" aspects of the "rehabilitation" of "socially maladjusted" (white) people. Even if poor white men found employment, they remained in need of the state's help in reforming "their habits, attitudes and interests" (South Africa 1940). The newly appointed (British) Professor of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, John Gray, was struck by what he saw as the resilience of a Calvinist tradition and the perpetuation of a Poor Law tradition (Gray 1937: 278–80). At the same time, the new department saw this cultural poverty as the responsibility of the state, not of the churches. The secretary of Social Welfare himself noted that government policy was now based on "a new conception of duty to the poor arising from the slowly dawning realisation that the poor need not be a liability but that they are a potential asset" (South Africa, 1940: 4). Moreover, science itself could be harnessed to the tasks of rehabilitation, as some of the members of the Carnegie Commission had recognised. The department championed social work rooted in casework and backed up by research. A detailed study of *Poverty and Dependency in Cape Town*—supervised by (then-Professor) Verwoerd—examined how the "dependent" destitute might be "rehabilitated" (Wagner 1936). The department also oversaw the expansion of social assistance for the blind

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[6] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 1935, col. 417 (Bremer).

and invalids. "It is generally accepted that it is the duty of the State to see that its citizens have the opportunity of making a living", explained one MP, adding that "it is doubly the duty of the Government to see that unfit persons shall be given means of existence. It is shameful that people have to beg on the streets".[7] The new invalidity pensions were—like the old-age pensions—means-tested, taking into account the income of co-resident unmarried children (and, in exceptional cases, of children who resided elsewhere also).

Provision for children was also expanded. Pressure from women's, child welfare and liberal organisations (Du Toit 2018) as well as from the handful of (white) women newly elected to Parliament resulted in the appointment of an inter-departmental committee on "Destitute, Neglected, Maladjusted and Delinquent Children" and then, in 1937, a new Children's Act. The new Act provided for care in two main respects, both intended to prevent (white) children becoming "socially maladjusted" or delinquent as a result of growing up in bad conditions at home. First, a battery of measures provided for the state to intervene where children were being neglected and to "rehabilitate" those who were already delinquent. Local officials were empowered to place in a foster home or institution any children who were identified as being "in need of care", including (inter alia) children with absent or delinquent parents, children who were themselves delinquent and—in an acknowledgment of the anxieties of the time—any child that "frequents the company of any immoral … person, or is otherwise living in circumstances calculated to cause or conduce to its corruption, seduction or prostitution".[8] The objective, as the Department of Social Welfare explained, was "to conserve for the nation the socially desirable qualities of those persons whose normal development is in danger of being retarded or frustrated through physical or mental defects, social maladjustments or unwholesome environmental stimuli". In implementing these provisions, the department embraced casework and "scientific social analysis" (South Africa 1940: 53), reflecting the new enthusiasm for scientific "poverty knowledge" (Davie 2015). Secondly, the 1937 Act provided for the expanded

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[7] S.P. Le Roux (Oudtshoorn), *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 26 March 1936, col. 2056.
[8] Act 31 of 1937, para 1.

payment of cash grants-in-aid to poor people caring for children, and to institutions or associations caring for children.

By the late 1930s, South Africa had an extensive system of social assistance providing for sections of the white population, including the elderly, blind and disabled, children and single mothers. Gray, in his inaugural lecture in 1937, assessed that "Today the provision for [the] European population … is scarcely less complete than that of Great Britain" (Gray 1937: 270). Gray's endorsement overlooked the limited extent of social insurance. The only contributory pension schemes were company- or sector-based, with few members. Unemployment insurance was finally introduced in 1937, but only in selected sectors (Meth and Piper 1984). Poverty among white working-age adults continued to be addressed primarily through public works and farm-support programmes. But the most important difference between South Africa and Great Britain was that the South African welfare state excluded almost entirely the African majority of the population.

The more liberal ministers, MPs and state officials had begun to promote a more inclusive approach. From 1936, pensions were paid to blind African as well as blind white and coloured people. Growing anxiety about juvenile delinquency among African adolescents in town prompted the approval of grants to a slow trickle of African mothers and children (Du Toit 2018: 11–13). The 1937 Committee that drafted the Children's Protection Bill made no distinction on racial grounds, arguing that "the principles underlying the treatment of children "in need of care" or of delinquents are of equal validity whether the children to whom they apply are of one race or another". Whilst there were "special social circumstances which affect the application of these provisions in the case of non-Europeans", it would be a mistake to adopt different standards for the welfare of non-European children. The Committee explicitly recommended the expansion of public provision of institutional care for black children (South Africa 1937: 52–3). When it came to implementation, however, African children continued to be excluded from public programmes (Du Toit 2018).

The exclusion of (or discrimination against) African people was justified using a variety of arguments. The general exclusion of the African majority was based on the perception, among almost all white

policymakers, that African people were different and inferior, in part because they were seen to be incompletely Christian (practising polygamous marriage and witchcraft) (Chanock 2001). The African population was also viewed increasingly as a threat to the "poor white" population and hence "white civilisation". The more charitable, missionary tradition within the NGK weakened during the 1920s and 1930s (Elphick 2012). With respect to social welfare programmes specifically, the extension of public provision to the African population was widely assessed as impractical and unaffordable (Du Toit 2018). It was also asserted that African people did not need public assistance, either because they had lower needs or because they could be supported by extended kin. The Native Economic Commission found in 1932 that:

> The poverty of individuals which occurs among Europeans is not common among Natives. Their communal system cares for all its people. Broadly speaking there is no starvation because each man will share his food with others. … Such poverty as exists, therefore, applies to the whole of the community among which it occurs, but urban conditions are beginning to break down the communal traditions, and instances were quoted to us of Natives who found it necessary to hide what food they have, because sharing would tend to leave them without the necessaries for their own subsistence. (South Africa 1932: para 998–9)

This argument became a pillar of the ideology of *apartheid* after 1948: The African population had its own traditions and practices. The Department of Social Welfare denied maintenance grants and "mother's pensions" to African people on the grounds that "under Native law it is the natural duty of the head of the kraal or guardian-at-law to support any minor belonging to his kraal or under his care". Moreover, "the granting of maintenance by the State will probably lead to an evasion of the responsibility resting upon the Natives under their own customs" (quoted in South Africa 1940: 64; see also Du Toit 2018). There was, of course, little evidence for this argument: Poverty was very widespread among African people, and (as in the white population) kin were often either unable or unwilling to assist. This denial of reality was the privilege of the powerful.

The Experience of War, 1939–1945: External Influences, Local Conditions and "Social Security"

The Second World War had a major effect in South Africa, as elsewhere across the British Empire and beyond. It precipitated a change of government and political realignment. It forged a political environment in which the government was unusually open to reform. And it introduced new proposals for reform, primarily through the diffusion of new ideas from abroad. The war thus changed the agenda for and the political possibility of reform. At the same time, opposition to public provision strengthened within the opposition National Party, in part through the influence of neo-Calvinist theology from abroad.

The outbreak of war led to the collapse of the Fusion Government and a split in the United Party. Prime Minister Hertzog advocated neutrality but lost a parliamentary vote. Hertzog resigned, the Anglophile Smuts was appointed as Prime Minister, and Hertzog led some (but not all) of his former National Party MPs to reunite with Malan's faction of the former National Party already in opposition. The exit of Hertzog and his supporters allowed the United Party, under Smuts, to tilt in a slightly more liberal direction. Its weak "liberal" wing was led by Hofmeyr, who served as Minister of Finance and intermittently as acting prime minister. Reform was also supported by the rump of the Labour Party. Whilst Hofmeyr was undoubtedly liberal, Smuts himself was more complex. During the war, Smuts made encouraging public speeches about the need to build a better society, including "a better life for all sections of the population", including (explicitly) the "native population".[9] At the same time he expressed concerns in his private correspondence: "I don't like all this preoccupation with the post-war paradise on earth which makes us all concentrate less on the war and more on schemes which confuse and divide us", he wrote to a close friend in London in early 1943; "it is here [in South Africa] very much as with you [in Britain], where people talk

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[9] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 12 January 1942, col. 5–6 (Smuts).

Beveridge instead of war and Hitler".[10] Nonetheless, Smuts allowed Hofmeyr the space to proceed with modest reforms, perhaps hoping to defuse the militancy shown by industrial workers—including white, coloured and African workers (Alexander 2000).

The first set of ideas to invigorate debate in South Africa during the war were independent of the war itself. In 1938, New Zealand's Labour Party government enacted universal old-age pensions and other benefits (McClure 1998). The New Zealand "model" was cited frequently in South Africa in 1941–1942 (see Miles-Cadman 1941; Burrows et al. 1942; Batson 1943). Several MPs visited New Zealand and referred to it in parliamentary debates. Introducing a debate on social welfare reforms in January 1942, a Labour Party MP asked explicitly "Can our government do what New Zealand has done?"[11]

Most reformers did not seek simply to replicate the New Zealand reforms, however. One of the United Party's more liberal MPs, Leslie Blackwell, had been born in Australia, before his family migrated to South Africa when he was ten years old. In the late 1930s he was fascinated with the New Zealand Labour Party's "full-blooded policy of 'Socialism in our time'" (Blackwell 1938). In 1941, Smuts sent him to Australia and New Zealand, charging him (inter alia) with investigating their social security systems. Blackwell returned to South Africa with reservations about the replicability of the New Zealand model:

> New Zealand is known throughout the Empire and beyond as the home of social security. It was here that the first full-blooded social security charter was put into operation, and it is here that it is being tested out most thoroughly today, but when I returned to South Africa I told my colleagues that they must be careful not to take it for granted that results arrived at in New Zealand could necessarily be predicted for the Union. New Zealand is a rich pastoral country with a homogeneous population and a high standard of living, without the extremes of wealth which are still to be found in South Africa. It has almost no problem of native or coloured people, and, most important of all, it has operated its social security experiment in times

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[10] Letter, Smuts to Leo Amery, 21 February 1943, reproduced in J. van der Poel (ed.), *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, Vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1973), 414.

[11] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 6 Jan 1942, col. 3304 (Van der Berg).

of great agricultural prosperity and commercial expansion. (Blackwell 1946: 125)

In the parliamentary debate on social welfare in January 1942, Blackwell (1946: 156–8) argued that comprehensive reforms were not feasible until African people in South Africa earned more.

In the meantime, pressure was building outside of Parliament, through what became known as the "social security movement". In September 1942, an economist and Vice Principal of the Durban Technical College, Joseph Sullivan, organised a Social Security Congress in Durban. Sullivan himself had been born in New Zealand. A team of economists from the University of Natal, led by Professor H.R. Burrows, published a detailed set of proposals (Burrows et al. 1942). Under pressure, Smuts established a Social and Economic Planning Committee to examine economic and social reforms, as well as a Commission of Inquiry into a National Health System.

The publication of the Beveridge Report in Britain in December 1942 further invigorated debate in South Africa. Beveridge was discussed in popular pamphlets (e.g. Sullivan 1942; Batson 1943) and in parliamentary debates (by MPs from diverse parties). In January 1943, Smuts appointed a Social Security Committee, including Burrows, to examine and cost options. Parliament dedicated considerable time to debating social security. In the June 1943 parliamentary election, Smuts and the United Party campaigned around the slogan "A better life for all", holding out a vision of a society in which "there will be no forgotten men" and the spectres of "want, poverty, and unemployment" would be "combated to the best of our ability". With the apparent blessing of the United Party, Sullivan stood successfully for election as an independent MP. In September 1943, the Social Security Committee recommended massive public expenditure on welfare (together with Keynesian macroeconomic policies). The Committee's report used Beveridge's terminology and referred to the new international approach to social security which had the "ultimate aim" of "a comprehensive, unified and socially-adequate security plan under the auspices of the State" (South Africa 1943: 11). Crucially, this would provide for at least some African people. The 1943 report acknowledged that "overcrowding of the Reserves, primitive

farming methods and low unskilled wages" made it "increasingly difficult" for African people to support their kin. African men and women might not need the "elaborate cash benefits indispensable for a civilised community", but "nominal payments" in cash or kind were now "essential" for the elderly and disabled. The Committee therefore recommended that old-age pensions be extended to the African population.

Support for the extension of old-age pensions was not limited to liberal reformers. The extent of poverty in rural areas—and the failure of migrant workers in towns to provide and care for all of their rural dependents—was of growing concern to the magistrates responsible for rural administration and the employers who sought to recruit labour in rural areas. In addition, policies of "influx control" could not prevent the growth of the urban African population, including women and children. This fuelled anxiety about the decline of marriage and the rise of juvenile delinquency within the African population. African political leaders—through both the elected but conservative councils in some rural areas and the (at the time) slightly less conservative African National Congress—demanded social citizenship, although they were generally distracted by the more important issue of political citizenship (Sagner 2000; Seekings 2000, 2005; Posel 2005).

Reformers made faltering steps towards extending some social programmes. In 1940, the new Acting Prime Minister Jan Hofmeyr instructed that all applications for grants under the Children's Act, regardless of race, should be assessed on merit. In practice, only applications for urban African children were entertained, and benefits were paid at a much lower level than for white children, probably because of the cost implications (Du Toit 2018). Old-age pensions were introduced for African men and women in both rural and urban areas in 1944, albeit with much lower benefits than for white pensioners. By 1946, there were almost twice as many African pensioners as white pensioners, although total expenditure on white pensioners was higher (Jones 1948: 42). Residential institutions were also established for a very small number of "non-European" men and women. In 1946, the state subsidised nineteen old-age homes for a total of 753 elderly white men and women, but only two homes for 217 "non-European" men and women (Jones 1948: 425).

In these debates on programmatic reform—in public and in Parliament—three positions predominated. First, there was the pro-reformist position, articulated outside of Parliament by the various strands of the informal "social security movement" and inside Parliament by the more progressive members of the United Party. Reform here entailed partial deracialisation and expansion of existing programmes. This position was informed by "New Liberal" thought: The laissez-faire, small-government approach of the classic liberals had given way to an appreciation of the need for the government to assume responsibility for tackling various problems that affected society as a whole, including poverty among the elderly and children. The war legitimated these arguments in favour of a more active government. Army service may have radicalised some South Africans (Roos 2003), as it did in New Zealand (Fennell 2017). Classic liberal sceptics tended to keep quiet. A second, also pro-reform position was a more social democratic one, articulated by the very small rump of Labour Party MPs (including van der Berg and Miles-Cadman). The third position—the National Party's—was in flux, as we shall see next. These positions certainly did not exhaust the full range of views within Parliament (or white South African society), but they were the positions articulated publicly. People with other views tended to keep quiet.

The main public opposition to programmatic reforms came from the National Party. The National Party had wavered in its support for an expanding state, especially in the early 1930s, but the modernisers (led by Verwoerd) had prevailed, ensuring that programmes were introduced (and expanded) for white people. The party never accepted, however, that pensions and other programmes should be introduced for African people. Moreover, shifts in the character of Afrikaner nationalism and especially the rise of neo-Calvinist theology within the NGK pushed the National Party to reconsider its support for expanding the welfare state. Until the 1920s, Stellenbosch was the unchallenged base of Dutch Reformed theology, with a strong emphasis on its evangelical mission. Paternalistic charity was integral to this. Whilst the NGK sought to retain a leading role, the National Party itself had embraced an expanded role for the state in tackling the "poor white" question. In the 1930s, however, the hitherto marginal strand of neo-Calvinist theology, based in the small *Gereformeerde*

Dutch Church and its associated university (formerly seminary) in Potchefstroom, gained increasing influence—at the same time as the Transvaal National Party grew in importance relative to the Cape National Party within the (federal) National Party.

The neo-Calvinists were inspired by the thought of the Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper. Many South African theology students studied at Amsterdam's Free University, founded by Kuyper (with the "Free" meaning free from state control). For Kuyperians, "the fundamental error of European history was a consistent erosion, since the French Revolution, of the sovereignty of God in favour of the autonomy of the individual" (Kinghorn 1997: 143). Kuyper was as critical of liberal individualism as he was of communism. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, some South African neo-Calvinists flirted with national socialism, despite its excessive interest in state power; some assumed leadership positions in the pro-Nazi *Ossewa Brandwag*, which briefly seemed to offer a more radical alternative to Malan's National Party (Marx 2008). But it was the National Party itself that served as the vehicle through which neo-Calvinist ideas shaped public policy, including over welfare reform. Kuyperian neo-Calvinism was deeply ambivalent about the welfare *state*—as evident in the speeches of some National Party MPs in Parliament. Whilst the systematic racism of *apartheid* cannot be attributed to neo-Calvinist theology, the concept of "Christian nationalism" was imported into the ideology of the NGK and National Party from the Netherlands, where Kuyper had used the concept with reference to church-run but state-funded schools (Elphick 2012). The NGK and National Party's evolving approach to social programmes—and what later (in the 1950s) came to be known as the "welfare state"—reveals a clear imprint of neo-Calvinism, perhaps in part because Kuyperian thought accorded with the prior scepticism towards social programmes, which had begun to be evident in the early 1930s. After its electoral victory in 1948, the National Party struggled to reconcile its deep ambivalence over the state's social programmes with the political pressure to expand them (Seekings 2020).

In private, and in the wider white South African society, conservative (as well as openly racist) views were undoubtedly much more widespread than was evident in Parliament. This conservatism had surfaced publicly

in arguments for social work rather than social assistance in the late 1930s, as we saw above, and in the archival records examined by Du Toit (2018). It is unlikely that the war transformed what most white South Africans really thought. But it did delegitimate the public articulation of conservative and racist views outside of the National Party (and *Ossewa Brandwag*).

Conclusion

In South Africa, as elsewhere, political actors had their own ideas about the roles of the state, kin, markets and non-state organisations such as churches. They had their own ideas about the form of social contract linking individual citizens to the state and society, as well as about who was deserving of assistance (whether public or private) and who was not. At the same time, local actors' understanding of who should get what and how were shaped—but not determined—through interactions with ideas from elsewhere. South African reformers, in each of Parliament, state and civil society, were well informed of diverse models of social policy reform, including new programmes (such as old-age pensions and different forms of social insurance) as well as "modern" forms of casework in social work. Policy reforms in Australia, New Zealand and Britain were especially influential, as is evident in official government reports, parliamentary debates and writings by activists in civil society.

Whilst there was no shortage of ideas on the public agenda, most of these were never implemented. The bold visions of social policy set out in the reports of a long series of government commissions and investigative committees—from the Pienaar Commission in the late 1920s to the Gluckman Commission (on a national health service) and the Social and Economic Planning Council in the early 1940s—were not realised. Neither social health insurance nor a national health service was introduced (Marks 1997). Unemployment insurance remained limited (Meth and Piper 1984). Contributory pensions remained privately run (although often mandated by government, hence what I have called elsewhere "semi-social" insurance—Seekings [2002]). Nonetheless, by 1948 South Africa had what was clearly a nascent welfare state: Social assistance and

unemployment relief (as well as the very much less important workmen's compensation) were being paid to at least 600,000 people, and probably more than 700,000 people, out of a total population of under 12 million. The state was also widely involved in the regulation of the family and interventions to contain delinquency. Expenditure on these social policies was one of the largest items on the government's budget. Moreover, the system has been partially and unevenly extended to African people, albeit with discriminatory benefits. This was a liberal welfare regime, in the sense that the role of the state was residual, providing for people when and only when the market failed (although, as in the wage earners' welfare regimes of Australia and New Zealand—see Castles 1985—the state intervened strongly to raise the wages of white workers). It was less liberal in its continued veneration of the family, although eligibility conditions for pensions and other programmes recognised that families—white or African—were less extended than they were imagined to have been in the past.

This nascent welfare state was shaped by the "power resources" of various local actors. Most obviously, the African majority lacked electoral power and had limited power through the deployment or threat of direct action. White workers had some organisational power, although they were divided between competing unions. They and the less skilled "poor white" population were, however, empowered by their votes. Changes in the voting preferences of white voters brought about changes in government with real consequences for public policy. Industrial employers wielded considerable influence, largely because the government was economically dependent: Few social policy reforms were effected without at least the acquiescence of industrial employers, especially the mining companies. Industrial employers supported the extension of old-age pensions to African people, i.e. to people who would otherwise be the dependents of their employees, but generally resisted the expansion of state-run contributory programmes. (White) farmers also enjoyed massive influence within the National Party, which meant that reforms could be imposed on them more easily when (as in the war years) the National Party was in opposition.

Identifying the political power of different classes or interest groups begs the questions of how these groups understood their interests and

how they legitimately pursued them in public. In South Africa, race—and racism—shaped all of this. The "social question" could not be separated from South Africa's racial version of the "national question" (nor vice versa). White employers, white farmers and white workers almost always saw themselves as white, with a specific interest in preserving their privileges as white people in an African context. Even liberals' enthusiasm for deracialising policies was paternalistic (when it wasn't simply self-interested). There was no significant social democratic movement because the racial hierarchy was generally viewed as more important than the relations of production, with the result that there was little solidarity between white workers and other workers. Race shaped even the way in which most reformers tackled the "social question" within the white population, drawing on ideas from other, less racialised contexts. Much of the impetus to the initial introduction of programmes to support the (white) elderly as well as (white) mothers and children as well as attempts to regulate (white) families came from anxiety about the effects of poverty on white solidarity and the racial hierarchy. This view was most pronounced within the National Party but extended also into the Labour Party (at least in the 1920s) as well as sections of the South African Party (and later the United Party). Social democrats opposed to capitalist hierarchy and progressive liberals opposed to a rigid racial hierarchy remained marginal to white politics and, except during the unusual circumstances of the Second World War, policymaking.

Contestation over the social question in South Africa (for a summary of the analysis, see Table 6.1) was also infused with shifting religious beliefs. Heclo noted in very Weberian terms the need to understand the moral and religious convictions of the actual people who built welfare states:

> The closer one looks at the lives of the men and women involved in every country, the clearer it becomes that those pushing for changes that academics would later label as social citizenship were people with deeply ethical commitments, usually of a religious nature. The project they set for themselves, each in his or her own way, was to bring social practice into closer alignment with religious/ethical principles of sympathy, brotherhood, and a just humanity. (Heclo 1995: 675)

Table 6.1 The social question in pre-*apartheid* South Africa, 1910–1948: changing ideas and policies

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social question and social ideas	Broader ideational frames and contexts	External ideas and models	Key actors	Policies, legislation and programmes
1910–1924	Post-war, post-Union construction of a united (white) nation and modern state	Poor whites: Family breakdown	Classic liberalism and racism	Poor relief	South African Party; mining capital; white workers	Child Protection (1913), mothers' pensions (1921), reformatories, etc.
1924–c. 1933	Pact Government; Great Depression	White workers; "poor white problem"; and racial hierarchy	New liberalism; labourism; Afrikaner nationalism; racism	Social insurance (ILO), social pensions, etc. (UK, Australia, New Zealand); social casework	National Party; Labour Party; and white workers	Grants for poor mothers/children (1937) and old-age pensions (1928/1929)
c. 1934–c. 1945	Rapid economic growth; Second World War	"poor white problem"; "social security"; juvenile delinquency; and rural poverty	New liberalism; Afrikaner nationalism; neo-Calvinist theology and racism	Rehabilitation of the poor; social security; and Beveridge Report	Liberal reformers	Grants for the disabled and blind; family allowances; unemployment insurance; and partial extension of some programmes to African people
c. 1945–the mid-1950s	Tentative transition to *apartheid*	Native and coloured questions	Afrikaner nationalism; neo-Calvinist theology; and racism	Development	National Party and NGK	Limited retrenchment of provision for African people

Note: The final period is dated from c. 1945 to the mid-1950s because the framing of the social question and the ensuing social protection policies did not change neatly with the change of government in 1948. The pre-1948 government began to back-pedal from about 1945, whilst the post-1948 National Party government was unsure what to do on key issues for several years, only hitting its stride in the 1950s

In South Africa, as in Europe (Kahl 2005; van Kersbergen and Manow 2009), the construction of the welfare state was shaped by religious beliefs. Some of the proponents of reform came from more secular backgrounds. Others understood the need for state action through religious lenses. Religious beliefs were especially important for the *opponents* of reform, first in the 1920s and early 1930s and then again in the 1940s. Whilst the social question was framed in primarily racial terms, religious beliefs inhibited (without forestalling entirely) the statist form of policies to address the social question.

Glossary[12]

African People of indigenous, African descent, excepting some people included under "coloured" (see below) and including a very small number of people of mixed descent who identified culturally with African people.

Afrikaner The first white settlers in South Africa, many from the Netherlands, others from Germany and France, who embraced an "African" identity during the nineteenth century, speaking Afrikaans, a language rooted in Dutch but remade in the late nineteenth century; in the past Afrikaners were also referred to as "Boers" (literally, farmers), a term now considered derogatory.

Bantu An official *apartheid*-era and hence derogatory term for African people.

Black A term sometimes limited to African people but sometimes inclusive also of coloured and Indian people.

Coloured A heterogeneous category, including people of "mixed race", people of Southeast Asian descent (mostly "Malay", often Muslim), as well as members of the indigenous Khoi and San populations of the Western and Northern Cape.

Indian South Africans of South Asian descent.

Native An official, largely pre-*apartheid* term for African people that over time came to be considered as derogatory.

Non-European/Non-white Used before and under *apartheid* to refer to African, coloured and Indian people; both terms came to be viewed as offensive to black people.

White/European People of European descent, including Afrikaners.

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[12] South Africa's racialised history had given rise to a host of distinctive terms for different sections of the population.

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7

A Racialised Social Question: Pension Reform in *Apartheid* South Africa

Marianne S. Ulriksen

Introduction

It is apparent that the *apartheid* regime promoted a racialised and exclusionary system, but we still need to understand how social security policies fit into the broader *apartheid* project. When the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948, it inherited a social security system based on means-tested social assistance programmes for the needy (the elderly and disabled) and a fragmented system of contributory pensions (see Chap. 6). However, the *apartheid* regime undertook no major social security reforms, which is puzzling. Focusing on social security policies for the elderly, as this group is the most likely to receive social security benefits from the state, it is curious that the state did not push for the creation of a state-run national contributory pension scheme because the *apartheid* government was otherwise willing to pass reforms and content with a strong state. In addition, why did the regime continue to include blacks

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as non-contributory pension beneficiaries (albeit at lower benefit levels) when in other areas the regime had no problem implementing harsh exclusionary policies for black South Africans? While the *apartheid* regime sought to promote the interests of their white, primarily Afrikaner, constituencies, the aim of this chapter is to understand how pension policy developments were justified within the *apartheid* ideology as well as the regime's reactions to global discourses. The argument is that self-interests may be a driver in policymaking, but policymakers also seek to justify their decisions in relation to dominant discourses and ideas, and, consequently, by studying the normative underpinnings of policy, we can find explanations to counter-intuitive scenarios such as this one.

Thus, this chapter addresses the following question: what ideas and concepts underpinned social security policies for the elderly in *apartheid* South Africa? In analysing this question, I use as my theoretical framework the "onion skin model", as discussed in the next section. My analysis focuses on the ideas and perceptions of white politicians because only the white population had any say in policymaking in this period (up to 1953, some coloured people could vote, and up to 1959, the African population had three white representatives in parliament). I do not disregard the voices of other population groups, nor do I condone such an exclusionary approach to politics and policymaking. However, since my goal is to understand the ideas that lay behind pension policies during the *apartheid* era, my primary focus should be the perceptions and justifications of the people involved in policymaking. Other population groups and the international society can indirectly play a role in influencing the positions of white politicians, and this is also reflected in the analysis when relevant.

In focusing on the ideational basis of social security policies in *apartheid* South Africa, the chapter fills a void in the literature. There is a substantial body of work on *apartheid* (i.e. Giliomee 2003; Hodder-Williams and Hugo 1976; Lodge 2017; Posel 1991; Ritner 1967; van der Westhuizen 2007; Welsh 2009). Only a few studies take an ideational approach (Klotz 1999; Legassick 1974; Norval 1996), but they do not focus on social security policies. There is some work on social security during *apartheid* (van der Berg 1997; Devereux 2007; Patel 1992, 2015;

Simkins 1984; Scully 2019), but none of these takes an ideational approach.

My analysis builds on a reading of parliamentary debates (Hansards) and historical accounts (see the appendix for methodological considerations). I predominantly conduct a qualitative reading of the material with the purpose of understanding the ideas and positions of different actors with respect to policy, but I have also conducted quantitative counts of keywords in the *Hansards* to gauge the dominance of and shift in overall key ideas over time (Figs. 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3). In terms of terminology, I focus on formal social security policies for the elderly—contributory pension schemes and non-contributory old-age pensions—thereby omitting the important work of community-based organisations providing care during the *apartheid* era (see instead Patel 1992). Non-contributory pensions are also labelled social pensions, old-age pensions, and social grants. The appendix in Chap. 6 explains the names given to the population groups of South Africa. I use the terms
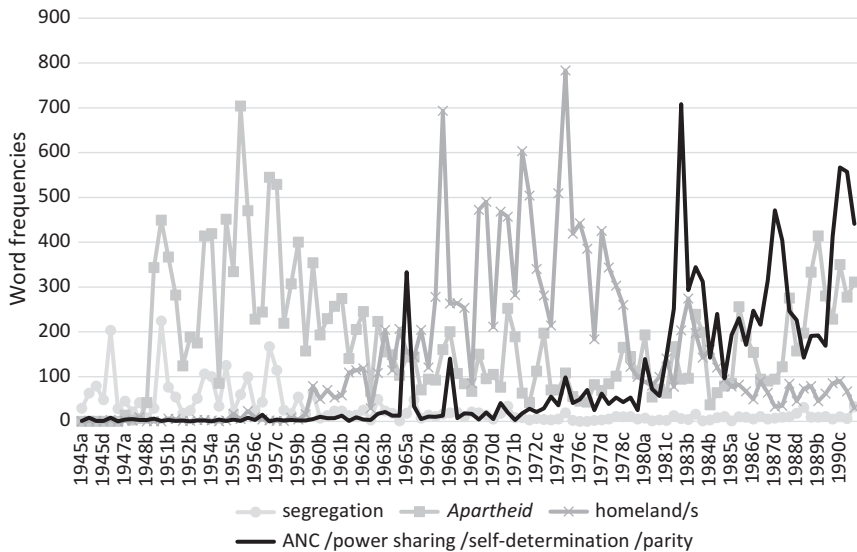
Fig. 7.1 Dominant frames expressed by South African MPs, 1945–1990. (*Source*: The author, based on author's analysis (see Appendix) of the Hansards from the South African House of Assembly, 1945–1990)
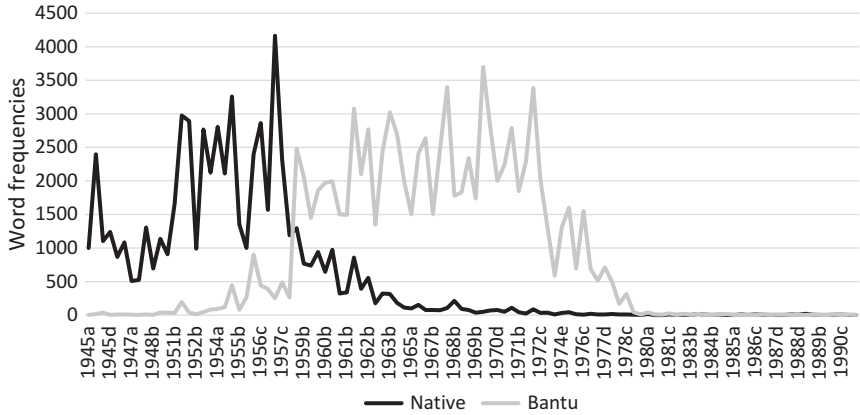
Fig. 7.2 Terms used by South African MPs to reference the African population. (*Source*: The author, based on author's analysis (see appendix) of the Hansards from the South African House of Assembly, 1945–1990)
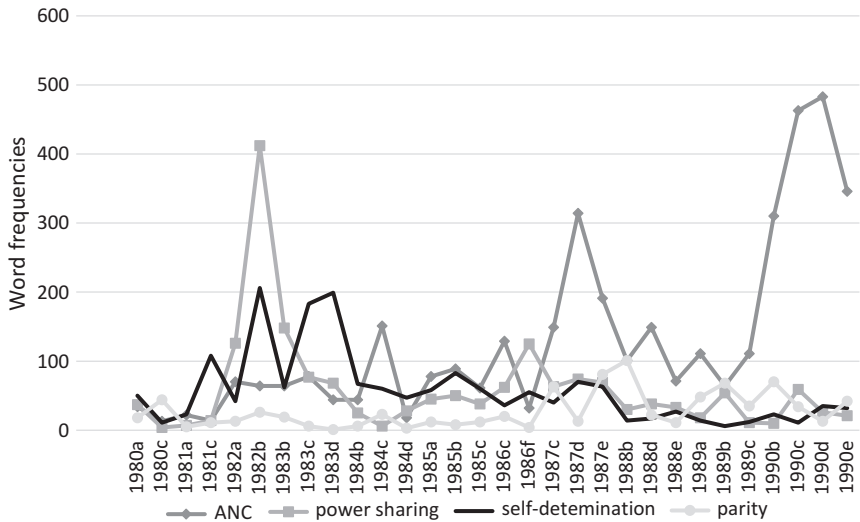
Fig. 7.3 Dominant frames vocalised by South African MPs, 1980–1990. (*Source*: The author, based on author's analysis (see appendix) of the Hansards from the South African House of Assembly, 1980–1990)

generally accepted during the periods of analysis even though some would now qualify as racist or as problematic in some other sense. Considering the extensive reference to concepts and terms used by contemporary actors in my analysis, I do not always use quotation marks for terms that are obviously contemporary.

Changes in Ideas, 1948–1990: An Outline of the Analysis

To explore how ideas justified and legitimised limited pension policy reforms in *apartheid* South Africa, I apply the onion skin model (see Leisering, Chap. 1). Leisering argues that, while pension policies (more broadly "welfare institutions") make up the visible surface of social policy, we have to look underneath the surface to understand the normative infrastructure that shapes social policy reform. At the deepest level, "frames" inform policies and are non-social ideas within which social policies are embedded. These ideas can be related to nation-building and development as well as global frames such as human rights and communism. The normative justifications of social policy are aligned to dominant frames but can also contrapose global frames that key policymakers regarded as illegitimate.

Based on the dominant frames of non-social ideas are four layers of social ideas that, at different levels, provide the ideational underpinnings of social policy. First, at the more abstract level, the "construction of social responsibility" designates the extent to which the state takes responsibility for a social issue and to whom in society this responsibility is directed. The recognition of central "social questions", which require political remedies, informs which social issues the state takes up. For instance, this could include the recognition that the issue of poverty requires political attention. Within the category of broader social questions, specific problem groups are identified, and their social problems are put on the policy agenda (the "policy paradigm"). It is within this policy paradigm that policy solutions are identified, which in turn make

Table 7.1 The onion skin model applied to South Africa, 1948–1960

Frame	**"Separate development"**—on how to deal with the influx of "natives" to cities and the "purity" of the white race
	Global frames: human rights and communism
Constructing social responsibility	**Racially graded social responsibility**
	– **The Afrikaner *volk*** (within "white unity")
	– "Europeans to carry non-Europeans on their back"
Social question	**Racialised social question** legitimised through **civilisation argument**
	– Livelihoods of "civilised" workers
	– The welfare of poor whites (separate from other racial groups)
Policy paradigms	Segmented concept of social problems and problem groups: focus on **Afrikaner upliftment**
Welfare institutions	**Racially graded pension schemes**
	– No national contributory pension scheme, instead disparity of funds
	– Social pension for the neediest and a benefit rate based on race

up the visible social policies ("welfare institutions"). Each period of analysis starts with a table summarising the application of the onion skin model to South Africa, which also structures the in-depth narrative.

Following Leisering's model, I start with the ideational frames that dominated the discourse among white members of parliament (MPs) during *apartheid*. Figure 7.1 illustrates how frames have shifted over time. In 1948, when the National Party came to power, the frame "*apartheid*"—the idea of separate development for different racial groups—dominated. This changed in the early 1960s when the concept of homeland/homelands—the idea of "independent nations" for different racial groups—came into more frequent use. As I will elaborate in the analysis below, this change does not indicate a general shift in the fundamental belief of racial separation but powerfully shows how frames changed to ensure continued legitimisation for (a lack of) policy reforms. Around 1980 there was another shift. The attempt to promote the idea of "independent nations" for Africans outside of white-dominated areas failed, and the *apartheid* regime increasingly came under pressure from both within and abroad. Figure 7.1 illustrates a period with no clear

ideational direction, which in turn had consequences for pension policy; a point that will be explored in the penultimate section.

The shifts in dominating frames delineate the periods into which the analysis is divided, although the partition into specific periods is artificial as frames and ideas are fluid and continuously refined or re-examined. Table 7.1 summarises the first period of analysis, 1948–1960, following Leisering's onion skin model, which I further elaborate on in the following sections (text in bold are the key focus areas).

1948–1960: "Separate Development" and the Problem of "Civilised Labour"

> [T]he election of the National Party in 1948 marked not so much a turning point in South African history as the intensification of a process which had been going on for three hundred years. (Wilson and Ramphele 1989: 204)

As the world moved towards a recognition of global human rights and decolonisation, South Africa marched in the opposite direction with deeply entrenched social and racial separation and the development of an increasingly draconian state. The National Party that came into power stood in opposition to the previous governing party, the United Party (UP), which J.C. Smuts led. Although in the 1940s there was some extension of social benefits to Africans (Chap. 6), the UP government also harboured fears of social mixing across race, and "Smuts never wavered in his belief that Africans were inferior people" (Thompson 2006: 177). Thus, while power changed hands in the parliament in 1948, the main political parties (the NP and UP, the official opposition) generally agreed on the need for social separation based on race, and there was continuous support for discriminatory social security policies in the national parliament. However, some critical voices were represented in the Parliament, by groups like the Labour Party, the Communist Party, and the "natives'" white representatives (the latter representation was removed in 1959) (Norval 1996). Although most MPs then shared ideas

of separate development, the NP distinguished itself from the previous government's central concept of "segregation" by promoting the idea of "*apartheid*" (Fig. 7.1).

Frame: *"Apartheid"*—The Idea of Separate Development

The National Party started to use the term "*apartheid*" after the party lost elections in 1943, but it was in the 1948 election campaigns that the concept started to gain greater expression (Evans 2017; Giliomee 2003). Scholars dismiss the idea that there was a blueprint or an *apartheid* grand plan. Instead, the concept of *apartheid* developed in contrast to the opposing UP's concept of "segregation" and global frames such as communism and human rights. The *apartheid* frame was also constructed to respond to the perceived challenges of controlling the African population and maintaining white dominance (Posel 1991; Norval 1996). In order to discuss the *apartheid* frame in more detail and how it is different from segregation, it is useful to first present an excerpt from NP leader D.F. Malan's campaign speech in Paarl, South Africa, 29 March 1948:

> There are two sections of thought in South Africa in regard to the policy affecting the non-European community. On the one hand, there is the policy of equality, which advocates equal rights within the same political structure for all civilized and educated persons, irrespective of race or colour, and the gradual granting of the franchise to non-Europeans as they become qualified to make use of democratic rights. On the other hand, there is the policy of separation (*apartheid*) which has grown from the experience of the established European population of the country, and which is based on the Christian principles of justice and reasonableness. Its aim is the maintenance and protection of the European population of the country as a pure White race, the maintenance and protection of the indigenous racial groups as separate communities, with prospects of developing into self-supporting communities within their own areas, and the stimulation of national pride, self-respect, and mutual respect among the various races of the country. (Malan 1948: 2–3)

Malan's reference to the "policy of equality" relates to the segregation policies of Smuts' government. Similarly to the NP, Smuts and his government were concerned with how to control the African population in ways that would limit their influx into the cities while maintaining white South Africans' access to cheap black labour, and the policy of segregation was also aimed at maintaining white political domination. However, Smuts underestimated many Afrikaners' fear of "the 'swamping' of white civilisation" (Terreblanche 2002: 314) and the extent to which many perceived that the policy of segregation had failed to stem the increasing urbanisation of the African population (Evans 2017; Norval 1996).

Apartheid was also framed in opposition to communism, which was perceived as a primary threat to Afrikaner nationalism because the communist doctrine completely disregarded racial differences. As explained below, Afrikaner nationalism—the idea of an Afrikaner *volk*—was an important element in the NP's rise to power, and, consequently, the communist demand for equal rights and a breakdown of racial barriers "was a thrust at the very heart of [the Afrikaners'] ethnic existence" (Norval 1996: 136). During the *apartheid* era, anyone advocating for equal rights across racial groups was regarded as a communist, although many of these advocates were, in fact, anti-communist (Norval 1996).

Apartheid was based on ideologies of nationalism and religious particularism within which pro-*apartheid* intellectuals emphasised that the differentiation between races was divinely ordained and each race had its own character and calling. Surprisingly perhaps, they argued that any policy of exploitation and oppression by whites was in conflict with the Christian basis of Afrikaner national life; instead, the NP vowed to facilitate opportunities for each racial group to develop according to its *volk*'s character (Welsh 2009; Norval 1996). As Malan put it that March day in 1948:

> In their areas, the non-European racial groups will have full opportunities for development in every sphere and will be able to develop their own institutions and social services whereby the forces of the progressive non-Europeans can be harnessed for their own national development. (Malan 1948: 3)

Hence, whereas segregation entailed "the concept of *one* community embracing different but interdependent elements", *apartheid* dictated "the concept of *several* alien and fundamentally incompatible national groups" (Ritner 1967: 27, my emphasis). In theory then, different "non-white racial groups" were not "inferior" to the "white race" but rather "irreconcilably different" (Ritner 1967: 27). However, in practice, NP politicians continued to perceive whites as superior to blacks. Moreover, because they did not believe that actual implementation of geographical separation was possible, they saw it as their ordained duty to provide "trusteeship and guidance" to the black population (Ritner 1967).

The idea of separate development in individual "nation-states" (i.e. homelands) only gained traction from the late 1950s to the early 1960s (see below and Fig. 7.1). In the first decade of NP rule, the focus was on the maintenance of the white population as a "pure white race" and complete eradication of any interracial mixing, although with a primary focus on the uplifting of the white Afrikaner community.

Racially Graded Social Responsibility

As in the pre-*apartheid* era, in the 1950s, white politicians on both sides of the House also argued that their social responsibility should primarily be for the white population because how "long can the Europeans carry the non-Europeans on their backs?" (USA 1954: Mr Loubser: 3501). Yet there was a marked difference between segregationist and *apartheid* discourses. The former made a distinction between "Europeans" (English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites) and "natives" (the African population) and treated each as a homogeneous group. The *apartheid* discourse, in contrast, promoted the idea of *volkseie*, which denotes the attributes that are particular to an ethnic/national group, i.e. *volk*, with a particular interest in the characteristics and identity of the Afrikaner *volk* (Norval 1996).

To elaborate, an underlying factor in the National Party's victory in the 1948 elections was the resurgence of Afrikaner nationalism, which united Afrikaners in a cross-class *volksbeweging* (people's movement). The governing alliance of Smuts and Hertzog from the 1920s to the 1940s had

largely downplayed past conflicts between Afrikaans- and English-speaking white South Africans, but many Afrikaners felt that this alliance was perpetuating the dominance of the English-speaking community. The 1930s and 1940s saw rapid social change and (continued) substantial economic inequality between Afrikaners and the English. In addition, Afrikaners perceived the United Party's retention of symbolic connections to Britain and the rapid urbanisation of Africans as the real threats to their identity (Welsh 2009; van der Westhuizen 2007). The National Party took advantage of this situation. As Terreblanche (2002: 298) explains:

> By overemphasising the alleged injustices done to Afrikaners by British imperialism and foreign capitalism and exaggerating the dangers of *swart oorstroming* ('black swamping'), Afrikaner ideologues succeeded in creating a 'syndrome of victimisation'—i.e., the idea that the existence and interests of the Afrikaner *volk* were endangered by other population groups.

Thus, although the logic of *volkseie* would later be transposed to other "groups" in society, the concern of the Afrikaner nationalist movement was initially focused on the construction and purification of the Afrikaner community, and, as a result, the social responsibility of the *apartheid* state was primarily constructed to benefit the Afrikaans population (Van der Westhuizen 2007; Norval 1996).

Consequently, the focus on *volkseie* enabled the NP to emphasise its social responsibility towards the Afrikaner volk over that of the (British) English-speaking white South Africans. However, NP politicians vacillated between using the term "race" to refer to *volk* (to differentiate between groups within the white population) and to "colour" (to differentiate between "white" and "black"). In distancing themselves from "non-white" groups, Afrikaner nationals emphasised white unity and the whites as the "civilised" population in contrast to the "uncivilised" black population.

Hence, the construction of social responsibility was categorised across racial lines. The white "race"—and within this group, particularly the Afrikaner *volk*— was the *apartheid* state's primary concern. The state

paternalistically regarded the black population as an "uncivilised" group that needed to be "carried by the Europeans" and, therefore, required some minimum of support, for instance, social pensions.

The Racialised Social Question Legitimised by the Civilisation Argument

The concept of "civilisation" has been important in white-dominated regimes since the eighteenth century: white "civilisation" was contrasted with African "savagery", thereby justifying the white population's dominance and privilege over other population groups. The rhetoric of "civilisation" remained an important means by which the NP mobilised support throughout the *apartheid* era (Van der Westhuizen 2007).

The 1930s and 1940s saw an increasing influx of low-skilled Afrikaners into the cities in search of work. Having grown up in rural areas, they were ill-prepared for city life and faced strong competition from the African population in the labour market. In addition, at this time, the low-income segments of all South African groups in the cities were increasingly intermingling, something which alarmed Afrikaans nationalists, as, in their view, they had to protect racial "purity" at all costs (Van der Westhuizen 2007).

Thus, the ruling NP government's social question was, in the first instance, how to ensure the separation of low-income Afrikaners from the African population. This concern was connected to other questions prevalent in South Africa: the "native" question, particularly trying to stem the influx of Africans into the cities, and the "poor white" question, which was dominant in the 1930s (see Seekings, Chap. 6). Nevertheless, the dominant issue in the first decade of *apartheid* was separating the Afrikaans working class from the African working class, which was made possible by labelling the former as "civilised" (i.e. white) and the latter as "uncivilised" (i.e. black) labour (Norval 1996).

Following this, I argue that the social question was racialised. The main social question for the NP government was the "civilised workers question", that is, a call for political remedies to ensure that low-income and low-skilled Afrikaners' economic position would be improved to

prevent their intermingling with other racial groups. The regulation of "black" labour as a social threat to a lesser extent called for social policy remedies but rather those of control and oppression.

Policy Paradigm: Afrikaner Upliftment as the Social Problem

Given that the social question concerned the situation of "civilised" (i.e. white) low-skilled workers, the NP focused on policy solutions that could eliminate the competition between black and white workers. Moreover, the Afrikaners were perceived as the primary problem group, given their disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the white English-speaking population, so the government pursued preferential treatment to ensure Afrikaner upliftment. From an ideational perspective, Afrikaner upliftment was important to ensure the unity of the Afrikaner *volk* by avoiding letting "working-class Afrikaner … consciousness as Afrikaners … be eclipsed by class-consciousness" (Welsh 2009: 13). However, it is also important to note that the NP was relying on low-income Afrikaners for their electoral victory in 1948 and in the many elections that followed (Van der Westhuizen 2007).

In order to improve the socio-economic status of Afrikaners, the *apartheid* state implemented job reservations and training programmes for low-skilled Afrikaners and, in various formal and informal ways, devised the exclusion of Africans from decent employment, such as by entrenching black subordination in employment, non-recognition of black unions, and "closed shop" agreements that gave vetoes to white unions (Van der Westhuizen 2007; Welsh 2009). This created lucrative employment opportunities for Afrikaners, particularly in the public sector and parastatals, which "contributed considerably to the rapid … embourgeoisement of Afrikaners" (Terreblanche 2002: 303). Afrikaners' share of the national personal income went from 27.9 per cent in 1946 to 32.4 per cent in 1960. In addition, the inequality gap between English- and Afrikaans-speaking whites closed: in 1946, the Afrikaners' per capita income was about 40 per cent of English-speakers' per capita income, whereas in the late 1970s it was 80 per cent (Van der Westhuizen 2007).

Racially Graded Pension Schemes

The NP had clear priorities concerning pension policies: "Our first consideration and our first interest is the lot of the White worker and the European old people in South Africa. That is our first interest and our first responsibility" (USA 1955, Dr de Wet: 1499–1500). During this period, the opposition raised proposals to introduce a national contributory pension scheme, but the government was content with regulating private pension funds and promoting separate contributory pension schemes in the public and parastatal sectors to which Afrikaners were given preferential access.

Opposition parties repeatedly proposed motions to introduce a national contributory pension scheme. One argument for such a scheme was that under the current system of means-tested social pensions and some private pension schemes, many had no social security in old age. In fact, "it is the people in the middle-income group who find things difficult today" (USA 1954, Mr Tighy: 342–343). Another argument was that a national contributory scheme could replace the existing expensive social pensions, thereby actually enabling the country to save money (USA 1953, Mr Eaton: 728; USA 1955, Mr Lewis: 1465–1472). Finally, there was also the aspiration to "[be in] line with other Commonwealth and European countries" (USA 1951, Mr Eaton: 6702).

While the opposition parties called for a national contributory scheme, there was disagreement about whether such a scheme should include all South Africans. The Labour Party argued that the government could not eliminate non-Europeans from the definition of "worker", and, therefore, "non-Europeans … are as much entitled to … a pension on a contributory basis as any European" (USA 1954, Mr Eaton: 350–351). However, the UP-dominated opposition's main view was based on the civilisation argument that demands for a national contributory scheme "flows from the advance in our civilised standards of living" (USA 1959, Mr Durrant: 540).

The NP government was unsurprisingly in line with the civilisation argument and also emphasised that the circumstances between the "native" worker and a qualified artisan "differ too greatly" (USA 1960, Mr van der Heever: 1865). However, the NP government did not accept

the idea of *one* national scheme because not only did the circumstances across racial groups differ, but one also could not "establish a pension scheme for mineworkers on the same basis as one for public servants", and so "the whole solution to the pension problem is to be found in…various schemes" (USA 1960, Mr van der Heever: 1865).

Thus, the NP government persistently argued against the idea of introducing a national contributory pension scheme, suggesting that such a scheme would be costly and that the white population would contribute disproportionally to other population groups, given that the new scheme would require, at least initially, state support:

> If there were a change to a national pension scheme to-day it would have to be taken through to the bitter end and I ask the supporters of this motion whether they have considered the implications of their proposal for a young country such as South Africa with its small White population and its overwhelming Native population. Speakers have said that if we introduce such a pension scheme the Natives and Coloureds will be included in it. Have you ever considered what it would cost a certain section of the people, people who contribute to taxation to-day, and from whose pocket the extra taxation would have to come? (USA 1955, Mr du Plessis: 1519–1520)

Instead, the government sought to promote the extension of private pension funds with the 1956 Pension Funds Act that served as the legislative foundation to regulate pension schemes to which employers and employees would both contribute. As explained by the Minister of Finance, the government saw a range of advantages to this new arrangement, such as it did not encourage dependency and minimised the need for social pensions in the future:

> The point I want to make is that these private pension funds serve the great social object of getting people to look after themselves, of being self-supporting and independent … For that reason there should be every encouragement from the side of the Government, and … [T]here is positive support in the form of the taxation relief given to the employer as well as to the employee contributing to a fund of this nature … if these schemes are established and extended, we can expect in future to have less provision made in the Pensions and Social Welfare Votes. (USA 1959, Minister of Finance: 573–575)

Furthermore, the government praised itself for instituting a non-discriminatory policy: "The attitude we on this side adopt when we plead for the encouragement of the various private schemes is that we do not exclude the non-Whites. We say it is a matter for the employer and the employee themselves" (USA 1960, Mr de Villiers: 1881). However, as the opposition pointed out, although some schemes were available for the "natives", "to a very large extent the Natives are not in a position to make voluntary contributions and they are consequently not able to draw benefits" (USA 1960, Dr de Beer: 1878).

The NP government not only encouraged private pension funds but was also instrumental in expanding contributory pension schemes to public-service and parastatal employees in administration, the police force, prisons, the defence force, and the railways, among other sectors in which Afrikaners benefitted from preferential employment. Through employment, white staff were granted membership in these contributory pension funds, whereas black staff were, at best, entitled to a gratuity at the time of retirement (USA 1956, Minister of Transport: 1117–1118). Interestingly, while over the years the immense costs of the social pensions were a repeated concern (see below), there was much less mention of the costs of keeping the public sector pension funds sound, although budget allocations were made for such purposes most years (USA 1955, Mr Hepple: 3391; RSA 1967, Mr van der Walt: 4890). Thus, the budget for public-service pensioners was heavily in favour of the white employees.

Together with the white workers, the condition of the "European old people" was the government's first priority (USA 1955, Dr de Wet: 1499–1500). This also implies that the situation of elderly blacks was only of secondary concern, and after 1948 when the NP government came to power, the government sought to restrict the numbers of Africans receiving social pensions by encouraging a stricter application of the eligibility criteria, and although many more Africans received a pension over other population groups and this number increased in the 1950s and 1960s, the number of African beneficiaries decreased relative to white, coloured and Indian beneficiaries (see Table 7.2). Similarly, while the nominal value of social pensions increased for all population groups, Africans continued to be seriously disadvantaged—in 1944, the pension

Table 7.2 Old-age pension beneficiaries in South Africa, 1949–1968

	1949	1951	1955	1957–1958	1968
Numbers					
Europeans	68,265	72,040	84,885	87,313	97,532
Coloured and Indian	40,125	42,980	49,060	49,030	65,359
Natives	199,514	197,332	215,206	217,097	248,640
Total	307,904	312,352	349,151	353,440	411,531
Per cent of total					
Europeans	22.2%	23.1%	24.3%	24.7%	23.7%
Coloured and Indian	13.0%	13.8%	14.1%	13.9%	15.9%
Natives	64.8%	63.2%	61.6%	61.4%	60.4%

Source: The author, data from House of Assembly debates (Hansards), 1949–1968

value for whites was 12 times higher than for Africans, while in 1965 white pensioners received a grant that was 11 times higher (Devereux 2007).

Only very few parliamentarians voiced concerns about the lower rates paid to other population groups, and then it was often because they were elected as their representatives. How small the pensions were for Africans and how unfairly they were administered is well illustrated by this quote from Mr Lee-Warden, representative of the "natives":

> The average pension which is paid to an African today is £13. Now, it is not £13 a week; it is not £13 a month; it is £13 a year! If you break that down it comes to 5s. [shilling] a week. To relate that to the cost of living one realizes how little it is.… It means that one person could buy six loaves of bread, costing 10d. [penny] each, in any one week. (USA 1960, Mr Lee-Warden: 3371–3373)

However, in general, racial discrimination in benefits was unquestioned, seemingly because the differentiated levels of civilisation were an undisputed paradigm and parliamentarians were primarily concerned with pensions for the white population. In fact, "policy debates were…predominantly conducted as if South Africa consisted of 4 million whites in a modern economy with few structural problems" (Beukes and Fourie 1992: 98). One aspect of the social pensions that did receive some criticism was the means test because it was perceived to "penalize the thrifty and set a premium on recklessness and thriftlessness" (USA 1955, Mr Gay: 1483). Critics argued that the means test was unfair to the elderly

who had saved and owned assets. Nevertheless, the government would not remove the means test given the high expected costs.

Overall, the social pension programme proved resilient. In the parliamentary debates in the 1950s, there was a strong sense that social pension was an expenditure that could not be cut:

> I agree with my friends over there that the cost structure is high. It was also high under their regime. The greatest expansion in the public service came under that Government and not under this Government. [But…do] they want us to abolish those services. Do they want us to abolish Social Welfare and all those things? No, of course not! (USA 1952, Minister of Economic Affairs: 68)

Although social pensions were not reformed in any way and only incrementally adjusted, the amount spent on pensions quadrupled from 1948 to 1960, given gradual increases in benefit levels and the number of beneficiaries (USA 1960, Mr van der Heever: 1859). The NP government's view on pensions was double-sided. On the one hand, it was sympathetic towards the needs of the elderly and believed that "we should try to see whether we cannot do more for our aged" (USA 1959: 568–569). This was not exclusive to the white population because—as explained earlier—the NP government accepted its (temporary) duty to care for other population groups under its "trusteeship". In addition, the government actively used social pensions for Africans to counter South Africa's negative image internationally (Patel 2015). On the other hand, the government had misgivings with the fact that only a small section of the (white) population "carried the rest on their back": "there are few countries in the world were such a small section of the taxable population does so much for those sections of the population who do not pay taxes" (USA 1956, Mr Haak: 2837).

To sum up, the *apartheid* government did not pursue any major policy reforms on pensions. The main new legislation was the Pension Funds Act of 1956, which was put in place to control and regulate pension funds. Calls for a national pension scheme were discarded: the government was content that private- and public-sector schemes would cover their constituency of Afrikaner workers because of their preferential

access to employment. Social pensions, inherited from the previous regime, were supplementary. Race differentials were not questioned because the idea of different levels of living standards was generally accepted. Incremental adjustments in benefit values and accessibility caused a continuous increase in social pension expenses, a concern for which would continue in the succeeding periods.

Shifting the Dominant Frame: From *Apartheid* to "Independent Nations"

When Hendrik Verwoerd—often named the architect of *apartheid*—became prime minister in 1958, the term *apartheid* was already in common use and a central frame. However, with Verwoerd's regime came another important change in the usages of concepts that would define the next two decades. Until then, the government had labelled the indigenous African populations "natives", implying that they were a homogenous group of people. However, now the government began to categorise Africans as distinct "Bantu ethnic groups", thereby laying the foundation for the development of separate independent "homelands", where each "ethnic" group had limited autonomy (Norval 1996). This dramatic shift in key concepts is illustrated in Fig. 7.2, which documents that around 1958 parliamentarians gradually replaced the term "native" with "Bantu". Figure 7.1 also makes it evident that a shift in frames took place by noting when the terms "homeland"/"homelands" replaced—although a few years later—the term "*apartheid*". However, these shifts in frames do not indicate a fundamental change in the underlying ideas of the *apartheid* project but rather a change in the justifications used to legitimise the regime.

   Current events also prompted the shifts in discourse. The first months of 1960 was a difficult period for the *apartheid* government because of the Sharpeville shootings, international condemnation, the failed assassination attempt on Verwoerd, and the massive outflow of capital (Welsh 2009). In the South African media "the word *apartheid* itself was blamed as the source of the trouble" because it had negative connotations abroad (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 41). The government, instead, steered the

discourse away from "separate development" and towards "multi-nationalism" and "ethnic self-determination". The government claimed that Africans would be given the right to self-government in their homelands (Posel 1991). As a result, "independent nations" (i.e. homelands) became the key "non-social" frame of the subsequent period.

1961–1979: "Independent Nations" and the Government's Attempt to Abandon Social Responsibility for Non-white Groups

The 1960s and 1970s were in many ways a turbulent period in South Africa and included several dramatic events, such as the assassination of Verwoerd in 1966 and the Soweto uprising in 1976. However, very little changed with pension policies. The *apartheid* government focused on establishing homelands with the desired aim of freeing the government from the responsibility of taking care of non-white population groups and ultimately maintaining white domination. In practice, the homelands scheme required extensive funding to facilitate, and although government spending increased, it was insufficient. Given the affluence of the white population, there was little need to pursue any major pension reforms. The 1956 legislation continued to regulate contributory pensions, although the number of funds grew, and the main change in social pensions was the introduction of the "principle of discrimination", which underscores the embedded nature of the civilisation argument. Table 7.3 summarises the application of the onion skin model for this period and is further elaborated in the following.

Frame: Homelands ("Independent Nations")

Welsh (2009) argues that the homeland solution was Verwoerd's second phase of *apartheid*. Whereas the first phase was pre-eminently about ensuring white control and Afrikaner upliftment, "the new phase purported to advance African ethnic 'nations' to self-determination in their 'homelands'" (Welsh 67–68). The term "ethnic self-determination"

Table 7.3 The onion skin model applied to South Africa, 1961–1979

Frame	**"Independent nations"**—still responding to urban influx and campaigning for racial separation
	Global frames: right to political self-determination
Constructing social responsibility	Outsourcing social responsibility to **each "independent nation-state"**
Social question	**Racialised social question**
	– Maintaining white domination
	– Civilisation argument when useful
Policy paradigms	Increased welfare of whites
	Grappling with **"superfluous appendages"**
Welfare institutions	**Stability in pension schemes**
	– Separate schemes to address "separate needs"
	– "Principle of discrimination"

mimicked the language used further north in Africa by African nationalists fighting to achieve independence, and, in this way, the government tried to gain legitimacy with its critics by distancing itself from colonialism and, instead, co-opting the ideas of rights to political independence (Posel 1991; Klotz 1999).

The 1959 Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act established the statutory basis for homelands, and the 1971 Bantu Homelands Constitution Act completed the legislative framework (Welsh 2009; Thompson 2006). Practically, the government established "Bantu territories", and any black person in white areas and cities that was deemed "superfluous to 'white' South Africa's needs" was forcibly removed to an area the government identified as fitting the black person's ethnic identity (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 126). The state forcibly removed and internally relocated 3.5 million people between 1960 and 1982 (Marais 2011). In effect, the population of the homelands grew from 4.2 million in 1960 to 11 million in 1980. "About half of the black rural families had been rendered landless [by 1980] in what was basically rural slums without services, facilities or employment" because there was not enough land and economic investments were also sparse (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 101). The actual establishment of independent states took time, was costly, and, in many places, was incomplete. Transkei spearheaded the process and became "self-governing" in 1963 and "independent" in 1976.

Bophuthatswana became independent in 1977, Venda in 1979, and Ciskei in 1981. As the "nations" became independent, their citizens lost their South African citizenship (Thompson 2006).

Outsourcing Social Responsibility to "Independent Nation-States"

The goal of the homeland scheme was to enable African groups to take responsibility for their own advancement, and the homelands became semi-autonomous political structures with responsibility for certain policy fields, most notably social welfare, but not other areas, such as defence and economic planning (Legassick 1974). However, so-called self-determination allowed white South Africa to shy away from its responsibility for and contribution to the development of other communities because "what nation-state can be held responsible for the educational expenditure or the unemployment, old-age, and other welfare benefits needed in another sovereign land?" (Wilson and Ramphele 1989: 205).

In reality, white authorities did not provide the necessary economic support to make the new scheme work, and Afrikaners continued to lead the homeland bureaucratic systems. The homelands, therefore, remained totally economically dependent on the white regime for employment opportunities and funding. Furthermore, although the South African state continued to finance social welfare policies, there was less pressure to pass any pension reforms that could benefit the African population because "the extension of the services [should] be a function of the ability of the Bantu to pay" (Legassick 1974: 19; Picard 2005).

Racialised Social Question

The social issue of Afrikaner upliftment in the 1950s was no longer pressing. South Africa experienced tremendous economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, and the Afrikaners particularly—benefitting from preferential employment—experienced increased affluence. By 1970 the Afrikaners had become a predominantly urban people, and their per

capita incomes rose in comparison to those of English-speaking whites: from 49:100 in 1946 to 70:100 in 1970. The total white population's per capita income grew by nearly 50 per cent during the 1960s. The decade was one of unprecedented affluence that led to the suggestion that white South Africans rivalled Californians "as the most wealthy community in the world" (Lodge 2017: 176; Welsh 2009). Africans also benefitted from industrial advancement; for instance, they gained from the increase in manufacturing employment opportunities. However, their income only rose by 23 per cent in the 1960s, and, thus, inequality between blacks and whites became even more accentuated (Lodge 2017).

In this context, the social question of the "civilised worker" lost some of its relevance because, within the new discourse on "independent nations", the strategy was to make the previously labelled "backward" and "uncivilised" rural areas attractive to Africans. Nevertheless, racial discrimination continued largely undisputed in the white-dominated South African Parliament, and the idea of different standards of living was still used when politically convenient.

Policy Paradigm: The "Superfluous Appendages"

Policy solutions were not clearly related to a social question in this period. Instead, the defining policy paradigms were predominately about maintaining white dominance, and central to this plan was the removal of as many Africans from white areas as possible. Consequently, the main perceived problem group that the government needed to address was that of the "superfluous appendages" (see below), although pension policies played a smaller role in solving social problems. As a government circular stated in 1961:

> It is accepted Government policy that the Bantu are only temporarily resident in the European areas…for as long as they offer their labour there. As soon as they become, for some reason or another, no longer fit or superfluous in the labour market, they are expected to return to their country of origin or the territory of the national unit where they fit in ethnically if they were not born and bred in the homeland. (quoted in Posel 1991: 234–235)

The government determined that "no stone is to be left unturned to achieve settlement in the homelands of non-productive Bantu" (Legassick 1974: 27), and, therefore, the policy grew more aggressive during the 1960s and the categories of "superfluous" people multiplied. Africans regarded as inessential to the "European" labour market included the aged, widows, the "unfit", and women with dependent children, as well as doctors, attorneys, traders, and others. The Deputy Minister of Justice, Mines and Planning G.F Froneman referred to these groups as the "superfluous appendages"—add-ons or extra "limbs" of the African labour force who were unnecessary in white areas. Helen Suzman was quite alone in the Parliament when she gave the voiceless majority's perspective:

> In other societies, the aged, the sick, the widows and the very young are treated with special care. In our society, they are singled out for especially harsh treatment…they are the 'superfluous appendages'. What does the honourable minister think the endorsing out of African families does to them? He is very proud of the number of people he has kept out of the urban areas, but never stops to think what…they live on and what their family lives are like. (Suzman 1970: 114–115)

Pension Policies

The *apartheid* government was intent on making the homelands more attractive than the cities to the Africans, which led to a redesign of the system that categorised the values of social pension benefits to different racial groups. In 1965, the government established a "principle of discrimination", according to which the government paid pension benefits in the ratio of 4:2:1 to whites, coloureds and Indians, and Africans, respectively. This principle was based on a civilisation argument in which "both the Indian and the Coloured live at very much lower levels than the White man and their income is also on a smaller scale" (Minister of Social Welfare and Pensions, as quoted in Devereux 2007: 544–545). The civilisation argument was, however, somehow reversed for Africans. In the 1950s, the government differentiated between rural and "detribalised" Africans who lived in the cities and, therefore, had lost their "tribal" identity and connections, which in turn led to differentiated pension

rates for Africans living in cities, towns, and rural areas, with higher rates for the former and the lowest for the latter.

However, by 1965, the government abolished this differentiation and set a uniform payment, which, in effect, slightly increased the pensions paid to Africans living in the rural areas while decreasing it for Africans living in the cities. Thus, in this case, the argument for different levels of civilisation no longer applied, because the government was intent on making the previously described "uncivilised" homelands attractive to ("superfluous") Africans and removing incentives to move to the cities (Wilson and Ramphele 1989; Devereux 2007; Posel 1991). Subsequently, pension levels started to even out somewhat to be in line with the "principle of discrimination". Thus, while the annual amount paid to white persons increased by 124 per cent from 1965 to 1975, the amount for the coloured and Indians increased by 154 per cent, and that for Africans by 238 per cent. Yet, at a ratio of 7:3:1, there was still some way to go to reach the 4:2:1 target (Devereux 2007). Moreover, while 3.2 per cent of the white population received a social old-age pension, this was only true of 1 per cent of blacks (RSA 1980, Mr Goodall: 2747).

Contemporaneously, the opposition again pleaded for a national contributory pension scheme and linked this proposal to the simultaneous removal of the much-criticised means test for social pensions, the idea being that with a national contributory scheme, social pensions would in time become (almost) redundant (RSA 1967; i.e. Mr Oldfield and Mr Fisher: 4873–4882). The government, however, did not want to remove the means test, although it was relaxed in various ways in the mid-1960s (RSA 1965, Minister of Social Welfare: 276–78). The government also seemed content to continue with the fragmented system of contributory pension funds whereby separate schemes could cater to "separate needs". In order to expand the pension schemes, the government would rather "try to compel … employers to … introduce private schemes … and … to conduct research on the basis of [the 1956 legislation to control and register all pension funds] to ascertain whether it will not be possible to make better provision for our workers in that way" (RSA 1967, Mr van der Walt: 4891).

Notwithstanding the government's resistance to pursuing any kind of pension reform, the number of pension funds increased from 6570 in

1972 to more than 12,000 by the end of the 1970s (RSA 1980, Mr Goodall: 274–2749). Given that it was estimated that 38.8 per cent of the economically active population in South Africa belonged to a pension scheme in 1976 (RSA 1980), we can assume that this meant that the white population was already well covered by the existing fragmented system, which again helps to explain the government's reluctance to expand contributory pensions to a national scheme for which the state would ultimately be responsible.

To sum up, there were no fundamental changes to pension policies in the 1960s and 1970s. The idea of different levels of civilisation was further entrenched and specified by the "principle of discrimination", and, although social pensions were improved slightly for Africans in rural areas, deprivation was widespread. Finally, the government saw no need to pursue any contributory pension reforms.

Shifting the Dominant Frame: From Independent Nations to an Ideational Void

The Soweto uprising in 1976 was "a seminal event in the decline of *apartheid*" and a turning point in many ways because it "occurred at a time when international isolation and pressure for economic sanctions were increasing" (Welsh 2009: 101). The "grand idea" of the homeland schemes became increasingly hard to maintain, as few believed the government was sincere about easing its domination (Van der Westhuizen 2007; Thompson 2006). This is also reflected in Fig. 7.1, which illustrates when the terms "homeland"/"homelands" started to lose traction. The Soweto events provoked some reforms in which "salary parity for teachers of all races with equal qualifications" was a key component (Welsh 2009: 108). The idea of parity was also raised with respect to social pensions around 1976. The opposition argued that discrimination based on race should be discontinued (RSA 1976, Mr Oldfield). During the same debate, the deputy minister of Social Welfare and Pensions stated that the "the Government has already declared itself prepared to … eliminate the gap with regard to the payments made to the various population groups" (RSA 1976: 7746). However, the "fact of the matter is that

it cannot be done at the moment" (RSA 1976: 7746). This is an important shift away from ideas of separate development and different levels of civilisation even if these changes were not immediately feasible according to the government. Nevertheless, within the government itself, there did not seem to be complete agreement on the idea of parity in wages and social benefits. For instance, the Minister of Information and the Interior Dr C.P. Mulder apparently—also in 1976—declared that "Blacks at the lower levels of work have to show greater productivity if the wage gap with the Whites was to be bridged" (RSA 1976, Mr Webber: 6110–6111). *Parity* became important in the 1980s debates, although the white parliamentarians also remained concerned about the possible cost implications of equal access to and value of pensions.

1980–1990: "A Country of Minorities" and Equalisation to an Extent

South Africa experienced a significant recession beginning in the late 1970s and extending into the 1980s, and many whites experienced a decline in income. Moreover, administration of the complex network of *apartheid* laws was extremely costly (Thompson 2006; Welsh 2009). International pressures, including increased anti-*apartheid* activism and the enforcement of international sanctions that signalled to the domestic opposition that there was international support for racial equality, further exacerbated the *apartheid* state's troubles (Klotz 1999). Table 7.4 summarises the application of the onion skin model for the period 1980-1990 and is further elaborated in the following.

Frame: Power-Sharing and Unclear Directions

The NP government recognised that given the crisis of the *apartheid* state, some racial concessions were unavoidable (Van der Westhuizen 2007). However, P.W. Botha, prime minister of the *apartheid* government, flatly denied anti-*apartheid* actors' suggestion of a unitary political system based on the principle of one-man-one-vote (Botha 1985). Botha

Table 7.4 The onion skin model applied to South Africa, 1980–1990

Frame	**"A country of minorities"** and reform impulses while seeking to maintain white dominance, no clear direction
	Global frames: increased anti-*apartheid* activism and sanctions urging racial equality
Constructing social responsibility	Recognition of the government's social responsibility **for everyone in the South African state**
	versus each to take care of oneself
Social question	Struggle for regime survival eclipsed the **social question**
	– **Parity**—the recognition that, *in time*, there must be equality between racial groups
	– Equalisation: "you get what you contribute"
Policy paradigms	**Cost containment**
	Impossibility of fulfilling increasing needs with the existing policies and political structures
Welfare institutions	**Cost containment**
	– Still no national insurance scheme
	– Move towards parity in benefits
	– Methods to "win hearts and minds"

remained committed to the idea of separate development, and "[f]undamental to his thinking was that South Africa was 'a country of minorities', each of which was to be accorded recognition. 'Groups' had to be the building blocks of any new system" (Welsh 2009: 209).

Although some political concessions were needed, the NP government could not contemplate giving Africans effective influence because the party feared the possible consequences of African majority rule on the white population (Thompson 2006). Instead, the NP drew inspiration from the US political scientist Arend Lijphard's idea of "consociationalism", which was essentially "power-sharing arrangements in heterogenous societies where minorities felt threatened by majority rule" (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 116). That the concept of power-sharing was dominant in the minds of white politicians in the early 1980s is also evident from Fig. 7.3. In addition, Fig. 7.3 highlights that, unlike previous periods in which we could identify a single ideational frame, there was no clear ideational direction in the 1980s, particularly after Botha's push for power-sharing based on his *apartheid*-related concept of "a country of minorities" faltered. For instance, although the idea of "parity" was discussed (see below), it was not a dominant frame. Instead, what became

the overriding issue in parliamentary debates was either a concern for regime survival or a movement for regime overthrow. Figure 7.3 illustrates the popularity of the concept "ANC", which is not an ideational frame but rather a context-based issue demonstrating an ideational void as conflicts increased and the future direction of the country became uncertain.

The government devised the Tricameral Constitution of 1983 as a solution to the problem of power-sharing, although it failed to gain credibility. Under this arrangement, whites shared power with Indian and coloured groups through the establishment of a new parliament consisting of three "uniracial" chambers (House of Assembly for whites, House of Representatives for coloureds, and House of Delegates for Indians). Africans were excluded from this arrangement. Each chamber became responsible for its "own affairs", such as social welfare, education, health, and local government, whereas a multiracial cabinet, representing all three chambers, became responsible for "general affairs", including taxation, defence, state security, law and order, commerce and industry, and African affairs (Thompson 2006).

Social Responsibility: Each to Their Own or White Obligation?

We can view the tricameral constitution as a mechanism for the white government's further divesting of responsibility for coloureds and Indians, who were now also accountable for "their own" social issues, as was also the case—at least in principle—in the ten homelands. However, members of the Conservative Party (right-wing opponents of the NP government, who were voted into parliament in 1983) felt that in reality (and unfairly in their view), the white population was still bearing the burden for other population groups:

> If we look at the Constitution, which was passed last year, it is clear that social welfare is the first matter to be classified as an own affair but—and this is the snag—subject to any general law with regard to norms and standards for the provision of financing for welfare services. Therefore, it is

actually a general affair from beginning to end … one must keep the contribution of the taxpayers, who are represented here in the House of Assembly, in mind. For the financial year 1982–83, it amounts to R3 152 million, and 2,206,000 people who are economically active paid it by way of personal income tax. The taxpayers of the House of Representatives paid R77 million, and 987,000 economically active people paid it. The amount for the House of Delegates was R74 million, and 235,030 people contributed to the State coffers. (RSA 1985, Dr Snyman: 2098)

Thus, some white politicians continued to feel that each group should take responsibility for only their members. Yet, within the NP, there was a growing recognition that somehow the *apartheid* system should transform and that the homelands' funding should by supported by white taxpayers (Hodder-Williams and Hugo 1976), that is, the state should take *responsibility for all its citizens* (including those living in the homelands). However, given the economic recession, international sanctions, a shrinking tax capacity, a sluggish economy, an excessive bureaucracy, and increased spending on defence, security, and black education, there was limited financial capacity to meet all needs (Terreblanche 2002; Thompson 2006).

Eclipsed Social Question: Equality How?

Although the government committed to move towards parity in wages and social benefits in the late 1970s (van der Berg 1997), exactly how parity was perceived to relate to equalisation is somewhat confusing. The Minister of Social Welfare and Pensions had a rather convoluted suggestion that brings to mind the civilisation argument of earlier periods but without the race element somehow. Using the figures from a research report on the living standards of various groups, the minister argued:

Does a Black person who spends R8 on housing have to receive the same pension as the White person who spends R55 on housing?… I think we should completely remove the element of colour from pensions. We should adjust pensions to people's basic needs in respect of food, clothing, housing, and miscellaneous things, for if we did that, it would no longer be

necessary to speak of Black, Coloured, Indian, or White pensions. Surely there is not a single hon member of the official Opposition who can rise and say that if a person's housing costs him R8, we should give him R55. On the other hand, surely there is no one who can say that if a person's actual expenditure on housing is R55, we should give him R8. (RSA 1980, Minister of Social Welfare and Pensions: 7317–7318)

The minister emphasised that equalisation for contributory pensions did not imply that "the man who contributed least should get out the same as the man who contributed most" (RSA 1980, Minister of Social Welfare and Pensions: 2777). Put more bluntly, although the minister had earlier argued to remove the "element of colour" from contributory pensions, he elaborated that "the idea of egalitarianism must not be promoted in such a way that the White man's contribution must carry the black man" (RSA 1980, Minister of Social Welfare and Pensions: 2778). Therefore, it seems that the NP government's understanding of equalisation in the early 1980s translates to "you get what you contribute" and that actual redistribution through social pensions should remain limited. The minister's arguments highlight a search for justifications for inequality in a time of great insecurity, and given the intense political climate, the regime's struggle for survival largely eclipsed social issues.

Policy Paradigms and Pension Policies: Cost Containment

The overarching policy paradigm of the time, given the government's financial constraints, was one of cost containment, which is also evident in the debates on pension policies. Opposition parties to the left of the government (i.e. the Progressive Federal Party and the South African Party) had not stopped their criticism of the means test for social pensions, which "to many people…is only slightly less complicated than Einstein's theory of relativity" (RSA 1980, Mr Widman: 2767). However, like the NP, they were concerned with the potential rising costs of social pensions in the years to come:

In 1968, there were 98,134 old-age pensioners receiving an amount of R35,587,000 per annum. Eleven years later, in 1979, there were 137,760 old-age pensioners to whom an amount of R142,553,000 was paid out every year … Working on the present basis, we shall find that in 20 years there will be 216,952 pensioners receiving R352,485,000 per annum. I am referring to Whites alone. What would the position be if other races were included and annual increases were taken into account in this regard? I do not want to think about it; the amount would be astronomical. (RSA 1980, Mr Rossouw: 2738–2739)

The potential cost implications were also "astronomical" because "we in South Africa are committed to the equalisation of pensions for all races in South Africa" (RSA 1980, Mr Goodall: 2747). As a result, the opposition argued that there is an urgent need to establish a national contributory pension scheme "without delay" and presented a motion to that effect (RSA 1980, Mr Rossouw: 2736–2737). The minister responded that a national scheme would "involve everyone", but "one certainly could not permit the Whites to carry the Blacks, the Coloureds, and the Indians in regard to such a scheme. They would have to look after themselves" (RSA 1980, Minister of Social Welfare and Pensions: 2773–2774). However, the minister promised to look into the matter, which in effect meant that the government once again shelved the idea of a national contributory scheme (a select committee was only appointed in 1984) (RSA 1985, Deputy Minister of Health and Welfare: 2125).

Despite earlier confusion on the terms of equalisation, the government remained committed to parity in social pensions, and the gaps between the races continued to narrow, although much too slowly according to the opposition on the left (RSA 1988). In 1985, white pensioners still received twice as much as African pensioners. Even so, "White pensioners, receiving R180 per month and living alone, could only just (and not always) keep their heads above water. Black pensioners, averaging R79 per month, were below the poverty datum line" (Wilson and Ramphele 1989: 64).

It was particularly Afrikaner farmers and lower-class people who were hit hardest among the white population by the economic recessions, and they found support from the newly formed Conservative Party that

argued their case in the Parliament: "it is the White who has become drastically impoverished during the past year as a result of redistribution of income" (RSA 1985, Mr Snyman: 2095). The Conservative Party members were intent on defending whites' social pensions and felt provoked by debates to equalise benefits in the other chambers:

> We are sick and tired of a Minister like the hon Minister Hendrickse saying he will freeze White pensions. Let me tell this hon Minister to keep his hands off White pensioners. Let him concern himself with his own affairs and levy taxes in his own House—not in this one! … We are tired of being milked by every group in this country and then being accused of discrimination. (RSA 1985, Mr Barnard: 872)

In the months leading up to this debate in early 1985, a new cycle of resistance, protest, and violence had flared up (Welsh 2009). It has been suggested that the government increased social pensions to the African population in the 1980s, not only as part of a move towards parity but also to "win-hearts-and-minds" (Devereux 2007; Welsh 2009). Although it is hard to find evidence of a government's covert motivations, it is striking that the government announced early in 1985 that old-age pensioners of all races would receive an R14 increase in their payments as of the first of October as well as a one-time bonus of R36 in May 1985 (RSA 1985, Minister of Cooperation, Development, and Education: 2372–2373). Therefore, even in the context of cost containment and widespread concerns over an uncontrollable social pensions budget, the government made additional payments, presumably to appease the population at a time of increased conflict.

In 1986, the mounting resistance led Botha to abolish the pass laws, which had been used to restrict the movement of the black population. Although the government had passed other reforms and made various concessions, urban influx control was "the central plank of *apartheid*" (Welsh 2009: 215). The ANC was no longer easily ignored, and the fundamental opposition to the NP government—and the *apartheid* regime— was increasingly extra-parliamentary (Welsh 2009). Any noteworthy debates on pension policies were limited after the mid-1980s; the majority of parliamentarians (except those on the right) now accepted the move

to parity, and the main debate centred on the pace with which it could be achieved within the given budget constraints (RSA 1988). Full parity in pensions was reached in 1993, the year before the country held the first free democratic elections. Spending on social old-age pensions increased from 0.59 per cent of the GDP in 1970 to 1.82 per cent by 1993 (van der Berg 1997). Consequently, social pensions were resilient and a constant feature of the *apartheid* era. Contributory pensions for their part did expand, but in fragmented ways, and the state's functions remained merely regulatory, ensuring that the pension funds catered to those with the ability to contribute and, hence, benefit.

Conclusion

Ideational frames changed remarkably in nature during the *apartheid* era, but these shifts do not reflect policy changes but rather the need to modify ideational justifications for the existing policy. Table 7.5 summarises the ideational layers, first, during the period in which the concept of separate development dominated (1948–1979) and, second, during the period of the 1980s when ideational justifications could no longer be maintained. Both the 1950s "separate development" frame and the 1960s–1970s "independent nations" frame sit firmly within the *apartheid* ideology in which the state's social responsibility primarily targeted whites. The main social question was how to separate the "civilised" whites from the "uncivilised" blacks and reflects the policy paradigm focusing on white upliftment with only charitable concern for blacks. Based on these underlying ideas, a continuation of the fragmented and racially graded pension system suited the *apartheid* government. In the 1980s, the *apartheid* government scrambled to find ways to maintain white power and limit the financial costs to the white population. Prime Minister Botha's insistence on maintaining group rights ("each group to take care of themselves") conflicted with the emerging global norm of racial equality, which was based on an individual-rights paradigm. Eventually, the former ideological stance had to give way, but it was not replaced by a clear ideational vision. In the end, finally, the complex

Table 7.5 Social protection in *apartheid* South Africa: changing ideas and policies

	Changes in politics and society	Social questions and social ideas	Broader ideational frames and contexts	External ideas and models	Key actors	Policies, legislation, and programmes
1948–1979	*Apartheid*	Civilised-workers question	Racist ideologies	Independent nations	White-dominated government	Continuation of pension systems
1980–1990	Disintegration of society	Stifled social question	Parity	Equality	Anti-regime activists	Move to parity in benefits

apartheid system and, with it, the whites-only Parliament and racialised old-age security scheme withered away.

What is striking about the South African case during *apartheid* is how the idea of social responsibility, justified with reference to civilisation arguments, was constructed to serve a discriminatory, racialised system. Advocating the idea of separate development and independent nations allowed the white political elite to focus on the welfare of their "own people" while blinding themselves to the obvious responsibility the government had for other racial groups. The white regime could then construct social support for other population groups, for instance old-age pensions, as charity to people for whom the government was not directly responsible. However, the government could not maintain the regime's ideational foundation because it had constructed social responsibility based on the different civilisation levels of various ethnic groups—an idea already dying out in the mid-twentieth century and belatedly in South Africa. Today, when countries make distinctions between citizens deserving of social policy and others, i.e. migrants, who are not deserving of state contributions, the construction of a state's social responsibility and its consequent impacts on policy are highly relevant areas of research, and the *apartheid* state is a reminder of how far policy can be pushed with reference to ideational and normative justifications.

Appendix

Data Collection and Sources

The primary data are the Hansards: Debates in the South African Parliament from the years 1948 to 1990. I selected this data source, first, because I seek to gauge the ideas, views, and justifications of the *apartheid* government's ministers and politicians as well as those of the opposition white politicians, as they, particularly the former, were the primary policymakers in South Africa during this period. Second, using contemporary debates permits my own assessment of what was said—there and then—instead of necessitating reliance on stakeholders' subsequent

recollections and (perhaps misleading/self-proclaimed) interpretations. Third, the volume of the debates is immense and rich. While the immenseness of material creates its own challenges, which I have sought to handle in various ways as explained in the following, the Hansards are an undisturbed picture of the spoken thoughts and opinions of white politicians during the *apartheid* era.

The Parliamentary Library in Cape Town kindly made the Hansards available to me as PDF files. Each PDF file (volume) typically covers about three months of debates of a given year and has an average length of about 1400 pages; each volume is saved under its year and a letter (a, b, c, or d) to clarify which period of that year the document covers (for example, 1950b is the second volume of 1950). While almost every single year is represented in my data by at least one—often more—volume(s), there are also gaps, either because certain volumes have not (yet) been made available to me, or because some volumes have been poorly scanned and I cannot search them. While some critical knowledge might be missing, I feel confident that I have a sufficient representation of data to meaningfully interpret the ideational foundations of pension debates in South Africa. In all, my active database of the Hansards consists of 141 volumes and almost 200,000 pages.

Quantitative Analysis: Frequencies and Word Selection

As the first step in my analysis, I sought to substantiate the dominant "frames" that white politicians used, i.e. what did the white political elite perceive as key concepts and challenges in South Africa (for the theoretical background of frames and non-frames, see Chap. 1). I used computational linguistic techniques to show the frequencies of key terms as they appeared in each Hansard and the temporal changes in the use of key terms across the whole collection of Hansards over time (as illustrated in Figs. 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3). I opted to use all the Hansards available, even though the number of volumes per year is not even. However, as my purpose is to illustrate trends in word use and changes over time and each volume is roughly the same length, I do not see a problem with this method of counting.

I selected words based on reading historical sources and academic works. I expected some terms to matter at certain times and less so at other times (as the figures also illustrate), i.e. ideas/ideologies such as "segregation", "*apartheid*", and "homelands", labels such as "native" and "Bantu", and concepts/justifications such as "self-determination" and "parity". Nevertheless, some words could not be used—although relevant—because they could have numerous meanings and therefore would provide a misleading picture. For instance, the idea of "independence" (for "Bantu" nations), the label "blacks" (representing the African or non-white population), and the justification of "rights" are all examples of words that can be used in many other contexts beyond the one relevant to this study, and, therefore, I have not included them.

Qualitative Analysis: Constructive Reading

To get an in-depth understanding of the pension debates, I picked volumes in which (based on previous word counts) the terms "pension" and "contributory pension" were particularly prevalent. I conducted a careful reading of these selected volumes (11 in all, representing the years 1951, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1960, 1965, 1967, 1970, 1976, 1980, and 1985). Since I seek to understand the broader debates surrounding the specific discussions on pension policies, I do not believe that a computation-based selection of "snippets" of text would allow me to understand some of the underlying tones and emotions involved. Consequently, I read longer sections of parliamentarians' speeches and discussions related to pension bills or other topics in which pensions somehow became an issue. Based on this careful reading, I have collected more than 80 pages of direct debates, which I then, in a subsequent reading, boiled down to a 13-page data overview in which I highlighted opinions for and against social pensions and a national contributory pension scheme, respectively, and the race-related justifications for these opinions. The narrative in this chapter is drawn from this final data overview and other information gathered from the Hansards, as well as additional information and historical data available in other literature (listed in the references).

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8

(Re)formulating the Social Question in Post-*apartheid* South Africa: Zola Skweyiya, Dignity, Development and the Welfare State

Jeremy Seekings

Introduction

In 1994, for the first time, "African", "coloured" and "Indian" South Africans voted alongside their "white" counterparts in the country's first non-racial election. (For an explanation of terms used in South Africa, see glossary in Chap. 6). The African National Congress (ANC), led by Nelson Mandela, secured a substantial majority, and Mandela became President. For almost three years he presided over a Government of National Unity, in which the ANC participated alongside the party of *apartheid*, the National Party,[1] although real power lay with the ANC. From early 1997, the ANC governed alone. The ANC's core support base comprised the African majority of the population that had been most oppressed under *apartheid* and remained largely disadvantaged as of 1994.

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[1] As well as the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party.

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Unsurprisingly, the social question was redefined. For the first time in South African history, <u>all</u> South Africans were full citizens, with the full social and economic rights of citizenship as much as political rights. Given the enduring racialised pattern of disadvantage, the social question was inevitably going to be redefined to focus unambiguously on the experiences of black, and especially African, South Africans. Prior to 1994, the South African state had often been concerned with poverty or wages or employment among white South Africans (and, in the 1980s, coloured and Indian South Africans), but only occasionally with how these issues were experienced by the African majority. In the 1980s, the *apartheid* state had redefined the social question in response to the threat to it posed by protesting black workers, students and other township residents and sought to win them over or at least to secure their acquiescence through modest policy reforms. But this political opportunism was half-baked as well as belated. Democratisation in 1994 marked a far more radical rupture with the past.

Democratisation opened up multiple possibilities of change. Whilst African people had all experienced discrimination and oppression under *apartheid*, different classes within the African population put forward their distinct claims to redress and thus sought to reframe the social question in their own, often sectional interests. African workers, organised into powerful trade unions, demanded higher wages and improved conditions of employment. The African middle classes, from whom much of the political elite came, demanded improved opportunities in professional and managerial occupations. The rapidly forming African elite, including much of the political leadership, demanded opportunities to seize a share of the country's wealth through "Black Economic Empowerment" (both legal and corrupt). The urban and rural poor wanted jobs and improved public services. The ANC was pulled and pushed by all of these demands.

The result was contestation over precisely how the social question was to be reframed. For African industrial workers—organised into powerful trade unions, with close ties to the ANC and a strong intellectual wing—the social question entailed primarily a racialised version of the struggle over inequalities generated through capitalist relations. The unions denounced the *apartheid* (or racial) "wage gap", between highly paid,

skilled, managerial and professional occupations (disproportionately filled by white South Africans) and unskilled and semi-skilled occupations (mostly filled by African South Africans). They demanded and quickly secured basic social democratic reforms: strengthened processes for collective bargaining over wages and conditions of employment (and for setting minimum wages in unorganised sectors); corporatist policy-making institutions; and worker-oriented skills development. These reforms entailed further expansion of South Africa's system of "semi-social" insurance for workers in formal employment. Workers in formal employment in most economic sectors were required to contribute to pension funds and, to a lesser extent, private health insurance. Most of these funds were, in practice, run by the trade unions. The government's unemployment insurance fund was extended, at least nominally. Unionised workers—more and more of whom were more middle- than working-class—became, in important respects, economic "insiders", concentrated in high-productivity sectors or the protected public sector.

For the African middle classes and elite, the social question revolved around the substitution of race-based affirmative action in place of *apartheid*-era racial discrimination, to open up rapidly opportunities for upward economic and social mobility. The fast-growing African middle classes and elites (at least outside of public sector employment) looked primarily to the private sector for their retirement pensions and health insurance (as well as for healthcare and the education of their children). High earners were not allowed to claim from the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

For the largest part of the population, however, the social question revolved around poverty and effective exclusion from the economy. Almost no one in the poorest half of the population enjoyed formal employment or trade union membership or access to the educational credentials required for highly paid occupations or the connections required for wealth accumulation. Without land, formal employment, educational credentials or connections, the poor were "outsiders" from the largely capitalist economy (Seekings and Nattrass 2005, 2015). Trade unions generally neglected workers outside of formal employment and the unemployed (Bramble and Barchiesi 2003; Buhlungu 2010). Indeed, the success of organised labour in addressing the "worker's question"

arguably framed the poverty question by pushing the economy down a skill- and capital-intensive economic growth path. The poorest half of the population enjoyed some power as voters and through the use (or threat) of direct action. These forms of power were limited, however, by the design of the electoral and political systems, especially in comparison with the power of other, non-poor classes (Seekings and Nattrass 2015). The poor thus remained heavily dependent on how poverty and the poor themselves were perceived by the country's more powerful political players, including especially the ANC leadership.

Given the success of the black elite, middle class and organised working class in accessing improved opportunities and standards of living, the fundamental post-*apartheid* social question revolved around poverty and crucially around elite perceptions of poverty and the poor. Under ANC governments, for the first time, poverty moved to the forefront of the rhetoric of the governing party and new state. The questions of workers' rights and racial redress were at least as important in terms of commanding the attention of the government, but the unresolved poverty question framed successive government documents and ANC election manifestos.[2] In the late 1990s ANC ministers and ANC-appointed officials reframed poverty as a largely developmental problem, representing the poor as the victims of *apartheid* in the sense that *apartheid* had denied them opportunities—just as it had denied fair opportunities to black workers or the aspirant middle classes and elite. In the 2000s, the social question was reframed, emphasising more the legitimacy of a claim (or right) to dignity on the part of the poor. This was reflected in the acknowledgement of the importance of social assistance programmes as a necessary and effective mechanism for mitigating poverty. The reframing of the social question was shaped by the rights talk associated with the post-*apartheid* constitution (and subsequent jurisprudence) and promoted strongly by civil society, as well as by the imperatives of electoral competition. Within government, the person who was most responsible for the embrace—and subsequent expansion—of social assistance was Zola Skweyiya, the minister responsible for Welfare (or "Social Development",

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[2] Several other "questions", including the "land question" and questions of enduring discrimination against women and other groups, were far less of a priority.

as it was renamed) from 1999 to 2009. This chapter examines, first, the ANC's developmental ambitions between 1994 and 1999, then turns to Skweyiya's successful efforts to legitimate social assistance during the 2000s and, finally but briefly, considers the period of partial reaction after 2009.

This chapter does not consider in detail the policies adopted in response to the reframing of the social question because these have been documented extensively elsewhere. In summary, the state's policies to create jobs were misguided and unsuccessful. Rather than emphasise the creation of jobs in labour-intensive sectors for unskilled workers, government policy focused on raising productivity and wages, resulting in more capital- and skill-intensive production in the formal economy. The inadequate numbers of new "jobs" entailed mostly low-earning self-employment in the informal economy. Government policy was especially unfortunate in view of the failure to improve the quality of public education and hence continued shortages of skilled labour. Successive ANC governments also failed to expand agricultural livelihoods. The primary cause of a slow reduction in poverty rates in the 2000s was therefore not employment but rather the social assistance system, inherited from *apartheid* but expanded through (primarily) a new Child Support Grant. The basic shape of the social welfare system remained unchanged, however, with a limited social insurance system and large holes in the social safety net. The combination of rising unemployment and an inadequate social assistance safety net was that poverty persisted (Seekings and Nattrass 2015; Nattrass and Seekings 2019).

"Poverty Knowledge" and the Developmental Imperative (1994–1999)

The ANC formed a government in 1994 alert to the scale of the challenge of poverty. The previous year, the ANC had backed an initiative by the World Bank and the University of Cape Town (UCT) to map poverty through South Africa's first countrywide income and expenditure survey (Wilson 1996). The *apartheid* state had never collected good data on

countrywide poverty. The 1993 survey was led by UCT Professor Francis Wilson, who in the 1980s had led a research programme on poverty that brought together local and thematic studies (see Wilson and Ramphele 1989). The 1993 survey provided the "scientific" data—or "poverty knowledge"—that had been lacking hitherto (see Davie 2015). Using a poverty line set at about R840 (i.e. about US$250, at the time) per month for an urban family comprising two adults and three children, and at a slightly lower level in rural areas, almost one half of the population of South Africa lived in poverty. In some parts of the country—notably the Eastern Cape and Northern Transvaal—about two-thirds of the population lived in poverty (Whiteford *et al.* 1995). The poverty line widely used within South Africa was about 60 per cent more generous than the standard international poverty measure of (at the time) US$1 per person day (adjusted for local purchasing power). Even using the austere $1/day measure, however, as many as one in four South Africans lived in poverty, which was a much higher proportion than in other countries with similar levels of development or GDP per capita.

At the same time, few ANC leaders had much recent experience in the poorest, rural parts of the country. Many had spent as long as three decades in exile or jail. Most of the ANC's "internal" leadership was drawn from urban areas. In the social welfare policy field, ANC activists were drawn primarily from the urban Western Cape, where they were especially familiar with the failings of *apartheid*-era social work and in some cases had been involved in community-based struggles over housing, rents and service delivery. Few ANC policymakers had close and recent experience of rural poverty.

The ANC first spelt out its understanding of and response to poverty in its 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP, which served as an extended election manifesto). Poverty was described as "the single greatest burden on South Africa's people". The ANC promised "a better life for all". "Attacking poverty and deprivation" would be "the first priority of the democratic government". The poor would be empowered "to sustain themselves through productive activity". The government's primary responsibility would be to "create opportunities for all South Africans". This would be supplemented with a safety net based on social security (ANC 1994). In his inaugural State of the Nation address,

Mandela committed his government to ensuring that South Africans enjoyed freedom from want, hunger and deprivation, as well as political freedoms. These, he said, were "fundamental to the guarantee of human dignity". They would be achieved through reconstruction and development. In his address, Mandela sketched a minimal safety net: primary school feeding schemes and workfare. His government would "confront the scourge of unemployment", he added, "not by way of handouts but by the creation of employment opportunities".[3]

The ANC inherited a significant safety net, despite the fact that the National Party—in government through the entire *apartheid* period—had been deeply ambivalent about the welfare state (Seekings 2020). In 1994, just over two million elderly or disabled people received means-tested, non-contributory old-age pensions or disability grants. About half a million other social grants were paid out. The total cost of these social assistance programmes came to more than 2 per cent of GDP. Racial discrimination in benefits had been abolished prior to the 1994 elections, although racial discrimination persisted in terms of access to some of the programmes. Social and semi-social insurance programmes provided little in the way of a safety net for the poor. Despite the importance of social assistance in mitigating poverty, the new ANC government was not enthusiastic. In his inaugural presidential address, Mandela himself denounced "handouts".[4]

After winning the election, the ANC formed a coalition government with the National Party. The Ministry of Welfare was one of the few ministries given to the National Party, which reflected its perceived insignificance. An ANC Member of Parliament (Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi) was appointed as deputy-minister, and an ANC-aligned academic and activist (Dr Leila Patel) was appointed as a special advisor to guide the process of drafting a new "white paper" (i.e. government policy proposals) on social welfare. In January 1996 Patel was appointed as director-general (i.e. senior bureaucrat) in the Department of Social Welfare. In mid-1996, the ANC's Fraser-Moleketi took over as minister.

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[3] Mandela, State of the Nation Address, 24 May 1994; available on https://www.gov.za/state-nation-address.

[4] Mandela, State of the Nation Address, 24 May 1994; available on https://www.gov.za/state-nation-address.

Through the 1990s the ANC-led government framed the challenge of poverty using three primary discourses: a conservative discourse focused on but not limited to costs; a technocratic discourse emphasising the authority of statistical measurement; and—especially—a developmental discourse (or, more accurately, ideology). Each of these three played its part in reframing the social question. The discourse of paternalistic conservatism later articulated by Skweyiya (see later) was very muted during this period.

The Department of Welfare emphasised the unaffordability of the social assistance system inherited from *apartheid*. In the face of "spiralling" costs, the government concluded that it could "no longer afford the social security function". The Department would "re-evaluate" social security to render it more cost-effective. Expenditures would be reduced by "eliminating" fraud, which were said to cost as much as 10 per cent of the social assistance budget. Applying the means test more strictly would also save "millions of rands" (South Africa 1995: 7; 1996: 20). A pressing dilemma was what to do about the State Maintenance Grant (for poor single mothers), which in practice excluded African people. Faced with a prospective bill amounting to about 2 per cent of GDP—that is, doubling expenditure on social assistance—if the exiting programme was extended to the whole population, the government's first instinct (in 1995) was to propose doing away with the programme (Lund 2008: 18–19).

These sentiments might have been promoted by the continued role of the National Party within the Department of Welfare during 1994–1997, but they also fitted with powerful sentiments within the ANC. ANC leaders and ANC-aligned officials seem to have associated social grants with *apartheid*-era social work, which focused on the supposed failings of individuals and the ensuing need for individual casework. The ANC wanted a more modern approach.

The ANC's modernism was both reflected in and pushed forward by its investment in statistical data. The South African state had for many decades demonstrated a "mania for measurement" (Posel 2000), albeit selectively (e.g. never measuring poverty among the entire population) (see also Davie 2015). The post-1994 state took this passion for measurement to new heights. The parastatal Statistics South Africa was

transformed: besides collecting standard economic and demographic data, it initiated annual household surveys and a five-yearly income and expenditure survey. The government also commissioned a major study of poverty and inequality. The ensuing data demonstrated, again and again, the extent of poverty. Poverty on this scale could not be due to the failings of any individuals but must rather have structural roots. For the ANC it was obvious that *apartheid* was *the* cause of South Africa's pervasive poverty because *apartheid* had denied black South Africans the opportunities to prosper. Vice-President Thabo Mbeki articulated this in his description in 1998 of South Africa as comprising "two nations": one, white and prosperous, the other, black and poor (see Nattrass and Seekings 2000).

What was needed was the abolition of racially discriminatory constraints on black South Africans and a massive programme of "reconstruction and development" (the RDP)—echoing the language used to frame state-driven programmes in Europe, following the Second World War. The ANC's priority was to promote development, not to expand "welfare" through either social grants or social work. The Department of Welfare said that it accepted the need for social grants but, "to ensure that those receiving welfare do not become permanently dependent on state aid, social grants for certain target groups will be closely linked to job creation and other anti-poverty programmes. Successful development programmes will empower people to earn a living, move off the social security system and achieve economic independence" (South Africa 1996: 19–20). As Mandela himself explained in speeches, the poor would achieve dignity through self-help, that is, through taking advantage of the opportunities that would open up now that *apartheid* had been abolished. In his 1996 State of the Nation Address, Mandela appealed to the poor not to "sit back, expecting charity" (whilst also urging the rich to stop viewing the poor as "hordes of irritants").[5] The ANC bought into the developmentalist ideology that had been hegemonic in Africa in earlier decades (Mkandawire 1999), along with the anxieties about "dependency" that often accompanied it (see, e.g. Seekings 2017a).

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[5] Mandela, State of the Nation Address, 9 February1996; available on https://www.gov.za/state-nation-address.

The new developmentalism was central to the White Paper for Social Welfare, drafted through a consultative process in 1995–1996 under Patel's leadership and then published in August 1997. The White Paper committed the government to the goal of "developmental social welfare" and "re-orienting [its] services towards developmental approaches". This meant helping people to meet their own needs, through "the development of human capacity and self-reliance", rather than relying on the state: "South Africans will be afforded the opportunity to play an active role in promoting their own well-being and in contributing to the growth and development of our nation". The developmental emphasis was perhaps aimed primarily at professional social work (which was "largely rehabilitative" rather than "preventative and developmental"), and the White Paper did commit itself to the principle of "appropriate social assistance for those unable to support themselves and their dependents". But the emphasis was clearly placed on enhancing the capacity of "vulnerable individuals and families … to earn a living through employment creation, skills development, access to credit and, where possible, through facilitating the transition from informal to formal employment". This encouraged a critique of the "welfare state" for promoting "dependency" through unearned "hand-outs". The White Paper itself proposed the establishment of a government unit "to identify groups of beneficiaries who could be absorbed into public works and other employment programmes" and seemed to envisage that the old-age pension programme would be scaled back as contributory pension programmes expanded (South Africa 1997; see further Patel 2005; Gray 2006). As the Minister of Welfare, Fraser-Moleketi, told parliament, "welfare has become associated with charity and hand-outs, with food parcels and pensions, something in which it was alleged bleeding hearts got involved". She called for a shift in thinking about "welfare", "from paternalism to self-reliance" and investment in development.[6]

This new approach was shaped by ideas from outside of South Africa. One important influence was the work of the South African–born but later US-based scholar James Midgley, whose book *Social Development:*

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[6] Debate on Appropriation Bill, Vote no.37—Welfare, Wed 27 May 1998, Hansard, col 3193-5, 3201.

The developmental perspective on social welfare was published in 1995. Midgley's book advocated "social development" as a new approach to social welfare distinguished by "its attempt to harmonize social policies with measures designed to promote economic development. … It stresses the need for a wider commitment to economic develop-ment and emphasises the importance of social interventions that are compatible with economic development objectives" (Midgley 1995: 1–2). Midgley's description of "distorted development" across much of the "Third World", informed no doubt by his adolescence in South Africa, resonated with South African policymakers after 1994. Patel (2014, 2015) acknowledges the deep influence of Midgley's work, as well as of the UN World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 (see also Gray 2006). Whilst Midgley and Patel were not hostile to social grants, nor (at that time) were they enthusiasts.

This thinking shaped the reform of the State Maintenance Grant, which was to have far-reaching and not entirely intended consequences. The grant provided generous support to poor, single mothers, but almost entirely excluded South Africa's black African population. When it was pointed out that abolishing the programme would cause massive hardship, the government appointed a committee to be chaired by another social work academic and activist, Francie Lund. The Department of Welfare described the Lund Committee's brief as to "look at ways of linking social grants with developmental programmes, so that single parent families can move towards becoming self-supporting". It would also look at ways of making absent parents contribute to the costs of raising their children (South Africa 1996: 22). In its report, completed in late 1996, the Lund Committee recommended that the State Maintenance Grant be replaced with a new Child Support Grant that would be rolled out to the entire population from 1999. Accepting tight fiscal constraints, the Committee had to recommend that benefits be parsimonious and older children be excluded (Lund 2008).

The government's thinking was clearly set out by Fraser-Moleketi in speeches to parliament. In early 1997 she declared that:

> With regard to poverty, we believe that development goes beyond redistri-
> bution and safety-net measures and implies a pattern of growth facilitated

by carefully designed Government interventions to reduce poverty and inequality. … We intended to ensure that there is a restructuring of the social security system … to foster the ability of the poor in our country to produce their way out of poverty through programmes which will generate and enhance livelihood as a fact and means of achieving household food security.[7]

Later in 1997, she told parliament that the new emphasis on developmental welfare would "empower individuals and communities so that they can break out of the poverty trap". She reaffirmed the government's "commitment to poverty reduction through cash transfers which supplement the household incomes of poor families", that is, the safety net. But, "welfare expenditure" had reached "its ceiling" so that in future budgetary allocations would increase slowly:

The challenge facing us is to use the available resources optimally and bring about savings in the total welfare function through aligning expenditure with priorities, promoting greater efficiency and accountability in delivery and ensuring that programmes are well targeted at those in the greatest need and that the design of programmes is appropriate and cost-effective.[8]

The modesty of the benefits under the proposed new Child Support Grant was justified on the basis that resources should be directed to other, more developmental programmes (especially during a period of fiscal crisis):

In an ideal world, I too would wish to be able to spend more on social security in the immediate term. However, in a developing country such as ours, we have to balance competing demands and decide how to use scare resources in the most effective way. Ultimately, the most effective antidote to poverty is for all our people to have a meaningful stake in the economy. While administering cash transfers, the Ministry of Welfare, in collaboration with other ministries, has embarked on a number of projects aimed at

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[7] Fraser-Moleketsi, *Hansard*, House of Assembly, response to State of the Nation Address, 11 Feb 1997, col 41.
[8] Fraser-Moleketsi, *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Budget vote, 8 May 1997, col 2309-14.

giving a hand up to the many who remain excluded from the main-stream economy.[9]

The Department of Welfare's flagship programme was a training pro-gramme for unemployed women with young children that would reduce their "dependence" on social grants. In early 1999, as the new Child Support Grants were being rolled out, Fraser-Moleketi told Parliament of women who had been "dependent on state maintenance grants" but who were now earning much more through projects such as brick-making and vegetable-growing: "We want to ensure that many of the beneficiaries move from dependency to self-sufficiency and towards building the self-esteem of women."[10]

Fraser-Moleketi's views were shared by other leading ANC policymak-ers. The influential chairman of the parliamentary portfolio committee overseeing social welfare, Cas Saloojee, acknowledged the importance of a social safety net but at the same time insisted that even a "comprehen-sive" system of social security would limit "the social security obligation of the state … to the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable and the unemployed". (In fact, the state provided almost no support for the unemployed). Saloojee continued: only by reducing the expense of social grants could the state divert "funds that are currently committed to social security … to developmental social welfare services":

> We have got to acknowledge that social security cannot solve the problem of the magnitude of poverty that we face, but that such financial resources can make a significant impact on job creation and empowerment of people to become self-reliant. The old expression 'Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach him to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime', comes to mind again.[11]

The ANC viewed developmental efforts, including training pro-grammes, as the priority. The real value of old-age pensions and disability

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[9] *Mail and Guardian*, 9 May 1997.

[10] Fraser-Moleketsi, *Hansard*, House of Assembly, debate on the State of the Nation Address, 9 Feb 1999, col. 305; also budget vote, 19 March 1999, col.2851-5.

[11] Saloojee, *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Budget vote, 19 March 1999, col 2859-60.

grants was allowed to fall, and total expenditure on social grants fell as a proportion of GDP.

President Mandela himself mentioned social grants only twice in his six State of the Nation Addresses between 1994 and 1999. In his first, in 1994, he mentioned that his government would address the backlog of applications for old-age pensions. In his last, in 1999, he said that pensions and disability grants would be raised, by a small amount—although this was not enough to raise their real value to the level when he had become president five years before. Mandela never mentioned the new Child Support Grants in his State of the Nation Addresses. By contrast, he mentioned development a total of 89 times in the six addresses.[12]

Zola Skweyiya's Partial Reframing of Poverty (1999–2009)

In mid-1999, following the election, the new president, Mbeki, appointed a new Minister of Social Welfare, Zola Skweyiya. Skweyiya was considerably older than his predecessor (he was born in 1942) and came from a rather different background. First, he knew from personal experience what it meant to go to bed without supper or to go to school without breakfast.[13] Second, he was immersed in the African mission-educated, Christian political tradition that was liberal on many issues but paternalistically conservative on others. His schooling had concluded at the elite Lovedale College—established by missionaries more than a century earlier—where he overlapped with Thabo Mbeki. He went on to the University of Fort Hare before following Mbeki into exile. Like Mbeki, Skweyiya did not return to South Africa until 1990. Whilst in exile he studied law (completing a PhD in communist East Germany) and held a series of largely diplomatic posts for the ANC as well as setting up its Legal and Constitutional Affairs Department. Both before and after 1990 he represented the ANC at the UN Commission for Human Rights. He

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[12] Mandela, State of the Nation Addresses, 1994-1999; available on https://www.gov.za/state-nation-address.

[13] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 27 March 2003.

was firmly part of the ANC's "nationalist", non-Communist wing. In 1994, Mandela appointed him minister of Public Service and Administration. In 1999, his old friend Mbeki moved him to the Ministry of Social Welfare.

At the time of his appointment as minister of Social Welfare in 1999, fewer than 3 million grants were paid monthly. When he stepped down, ten years later, about 13 million grants were paid monthly—an increase of an average of 1 million grants per annum over Skweyiya's ten years as minister. Over the same period, expenditure on grant payments approximately trebled, in real terms (i.e. taking inflation into account). Whilst economic growth was strong across much of this period, expenditure also grew significantly in relation to GDP. As subsequent studies made clear, this expansion of social assistance played a major part in the slow reduction of income poverty (van der Berg *et al*. 2006; Leibbrandt *et al*. 2010).

This future expansion of social assistance was not suggested in Skweyiya's first comments after becoming minister. He initially seemed to take up where Fraser-Moleketi had left off. His Department continued to emphasise "the promotion of self-reliance to reduce dependency on … social grants" (South Africa 1999: 6) and was renamed the Department of Social Development. It adopted a "Ten Point Plan" that listed its priorities, in apparent order of importance: the first priority was "restoring the ethics of care and human development in all welfare programmes" (which entailed "the rebuilding of families and communities"); the second was "developing and implementing an integrated poverty eradication strategy"; only third did the Plan list social security (South Africa 2000).

In early 2000, however, Skweyiya struck a different note in his first major speech as Minister of Social Welfare. Skweyiya began by quoting President Mbeki on the importance of a "humane and people-centred society".[14] He went on to describe some of what he had learnt over the past year whilst travelling around South Africa:

I met the grandmother in the rural village of Inanda caring for a HIV-positive daughter, the girl-child taken from school to care for her siblings,

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[14] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Welfare budget vote, 18 April 2000, col. 2661.

and the single mother who cannot find a job. I saw the pain on the face of a young child who had been abused and raped in Claremont near Durban. I heard the frustration of a father with disability who wants to learn new skills in Maokeng, Kroonstad, but has nowhere to turn to. I listened to the anguish of the devastating effect of the loss of a pension or grant in poor families.[15]

He concluded that "much more needs to be done" to reverse the degradation and marginalisation of the poor.[16] Through his "encounters" with the poor, Skweyiya learnt something that researchers subsequently confirmed: Social grants were very important in sustaining dignity (see, especially, Wright *et al.* 2014, 2015).

The chairman of the parliamentary portfolio committee, Saloojee, followed Skweyiya's lead, striking a more positive tone. He referred explicitly to the need to restore "the dignity of all of our people" through poverty reduction—and then emphasised repeatedly the importance of social grants to the relief of poverty. He lamented the lack of an "integrated poverty strategy" but envisaged an expansion of social assistance, especially through the Child Support Grant. "The initial strategy for targeting our country's poorest children is to be followed by broader coverage, to ultimately include all the country's poor", he said. "If these children go hungry and have parents with no visible means of support, we have failed these children by not providing them with support to ensure their protection and development".[17] The government would be guided by the recommendations of a Committee of Inquiry (to be chaired by Professor Viviene Taylor) appointed to examine what might be entailed in a more comprehensive system of social security.

In comparison with the five years of the Mandela presidency, this was an extraordinary embrace of social assistance. It was dressed up in the discourse of dignity that Mandela (and his then vice-president, Mbeki) had used previously, but the discussion of social assistance gave this discourse new substance. In the late 1990s the discourse of dignity had been embedded in South Africa's new Constitution (in 1996) and in

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[15] Ibid., col. 2663.

[16] Ibid., col. 2663–4.

[17] Ibid., col. 2673-7.

subsequent constitutional jurisprudence, giving the discourse heightened prominence and legitimacy. The 1996 constitution recognised respect for a person's "inherent dignity" as one of the founding values underpinning the new constitutional order. This represented a "stark and dramatic" break with the *apartheid* past (as then Chief Justice Mahomed put it in 1998, quoted in Chaskalson 2000: 193). As Constitutional Court Justice O'Regan elaborated in 1995:

> Respect for the dignity of all human beings is particularly important in South Africa. For *apartheid* was a denial of a common humanity. Black people were refused respect and dignity and thereby the dignity of all South Africans was diminished. The new Constitution rejects this past and affirms the equal worth of all South Africans. Thus recognition and protection is the touchstone of the new political order and is fundamental to the new Constitution. (quoted in Chaskalson 2010: 1381)

O'Regan wrote this in connection to capital punishment, which the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional. Dignity was central also to judgements on issues such as corporal punishment and gay marriage. But dignity had very clear relevance also to the interpretation of social and economic rights, as Arthur Chaskalson (the then president of the Constitutional Court and later also Chief Justice) acknowledged explicitly. Section 27 of the Constitution enshrined "the right to have access to … social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance"; it committed the state to taking "reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realization" of this right. As Chaskalson commented in 2000: "These rights are rooted in respect for human dignity, for how can there be dignity in a life lived without access to housing, health care, food, water or in the case of persons unable to support themselves, without appropriate assistance?" Chaskalson went on to explain that the Constitution did not "contemplate" complete equality of goods or wealth. Rather, it required the state "to show respect and concern" for those citizens whose basic needs were not being met at the same time as taking into account "the general interests of the community concerning the application of resources", through taking

"reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation" of access to the goods that were minimally necessary for human dignity (Chaskalson 2000).

Skweyiya's concern for the dignity of the poor framed his positive attitude towards social grants. In 2001, he described social assistance as "the Government's *primary* investment in poverty alleviation" (emphasis added). He added that, whilst "the current grant amounts are not sufficient to address large-scale poverty, deprivation and inequality in South Africa", the government would "continue to increase spending on social assistance as resource constraints allow".[18] His department's Annual Report for 2001 similarly identified social security as—for the first time—its primary priority, acknowledging that its developmental training programme for unemployed women had floundered (South Africa 2001: 9).

This new perspective was far from hegemonic, however, as soon became clear in the debate over the Taylor Committee's report. In its somewhat chaotic report, completed in early 2002, the Taylor Committee endorsed the hegemonic developmental approach to "social protection": public health, education and other services were necessary to enhance the capabilities of the poor. In the short term, however, the Committee recommended that the holes in the existing safety net be filled through the extension of the Child Support Grant to the age of 18 and then the introduction of a modest "basic income grant" for *all* adults (South Africa 2002). Skweyiya himself initially seemed favourable. But he faced strong opposition within the ANC leadership and government. The powerful government spokesman Joel Netshitenzhe reiterated the mantra that able-bodied adults should not receive "handouts" but instead should be helped to "enjoy the opportunity, the dignity and the rewards of work". The government would not support a basic income grant, he said, because it had a rather different "philosophy".[19]

The proposed basic income grant never attracted significant support within the ANC leadership: grants for unemployed adults were routinely

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[18] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 3 April 2001, col 1956-7.
[19] *Sunday Times*, 28 July 2002. See also Matisonn and Seekings (2003); Meth (2004); Barchiesi (2007).

denounced as "handouts". Pensions for the elderly were never really questioned (although the government did resist lowering the age at which men became eligible for old-age pensions). The disability grant became more controversial over time, with ANC MPs voicing concerns that able-bodied people were receiving grants or, even, that they were contracting HIV in order to access grants (Kelly 2013). The most controversial issue, however, was the Child Support Grant, paid mostly to poor mothers. Opponents argued either that it was not affordable or that it encouraged undesirable behaviour. The question of affordability brought Skweyiya into conflict with, especially, the powerful Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel. By challenging the supposed unaffordability of expanded grants, rather than contesting the philosophy, Skweyiya put Manuel on the defensive:

> The ANC will not be bamboozled into doing things that it knows are not possible. We would like to give each and everybody that basic income grant. We would like to ensure that each and every family eats every night. The basic question is, how do we do that? We have a problem here. We introduced the child support grant to be given to each and every child under the age of seven … Up to the present moment half a million children are still not getting that. The money is there, but the question is how to bring it to the people.[20]

Under pressure, the government did announce that the age limit for Child Support Grants would be raised (in phases, between 2003 and 2005) from a child's 7th birthday to the child's 14th birthday.[21] Although President Mbeki himself made this announcement in 2003, he subsequently seemed less than enthusiastic. One year later, in his 2004 State of the Nation Address, he pointedly did not include social grants in his list of the ANC government's achievements since 1994. Instead, he referred to the need to "create the conditions … to reduce the numbers of our people dependent on social grants".[22] The ANC did decide, however, to emphasise strongly the rising number of social grants in its campaign for

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[20] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 27 March 2003.

[21] Mbeki, State of the Nation Address, 14 Feb 2003.

[22] Mbeki, State of the Nation Address, 6 Feb 2004.

the country's third democratic general election in April 2004—although it did not promise any significant expansion of social grants, emphasising instead the prospect of one million new "job opportunities" through the workfare programme (ANC 2004). Following the elections, Mbeki delivered a second State of the Nation Address. Now he did refer to the consolidation of a "social security net". But he also reiterated the imperative of reducing dependency on social grants, declaring that "a society in which large sections depend on social welfare cannot sustain its development".[23] That same year the government launched its new, "Expanded" Public Works Programme, to provide a small proportion of unemployed people with some of the "dignity of work"—a concept with deep roots in the ANC and South Africa (Barchiesi 2011; Ferguson 2015)—and, through enhancing skills and the experience of work, "reduce, over time, the proportion of our people who subsist solely on social grants".[24]

Over the following years, Skweyiya balanced the defence of selective social assistance—for deserving categories of poor people—with the kind of developmental rhetoric that had prevailed prior to 2000. In a 2005 debate, he emphasised that his department had "sought to ensure the provision of comprehensive social protections services against vulnerability and poverty to as many deserving people as possible", including through expanded social assistance programmes. At the same time, he trotted out an old denunciation of fraud. His department had offered indemnity to anyone who came forward and admitted to receiving a grant illegally. A total of 30,000 people had done so, resulting in considerable savings. But "we are not satisfied with the result of the campaign" because "more people should have come forward". Now, the law would be enforced, beginning with public servants and the syndicates behind fraud. Also, he suggested, the sustainability of the social protection system depended on poor people taking advantage of improved economic opportunities so as to become less dependent on the state.[25]

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[23] Mbeki, State of the Nation Address, 21 May 2004.

[24] Skweyiya, 2004 budget vote, *Hansard*, 3 June 2004, col. 594.

[25] Skweyiya, 2005 budget vote, *Hansard*, 5 April 2005, col. 1333-1400

Skweyiya's message may have been mixed but was far more positive about social grants than many of his colleagues in the ANC. One ANC MP invoked the need for "moral regeneration" whilst declaring that modest grants would merely create dependency. "The ANC does not believe that it was supposed to create a South Africa where people would depend on the state for food, without opportunities for development", he proclaimed, speaking in Zulu; "it is not part of the African culture to wait to be fed instead of doing things on your own".[26] Another ANC MP, reinforced this point:

> Our people are not waiting for handouts. The budget is such that people can provide for themselves. People have heeded the call: 'Wake up and do it yourself". In this budget we are trying to support them in their efforts to become independent. … In the rural areas people plough and do different kinds of job to sustain a living.

In response to opposition parties' rhetorical support for the expansion of social assistance through some kind of basic income grant, this ANC MP declared that "the basic income grant that [an opposition MP] is referring to is not the solution for the needs of the people. People have their own way of living, not by getting handouts".[27] Skweyiya felt the need to rebut his own colleague, noting that "it had been proved beyond any reasonable doubt" that grants did <u>not</u> create a culture of dependency (see also Surrender et al. 2010; Ferguson 2015). He also took care to point out that the government's caution was not because ANC leaders were "scrooges", but rather because of resource constraints.[28]

Skweyiya successfully legitimated social grants for selected categories of deserving poor, not for the unemployed (the dreaded "handouts"). He did not do away entirely with the earlier developmentalist doctrine. His Department for Social Development initiated a new developmental programme (*Gwebindlala*) to "provide income support while simultaneously

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[26] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 5 April 2005, col. 1350-7 (Lewis Nzimande).

[27] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 5 April 2005, col. 1389 (B. Solo).

[28] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 5 April 2005, col. 1398-1400 (Skweyiya).

developing the human capital of beneficiaries through skills development and job-placement services".[29] This rhetoric was not unlike the rhetoric associated with the welfare state in Europe and elsewhere, except that in the South African context programmes like this provided support and services for very few people, whilst a very large number of people received no income support at all and many others received very modest income support. The developmentalist discourse appealed to the ANC's more conservative MPs, one of whom commented that "maintaining our lives through charity is not black people's way of living … Whenever we found ourselves in situations beyond our control, we would be given a cow. Although one would not get ownership of the cow, one would be able to get milk and plough the fields".[30]

The distinction between those poor who deserved grants (i.e. the elderly, disabled, children and caregivers) and those who needed to be put to work meant that government documents both celebrated and criticised grants. A discussion document released in early 2007 emphasised the "dignity of work". It criticised social grants that lacked any mechanism for helping beneficiaries to find work and explicitly advocated more efforts to promote the kinds of employment appropriate for people with minor disabilities (and currently receiving disability grants). The document advocated "active labour market measures, skills development programmes, special employment and labour-intensive development programmes and labour-intensive government services", as well as further "consideration" of an "aggressive expansion" of public works programmes: "the drive to get all South Africans working when they are able to do so must become a central preoccupation" (South Africa 2006a).[31] Similarly, the Department of Social Development's "Strategic Plan" for 2006–2010 referred to its continuing commitment to a "paradigm shift" from a welfarist approach to "developmental welfare" (South Africa 2006b). The ANC's 2007 policy discussion document on "social transformation" also emphasised the "dignity of work" and the importance of public works

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[29] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 28 March 2006, col. 986 (Dr Jean Benjamin (Deputy-Minister).

[30] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 28 March 2006, col. 1000 (B. Solo).

[31] Later, in the early 2010s, the term "activation" entered the policy discourse in South Africa.

programmes as an alternative to social assistance. Arguing (rather unclearly) against a basic income grant, the ANC suggests that discussion should take place "in the context of our challenges as a *developmental state* rather than against the ideological backdrop of a *welfare state*" (ANC 2007: 3, emphasis added). The primary emphasis of the "attack on poverty" should entail empowering people "to take themselves out of poverty". The social safety net should be limited to the protection of "the most vulnerable in our society" (*ibid*: 2), implying specific groups of deserving poor rather than the poor in general.

The government's overall approach thus remained resolutely developmental: poverty reduction required simply that the benefits of economic growth be "shared". In early 2006, the government launched its Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA). This envisaged that poverty and unemployment rates would be reduced by one half through increasing the economic growth rate (to 6 per cent p.a.) and sharing growth, primarily through absorbing more labour into the "mainstream economy". Key elements of the plan included increased public investment in infrastructure, accelerated skill development and reducing the regulatory burden on small- and medium-sized businesses (South Africa 2005). Whilst economic growth rates remained strong up to the global economic crisis of 2008–2009, the benefits were not shared widely: wages rose but employment in the formal economy remained stagnant.

Skweyiya recognised that he needed to rebut the lingering distaste for social grants among many of his ANC colleagues, which they often dressed up in their commitment to developmentalism. Skweyiya's solution was to commission research that would provide the data to undermine his colleagues' objections. The first of the ensuing reports, completed in late 2006 and presented to Cabinet, dispelled "assertions that our social assistance programme encourages teenage pregnancies, that children are fostered for the purpose of accessing grants, and that people with disability will harm themselves in order to continue accessing social grants" (as Skweyiya reported to Parliament in 2007).[32] Further reports

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[32] *Hansard*, House of Assembly, Social Development budget vote, 28 March 2007, col.2393 (Skweyiya).

examined the effects of grants on poverty alleviation and development, the benefits of raising the age limit on the Child Grant, the means-test and conditions on grants.

These reports did not persuade all ANC leaders that social grants should be expanded further. At a national conference in December 2007, the ANC resolved that the Child Grant age limit be "gradually extended to eighteen years" and the age threshold for men to receive the old-age pension be reduced to sixty years. But the ANC resolved also that "grants must not create dependency and thus must be linked to economic activity" (ANC 2007). In his State of the Nation Address at the beginning of 2008, President Mbeki—who had been defeated by his rival Jacob Zuma in the contest for the presidency of the party at the December conference—referred to the age threshold for pensions but pointedly did not mention the Child Grant. When, a few days later, Skweyiya told the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee and then announced in a press briefing that the age limit for the Child Grant would be increased to 18 years, this was almost immediately contradicted by the minister of Finance.

Less than a year later, however, the government confirmed that the age limit would be raised. ANC leaders (including the Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel) attributed the government's shift to the "compelling evidence" in "recent research" that the Child Grant had reduced child poverty. He (and interim President Motlanthe in his 2009 "State of the Nation Address") seems to have been referring not to the research commissioned by Skweyiya but to research commissioned by the Treasury that attributed the decline in income poverty (and child hunger) in the early 2000s to the Child Grant.

Unsurprisingly, ANC leaders did not draw attention to two other factors: factional politics within the ANC combined with the imminence of the 2009 elections. In late 2007, an eclectic coalition supported Jacob Zuma and ousted Mbeki as party leader; one year later the coalition ousted Mbeki as president of the country. At the time this was widely interpreted as a "shift to the left" within the ANC (e.g. Proudlock 2011: 154; and generally Booysen 2011). The new leadership proved to be more opportunistic than left wing. The decision to raise the Child Grant age limit—which was not made until almost one year after the pro-Zuma coalition secured control over the ANC—seems to have been due more

to the sidelining of Mbeki personally and electoral opportunism. The ANC in 2009 faced a resurgent parliamentary opposition (comprising both the Democratic Alliance, supported largely by racial minorities, and the new Congress of the People led by Mbeki supporters who defected from the ANC) and widespread extra-parliamentary protests (the so-called "rebellion of the poor"—Alexander 2010). Under Zuma, the ANC sought to project itself as a party that had both achieved much hitherto and was now regenerated under new leadership (Beresford 2015; Booysen 2011). Crucially, the "new" ANC needed to demonstrate that the government was doing something new and positive to reduce poverty. Given that most of the other political parties were calling for the Child Grant age limit to be raised, the ANC chose to emphasise in its election manifesto that its expansion of social grants had "pushed back the frontiers of poverty" (ANC 2009).

More generally, the courts and civil society activists had transformed the normative and discursive context. Activists and the courts rarely agreed on precisely how social and economic rights should be operationalised, but they concurred, for the most part, on the underlying understanding of "dignity" and community, rooted in a Kantian moral philosophy. They thus continued to strengthen and legitimate the alternative discourse around social grants adopted (at least sometimes) by Skweyiya. The strongest judicial statement of this was in two cases in which the Constitutional Court ordered the government to pay pensions and grants to legally resident non-citizens on the same basis as citizens. In one of these judgements, Justice Mokgoro emphasised the constitutional commitment to building a "caring society". Permanently resident non-citizens should not be abandoned "to destitution if they fall upon hard times"; the state should not force them into "relationships of dependency upon families, friends and the community in which they live" (Mokgoro 2004). The government resisted legal efforts to expand social assistance programmes. Officials in Skweyiya's own department filed affidavits opposing cases brought by civil society activists to expand social grants. Moreover, the courts themselves were generally reluctant to push the executive too far or too fast, especially when policy shifts had major financial implications. In a series of major cases, the courts decided that the government was not obliged to provide very expensive healthcare or

housing for all, nor to extend old age pensions or child grants. In a case that provoked the ire of civil society activists, the Constitutional Court decided unanimously against determining any "minimum core" of public services that citizens could claim under the constitution (see, e.g. Langford *et al.* 2013). But the courts ensured that the experience of poverty continued to be viewed as an indignity that society had to address. As one legal scholar put it, drawing on the work of American philosopher Martha Nussbaum, "conditions of poverty are not a reflection of the moral blameworthiness of groups experiencing poverty rather they reflect how we as a society have failed to value human dignity". Respect for human dignity requires "redressing the social and economic conditions of those whose capacity for development and agency is stunted by poverty"—and accepting shared responsibility to enable the poor to live as equal members of society (Liebenberg 2005: 12–14).

Skweyiya's complex defence of social grants for deserving categories of poor people but preference for job creation for able-bodied adults entailed an understanding of "social citizenship" and solidarity that accorded with popular opinion and norms. Quantitative and qualitative evidence suggested that most South Africans shared a strong sense that a large number of people were deserving of the support of society as a whole. Almost all South Africans concurred that differences in income (as well as differences in wages among working people specifically) were too large, and that the government should redistribute from rich to poor (Roberts 2014). Most South Africans, without regard to race or class, not only supported the principle of tax-financed pensions for the elderly but believed that the value of the pension should be increased (even if it meant that they themselves paid higher taxes). Most South Africans also included in the "deserving poor" people who were unable to work because they were disabled or sick, or who were caring for children or the elderly (Seekings 2007, 2010). There was even some evidence that people believed that the unemployed had some "right" to some kind of support (e.g. CASE 2005; Roberts 2014). At the same time, there was widespread scepticism about social grants for unemployed adults and outright condemnation of grant recipients who "misspent" their grants (e.g. on alcohol) (Seekings 2007; Dawson and Fouksman 2020).

The Conservative Backlash: The Social Question After Skweyiya (from 2009)

Skweyiya did not stand for re-election to parliament in 2009. His immediate successor, Edna Molewa, was Minister of Social Development for a little more than one year before she was in turn replaced (in November 2010) by Bathabile Dlamini. Dlamini, who was a loyal member of the faction around Zuma, remained minister until Cyril Ramaphosa ousted Zuma as president in February 2018. Dlamini's term as minister—lasting more than seven years—is remembered primarily for the controversy surrounding the award of the national contract to pay social grants to the multinational company Cash Paymaster Services and her ensuing incompetence and dishonesty in solving the crisis (Gronbach 2017). But it was also a period of conservative reaction against the expansion of the social assistance system under Skweyiya, albeit a reaction that did not lead to any clear retrenchment of social grant programmes. Under Dlamini, the Department of Social Development began to emphasise more strongly the need to strengthen the family so that the family could take over from the state much of the responsibility for care. A 2012 White Paper emphasised "self-reliance", that is, the converse of dependency (South Africa 2012a).

President Zuma himself provided a clear line to his ministers. In 2011, he reportedly told businessmen that "we cannot be a welfare state"; taxpayers should develop the country "rather than feed the poor".[33] This might sound like an argument against further expansion, but Zuma later made clear his own patriarchal criticism of paying grants to young women. In a 2015 speech to traditional leaders, Zuma branded teenage mothers as irresponsible bad mothers, claimed that they were not using the child support grant for their children and suggested that they were cheating the system. Instead of being allowed to drop out of school, Zuma suggested they should be sent to somewhere like Robben Island— the *apartheid*-era prison for political prisoners—where they could complete their schooling, thus empowering them to work and support their

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[33] "Zuma says S. Africa can't be welfare state: SAPA", 24 November 2011; https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJOE7AN04C20111124.

children themselves. If they were to be given grants, then the grants should not be paid in cash, which recipients could spend as they like, but rather in vouchers that could only be used to buy designated items. Zuma, together with many other conservatives, saw the "problem" in terms of the supposed immorality of young women, not the economic and other structural factors that encouraged teenagers to become mothers.[34] Other ministers worried about "dependency" with regard to other areas of public policy. Announcing a new model for funding public housing, Minister Lindiwe Sisulu, for example, stated that "giving free houses creates a dependency syndrome". The government "cannot continue giving out free houses anymore", but instead would "give people subsidies so that they can build houses themselves".[35] The ANC adopted a very ambivalent stance towards social protection in its election manifestos (ANC 2014).

Under Zuma, the government and ANC emphasised poverty as much as previous governments in their plans and resolutions. Inequality was emphasised even more strongly than hitherto. But the plans emphasised the developmental state not the welfare state. The most prominent plan completed during this period—the 2012 National Development Plan (South Africa 2012b)—focused on the reduction of poverty and inequality. As the Plan made clear in its chapter on social protection: "These goals can be achieved by building capabilities that enable individuals to take part in the formal economy and in other parts of society"—reversing the effects of *apartheid*. "If apartheid destroyed opportunities for the majority of the population and trapped them in poverty, the challenge for the next 20 years is to rebuild the opportunity structures and help individuals develop the capabilities to live the life they wish to lead". Whilst "employment is the best form of social protection", the state should continue to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves—in "labour market and employment friendly" ways. A "balance" should be struck between the provision of a safety net and "incentivizing and supporting

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[34] http://mg.co.za/article/2015-03-11-zuma-send-teenage-mums-to-robben-island.

[35] Xaba, V. 2016. No more free RDP houses to curb dependency. *The Sowetan* http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2016/04/10/no-more-free-rdp-houses-to-curb-dependency.

individuals to develop their own ability to respond to shocks and save for rainy days". The Plan envisaged replacing the existing, and admittedly patchy, safety net with a comprehensive "social floor"—borrowing the concept promoted by the ILO, culminating in the ILO's 2012 Recommendation 202 on Social Protection Floors—but the Plan proposed no new programmes that might actually achieve the ambition. Social assistance would be expanded only insofar as more efforts would be made to ensure that eligible individuals applied for and received existing grants. The "social floor" for the unemployed working-age population would entail not social grants but rather "various active labour market initiatives such as public works programmes, training and skills development, and other labour market related incentives". The Plan seemed to envisage vaguely a massive expansion of these initiatives, but there were few specific proposals. The Plan also worried about the continued affordability of existing programmes.

Zuma's State of the Nation Addresses indicate his disinterest in social grants. In 2009 he told Parliament that "We are mindful of the need to link the social grants to jobs or economic activity in order to encourage self-reliance amongst the able-bodied". In 2011 he repeated this point: "Since we are building a developmental and not a welfare state, the social grants will be linked to economic activity and community development, to enable short-term beneficiaries to become self-supporting in the long run." He regularly reported on action to prevent fraudulent grant payments. From 2012 he reported the rising number of beneficiaries—due to decisions taken before he took office, combined with population growth—but otherwise barely mentioned grants at all.[36]

The ideological shift within the ANC may have corresponded with deepening ambivalence among the public (although it is unclear whether elite discourse led public opinion or vice versa). Both quantitative and qualitative research suggests that support for social grants in South Africa is conditional on the behaviour of the recipients. More than 50 per cent of respondents in a representative countrywide survey in 2015 agreed that young women spent too much of their grants on alcohol. One half of the sample also agreed that young women have children so that they can access a child grant. When the same questions were asked in a 2018

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[36] https://www.gov.za/state-nation-address#2009.

survey, public opinion seems to have become more critical. As many as 60 per cent of respondents agreed that young women spent too much of their grants on alcohol. In both 2015 and 2018, more than half of the respondents agreed that adults who were physically able to work should be required to do so in return for any money received from the government. In 2018, the same proportion agreed that citizens become lazy when they rely on government grants or pensions.[37] Roberts (2014) reports that support for the redistribution of income by the government seems to have declined modestly (by some but not all measures) between the mid-2000s and the early 2010s. If so, this may be driven by declining concern with inequality and support for government action among the growing African middle classes (Seekings 2017b). More and more qualitative researchers find evidence that at least some poor people are quite critical of the payment of social grants, especially to young women (e.g. Mosoetsa 2011; Blake 2018).

In practice, the Zuma governments of 2009–2018 presided over a marked lack of development and job creation. As became clear later, large parts of the state were "captured" by private interests, who used the state for personal enrichment rather than national economic development or poverty reduction. The government's corrupt allocation of the national contract to pay social grants and its inability to address the subsequent abuse of grant payments were indicative of the broader malaise.

Skweyiya—like Mandela—was, for the most part, conservative. But his conservatism was paternalistic, unlike the more reactionary patriarchal conservatism articulated by Zuma. Skweyiya was surely horrified by "state capture" and the crisis of grant payments under Zuma. Skweyiya believed that all people, however poor, were members of the broader community and had some claim to collective resources, alongside a general responsibility to strive for self-reliance. Whilst he was minister, childcare grants were rolled out for an additional ten million children, at a cost of more than 1 per cent of GDP. This was, to his mind, the right thing to do. The social question, for Skweyiya, meant assisting poor people who were unable to satisfy their own minimum needs through their own

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[37] Data from 2015 Comparative National Election Study and 2018 Afrobarometer survey, my analysis.

efforts. For Zuma, in contrast, the social question appears to be a cultural or moral one: decadent urban and/or Western morality needs to be rolled back, and a disciplined and patriarchal African social order re-established.

Skweyiya would have been unlikely to preside over the expansion of the welfare state had he not taken over what was already a welfare state, notwithstanding the hostility or ambivalence towards it both within the National Party (under *apartheid*) and the ANC (in the period 1994–1999). The reframing of the "social question" in South Africa in the early 2000s was, in important respects, path dependent: existing, *apartheid*-era social assistance programmes had helped to cement an understanding within the general population of who is deserving and who is not. This permeated into elite thinking in the late 1990s sufficiently to deter major programmatic retrenchment and in the 2000s to facilitate programmatic expansion. Skweyiya himself was party to a long tradition of paternalist conservatism within South Africa's African elite. Nonetheless, there was nothing inevitable about the expansion of social assistance under Skweyiya. The ANC might have chosen other programmes to shore up its electoral support among the poor. It might have adopted a more patriarchal line long before Zuma became president.

The first two phases in the post-*apartheid* reframing of the social question involved some influence of ideas from abroad. The developmental turn from "welfare" to "social development" was influenced by the ideas articulated by Midgley. It may also have been influenced by the large number of Nordic, other European and Australian policy consultants who flooded into South Africa in the 1990s, most of whom fuelled a vision of skill-intensive, high-wage job creation, with unemployment being tackled through active labour market policies. Skweyiya's advocacy of expanded social assistance coincided with the global embrace of social assistance by international organisations (von Gliszczynski and Leisering 2016). Under Skweyiya, the Department of Social Development commissioned research from a series of foreign researchers to support his argument for expansion. In both phases, however, reframing was rooted firmly in the convictions of South African policymakers. Whilst many of the individual technocrats held more progressive views, the dominant approaches within the ANC leadership were all conservative, whether

Table 8.1 The social question in post-*apartheid* South Africa, 1990s–2017: changing ideas and policies

Period	Changes in politics and society	Social question and social ideas	Broader ideational frames and contexts	External ideas and models	Key actors	Policies, legislation and programmes
1990s	Political transition from *apartheid* to democracy	Democracy, reconstruction and development	De-racialisation; fiscal extravagance then conservatism; developmentalism	Development; social development; social rights; regulation of employment and wages	African National Congress; trade unions; and civil society	Complete formal de-racialisation of programmes and Child Support Grant (from 1999)
1999–c2008	Reconstruction; Unemployment; HIV-AIDS	Development; poverty question; and "dignity" and social rights	Developmentalism	Basic income and conditional cash transfers	Factions within African National Congress; trade unions; and civil society	Expanded Child Support Grant and public works programmes
c2008–2017	State capture and unemployment	Racial inequality	Conservatism	Minimum wage regulation	African National Congress; trade unions; and civil society	-

developmental (in the late 1990s), paternalistic (Skweyiya) or patriarchal (under Zuma). The result was that a social (protection) floor or comprehensive safety net remained an ambition rather than a reality. Table 8.1 summarises the analysis.

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Part V

Brazil

9

The Anatomy of the Social Question and the Evolution of the Brazilian Social Security System, 1919–2020

Lena Lavinas

Brazil: A Crude Path to Modernity

Brazil's slide into modernity has been marked by the brand of exclusion. Ours was a crude modernity, built on negation and the stifling of citizenship, whether in terms of civil, political, or social rights.

At each level of development, at each new cycle of economic growth, under authoritarian regimes or living in democracy, in crises or during periods of reconstruction, the anatomy of Brazil's social question reflects tensions over the fight for inclusion and the struggle to carve out a social existence, and the forces resisting that change. The shape of social policies

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and their progress through time mirror that clash, or the silencing thereof. They are thus the final expression of the struggle for public recognition of the people's demands.

As we argue, in Brazil, the essence of the social question, or the process of the construction of citizenship, developed fairly independently from the construction of the social protection system, although Social Security, instituted by the 1988 Citizen Constitution, is one of the most remarkable conquests on that score.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, it develops a periodization and typology of the multiple historical configurations of the social question in Brazil over the past 100 years in order to observe its relationship with the construction of the social protection system, Social Security, in particular. As guaranteed in the 1988 Constitution, that system includes social insurance, social assistance, and public healthcare. Second, the chapter systematizes how social movements, conflict-led dynamics, labour, and different regimes of accumulation shaped social policies and citizenship, contributing to define patterns of inclusion—which varied over time, lending new form to the social question, the many facets of which seem to form a kaleidoscope of "social questions".

Over the course of this chapter, we seek to demonstrate that, in the span of just over a century, the social question took on a variety of forms, but was repeatedly marked by the struggle for recognition and the fight for inclusion—a strong indication that the process of constructing citizenship has been something of a permanent effort to break down boundaries.

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the present chapter is divided into four sections. This structure reflects the periodization adopted in attempts to characterize the essence of the social question, which expresses itself in terms of clashes between society and the State. These phases are associated with changes at the level of the political regime, patterns of development, the shape and function of institutions, and the agendas driven by the social conflicts that they spring from. They include struggles for labour rights, access to land, democracy, better living conditions, equality, inclusion, mobilization against racism and sexism, and the fight to preserve rights that, once attained, are immediately threatened and contested.

Following this introduction, the second section covers 1899–1929 and is divided into two subsections. In this phase, the social question is, above all, "the question of the needs of the people" (Castro Gomes 2005: 49).

The third section focuses on the period that saw the construction of regulated citizenship (Dos Santos 1979): 1930–1963, a span that includes a prolonged authoritarian period (1930–1945) but also a democratic respite (1946–1963). The State led the charge on this front. With the consolidation of social insurance for a small portion of the working class, the social question was transformed into a regional question, framed by the struggle for increased access to land.

In the fourth section, the chapter situates the social question within the struggle for democracy and against inequality, mobilizations that would swell and multiply throughout both the "economic miracle" and the severe recession that followed.

The fifth section goes from the civil-military coup of 1964, which entailed a loss of political rights, to the mid-1980s, when the severity of the economic crisis broke the prevailing political pact and led the military to support a "slow, gradual, and secure opening". During this phase, the social question may be defined as the democratic question, coupled with the fight against inequalities.

The final section analyses the period after re-democratization (post-1988), which brought a transition to a civil government and the reinstatement of open elections for the presidency. Here, the social question would become the question of full, unrestricted citizenship in the attempt to build a new Brazil (Paoli 1989). Social Security was implemented, broadening the scope and scale of social protection and introducing universal rights for the first time in Brazil's history.

1889–1929: The Social Question as the Needs of the People—Under the First Republic— Repression, Concealment, and Reshaping

Two phases precede the classical model of associating the social question to labour and the emergence of the social protection system.

In the first phase, which we place between the proclamation of the Republic in 1889 and the end of the 1910s, the social question was framed by grassroots movements around the cost of living, the right to housing, and unionization. This time frame is also justified by the fact that in 1919, Brazil—as a signatory of the Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles, which led to the creation of the International Labour Organization (ILO)—formally recognized the power of the international workers' movement, with important consequences for domestic policy. As a founding member of the ILO, Brazil took part in the first International Labour Conference that year and adhered to the tripartite system of representation determined there, bringing together governments, employers, and employees.

Brazil's adhesion to institutions such as these, which would begin to mould relations within this new community of nations and implement a new international order, would have an important effect on the framing of its first labour laws.

The second phase, between 1919 and 1929, saw the discussion and passage of the country's first social laws to regulate wage labour, and the first initiatives designed to ensure the right to retirement benefits and pensions.

To the eyes of many authors (Castro Gomes 1979, 2005; Cardoso 2010), the 1920s were the years in which the social question shifted from the struggle over the cost of living and a lack of affordable housing—a broad-ranging movement that had become increasingly radical over the years—to the field of labour rights in a strict sense. At stake were the number of work-hours per week, women and minors at work, vacation time, and the lingering, urgent matter of occupational accidents—compensation for which, when it did come, depended on the goodwill of one's employer.

The introduction of the Commission on Social Legislation in the Chamber of Deputies in late 1918, as well as the first vote on the Occupational Accidents Law in 1919, would contribute to redefine the social question and lend it new centrality. Both measures reflected the strengthening of the workers' movement on an international level and provoked a backlash from national elites.

Employers worked to restrict the measures as best they could, looking to avoid excesses that might undermine their process of accumulation. In the words of Castro Gomes (1979), employers put on a united front that was complex and contradictory: on the one hand, their stance preserved "the classical principles of liberalism, defending the 'freedom to work,' but gradually grafted onto it an acceptance of state intervention, an acceptance that was forced upon them and limited to specific issues" (163).

In 1915, the federal government had put forth a bill proposing mandatory compensation for occupational accidents. While the proposal remained tabled for a number of years, it would be joined by other issues, such as the establishment of a minimum wage for industrial workers. These scattered demands were the reflection of budding pressure, born of the advance of industrialization and urbanization.

The period was thus shaped by the emergence of a regulatory framework focused on wage labour, meeting the needs of a very small subsection of the working population.

The business community lobbied for women to be able to work the same hours as men, instead of daily shifts of up to six hours.[1] They supported a ban on work for minors under 10 (not 12), spoke in favour of a minimum age of 15 (not 16) for a young person to be considered an adult on the labour market; pressed for a 56-hour work week; and opposed the establishment of schools and childcare facilities within factories, a long-time demand of social movements. In other words, they contested the workers' demands, point by point.

They did, however, accept the establishment of private workers' compensation policies (for minor accidents, death, or disability), taken out with insurance companies. These policies only covered the worker in question, with no provision for dependents, and would not trigger payment of retirement benefits or pensions for those who ceased to work. In other words, they vehemently denied the creation of Social Security. And it would be on these terms that the occupational accidents bill would

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[1] They successfully contested the idea of banning women from working night shifts, as well as eliminating a proposal that would have ensured a period of rest (with two-thirds of pay) before and after childbirth (Castro Gomes 1979: 177).

finally pass in 1919, the regulatory cornerstone of the nation's social protection system.

The capital-labour conflict was transformed into an individual, external issue, regulated by a contract and designed to be dealt with between the worker and the insurer. In the words of Dos Santos (1979), "until 1924, suits over occupational accidents would remain in the realm of private conflicts. Strictly speaking, they were matters for the police, and victims had to request an investigation" in order to determine whether or not compensation was in order.

Thus, the event commonly celebrated as the first conquest of the incipient working class—protection against accidents in the workplace—fell outside the scope of public social insurance. The Eloy Chaves Act, passed in 1923 (see later), likewise failed to include worker's compensation as a part of the incipient social protection system. It would remain subject to private contracts, outside the realm of social rights. For the next 40 years, employers' associations staunchly opposed the adoption of collective, contributory, public insurance systems.

In 1921, the social question remained present, and it would make its presence felt in the heated electoral debate. But not even that could guarantee the effective functioning of the National Department of Labour, which had been created in 1917 in response to a wave of strikes. The aim was to monitor compliance with the laws that were beginning to establish a new system of protection for labourers. Due to pressure from business interests invested in delaying and hindering the effective application of these new laws, the department would remain functionally inoperative. In its stead came the National Labour Council (Conselho Nacional do Trabalho, or CNT), instituted in 1923, even as the government aggressively repressed mobilizations by the emergent working class. Workers on the federal and state railways had been on the point of outright rebellion, and their walkouts during the general strikes had seriously affected other productive sectors. They were the most organized and mobilized group calling for workers' rights.

These obstacles, however, failed to foil some of the most important institutional innovations of the so-called First Republic (1889–1930). One was the Eloy Chaves Act of 1923, which created the nation's first fully funded pension scheme by instituting the Pension and Retirement

Fund for the workers on the São Paulo Railway. The Fund would also provide other labour-related benefits. In addition, there were the Lei de Férias (which regulated vacation time) and the Código de Menores (which stipulated working conditions for minors). The Pension and Retirement Funds (CAPs) were created in Brazil at the initiative of a group of lawyers, businessmen, and public figures (Malloy 1986), strongly influenced by Argentina, where similar funds had been in place since 1904.

Not even this would blunt the impact of the Funds on the ascendant Brazilian business class, which believed that it would be essential for the State to act, not as a gendarme, but now as a "machine for progress" (Pio Vieira 1978: 119). This was the tone taken by the leader of the movement in Brazil, federal deputy Eloy Chaves, a scion of the colonial oligarchical elite and the Paulista aristocracy.

Eloy Chaves' proposal revealed a Bismarckian inspiration, relying on mandatory contributions from both employees and employers to a self-administered, non-state pension fund. The project called for a broad range of other provisions: medical care and medication for the policyholder and his family; regular retirement benefits; pensions for employees' heirs; immediate coverage of funeral expenses; and disability retirement. The fund was to be administered by the beneficiaries themselves (Pio Vieira 1978: 236), with the participation of the employer.

Chaves proposed a constellation of decentralized funds outside the umbrella of the State and administered by the private sector. He opposed a general rule for pensions and the creation of a public fund. True to his liberal values, he put his foot down at State intervention into the provision of retirement benefits and pensions.

The act was finally passed in January of 1923. Each railway company would have to create a retirement and pension fund for its employees (whether permanent or temporary). The funds would be fed by monthly contributions from employees (3% of their salary) and an annual contribution from the railway companies (1% of gross income[2]); and the State would not contribute funds of its own, but would allocate revenue from

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[2] Dos Santos (1979) clarifies that, in the absence of oversight, the 1% contribution was effectively made, not based on gross revenue but rather the wage bill. This situation persisted through the 1960s, substantially reducing the employer's contribution.

an extra tax of 1.5% on railway fares. These resources would be deposited in a special account in a bank chosen by the administrators of the Fund, with no government participation, and would be put towards purchasing national or state bonds.[3]

Old-age pensions were calculated based on the worker's average salary over their last five years of service, granted after 30 years of service and 50 years of age,[4] and were lifelong. Moreover, a worker who suffered "total and permanent disability [would] have the right to retirement, no matter the length of his service" (Pio Vieira 1978: 267). Retirement benefits for the disabled would be equivalent to 50% of the retirement benefit received by workers with over 30 years of service and 25% for workers who had between 10 and 30 years of service. It would not be possible to receive multiple regular old-age pensions or retirement benefits concurrently.

The most important part, which had to do with the model of capitalization, is laid out specifically in Article 39: "Retirement benefits and pensions may be lesser than stipulated in this law if resources in the Fund cannot sustain the respective charges, and this may be the case while resources remain insufficient" (Pio Vieira 1978: 271). In other words, the rule established a defined contribution and an undefined benefit, exempting the employer from guaranteeing a true substitute income in the period after one's working life.

Attempts to extend the Eloy Chaves Act to major companies in all sectors soon followed, while resistance to the law spread within the railway sector. Chaves himself came out against proposals that sought to expand the model to other sectors and attempts to involve the State in financing pensions. In his vision, the new Funds ought to live off of their own resources and go without public financing, unlike the classical Bismarckian model, which included state subsidies. More generally, "State contribution had to be avoided at all costs in the structuring of any other Funds for any other categories of workers" (Pio Vieira 1978: 300).

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[3] Law 4.682 of January 24, 1923. Pio Vieira (1978: 266).

[4] The initial recommendation was a minimum age of 55, but, under pressure from the railway workers, Eloy Chaves reduced it to 50.

Thus, we need to qualify the classical reading that the corporative, paternalistic structure of the government under the First Republic was responsible for developing Brazil's first mechanisms of social protection (Slivnik 2018).

The CAPs would stand as the country's main social insurance model through 1931, when the system underwent its first reform. By then, some 98 company-specific Caixas had been created, covering close to 147,000 members (Slivnik 2018).

According to Slivnik (2018), the CAPs persisted throughout the 1920s as "civil societies run by Advisory Boards, composed of representatives for employers and employees, which were to determine [the Fund's] investment policy and deliberate over the concession of retirement benefits and pensions" (45). The Chaves Act rejected the mutualist tradition developed within the workers' movement, which had been able to offer low-cost medical services and medicine.

On another legislative front, the country saw increased regulation of wage labour. Employer associations' attempts to quash the approval of vacation rights came to naught. A law guaranteeing 15 days of vacation for employees, labourers, and workers at banks and other institutions was passed in 1925 (Castro Gomes 1979). The legislation would not go into effect for factory workers until 1930, however, thanks to violent resistance on the part of the industrial bourgeoisie and the indifference of the governing authorities.

Child labour would be regulated in 1927; underage workers were a considerable contingent of the agricultural workforce, but also in rapidly expanding urban sectors, especially industrial production. Employers successfully proposed that youth aged 14–18 be treated as adults, while children of ages 10–14 would be able to work up to six hours per day.

The balance of these first few decades of republican rule is fairly slim. Despite minor advances in terms of labour regulations, the absence of compliance oversight and repeated stonewalling on the part of employers in commerce and industry hamstrung hopes of more far-reaching gains for urban workers. In the 1930s, only 3% of the working population were covered by these new labour regulations (D'Araújo 2019).

We may, however, safely dismiss the idea that before the Vargas era, the social question was treated as "a matter for the police" (D'Araújo 2019;

Castro Gomes 1979). At this point in time, it combined both dimensions. "Social legislation far beyond the political aim of ensuring social peace and spill over into the economic realm, as coercion made it possible to secure greater productivity from the workforce" (Castro Gomes 1979: 215).

In addition of being incipient, the foundations of the Brazilian labour and social insurance legislation left out the majority of those working on the streets or at odd jobs.

1930–1945: The Social Question as a Workers' Question

The Revolution of 1930, that put an end to the First Republic, was a military coup d'état led by Getúlio Vargas, who had run for president in 1930 as the candidate of the Aliança Liberal (Liberal Alliance). The Alliance's motto was "Let us carry out the revolution serenely, before the people do it violently". This newly formed coalition cast itself as an alternative to the political establishment represented by major coffee producers and exporters, who had dominated the system during the First Republic. Getúlio was defeated; the administration's candidate, a representative of the São Paulo oligarchs, won but was kept from taking office by the coup. Getúlio Vargas became the head of the Provisional Government, awarding himself broad powers. The 1891 Constitution was revoked, and Vargas began governing by decree. A new constitution would only be put in place in 1934.

Before leading the military coup, Getúlio Vargas—who was to govern Brazil through an authoritarian regime from 1930 to 1945—once declared on the campaign trail: "We cannot deny the existence of the Social Question (*questão social*) in Brazil as one of the problems that must be addressed seriously by the authorities. What little we have in terms of social legislation is not applied, or only the smallest part of it is, sporadically, despite our commitments in that regard as signatories of the Treaty of Versailles."[5]

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[5] Speech made on January 2, 1930, in Rio de Janeiro. Documents from Biblioteca Nacional, 1963.

Brazilian social legislation was moved forward by an unprecedented international scenario in which multilateral accords took on the strength of legislation. But in the real world, that very legislation was powerless. Still, Vargas pointed out a social question, and it would fall to the State to address it. This would be one of the great legacies of the Vargas Era: the construction of an institutional framework designed to protect labour and workers, albeit during a period of authoritarianism and the repression of unions and grassroots movements, leaving out the majority of non-regular workers.

Social policy post-1930 focused on the matter of labour, a central pillar of the new regime of accumulation. This new social engineering was, in Vargas' words,[6] designed to overcome "pauperism and all the ills that stem from an excess of activity without fixed occupation". It began with the creation, following the Revolution of 1930, of the Ministry of Labour, Industry, and Commerce, and the foundation of the National Department of Labour in 1931.[7] Finally armed with an institutional structure designed to analyse, formulate, and execute social and labour laws, the State would take vigorous, direct action towards regulating capital-labour relations, supported by a new union law approved the same year, which would repress, delegitimate, and demobilize free unionization (which had been legal since 1907). To this end, one of the new government's first measures was a 1931 law governing unions.

In order to exist, any union organization would have to be formally recognized by the Ministry of Labour. Employee and employer unions were instituted, organized by branches and professions. The new union law also stipulated that, from 1943 onward, it would become compulsory for every worker in a given category to pay a union tax. These new unions were denied the right to political or ideological manifestations and ultimately served to stand beside the government in defending the economic, social, and legal interests of their professional categories; drawing up contracts; maintaining cooperatives; and providing social services (D'Araújo 2019). In practice, over the 1930s, Vargas' social legislation led to the

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[6] Vargas in 1938, quoted by Cardoso (2010: 786).

[7] The measure had first been proposed in 1917, but it was blocked by uncompromising resistance on the part of employers.

destruction of autonomous unions and the independent organization of the working classes.

Only unionized workers would enjoy the benefits of labour legislation and its associated rights (including vacation), and only they could participate in collective bargaining. Non-union members were also unable to file official complaints (Dos Santos 1979). At its root, then, the legal and institutional framework taking shape thus worked to set peers apart.

Before 1930, the Brazilian government had taken a liberal approach to the unions, repressing their mobilizations while refraining from regulating them. The period that followed saw the making of state-led, corporate unionism, guided by the principle of the "collaboration between classes".[8] Independent unions were subject to interventions and police invasions, and their members might be jailed (Castro Gomes 2005).

Starting in the early 1930s, despite the grave economic crisis that had overtaken the country in the wake of the 1929 crash, an important set of measures would broaden the scope of the regulation of the labour market in a move to encourage the ongoing accumulation process. They included the official recognition of certain professions; the first rules governing the adoption of collective agreements; wage equality; workday laws in industry and commerce; new rules about the employment of women and minors; and a law that "nationalized" the workforce (requiring that two-thirds of employees be Brazilian citizens).

The employment record book of 1932 became a watershed, separating out urban workers who were gainfully employed, belonged to recognized, State-regulated professions, and bore the official stamp of the union. This configuration thus established a durable, stubborn link between one's employment record book, one's status as a unionized worker, and access to social benefits.

In 1934, a new Constitution would introduce the labour court system. At that point, it was overseen by *juízes classistas*, union representatives who stood in as labour judges. This indirectly expanded executive action into the realm of the judiciary, concentrating more power in state hands when it came to adjudicating labour conflicts.

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[8] A turn of phrase coined in 1931 by Senator Lindofo Collor, then Minister of Labour.

Dos Santos ([1979](#)) refers to this complex process of constructing new institutions as *regulated citizenship*:

> All members of the community who find themselves in any occupation recognized and defined by law are considered citizens. Citizenship is thus expanded through the regulation of new professions and/or occupations, first of all, and through the broadening of the scope of the rights associated to said professions, rather than the expansion of the values inherent to the concept of belonging to the community. Citizenship is embedded within one's profession, and the rights of the citizen are limited to the rights relevant to his place in the productive process, as enshrined in law (75–76).

Of course, this regulated citizenship was aimed at industrial workers, who were relatively few in number, and failed to take in the rural population: in 1940, 70% of the population lived in rural areas, and only 3% of that group owned land (Cardoso [2010](#)). Rural poverty would be addressed not through agrarian reform—eternally postponed and sidestepped (see Chap. [10](#), in this book)—but by expanding the nation's agricultural frontier and occupying Amazonia and the Centre-West, seen as demographic voids. This made it possible to boost the meagre productivity of small-scale rural production without touching highly concentrated landholdings—and hence without challenging the bases of reproduction for many of the country's elites.

When it came to rights and benefits, social policy came to reproduce the same stratification instituted in the job market, setting apart those recognized as workers from the masses without citizenship. In the process, antagonisms and divisions were fostered amongst working people who were afforded different statuses.

One of the first measures in the realm of social protection would be the reform of the Old-Age Pension and Retirement Funds (CAPs), in 1931. The Eloy Chaves Act was modified: the benefits afforded to railway workers were now extended to the employees of other companies that provided public utility services (transportation, electricity, telegraph and telephone service, water and sewage). This expansion did not challenge the company-specific model, nor did it alter the financing rules

stipulating that State representatives could not participate in the Advisory Boards.

While the number of CAPs would continue to rise (by 1936, there were 189, as opposed to 98 in 1931) (Slivnik 2018), their institutional status was shaken by the restructuring of the social insurance system, which came under State control, with the creation of the Institutes of Retirement and Old-age Pensions (Institutos de Aposentadoria e Pensões, or IAPs) in 1933.

The first IAP was created for maritime workers and would set the mould for the rest. From 1934 onward, other professions would create their own Institutes, among them commercial employees (IAPC), bank employees (IAPB), industrial employees (IAPI), and transportation and cargo workers (IAPTEC). This movement would gradually lead to the reorganization of the CAPs (one was created for civil servants in 1939).

Both models—CAPs and IAPs—would persist through the 1960s, functioning in different ways. Not only did they move away from the company-specific framework and bring together all the workers in a given sector across the nation, but the IAPs also included federal representatives on their Advisory Boards who were tasked with appointing the chair. Slivnik points out another relevant difference: "the funds corresponding to the State's quota, for IAP contributions, which were obtained through newly created fees and taxes, now went through the National Treasury, unlike the Eloy Chaves Act, wherein the funds were collected by the companies themselves and deposited directly into the Funds" (Slivnik 2018: 54–55). This would seem to be the expression of an actuarial concern on the part of the State, which now also began to use the resources saved up in the IAPs.

By separating out the workers recognized as such into sectors controlled by State-authorized unions, the emergent social insurance model maintained the splintering of horizontal solidarity and heightened the struggle for benefits specific to each category.

The problems caused by this fragmented model are well known. They would be listed in an ILO report published in 1935 by the Ministry of Labour, Industry, and Commerce.[9] Among other measures, the report

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[9] In 1934, Adrien Tixier, an ILO employee and specialist in Social Security, came to Brazil on an independent mission to evaluate the incipient social insurance system (see Slivnik 2018: Chap. 2).

suggested the creation of the National Institute of Social Insurance (INSS) to unify the social insurance system and provide uniform rights and benefits; to set up regional funds with a minimum of 50,000 associates per organization (to ensure financial solvency and resilience);[10] and that Brazil's social insurance legislation be brought into greater compliance with the international conventions led by the ILO.[11]

The recommendations fell on deaf ears, and the IAP model was enshrined in 1937, the year in which Vargas proclaimed the Estado Novo (the new state), quashing individual and political freedoms and tightening control over unions.

As Vargas put it in 1938, responding to complaints of his curtailing of individual freedoms: "The Estado Novo does not recognize the rights of individuals over the collective. Individuals do not have rights, they have responsibilities!" The National Security Law of 1935 had already hammered a nail into the coffin of social movements, turning the social question into a matter of national security (177), in light of the Communist threat (Castro Gomes 2005).

Despite the advance of the social insurance system, the severe deficits in the country's social protection network were countless and unquestionable, as conservative ideologues and jurists[12] associated with the Varguista push did not deny. In the early 1940s, disability benefits were far below subsistence level; those in search of outpatient services or hospitalization would find few options; and there was no credit available for low-income housing, one of the great demands at the time.

Moreover, very few enjoyed that insufficient protection to begin with. According to the 1940 Census, out of "26.8 million workers, only 16.6% could be considered potential beneficiaries of social insurance under the legislation governing CAPs and IAPs. Among those 'left out' (those whose professional activities went unrecognized by law), 9.4 million were rural workers, 2.9 million worked in undefined or undeclared professions, and

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[10] At that point, 80% of CAPs had fewer than 1000 covered members.

[11] Compensation for work accidents (1925); work-related illnesses (1925); equal treatment for foreign and domestic workers (1925); compulsory health insurance (1927); and compulsory disability, old age, and death insurance (1933).

[12] On this, see Cardoso (2010) for a deep analysis of the works of Oliveira Viana as a consultant for the Ministry of Labour under Vargas.

9.9 million were domestic workers"[13] (Slivnik 2018: 98, 200), generally unremunerated. Even in the trades covered by legislation, coverage ranged between one-fourth and three-fourth of workers; by 1940, coverage was far from complete (Slivnik 2018).

Finally, these various institutes and funds did not provide unemployment insurance or any sort of aid for workers who left the job involuntarily. Nor were the benefits provided uniformly, except in the case of retirement benefits and pensions, which were the cornerstone of the system. Different sums and rules applied across each sector.[14] As Werneck Vianna (1998) explains, medical assistance was only offered if resources were available and conditioned on a supplementary contribution.

While retirement benefits for disabled and other workers' categories were slim, old-age pensions were even more so, thanks to the application of a 50% reduction.

The minimum wage, another institutional innovation of the Vargas era, born in 1936 and still a linchpin of labour rights, began to be regulated by the federal government in 1940. Its nominal value was set very low; under no circumstance would it suffice to meet a family's needs in terms of food, clothing, hygiene, and transportation, as the law that created it imagined. Moreover, the minimum wage varied across 14 different administrative regions. The minimum wage would only be established nationwide in 1984, under the military dictatorship that had been in power since 1964.

The institutional framework that included and standardized labour laws and welfare rights would take on its definitive form in 1943 with the introduction of the Consolidated Labour Laws (Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho, or CLT), consolidating all laws that had been created since the Revolution of 1930 to govern individual and collective labour relations (individual contracts and collective agreements; workdays, vacation, and weekly rest; protection for workers, women, and children; occupational medicine, labour courts, etc.).

In 1945, shortly before he was forced out of office, Vargas approved a decree creating the Brazilian Institute of Social Insurance, which was

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[13] A total of 99% women, according to the 1940 Census (Slivnik 2018: 108).
[14] For more details, see Slivnik (2018).

designed to centralize and unify all existing social insurance regimes. The decree would be revoked by his successor that year, however, leaving the fragmentation, selectivity, and minimal efficacy of Social Security intact.

Nevertheless, the creation of the CLT seems unquestionably tied to a desire to resolve the social question—understood in that moment as a labour question—in that it established the positive value of productive work.

In the scenario depicted by the "myth of concessions", labour laws and social rights emanate directly from State action and are conceded by its representatives in a peaceful process (Castro Gomes 2005), moving past conflicts and struggles and addressing the social question ignored under the First Republic. The Estado Novo is seen to have thrown itself into the task of forging a social democracy, in spite of the ongoing suppression of individual and political freedoms.

Prevailing dissatisfaction with living and working conditions, even amongst those benefiting from regulated citizenship, may explain the outbreak of strikes and protests after the fall of the Estado Novo (1945) and the return to a democratic regime.

1945–1963: The Social Question as the Regional Question Under Democratic Rule

Vargas was deposed by a military junta on the eve of the first democratic elections in 15 years. A new Constitution was ratified in 1946, which preserved the social rights secured over the course of the 1930s, as well as their exclusionary rules. The document represented a new commitment to democratic rule and political freedoms. It broadened political citizenship by extending the vote to all those over age 18, while still excluding the illiterate. The right to strike would be restricted and ultimately regulated by decree, effectively banning stoppages across nearly all professions (Schwarcz and Starling 2018). Not even this rule would prove effective, however. In 1946 and 1947, bottled-up grievances spi lt onto the streets again.

Vargas was democratically elected and returned to power in 1950, having run on a campaign of expanding his nationalist, industrializing agenda—but not even this could placate the workers covered by his social legislation. In addition to factory strikes, mass mobilizations took over the streets again. In 1953, the March of the Empty Pots, against the cost of living and in support of wage increases, rallied 60,000 people in the industrial heart of the nation, São Paulo. The marchers' demands included price freezes, an expansion of the water and sewer networks, and reforms to extend protective legislation to rural workers, among others.

Shortly thereafter came the Strike of the Three Hundred Thousand, which took in countless industrial sectors. After a month of action, the government backed down and conceded an average salary increase of 32% (Schwarcz and Starling 2018). Beyond the salary increases, the general strike had a major impact in that it put the urban question back on the map of social demands. In the words of Leal (2011), spaces of reproduction—housing, transportation, basic sanitation, electricity, healthcare, schooling, postal services, and consumption—would reframe the essence of the social question through spontaneous action during this new phase of peripheral capitalist development.

Against a background of extreme social polarization, the Organic Social Insurance Law (LOPS) was passed in 1960, designed to unify legislation around the Institutes and Funds for retirements and pensions. Fleury (1994) describes LOPS as a second attempt to rationalize the system, the first having been Vargas' abortive Brazilian Institute of Social Security.

LOPS marks a fundamental change: it moves away from the fully funded model and introduces the public simple distribution model, as well as authorizing the inclusion of self-employed workers in cities as individual contributors (Teixeira 1990). "The focus shifted to standardizing benefits and broadening coverage—preserving the original exclusion of rural workers—and the end result was a demagogical gesture that worsened the system's financial straits even as it failed to expand its narrow financial base" (Fleury 1994: 194).

Instead of ebbing, this tension and social agitation would draw strength from the protagonism of new social actors, who had not yet been incorporated into the realm of regulated citizenship. The independent

mobilization of rural workers would redefine the social question, which had hitherto been framed in terms of social legislation and an existing framework that marginalized them.

Small farmers and their families rose up across the country, calling for access to and legalization of the occupied land where they were working and resisting attempts to expel them. The struggle against the latifundia system entailed fighting both the concentration of property and the profound poverty to which the citizenship-deprived masses were subjected. These rebellions began in southern Brazil, but the Northeast would see the emergence of a peasant organization that would expand the social question beyond the urban industrial sphere.

The Peasant Leagues, formally constituted in 1955,[15] served to put land reform on the nation's political and social agenda. The right to land, here, was equated with the right to decent work, free of oppressive relations. The Leagues formed in the sugarcane fields, a region where the majority of the enslaved population had been taken during the colonial period. There followed four centuries of absolute, quasi-feudal control by *coronéis*, local landowners, whose power was now threatened by the independent organization of largely illiterate and destitute farm workers, forgotten by the Republic and by its democracy.

Reluctant to collaborate with the State, the Leagues moved to occupy fallow or abandoned plots of land to allow poor, exploited peasants to cultivate them and thus improve their standard of subsistence. They provided legal advice and medical assistance and defended members who were threatened or expelled by major landowners, who subsequently refused to compensate them for their investment in the land. On the whole, the Leagues worked to denounce violence as a way to regulate labour relations.

For the first time, working independently, the citizenship-deprived rural population would act to reframe the social question in Brazil.

Overlapping rural and agrarian issues, compounding the rural-urban conflict and the new shape of the urban question, would make approaches

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[15] The Union of Rural Farmworkers and Labourers (ULTAB) had been created in São Paulo the year before, and it would become the National Confederation of Workers in Agriculture (CONTAG) in 1963.

to the social question as a whole even more fraught. In 1963, practically faced with a looming insurrection, João Goulart's labour-friendly administration introduced two aggressive measures designed to meet the demands of rural workers.

First, the legislature approved a bill that had been tabled since 1956, creating the Rural Workers' Statute (EST), which finally extended to rural wage labourers the same labour rights which urban workers had enjoyed for two decades: unionization, a minimum wage, vacation, paid weekends, advance notice, and compensation. The statute also included special measures designed to protect women and children. While undoubtedly innovative, it was also selective, leaving out the vast majority of the diverse workforce in the countryside. Even so, its potential to reform and modernize social relations in the countryside posed such a threat that the EST would be revoked in 1973, during the most repressive period of the military dictatorship.

Second, the government created the Rural Worker Assistance Fund (FUNRURAL). This pioneering measure stipulated that labourers in the countryside would have the right to 1% of the sale price of their products. The funds would be channelled through the Institute of Retirement and Pension Benefits for Industrial Workers (IAPI). In practice, the programme ran consistent deficits, given obstacles to revenue collection. It would be reformulated and made independent, with an administrative structure of its own, in 1971, under the military regime.

In both instances, these attempts to regulate citizenship for rural workers and small farmers proved unsatisfactory, as the concept represented a threat to the power of agrarian oligarchies, which frontally opposed the logic of individual and social rights (see Ondetti, in this volume).

1964–1988: Dictatorship, the Authoritarian Modernization of Social Insurance, and the Struggle for Democracy

The authoritarian context that followed the civil-military coup of 1964 was marked by the suppression of political freedoms and the furious repression of all opposition. It gained decisive support from the urban

middle classes, fuelled by their dread of Communism and the consequences of prolonged economic stagnation. Buoyed by these fears, a military dictatorship would govern the country for the next 21 years, with a technocratic model of development that attained eye-popping growth rates (11% per year from 1968 to 1973). This growth lent some legitimacy to the military government; at the same time, inequality also deepened.

Surprisingly, amidst a severe policy of wage reduction, which would diminish the purchasing power of the minimum wage and the working classes, the military regime completely reorganized the social insurance system, in an overhaul focused on efficiency. The system would undergo not one, but two profound administrative reforms.

The first reform came in 1966: the unification of all IAPs, with the exception of the institute for civil servants (IPASE), led to the creation of the National Institute of Social Insurance (INPS). The authoritarian regime was able to overcome resistance from unions,[16] aided by their lack of funding. The union base was stifled, and control of the system was shifted to a public structure, centralized at the federal level.

Those covered by the INPS were entitled to retirement, pensions, and other social insurance benefits, as well as medical treatment at partnering public or private hospitals. These beneficiaries were formally employed workers (and their dependents), those with their employment record books up to date. Left out were the informally employed, domestic workers, the clergy, and rural workers. The reform established a compulsory contribution rate for employers and employees, and the benefit calculation rules were applied uniformly, regardless of each sector's organizational strength.

This was yet another step towards the universalization of the system. However, this unification was motivated less by universality than by efficiency, as it preserved occupational distinctions at its foundation. Civil servants, for example, were maintained in a parallel system along the lines of the old IAPs. In 1968, however, the regime began allowing those not

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[16] Werneck Vianna (1998) recalls that previous attempts to unify the IAPs under democratic regimes failed because union and social insurance activists mobilized workers in protected occupations in defence of their rights, thus preserving their political privileges.

formally employed—employers, as well as the self-employed—to contribute to the system independently. This expanded the system's financial base, and the improvement in coverage was taken by some as compensation for the repression of social demands (Teixeira 1990).

Another creation from this period was the Severance Indemnity Fund (*Fundo de Garantia por Tempo de Serviço*, or FGTS), a sort of unemployment insurance instituted after lobbying from the business sector. Formally employed workers were entitled to a savings account in their name, linked to their work contract, into which a sum corresponding to 8% of their salary would be deposited on a monthly basis. Those dismissed without cause would be able to access the funds in the account. In fact, the FGTS was introduced to make it legal to fire workers who'd been continually employed for over ten years, since under the terms of the CLT they had achieved *estabilidade* (tenure) and could not be dismissed.

Another important institutional innovation that arose from this restructuring, led by the now-unified Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, was the framing of a national healthcare system that privileged an assistance-based approach funnelled through private networks. It was at this point that, as part of its economic development project, the military government supported the growth of a powerful medical-industrial complex, driving the privatization of medical assistance, whether through purchases in the private sector funded by Social Security or public subsidies for the construction of private hospitals. This would kick-start the process of the internationalization of the healthcare system, as multinational companies arrived in Brazil to meet the healthcare consumption demands of the rising middle classes.

In the field of healthcare, a new pattern of stratification manifested itself. Low-income workers who were currently formally employed were treated at public hospitals, institutions plagued by deficient financing and with dismal records in terms of patient outcomes. As increased demand led to bottlenecks, new routes of access to private medical services emerged, company health plans chief among them. The result was that State increasingly purchased third-party services on the market to meet the needs of social insurance beneficiaries (Werneck Vianna 1998). Meanwhile, the middle classes and those with significant purchasing power were drawn in by the promise of better care through private

medical institutions, driven by fiscal incentives (individual tax deductions[17]) and rising incomes. All the while, the poor, those deprived of citizenship, remained at the mercy of a meagre network of philanthropic institutions.

At the same time, "exclusionary expansion" continued to hold sway, with the gradual, almost always incomplete incorporation of new categories. PRORURAL, or the Programme of Assistance for Rural Workers, was instituted in 1971; despite the new name, this was merely a revamped version of the 1963 FUNRURAL. In spite of challenges to implementation and its negligible functional efficacy, PRORURAL did provide textual reinforcement of social rights for groups that had previously gone wholly unprotected or had only patchy coverage.

Another relevant extension of coverage came with the 1972 regulation of the profession of domestic worker and its subsequent incorporation into the social insurance system. As recently as 2013, the majority of working women in Brazil were domestic workers. But the law remained a dead letter.

The second and most significant reform of the social insurance system under the authoritarian regime would come in 1977 when the military government completely overhauled the National System of Social Insurance and Assistance (SINPAS). For the first time, social assistance was included in the system's organizational structure. In an attempt to ensure better management, different services were addressed by a variety of bodies. Social Security remained with INPS; medical care was taken over by the National Social Insurance Medical Assistance Institute (INAMPS);[18] and the Brazilian Assistance League Foundation (FLBA)[19] and National Foundation for the Welfare of Minors (FUNABEM)[20]

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[17] The 1966 tax reform and the 1967 Constitution inaugurated a new array of tax deductions.

[18] Other creations of the period included the Institute for the Financial Administration of Social Insurance and Assistance (IAPAS), tasked with collecting contributions, overseeing resources, and managing the system's funds, and DATAPREV (Public Pension System Data Base), which worked to systematize and manage the network's data.

[19] Originally the Brazilian Assistance League—the organization was founded in 1942 to provide aid to the families of soldiers serving in World War II. It was reorganized as a Foundation in 1969 by the dictatorship.

[20] Created in 1964. Under the military dictatorship, juvenile delinquents came to be seen as a "national security issue", and there emerged a consensus that poor children belonged in boarding schools. The repressive policy of sending delinquents to reform school lasted through the start of the re-democratization process in the mid-1980s.

would be brought in to address the indigent population, albeit employing a repressive approach. In practice, the system continued to segregate services by clientele. More troublingly, as this assistance was institutionalized, it developed a clear punitive bent; the groups it attended almost exclusively were single mothers (LBA) and juvenile delinquents (FUNABEM), both targeted by public policy by virtue of their deviant behaviours.

Such a distorted perspective of social assistance explains why the government implemented no poverty-fighting programmes supported by cash transfers to mitigate the hardships suffered by those unable to meet their most basic needs. Poverty mitigation, meanwhile, remained largely charitable and provided by private institutions.

As the 1970s' decade drew to a close, the economic miracle began to melt away and the social question was channelled into the struggle for democratic freedoms, amnesty (1979), and political opening. With the support of the Catholic Church, society organized and mobilized in working-class neighbourhoods. Associations of all stripes were formed, rooted in a shared logic of resistance to the dictatorship. One item on the agenda, just as at the turn of the century, was the cost of living: the working population bore the brunt of skyrocketing inflation (211% in 1983) and considerable wage cuts, which reduced the real value of the minimum wage by over 50% (Lavinas 2017). Though GDP per capita rose 6.1% p.a. from 1970 to 1980, the Gini index, as measured by household income, went from 0.504 in 1960 to 0.592 in 1980. This was the rise of the "new trade unionism" (Schwarcz and Starling 2018), which broke away from the state-controlled model of the Vargas era and opened up a phase in which leaders would seek to forge a unified representation for the working classes, moving beyond socio-occupational categories.

Pressure to put an end to the dictatorship grew across the country. So, too, did reactions from within the armed forces from those opposed to a return to democratic order; repressive mechanisms which had never been dismantled were set to work again.

On January 15, 1985, a new civil government inaugurated the New Republic, and a Constituent Assembly would be called in 1987 to draw up the nation's new carta magna. Rarely had Brazil seen such widespread mobilization and engagement with the constitutional debate. Through

associations, committees promoting grassroots participation, activist gatherings, and unions, petitions would be drawn up and hundreds of proposed amendments were submitted from all sectors of society. This may serve to show how it is nearly impossible to speak of *the* social question in Brazil, given the enmeshed tangle of issues that would come to shape the Citizen Constitution of 1988. That Constitution would become the repository of collective hopes of addressing a whole variety of social issues.

Among the groups most active in drawing up the section on social rights, scholars, politicians, and activists from the field of Social Security took pride of place.

1988–2015: A New Wave of Democracy—Social Security for All[21]

The 1988 Constitution establishes citizenship as one of its fundamental pillars. Among its explicit objectives are the construction of a free, just society rooted in solidarity, the eradication of poverty and the reduction of social and regional inequalities, as well as the welfare of all, without prejudice or any form of discrimination. The document guarantees the participation of civil society across a variety of forums (healthcare; education; social assistance) to democratize the decision-making process.

The process of re-founding the nation (Paoli 1989) and the return of democratic rule, would, however, unearth issues that had to be addressed urgently. Extreme poverty, that long-stifled element of the social question, finally came to the fore. It had worsened belatedly, not as a consequence of the waves of industrialization and the impoverishment of the working classes—which predated workers' mobilizations—but as a manifestation of inertial inflation, which had been forcing up the prices of basic necessities since the 1970s. In 1993, hyperinflation hit 2477% (IPCA—IBGE, Contas Nacionais 2018), threatening the very survival of multiple sectors of the population.

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[21] Part of this section draws on Lavinas (2017).

The fight against hunger would become a central element of the social agenda. As in the past, it would focus on the struggle against the cost of living. The first major social mobilization along these lines was the campaign for Citizen Action Against Hunger, Extreme Poverty, and For Life.

Poverty as a social question would become a central part of the landscape of social struggles, as the social protection system enshrined in the 1988 Constitution, with the creation of Social Security, was regulated and implemented. For the first time, the term "Social Security" was added to the body of the law, and Brazil's poor became entitled to rights.

The Constitution of 1988 was a watershed moment in Brazil in terms of social rights. With it, the country would be transformed. Articles 194 and 195 of the Constitution implemented a Social Security System, comprising healthcare, pensions and other labour-related benefits, welfare schemes, and unemployment insurance (Article 201). Under the Citizen Constitution, healthcare is defined as universal and free of charge. Nonetheless, private institutions may work to complement the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde, or SUS), in keeping with directives established by the public system. Social insurance, including unemployment insurance, is contributory and guarantees a relatively broad array of types of coverage in cases of forced or definitive inactivity (pay-as-you-go model). Social insurance also guarantees pensions and other benefits to small family farmers irrespective of prior contribution records This is a major achievement in the process of universalizing access to pensions for both rural and urban workers. Non-contributory old-age pensions to rural workers, both male and female, are paid out of the general budget of the Social Security System (collecting contributions from both employees and employers). They are not considered welfare benefits but a solidary principle in order to promote equality of rights. Social assistance schemes, meanwhile, introduce the right to a safety net for the demonstrably poor, subject to means test.

The incorporation of social assistance under the umbrella of Social Security comes as an extremely relevant institutional innovation. Until this point, care for the poorest and destitute had been mostly limited to charity and philanthropic organizations, but then it has become the State´s legal obligation (Lavinas et al. 2017).

Other equally important rights were written into the letter of the law: the right to housing and the social function of the city and urban property; the social function of agricultural property (see Chap. 10, in this book) and the promotion of agrarian reform; food security; the right to free and secular education at all levels (day care and preschool; primary, middle, and high school; college; and youth and adult education); and the right to security, to say nothing of the Constitution's considerable expansion of labour and union rights. Eduardo Fagnani and Flavio Tonelli Vaz write that the Constitution of 1988 inaugurated "a social protection system inspired by the values of the social welfare state" (2013: 98–99) as seen in Europe.

Finally, the Constitution reaffirmed the ILO model of tripartite financing for Social Security. Should the National Treasury need to transfer fiscal resources to the General Social Insurance Regime (RPPS, which is contributory), one might argue that the situation would not constitute a "deficit", but rather a follow-through of a constitutional responsibility (Fagnani 2005).

To shore up the social order outlined in the Constitution, the members of the Constituent Assembly established a specific budget for Social Security, set apart from the fiscal budget (revenues from which would go towards financing other social rights, such as education, sanitation, housing, etc.). The idea was to ensure a measure of fiscal autonomy for Social Security by feeding it with certain exclusive revenue streams drawing on a variety of sources.

With this in mind, the Social Security budget draws off of contributions from employees and employers and from voluntary contributors (self-employed workers, idle working-age adults, etc.), in keeping with the logic of contributory Social Security. It is also fed by so-called social contributions, which include taxes on consumption, reflecting a society-wide contributive effort, or on company earnings, rather than income tax. Finally, there are also contributions from lotteries and revenue from the ministries that make up the various sectors of Social Security, although these are modest sums. In theory, all of these revenue sources are tied to Social Security and supply it exclusively. However, since 1994, the federal

government started slashing the Social Security budget in order to shift funds over to the fiscal budget, applying a 20% cutback[22] (dubbed as the Unbinding of Federal Revenue or DRU).

National Social Insurance Scheme

Brazil adopted two public social insurance regimes in addition to the complementary fully funded regime, which is voluntary. They were all instituted by the Social Security Organic Law n. 8.212 of 1991.

The General Social Insurance Regime (Regime Geral da Previdência Social, or RGPS) provides pensions and other contributory benefits for workers in the private sector, and is operated by the National Social Security Institute (Instituto Nacional da Seguridade Social, or INSS). The Special Social Insurance Regime (Regime Próprio da Previdência Social, or RPPS), meanwhile, covers civil servants at all levels of government and the military, and it is included in the fiscal budget (not in the Social Security budget). Finally, the 1988 Constitution created the Complementary Social Insurance Regime, served by open (run by banks and financial institutions) and closed (company-based) private pension funds, a system designed to complement workers' incomes after their definitive retirement. These complementary fully funded pension schemes are subject to private regulations. The open private pension fund are voluntary, whereas the company-based funds tend to be mandatory, reaching the fraction of wages that surpasses the public contribution cap (see later).

The RGPS is contributory and compulsory for workers in the private sector covered by the Consolidated Labour Laws but also takes in a broad range of voluntary policyholders (working-age adults, the self-employed, individual micro-entrepreneurs, and rural producers). It is a pay-as-you-go regime, with rules that, though distinct, cover both rural and urban dwellers.

The contribution rate is 20% of received remuneration or any contribution between the social insurance floor (the current minimum wage) and the contribution cap, set at R$5840.00 (USD 1500) per month in

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[22] Lifted to 30% in August 2016.

2019. This 20% is split between workers and employers; the workers' part is graduated, varying from 8% to 11%, while the rest is the employer's responsibility. Non-salaried contributors pay the full 20%, with the exception of Individual Micro-Entrepreneurs (*Microempreendedores Individuais*, or MEIs), for whom the rate was lessened (invariably 5% of a minimum wage), and small family farmers, who are taxed 2.1% of the value of the gross revenue from the sale of their production. In addition to this category of contributor, classed as "specially insured", rural social insurance includes two other forms of membership, which fall under the general contribution rules for the RGPS.[23]

The array of benefits provided by social insurance is a varied one, ranging from retirement plans and pensions to paid maternity leave, unemployment insurance, family allowance, sick pay, accident benefits, and aid for inmates' families, among others. Not all working categories are eligible to all benefits. The regulations vary according to the benefit and the beneficiary, but over recent years, they have trended towards greater uniformity, even between the RGPS and the RPPS (for instance, the floor and the cap are the same across both regimes).

As of 2019, approximately 30.3 million retirees and pensioners are covered by the RGPS. Around two-thirds of all RGPS' monthly retirement benefits and pensions amount to the social insurance floor, which stands at the minimum wage. Of all benefits, 80% fall below the level of two minimum wages. Around 85% of the elderly population (60+) is covered by social insurance or assistance old-age benefits (Continuous Cash Benefit—BPC, see later) in Brazil.

A broad pension reform was approved in 2019, with the purpose of unifying both regimes (private sector and civil servants) as recently achieved in China (see Chap. 3, in this book) and trying to impose a short-term transition towards a fully funded compulsory system. This reform will have further impacts on the Social Security system as a whole, negatively affecting the healthcare system and welfare schemes.

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[23] In addition to the "specially insured worker" (a category exclusive to small rural producers working on family farms), rural social insurance also includes the categories "individual contributor" (rural producer and self-employed worker) and "rural employee" (worker who provides services of a rural nature to an employer on a non-sporadic, remunerated basis). For individual contributors, a 20% rate is levied on the base salary, while rural employers have 8, 9, or 11 percent of the base salary withheld and levied by their employer.

Social Assistance

The right to a minimum level of protection by the State has completely reconfigured the social pact. Now, the Organic Social Assistance Law (LOAS, Law n. 8.742), passed in 1993, guarantees a minimum wage to poor senior citizens (aged 65 or older) and the handicapped living in families with per capita household income below one-fourth of the current minimum wage. The number of recipients of the BPC (Non-Contributory Regular Pension) amounts to 4.9 million. The monthly benefit corresponds to a minimum wage, equivalent to R$998 in 2019. As stated by the Constitution, it is universal, though means-tested, applying to both rural and urban areas.

In parallel, since 2003, those who are not eligible for a BPC—that is, millions of children, young adults and able-bodied adults—can now qualify for a Bolsa Família stipend. In this respect, Bolsa Família went on to fix the limited coverage imposed by the eligibility criteria of the BPC. As an anti-poverty programme, it is less costly than BPC, given the difference in the average benefit—which in the case of Bolsa Família is R$185 (US$ 48) per month. The household benefit is subdivided in a basic stipend and a variable one paid for children or youth aged 0–17. In 2019, while federal spending with Bolsa Família corresponded to 0.48% of Brazilian GDP, the BPC represented 0.88% (Lavinas 2020). Targeting mechanisms also differ; unlike the BPC, Bolsa Família recipients are subject to controls and conditionalities (school attendance, medical visits, immunization). In 2019, 14 million families are Bolsa Família beneficiaries, a headcount that certainly falls short of the total target population. "Bolsa Família" has been recognized nationally and internationally as an exceptional public poverty-fighting policy. None of this, however, was enough to ensure that the programme be enshrined as a right, ensuring full coverage for its target population. As a non-right, "Bolsa Família bends to budgetary logic and fails to expand its coverage as a countercyclical measure, as might be expected" (Lavinas 2017: 131).

The Unified Healthcare System

The utopia of healthcare for all is undeniably the hallmark of not just the 1988 Constitution but also the entire societal ideal in play at the time. The 1988 Constitution created the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde, or SUS), specifically as a counterpoint to the trend towards the privatization of Brazilian healthcare, inherited from the years of the dictatorship. It was authorized by the SUS Organic Law n. 8.080 of 1990.

The principle behind the public healthcare system, inspired on universal European models, is "health and democracy". The slogan speaks to the basic idea behind the public health movement, which led to the healthcare reform, as well as to its mobilizing power. The aim is to break away from the legacy of liberal, profit-oriented medicine and cut down on the use of the designation "philanthropic" for healthcare institutions. In their place would come a public system committed to full service, universal coverage, and equal access.

Nevertheless, SUS does not guarantee full public provision, since most services are contracted out to the private sector via concessions. Despite the tremendous expansion of the public health network in the 1990s and its open-door treatment policy, private providers grew quickly, gained momentum, and ultimately drained SUS funding through tax waivers and tax credits. To give some sense for the contradictions and ambiguities that plague healthcare policy, total public spending at all levels of government on healthcare stands at 4% of GDP (multilateral agencies recommend 6%). Private spending, meanwhile, which is largely out of pocket, has come to 5.5% of GDP. The public network treats 75% of the population, while the other 25% patronize the private sector; this is an eloquent testament to the twinned, hybrid health system in Brazil.

Ever since its creation, the Unified Health System has suffered from chronic underfinancing as a result of the government's decision to support the expansion of the private sector—which is now increasingly international and financialized. To this day, the healthcare plan market, created in 1968 by the military regime, is being underwritten by hefty tax incentives. Ocké-Reis and da Gama (2016) estimate that, between 2000 and

2013, tax credits on healthcare (through waivers) in relation to total expenditures by the Ministry of Health remained practically stable, around 30% per year.

Programmes such as Farmácia Popular, which allows for the free distribution of medication and has extremely high approval ratings, meet just one-third of prevailing demand. The result is that medications are the fifth quintile of the income distribution's number one healthcare expense (Lavinas and Gentil 2018). In short, the Brazilian health system remains deeply stratified by income.

At its birth, then, Social Security was marked by a mixture of improvements and ambiguities that reflect historic problems and the challenges posed by multiple social questions. This is due in part to prevailing macroeconomic policy, which has given no quarter to a more effective universalization of social rights. Social spending has risen significantly, but it remains predominantly concentrated in cash transfers—they make up for 68.8% of social spending across all levels of government—as opposed to in kind provision (Lavinas 2017)—which has been seen to have much broader redistributive effects and to homogenize the patterns of social reproduction across social classes.

The importance and scale that the social protection system acquired through the consolidation of Social Security broadened the process of social inclusion, which was also driven by a new cycle of economic growth that incorporated tens of millions into the mass consumer market who had previously been excluded or only marginally included. This would become clear at the peak of the social-developmentalist model (2003–2014), which combined three drivers of growth: a renewed focus on natural resources, the expansion of the domestic consumer market, and investments (Bielschowsky 2012).

But amidst a period of wage recovery, with broadened poverty-fighting programmes, access to credit, and incorporation into the mass consumer market, Brazilians—now armed with citizenship—took to the streets en masse to call out for public transportation, quality public healthcare and education, and affordable housing.

These would ultimately attract anti-Workers' Party right-wing groups and serve as a magnet for the frustrations and aspirations of multiple

political positions' deepening political divergences. The Landless Workers' Movement (MST), created in 1984, and the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST), from 1997, are evidence that forms of exclusion persist in both rural and urban environments. Democracy and the consolidation of a social protection system—understood as access to social ownership—have not alleviated the hardships faced by those seeking to live off the land they work or those who hope to find a decent roof under which to live.

The Black movement, and its struggle for racial equality, is another social force that has redefined the terms of the social question in Brazil. While the 1989 Caó Act made racism a non-bailable crime with no statute of limitations, it proved necessary to create a Statute of Racial Equality in 2010 to ensure the practical application of equality of opportunity; the defence of individual, collective, and diffuse ethnic rights; and the fight against discrimination. Black and Brown people represent 52% of the Brazilian population, but they are disproportionately poor, undereducated, and most vulnerable to violence, especially when wielded by the State. Being a Black, in Brazil, is still "a matter for the police", as the saying goes.

A hundred years after the abolition of slavery, the recognition that racism is an essential aspect of the social question in Brazil made it possible to take steps away from colourism and a long past of exclusion. Legally mandated diversity has advanced, moving towards the universalization of access. The 2012 Law of Social Quotas, for example, set aside 50% of admission spots at federal public universities for young people from low-income families (per capita household income of up to 1.5 times minimum wages) who attended public high school, a measure which significantly boosted Black enrolment. The 2014 Law of Racial Quotas set aside 20% of federal jobs for Black, Brown, and Indigenous candidates.

The social question in twenty-first-century Brazil remains defined by the ongoing struggle for the recognition of social cleavages that have become naturalized and masked, and by the implosion of certain barriers that reinforced selectivity, stratification, and discrimination.

Conclusion: The Social Compact at Risk

This chapter has sought to systematize multiple facets of the social question in Brazil, covering a period that opens with the incipient debate about social protection begun in the late 1910s (for a summary, see Table 9.1). Looking back on the century-long process of the construction of a system of Social Security in a peripheral economy marked by deep structural heterogeneity, we may see that the layers of recognition (Leisering 2019, see also Chap. 1 of this book) of the social question have continued to multiply and remain intertwined and indivisible.

Social policy has expanded both under democracy and dictatorship. Under the first period of dictatorship (Vargas, 1930–1945), social policy has been instrumentalized as a means of social control. Labour relations were at the foreground of social policy and labour legislation built on the denial of the civil rights of workers and citizens. During the second period of dictatorship, 1964–1985, Social Security was modernized.

We have seen the continual, growing advance of coverage against risks, which moved from the regulated citizenship of the first phases of state-led industrialization to the universalization of rights enshrined in the Citizen Constitution of 1988. The social question, newly framed in terms of social inclusion, redefined the scope of social policies and reaffirmed universalistic value orientations.

While the early social security and labour legislation would organize the labour market to ballast the process of industrialization and the conservative modernization of Brazilian society, the consolidation of citizenship belatedly introduce an entirely new dynamic.

The re-democratization of Brazilian society in 1988 allowed for the creation of a relatively solid, broad system of social protection bolstered by exclusive funding, which included both labour rights and the struggle against poverty.

This being said, the realm of the public provision of goods and decommodified services is also a stronghold for resistance to the equalization of opportunities. We have not yet been able to bypass income and status as forms of access to quality education, healthcare, or even public safety, although identity-driven movements are currently leading the

Table 9.1 The social question in Brazil: changing ideas and policies

	Social question	Ideas, frames, and contexts	Institutional innovations	Key actors	Policies
1889–1918	No recognition of social question	People's Needs Eugenicist theories	Abolition of slavery and turn to Republic Few working regulations (women and minors)	Socialist and anarchists trade unionists Grassroots movements	Authoritarian modernization driven by the State in urban areas
1919–1929	Labour protection	Labourism Bismarckian model of social protection ILO models and Treaty of Versailles	Private social insurance Old-age pension and retirement funds per enterprise	Railway workers Paulista aristocracy Congress	Retirement pension fund Child labour regulations
1930–1945	Worker's question: regulated citizenship	Fight against pauperism "Collaboration between classes" Developmentalist state	Institutes of Retirement and Old-Age Pensions Consolidated Labour Laws Minimum wage Worker's ID	State Entrepreneurs	Repression of free unions and grassroots movements National Security Law Strong corporatism-rights associated to professions

Table 9.1 (continued)

	Social question	Ideas, frames, and contexts	Institutional innovations	Key actors	Policies
1946–1963	Agrarian question	Democratic rule and political freedom	Organic Social insurance Law Rural Worker's Statute Rural Workers Assistance Fund	Social movements Peasant Leagues	Labour rights for rural labourers
1964–1987	Question of Democracy	Authoritarian modernization "Exclusionary expansion" of social protection	Unified social insurance system National Institute for Social insurance Severance Indemnity Fund	Military Conservative middle classes Catholic Church	First social assistance measures New rights for rural labourers
1988–2015	Social inclusion	Universality—Social Security for all Acknowledgement of the racial question	Social Security Unified Healthcare System Social welfare Pay-as-you-go regimes	Congress New Unions Social movements	Continuous Cash Benefit (BPC) Non-contributory Rural pensions Bolsa Família Affirmative action

charge in denouncing how this exclusionary universalization acts in a discriminatory fashion and undermines citizenship.

This positive and promising outlook is nevertheless at stake and has been under attack since the impeachment of democratically elected President Dilma, in 2016, and the following election of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who took office in January 2019 and is openly committed to the dismantling of the public sphere in Brazil.

Two labour reforms, adopted in 2018, have already reinforced informality and work precariousness, representing a blow to social rights. With declining contributions from employees and payroll exemptions for employers, the Social Security budget will soon be stifled and unable to fund pensions and other labour benefits. As a consequence, the structural heterogeneity that decades of industrial policymaking and various developmentalist models failed to overcome will amplify again, magnifying inequalities, as is already the case. Sick-pay, occupational accident insurance, and maternity leave are benefits in peril. They risk being moved from the scope of the Social Security system to the financial sector, through contracts with private insurers. New waves of pension reform will probably undermine further the public pay as you go system.

Even the Bolsa Família programme, relying on targeting mechanisms, is now contested, collapsing the most innovative dimension of the 1988 social compact: the right to minimal protection from the State, through a subsistence income. A sign that compensatory anti-poverty schemes, albeit cheap and central to the logic of residual welfare policies, do not escape the grip of the neoliberal mindset that governs today's Brazil.

The assault on the social through disenfranchisement, if unstopped, will interrupt and prevent social citizenship from fully consolidating in Brazil.

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10

Ideational Bases of Land Reform in Brazil: 1910 to the Present

Gabriel Ondetti

Brazil's colonial past conferred upon it a highly unequal landowning structure in which the large majority of the rural population was either landless or land-poor, while many vast holdings were not intensively utilised. Neither independence from Portugal in the early nineteenth century nor the transition from monarchy to republic near the end of that century ameliorated this situation. At least in part because of this underlying structural context, the "agrarian question," or what to do about a highly unequal rural landholding structure, has been a longstanding source of debate and political conflict. Few issues have been as salient or provoked as much strife.

The agrarian question is different from the issues discussed in the rest of this volume. Most obviously, unlike a social security system, land reform for the most part only benefits the rural population. In addition, the agrarian question has not been just a social question but also an economic one. Indeed, its rise as a national issue in Brazil was driven to a substantial extent by concerns that an unproductive farm sector would

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hinder industrialisation. Still, there is good reason to address land reform as a social issue. Given the frequent exclusion of rural populations from early social security development, land reform can be thought of as a kind of proto-social protection programme for the countryside, providing a measure of income and food security in lieu of cash transfers. Indeed, some would argue that it is superior to cash, since land ownership provides a degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency that cash cannot.

This chapter explores the historical trajectory of the agrarian question in Brazil. It focuses, in particular, on ideas about the nature of the agrarian structure, its consequences and how to address the problems it causes. However, as with other chapters in the volume, it is not simply an intellectual history. Rather, it examines how ideas have interacted with other variables, especially collective actors, legal institutions and policy outcomes. While the emphasis is on ideas advanced by advocates of reform, some attention is devoted to opposing arguments. It draws on both existing scholarly works and a variety of primary sources, including constitutional texts, newspaper reports, documents published by social movement and non-governmental organisations and official land reform data. The chapter fills a significant gap in the scholarship on land reform in Brazil. Although the literature in this area is rich, there are few historical overviews, and those that do exist (Camargo 1986; Linhares and Teixeira da Silva 1999) do not focus specifically on ideas. In addition, those works are now somewhat dated.

A historical analysis virtually demands some kind of periodisation as a way of making sense of the evolution of events, but breaking history into discrete segments is a somewhat arbitrary and artificial exercise. No claim is made that the scheme used here is the only one possible or even the best one for all purposes. Nevertheless, the chapter argues that the trajectory of the agrarian question can be usefully understood in terms of four basic periods, each of which was characterised by a distinct set of political dynamics with regard to this issue.

During the first, which encompasses the 1910s, some of the ideas that would most profoundly shape the agrarian question in Brazil were articulated. However, a political context marked by strong landowner dominance sharply limited their influence. The second period, from the 1920s to the mid-1950s, was characterised by important political

transformations and the recognition of the agrarian question as a pressing issue. Pro-land reform ideas diffused more widely and gained tentative expression in legal institutions, especially the constitution. However, the state did little to alter the structure of landholding, in part because the direct beneficiaries of land redistribution, the rural lower class, remained politically quiescent.

The third period, from the end of the 1950s through the mid-1980s, brought greater conflict over land. It was marked initially by the emergence, for the first time in Brazilian history, of a grassroots land reform movement. However, rather than achieving its goal, the movement contributed to the rise of a repressive military dictatorship that ultimately rejected its demands. Still, the conflicts of the period brought significant institutional advances and the emergence of an intellectual and political movement within the Catholic Church highly favourable to land reform. Both would influence the events of the fourth period.

From the late 1980s to the present, the democratisation of Brazilian politics has helped produce unprecedented increases in both mobilisation for land and actual implementation of land reform. Although the major ideas supporting reform have remained largely the same as in the past, some new rationales have emerged in recent decades, linked mainly to environmental and health concerns. In addition, facing greater threats than before, landowning elites and their allies have engaged in innovative forms of organisation and devised new rhetorical strategies focusing on the modernisation of agriculture and on the failings of the many land reform settlements (see below) that now dot the countryside.

While land reform has clearly reached its historical peak during this most recent period, the degree of change in the agrarian structure remains modest, hardly altering the general distribution of rural property, which remains among the world's most unequal. Overall, then, Brazil is a case in which pro-land reform ideas have deep historical roots and have achieved considerable institutional expression, but in which actual land redistribution has remained superficial, due to a political power balance that has favoured large landowners over the major direct beneficiaries of land redistribution, the rural landless and land-poor.

Emergence of Pro-land Reform Ideas: the 1910s

Land reform would not become a substantial national political issue in Brazil until the 1930s. However, some of the core ideas behind it emerged earlier. The 1910s constitute a particularly important period in this sense, since they saw the publication of a number of texts providing compelling rationales for state intervention in rural land ownership.

Some scholars trace the origins of the Brazilian agrarian question to late nineteenth-century liberal political elites, like Andre Rebouças, an advisor to Emperor Pedro III who advocated the end of slavery and the distribution of land to former slaves (Camargo 1986: 56),[1] or Rui Barbosa, a legislator and government minister who, following the establishment of a republic in 1889, pushed for reforms that would create a more fluid land market (Linhares and Teixeira da Silva 1999: 71–75). However, a lucid general argument in favour of promoting equitable landownership would only appear some years later.

That argument came from the pen of Alberto Torres, a politician and intellectual known for his nationalist views (Pinto 2010). During the first half of the 1910s, Torres published a series of essays and books that advanced major criticisms of Brazilian society. Many had to do with the political regime established by the 1891 constitution, but he also laid out a sophisticated critique of an economic system devoted to producing a handful of export commodities (mainly coffee, sugar, latex and cacao) on large estates. Torres argued that this system enriched a narrow landowning elite at the expense of society as a whole. Not only did it concentrate the income from agriculture, but it also contributed to high food costs (since the best land was devoted to export crops) and tended to degrade the environment because the easy access of wealthy planters to land discouraged careful use of soils.

Torres advocated reforms that would partially reorient agriculture towards the production of food for the domestic market and promote wider ownership of land. Such a system, he argued, would increase

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[1] Slavery ended in 1888, later than in any other country in the Americas. Rebouças' advocacy notwithstanding, the freed slaves did not receive land.

popular welfare, stem migration of the rural poor to the cities and promote better stewardship of natural resources. Torres did not go as far as to urge expropriation of private land, but he did suggest that the state should take the lead in distributing unused or unclaimed lands in small parcels to the landless and land-poor. According to the author:

> "it would make sense to promote…the division of properties in order to disperse wealth, thus consolidating popular welfare. Our politicians have not yet grasped that Brazil needs to strengthen its people, endowing the poor classes of society with that minimum level of security and welfare that comes from owning property…Our policies should move with greater courage – without attacking property or established rights – toward a wider distribution of wealth and a more complete levelling of opportunities and means for action." (Torres 2002 [first published in 1914])[2]

At roughly the same time that Torres was elaborating his critiques, another author in distant France was launching a broader attack on property rights that would eventually wield significant influence in Brazil, as well as other Latin American countries. Based partially on earlier writings by August Comte, the jurist Léon Duguit argued in a series of lectures delivered in Argentina in 1911 that private ownership of land (and other capital assets) should be understood not as an inalienable individual right but as a "social function" (Duguit 1918). As such, it involves an obligation to use land in ways that benefit society as a whole, which in practice mainly means putting it into agricultural production. If the owner does not fulfil this obligation, the state, Duguit suggested, should have the power to coerce him to do so.

Like Torres, Duguit was not a socialist and did not oppose private property. Nevertheless, he did believe that nineteenth-century liberalism had gone too far in championing individual rights, and he argued for a reorientation of legal codes towards obligations to the collective good. Although Duguit's ideas about property did not achieve great influence in his native Europe, his emphasis on productive use of assets was potentially more compelling in Brazil, where agriculture remained the core of

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[2] All translations in this chapter are by the author.

the economy and land ownership was concentrated in a small elite who often failed to use their holdings productively. The contrast between huge, lightly cultivated estates and the millions of peasant families who scraped out a precarious living on tiny holdings or on other people's land was destined to make the social function an appealing concept to reformers in Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America.

However, at the time of their publication, neither Torres' nor Duguit's ideas appear to have had much impact on Brazilian society. This was probably because the system Torres was criticising, based on the kind of strong property rights regime that Duguit denounced, rested on powerful pillars of support. The decentralised oligarchic system created after the fall of the monarchy had not yet faced major challenges. Despite the trade disruptions caused by World War I, commodity exports continued to be a key source of growth, and the groups who dominated that sector, especially the coffee "barons" of the state of São Paulo, enjoyed great prestige and political influence. Given the low levels of urbanisation and industrialisation, there were few actors capable of forcefully questioning the status quo.

Societal Recognition of the Agrarian Question: 1920s to the Mid-1950s

Political and economic transformations that occurred during the 1920s and 1930s altered the balance of power and thus favoured the wider diffusion and further elaboration of pro-land reform ideas. To some extent, awareness of the agrarian question came to influence legal institutions, most notably the constitutions drafted in 1934 and 1946. However, the awakening of society to this issue had two crucial limitations. First, the prospective direct beneficiaries of land reform did not engage in significant political action. Second, and relatedly, the state did little to promote a more equitable pattern of landholding.

Two events were especially important in destabilising the oligarchical system. First, in 1922 a movement arose within the armed forces that criticised the political regime as corrupt and unresponsive to popular

needs. Made up of junior officers, the *tenentes* (or "lieutenants") undertook repeated armed rebellions. From 1924 to 1927, a *tenentes* force roamed the interior of the country, seeking support from the population and resisting various attempts to destroy it. Although it ultimately dissolved, the movement constituted a blow to the system's legitimacy. Second, the stock market crash of 1929 initiated a global economic crisis that undermined Brazil's export-oriented development model and helped provoke a political regime change. Prior to that point, there had been an informal agreement between the elites of São Paulo and neighbouring Minas Gerais to rotate in controlling the presidency. In an attempt to protect their interests in the face of the crisis, in 1930 São Paulo broke with this arrangement and sought to hold onto the office for a second term. In response, Minas Gerais joined some other states in organising a military coup that brought to power Getúlio Vargas, a wily politician who would deeply influence Brazil's development.

Vargas led Brazil from 1930 to 1945, mainly as a dictator, and again from 1951 to 1954 as a democratically elected president. During these years, he centralised power in the national executive branch and increasingly used the state to promote industrialisation and diversify the economy away from agriculture. He was also largely responsible for the creation of the country's social security system and a labour code that extended significant new rights to workers while also imposing corporatist controls on their organisations (Malloy 1979). The Vargas presidencies thus played a crucial role in the rise of the statist development model that Brazil would pursue until at least the early 1990s.

The Great Depression and Vargas' rise to power favoured the emergence of the agrarian question as a national issue. The collapse of trade and the suffering it caused called into question the benefits of export-led development and diminished the prestige enjoyed by planters and their associates. While the landowning elite remained powerful, other social groups, especially industrialists but also civil servants and urban workers, saw their status rise as a function of the growing emphasis on state-led industrialisation. Political space expanded within the state and the broader society for ideas that questioned the compatibility of the landholding system with public welfare. Consequently, in the early 1930s,

both Torres' ideas and the concept of the social function gained considerable popularity.

Despite having died in 1917, Torres became among the most influential intellectuals of the Vargas era, since his nationalism and rejection of export-based development were in tune with political trends (Bravo 2016). His books were republished, and three works by other authors came out on his life and thought (Rachum 2015: 89). A society was formed in 1932 called the "Friends of Alberto Torres," which included prominent intellectual and political figures. Torres' ideas regarding the rural sector were endorsed by the former *tenentes*, who became key advocates of land reform in the early 1930s and in some cases held influential positions within the state (Camargo 1986; Bravo 2016). To advance their reformist views, in 1931 the *tenentes* created an organisation called the "October 3 Club," which issued a manifesto that reflected many of Torres' views.[3] On the agrarian question, the document asserted that it should be "obligatory for governments to reduce to the minimum possible all forms of latifundia [i.e., large landholdings]" and urged the state to distribute land to the landless (Bravo 2016: 122).

Vargas himself also echoed some of Torres' ideas about rural society, both during the early 1930s and in later years. In speeches, Vargas sometimes underscored the problem of rural-urban migration and the irony of landlessness in a land-rich country; for example, in a 1933 speech he argued that, because of the allure of the cities to destitute rural workers, "the urban proletariat has increased disproportionately, leading to pauperism and all the ills resulting from the surplus of work without permanent jobs" (quoted in Cardoso 2010: 786). In a 1941 address, he asserted that "it is impossible for us to maintain the dangerous anomaly of peasants without their own land in a country where rich valleys like the Amazon remain uncultivated and vast pastures are without livestock." Furthermore, he warned that if rural living conditions did not improve, Brazil could "witness an exodus from the fields and the overpopulation of the cities, an imbalance with unforeseeable consequences, capable of weakening or annulling the campaign for the integral improvement of the Brazilian man" (quoted in Cardoso 2010: 784).

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[3] Its name came from the date on which the 1930 coup d'état was initiated.

Just as Torres had, Vargas and his *tenente* allies called for reforms that would promote more equitable landownership without frontally attacking the institution of private property. Upon taking office, Vargas announced a programme of government, one aspect of which was the distribution of farmland in order to "encourage, without violence, the progressive extinction of the latifundium" (quoted in Rachum 2015: 89). A similar position was laid out in the October 3 Club's manifesto. Rather than demanding massive expropriation of private estates, it called on the state to "promote the social utilisation of public lands and those that have been illegally occupied and exploited so that, once they have reverted to state control, they can be used to establish cooperative agricultural colonies" (quoted in Bravo 2016: 122). While the *tenentes* would fade as a political force after the mid-1930s, Vargas continued to rhetorically endorse land reform periodically until his dramatic death by suicide in 1954 (Camargo 1986).

Like Torres' ideas, the social function of property, after being largely ignored in Brazil in previous decades, became the subject of substantial discussion during the early 1930s. Editorials about it were published in newspapers by eminent lawyers and politicians and some major political parties incorporated it into their programmes (Sodré n.d.: 54). It was also a topic of debate during the 1933–1934 constituent assembly and, as discussed below, would have some influence on the resulting constitutional text. The concept was endorsed by actors of diverse perspectives; for example, Antônio Augusto Borges de Medeiros, an erstwhile Vargas ally who sided with the conservative São Paulo opposition after the 1930 coup, argued that property should no longer be "the sacred and inviolable right of the French Revolution of 1789" but rather a "social function" and that, as such, "its exercise is subordinated to the norms and prescriptions that the state assigns it in the name of the public interest" (Medeiros 1933: 34). In its 1932 manifesto, the pro-Vargas October 3 Club asserted that "With regard to property, individual interests cannot be allowed to override the social function" (quoted in Bravo 2016: 121). Finally, João Mangabeira, a prominent legislator who opposed Vargas from the left, was an enthusiastic defender of the concept. In a 1934 editorial, Mangabeira called Duguit "the most profound, the most brilliant, the most original, the greatest of French constitutionalists," and argued that

in the jurist's Argentine lectures, Duguit "frames the question in such terms and resolves it in such a way that he turns his doctrine, frankly, victorious" (quoted in Maldaner 2015: 72).

While ideas advanced by Torres and Duguit gained considerable prominence after 1930, land reform advocates did not limit themselves to parroting these ideas. One relatively new theme that developed during these decades was the link between land reform and industrialisation. Torres had believed deeply in Brazil's agricultural vocation and showed little interest in promoting industry. However, that position ran contrary to the thrust of state policymaking under Vargas and his successors. Post-1930, the agrarian question was increasingly tied to the ongoing processes of import-substitution industrialisation and construction of a social security system to meet the needs of urban workers (Moreira 1998; Linhares and Teixeira da Silva 1999). For Brazilian manufacturing to prosper, it was argued, it would need a substantial domestic consumer market. That fact that much of the population was made up of destitute peasants was an obstacle to that goal, one that could be addressed through land redistribution. Moreover, by the 1950s, there were growing concerns that insufficient farm production would impede industrial development by stoking inflation and limiting inputs for sectors like food and textiles (Linhares and Teixeira da Silva 1999).

Such arguments were most forcefully articulated by economic nationalists, who played an important role not only in the *varguista* coalition but also in forces to the left of that coalition, especially the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) (Moreira 1998). Although banned from elections during most of this period, the PCB had significant intellectual influence and was increasingly involved in labour organising. Communists tended to frame the problems of the rural sector as reflecting the persistence of "feudal" or "pre-capitalist" economic relations that tied landless families to large landowners (Caminha 2018). Land reform would modernise the countryside by replacing these paternalistic, patron-client types of relations with ones based on market exchange. The PCB supported a more aggressive approach to land reform than other groups. Most of the *tenentes* and other moderate nationalists, including Vargas, called for a gradual transition away from the latifundium-dominated land tenure structure (Bravo 2016). They viewed forcible expropriation of private

holdings as a tool to be used cautiously and seemed to believe that much could be achieved simply by taxing fallow land. In contrast, the communists called for more abrupt and sweeping change.[4] In a manifesto published in 1958, for instance, the PCB endorsed "the radical transformation of the agrarian structure, with the liquidation of the land monopoly and pre-capitalist labour relations" (quoted in Santos 2008: 139).

Duguit's ideas regarding the social function of property were also not necessarily accepted without debate or in their original form (Maldaner 2015). Even critics tended to acknowledge during these years that private property rights could not be absolute. However, they (particularly conservative Catholic jurists) questioned Duguit's broader critique of individual rights as vague and dangerous. Rather than *being* a social function, they argued, private property should be thought of as *having* a social function and thus being subject to certain legal constraints on its use (Sodré no date; Maldaner 2015: 65–66). Probably owing to both the logical force of this argument and ignorance of Duguit's actual writings, which were not easily accessible, this perspective would become the dominant way of understanding the social function in Brazil, as in much of Latin America (Mirow 2010; Ondetti and Davy 2018).

As this discussion suggests, by the 1950s, the agrarian question was well established in Brazil at the ideational level. The belief that rural land inequality exerted a negative effect on the country's social and economic development was widespread, at least among more informed sectors of society. There was also substantial support for reform of the land tenure structure, although opinions varied considerably regarding the character of that reform. In terms of the onion model discussed in the introduction, the "agrarian question" was a type of social question, implying a general concern about the acute concentration of rural landownership coupled to a call for a solution. The agrarian question gave rise to different "policy paradigms" that framed the issue in different ways and envisaged different policies, ranging from rapid liquidation of all large estates to a gradualist approach based on distribution of public lands and

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[4] It is worth noting, however, that the most prominent PCB leader, Luís Carlos Prestes, was a former *tenente*. Prestes' embrace of Marxism made him a major exception to the moderate reformism that characterised the *tenentes*.

taxation of unproductive private holdings. The rise of the agrarian question was part of the more general "social question" that was arising as a result of changes set in motion by the global economic crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s. At the same time, however, it was also an aspect of an emerging societal concern with developing a modern industrial economy that would make Brazil autonomous of foreign powers, that is, an "economic question."

To a significant extent, societal recognition of the agrarian question came to be reflected in legal institutions. Most importantly, it had some impact on the new constitutions drafted in 1934 and 1946. Influenced by both domestic events and examples of socially oriented post-World War I European constitutions, the 1934 document featured a variety of social, labour and educational provisions symbolising the state's recognition of the social question. These included several provisions related to land access, an issue ignored by the 1891 constitution. Among other measures, the new constitution:

1) Required that agricultural work be the subject of a legal code that would "strive to fix the rural man in the countryside" (i.e. prevent rural-urban migration).
2) Required that the federal government, in cooperation with the states, organise "agricultural colonies" for the benefit of people from poorer regions and those lacking work.
3) Gave all Brazilians who did not already own property the right to obtain up to ten hectares of land for free by occupying it for ten years and turning it productive.
4) Prohibited concessions of more than 10,000 hectares of public land to a private actor without prior authorisation of the Senate.

In addition, the 1934 constitution contained an at least implicit social function clause. The initial draft had included a clause referring explicitly to that concept in a section titled "The Social Order." It read, "Guaranteed is the right to property, with content and limits to be defined by law. Property has, above all, a social function which cannot be exercised against the collective interest" (Maldaner 2015: 73). Over the protests of João Mangabeira and some other constituents, the clause was moved to

the "Declaration of Rights and Obligations" section and its wording altered to: "Guaranteed is the right to property, which cannot be exercised against the social or collective interest." These changes shifted the emphasis from social obligations to individual rights. Nevertheless, by asserting that property rights are limited by obligations to society as a whole, it represented a change relative to the 1891 constitution, which had merely allowed the state to seize private property for public projects such as roads or parks.

The 1937 constitution, which framed Vargas' dictatorial *Estado Novo* (New State) regime, excluded most of the pro-land reform provisions. However, the 1946 document, drafted under a more democratic regime after Vargas' resignation, restored them, albeit in somewhat different form. The state's obligations to "fix the rural man in the countryside" and create agricultural colonies were reaffirmed, and the area obtainable through squatting was increased to 25 hectares. In addition, the notion of a social function of property was reintroduced, without, once again, using that term. The section on individual rights stated, "Guaranteed is the right to property, save in the case of expropriation for public necessity or utility, or for social interest, conditional on prior and just indemnity in cash." In addition, the section on the "Economic and Social Order" indicated that "The use of property will be conditioned on social welfare. The law can…promote the just distribution of property, with equal opportunity for all." While this language was generally more favourable to land redistribution than the corresponding language in the 1934 constitution, the new stipulation requiring that owners of expropriated land be indemnified in cash imposed a limitation of no small importance (Camargo 1986: 173). Due to this rule, any substantial land reform based on expropriation of private holdings would be vastly expensive to the government that implemented it.

Despite the intellectual rise of the agrarian question and the inclusion of moderately pro-land reform language in the constitution, little was actually done during these decades to alter the structure of rural landowning. Vargas established several colonisation projects on public land. Most were a part of a highly publicised, but practically insignificant initiative during the early 1940s called the "March to West" by which the state tried to populate and develop a part of Brazil's vast rural hinterland (Lenharo

1986). Following the 1945 democratic transition, a number of bills were introduced in Congress that sought to advance land reform (Camargo 1986: 171–187). Most attempted to provide a statutory basis for the state to expropriate underutilised private holdings, and at least one tried to skirt the constitutional requirement of compensation in cash through a creative interpretation of this provision.[5] Nevertheless, none of them was ultimately approved. Similarly, as Lavinas points out in this volume, the state did very little during these years to extend to workers in the countryside the social and labour policies that benefitted urban workers. As with land reform, Vargas and his allies made repeated promises to carry out such reforms, but ultimately did not do so (Camargo 1986; Fausto 2006).

The key reason behind the lack of progress was an imbalance of political influence in favour of conservative forces. Vargas' rise to power had both reflected and reinforced the weakening of the rural oligarchy. Nevertheless, landowners retained great power, due to their wealth, their role as suppliers of foreign exchange and their vast political network. In 1932, the São Paulo coffee oligarchy had spearheaded an armed rebellion against Vargas. Although the government eventually triumphed, the conflict lasted three months and took hundreds of lives. Vargas subsequently bowed to São Paulo's demand for a transition towards an elected, constitutional government. This concession was the beginning of the end of the influence of the *tenentes*, the most important social reformist faction associated with Vargas. The conservative turn was consolidated under the *Estado Novo*. The democratic opening of 1945 did not initially revert this situation, since landowners used their influence in Congress to frustrate efforts at land reform. Much of that influence was exercised through the Social Democratic Party (PSD), the more powerful of the two *varguista* parties, which owed its electoral force largely to conservative rural political networks. By the 1950s, relatively few voices openly defended the agrarian status quo. However, various motives were averred for resisting land reform bills, including the importance of protecting property rights, the need to postpone reform until a supposed future time of greater

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[5] A 1952 bill endorsed by President Vargas would have mandated the state to compensate expropriated landowners at the original purchase value of their land, rather than its current market value (Camargo 1986: 180).

political tranquillity and the risk of undermining investment and production (Camargo 1986; Linhares and Teixeira da Silva 1999).

One important underlying reason for the persistence of landowner power was the quiescence of the rural lower class. While Brazil experienced some non-political symptoms of rural discontent, such as millenarian movements and rural banditry (Façó 1991; Martins 1995), no substantial grassroots movement for land reform or other state policies emerged during these years. For the most part, large landowners remained solidly in control of their workforces and communities. To the extent that land reform arose as a national issue, it was because of the actions of urban political elites who sought to use it to advance their own agendas. Had there been a substantial mobilisation of the rural poor, Vargas and his followers might have leveraged it to attempt substantive land reform, or at least extend social and labour rights to the countryside. However, the lack of a significant challenge made such a turn of events unlikely.

Mobilisation Without Reform: Late 1950s to Mid-1980s

What could be thought of as a third period in the evolution of the agrarian question runs from the end of the 1950s until the reestablishment of democracy in the mid-1980s. This period was characterised most notably by, on the one hand, the emergence of a substantial grassroots movement for land reform and, on the other, a conservative reaction that ended up stonewalling the movement's core demand and contributing to the rise of a military dictatorship. Although this period ultimately did not result in significant land reform and was not as fertile ideationally as the previous ones, it was not totally sterile for advocates of this policy. Institutional reforms occurred, which would set a high bar for future authorities. In addition, certain ideas arose that would gradually come to have a significant impact on the struggle for land.

The traditional passivity of the rural lower class came to an end in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Mobilisation began among tenant farmers in the state of Pernambuco and, with the support of leftist politician Francisco Julião, gradually spread to other parts of the poor north-eastern

region of Brazil (Azevêdo 1982; Bastos 1984). Known as the "Peasant Leagues," the movement was involved in both providing its members with practical assistance with problems like legal defence and medical care and demanding sweeping land reform, which it vowed to pursue "by law or by force." Another regional movement for land emerged in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil's southernmost state. Like the Peasant Leagues, the Movement of Landless Farmers (MASTER), was initially a defensive response by poor farmers with precarious land access (Eckert 1984; Wagner 1989). However, with the implicit support of leftist governor Leonel Brizola, it began invading properties considered to be vulnerable to state seizure, due to abandonment or dubious ownership claims.

During the 1960s there also arose a rural unionisation movement. For years, PCB activists had sought to organise rural workers, but their progress was impeded by landowner hostility, lack of a favourable legal structure and the indifference or hostility of governing authorities. Under the left-leaning government of João Goulart (1961–1964), however, the political climate became more hospitable and, in 1963, the Congress passed the Rural Worker Statute, which facilitated union registration. PCB-led unions grew in number, especially in the northeast (Maybury-Lewis 1994; Pereira 1997). Concerned that the rising rural mobilisation would be harnessed by leftist forces, groups associated with the Catholic Church also entered the fray, organising progressive but non-communist unions. State authorities likewise sought to encourage and channel the growing rural labour movement, at least initially as a way of counterbalancing the Peasant Leagues, which had rejected collaboration with Goulart. The unions were more active in organising wage laborers than the Leagues, but the social bases of the two overlapped significantly. Although more focused on bread-and-butter issues than the Leagues, the unions also endorsed land reform.

Nevertheless, the growing clamour for land redistribution did not result in significant reform. President Goulart, who represented the more leftist faction within *varguismo*, introduced legislation that would have allowed a far-reaching land reform, in part by eliminating the constitutional requirement of prior compensation for expropriations in cash (Dezemone 2016: 141). However, Congress refused to pass it, along with some other progressive reforms. Moreover, Goulart's efforts to use mass

protest to pressure legislators into approving his agenda backfired, helping provoke a military coup in 1964 and the establishment of a conservative authoritarian regime that would last until 1985. Although the regime initially showed signs of wanting to implement its own expropriation-based land reform (including legislation discussed below), it ultimately backed off this proposal. Instead, its agricultural policies focused on promoting technical modernisation, mainly through the provision of subsidised credit to large producers. To the extent they were addressed at all, rural social problems were dealt with through other policies. Reviving a Vargas-era initiative, the regime established a series of agricultural colonisation projects in frontier areas, especially the vast Amazon River basin. In 1971, it also introduced a social security programme, including pensions and healthcare, exclusively for people involved in agriculture and other rural activities. Although the benefits were extremely modest, the programme was extensive and did not require any contribution from beneficiaries (Malloy 1979: 132–134; Houtzager 2008).

To make matters worse for the land reform cause, doubts about the wisdom of advancing it grew within the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), traditionally among its most ardent defenders. As mentioned earlier, the PCB had long stressed the importance of mobilising the peasantry to struggle for land, since breaking up large estates would encourage a thorough transition to capitalism in the countryside (Passos Guimaraes 1963). However, that view was increasingly challenged by Caio Prado Jr., a leading Marxist intellectual (Prado 1963, 1966). What distinguished the Brazilian rural society, Prado suggested, was not its feudalism (which he questioned), but the weak ties of the population to land. The Portuguese had established an economy based on vast plantations relying on slave labour. Outside of these estates, few families enjoyed stable access to enough land to maintain an independent family farm, even after the end of slavery. They therefore depended deeply on large landowners for their livelihood, whether in the form of wages or quasi-wage compensation. Thus, with the exception of a few rural areas affected by European immigration, Brazil lacked a landed peasantry. Consequently, Prado believed, calls to mobilise for land redistribution were destined to fall largely on deaf ears. Instead, he urged the PCB to focus its appeals to rural dwellers on labour-oriented demands, such as better wages and working

conditions (Prado 1963). While Prado's arguments probably helped encourage the PCB's embrace of an incremental, union-based strategy in the countryside, the party continued to call for land reform as a long-term solution (Pereira 1997; Santos 2008).

Despite the lack of substantial land redistribution and the wavering advocacy of the PCB, this period did bring some developments with positive implications for advocates of land reform. First, significant advances occurred with regard to legal institutions. In 1964 President Humberto Castello Branco, the first leader of the military regime, decreed the Land Statute, which appeared to mandate a substantial land reform. The law allowed expropriation of private holdings based not only on low productivity but also on sheer size. In other words, even a productive estate could be expropriated if it exceeded a certain number of hectares. A constitutional amendment approved at the same time removed the requirement that expropriated landowners be indemnified in cash and instead allowed compensation in bonds payable over a 20-year span.[6] The law declared that its purpose was to "condition the use of land on its social function," "promote the just and adequate use of property" and "make obligatory the rational exploitation of land" (article 18), among other objectives. In addition, the regime's 1967 constitution became the first in Brazil's history to use the term "social function," stating that one of the principles of the "Economic and Social Order" was "the social function of property" (article 157). Although they went largely unimplemented, these robust legal provisions, as discussed later, established a high baseline for subsequent legislative initiatives.

Second, this era brought some innovative ideas related to the agrarian question. The most consequential arose within the Catholic Church, a crucial institution in this traditionally Catholic country. The church had long been considered a bastion of the status quo. Its occasional advocacy of social reform, including land redistribution, was motivated largely by fears that social grievances would be exploited by godless communists. However, during the late 1960s and 1970s, it developed a strong left

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[6] Payment would be based on values declared for the purposes of the federal land tax. Since landowners had an incentive to minimise the value of their land for that purpose, this rule would tend to exert downward pressure on compensation.

wing of its own. This "popular church" movement was deeply committed to land reform, a policy it came to view as the embodiment of Christian values of fraternity and solidarity with the poor and downtrodden. Not only did the church advocate land redistribution, but Catholic lay activists and priests also became actively involved in organising rural people to struggle for land (Mainwaring 1986; Martins 1991; Adriance 1995).

Central to this process was the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), which, beginning in about the early 1970s, adopted a consistent pro-land reform position. In 1975, moreover, the CNBB founded the Pastoral Commission on Land (CPT), an entity devoted to supporting demands for land reform through advice, legal defence, donations and direct involvement in organising initiatives (Poletto and Canuto 2002). Though initially focused on the Amazon, where the military regime's development initiatives had spurred violent conflict over land, the CPT quickly established local chapters throughout much of the country. It supported efforts to unionise workers and, as will be discussed later, played a fundamental part in creating what would become the key land reform organisation of the post-military era, the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), in 1984. CPT activists used religious symbols and biblical references to frame the struggle, comparing it, for example, to Moses' decades-long trek through the desert to the promised land. Although the military had little interest in redistributing land, the church's activism helped revive the agrarian question during the early 1980s, forcing authorities to adopt efforts to quell land-related conflict, especially in Amazonia.

The popular church movement had both international and domestic roots. In part, it was a response to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), a series of gatherings through which the global Catholic Church had resolved to make itself more relevant to the lives of the faithful (Adriance 1986). In Latin America, this call was interpreted as a mandate to develop a "preferential option for the poor" or, in other words, to adopt efforts to materially improve the lives of the poor in the here-and-now, not simply through charity but by supporting political efforts at equity-enhancing reforms. During the late 1960s and 1970s, Latin American theologians, including the Brazilian priest Leonardo Boff, played a fundamental part in the development of "liberation theology," a

school of thought that argues that the church has a moral and doctrinal responsibility to intervene in society on behalf of the poor. While the popular church movement extended throughout much of Latin America, Brazil was one of the countries most affected by it (Bruneau 1982; Mainwaring 1986).

Thus, although the period analysed in this section was characterised most notably by the state's ultimate rejection of the demands for land reform raised by the Peasant Leagues and other actors of the pre-coup era, by the early 1980s, buoyed by frontier violence and Catholic Church sponsorship, the agrarian question was re-emerging as a national issue. In addition, the military had left a relatively positive institutional legacy, including the Land Statute and a constitution that explicitly recognised private property's social function.

Democracy, Protest and Limited Reform: Mid-1980s to the Present

The period since the return of elected civilian governance in 1985 has been marked by two major shifts related to the agrarian question. First, grassroots mobilisation for land reform achieved a scale and level of organisation unprecedented in Brazil's history. Second, land redistribution by the state, though still limited, also reached its historical peak. These changes are related to the broad context of regime democratisation but do not reflect gains in legal institutions specific to agrarian reform, which arguably deteriorated relative to the military era. The key ideas underpinning the struggle for land have continued to be largely the same as those in earlier eras, but in recent decades the actual implementation of land reform has given rise to a relatively new debate about its virtues and flaws, with advocates often emphasising the environmental and health benefits of smallholder production and detractors disparaging land reform settlements as poverty-ridden shanty towns.

The armed forces' control of the federal executive branch, seized through the 1964 coup, was returned to civilians in 1985.[7] Over the next five years, Brazil extended the suffrage to illiterates (who had previously been denied the vote), approved a new constitution and held its first popular presidential election since 1961. Despite numerous crises and the removal of two presidents by Congress, democracy has survived more than three decades.

Sustained democracy, combined with the support of other civil society actors, helped give rise to a grassroots land reform movement that by the second half of the 1990s constituted a substantial political force (Fernandes 1996; Wright and Wolford 2003; Ondetti 2008a; Pahnke 2018). It was anchored by the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), an organisation combining centralised national leadership with local affiliates throughout the country. The MST arose in the extreme south of Brazil, but gradually expanded to other regions. While its creation was largely a product of activism by the popular church, especially the CPT, it eventually became autonomous of the church. It developed its own secular worldview made up of a heterogeneous mixture of mainly Marxist ideas, as well as its own distinctive tactical methodology, based on massive invasions (or "occupations," as activists term them) of under-utilised private estates and the formation of roadside squatter camps. While overshadowed by the MST, the rural unions also continued to struggle for land and, inspired by the MST's relative success, adopted some of its methods. The movement peaked in the late 1990s, when there were some 850 land occupations nationwide (see Fig. 10.1). In recent years it has declined, due in part to authorities' growing unwillingness to grant land to people who occupy it. Nevertheless, at its peak the movement was undoubtedly a much larger and better-organised phenomenon than its counterpart of the early 1960s.

Land reform has also intensified greatly relative to the past. Official data suggest that some 95% of the families that have benefitted from land reform in Brazil received their land during the current democratic period

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[7] The legislature was only closed for a short period during the early 1970s but functioned under substantial restrictions thereafter. The first post-coup civilian president, José Sarney, was chosen by a special electoral college. It was only in 1989 that a popular election was held for president.
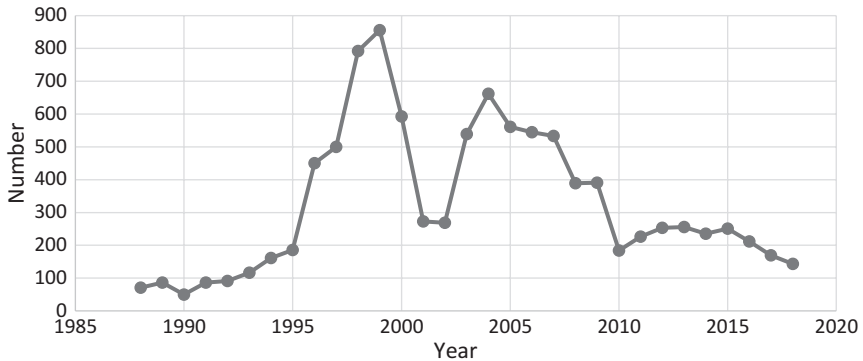
Fig. 10.1 Land occupations in Brazil, 1988–2018. (*Source:* The author, data from reports of the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT; https://www.cptnacional.org.br/index.php/publicacoes-2/conflitos-no-campo-brasil) and the database Dataluta of the Núcleo de Estudos, Pesquisas e Projetos de Reforma Agrária (NERA), Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP; http://www2.fct.unesp.br/nera/relatoriosbr.php))

(see Table 10.1). This period also accounts for more than 75% of all expropriated farmland. Clearly, protest actions led by the MST and other groups have played a key role in pressuring the state to redistribute land, mainly by calling the attention of the media and the public to the plight of the landless (Carter 2011). Protest has been relatively effective in part because Brazilians, as opinion polls have consistently shown, generally support land reform (Ondetti 2008a, b; Simonetti et al. 2012) and, in a society with a free press and competitive elections, authorities cannot ignore public preferences entirely.

Nevertheless, reform activity has been inconsistent. As Table 10.1 indicates, the first three presidents of the democratic era (José Sarney, Fernando Collor and Itamar Franco) did not redistribute much land. That trend ended, however, under Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) of the centrist Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), who settled more landless families than all his predecessors combined and expropriated almost as much private land. His successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) of the leftist Workers' Party (PT), also granted land to a substantial number of families but did so mainly by distributing public lands, legalising informal holdings and filling vacancies in existing

Table 10.1 Land reform in Brazil, 1900–2019

Presidential term	Families Granted Land		Hectares of Land Expropriated	
	Number of families	Percentage of all families	Hectares	Percentage of total land
Pre-1985	45,471	4.7	6,044,955	23.7
Sarney (1985–1989)	68,999	7.1	4,240,141	16.7
Collor (1990–1992)	34,773	3.6	163,902	0.6
Franco (1993–1994)	14,407	1.5	1,101,856	4.3
Cardoso (1995–2002)	408,976	42.1	10,167,614	39.9
Da Silva (2003–2010)	359,476	37.0	3,511,552	13.8
Rousseff (2011–2016)	36,564	3.8	224,216	0.9
Temer (2016–2018)	3,292	0.3	5,344	0.0
Bolsonaro (2019–)	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	971,958	100	25,459,580	100

Source: The author, data from Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA)
[a]2019 figures are through July

settlements, rather than expropriation. After da Silva's first term (2003–2006), reform began to tail off, and it has ground to a virtual halt in recent years. Even Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) of the PT did little in this area. These fluctuations arguably reflect the fact that land reform is only materially relevant to a small minority of Brazilians, given that more than 80% of the population now lives in urban areas. Its salience thus tends to surge in response to dramatic events, such as instances of violent repression against land occupiers, only to fade as public attention inevitably shifts to other issues (Ondetti 2008b). Moreover, during the last two decades the expansion of the conditional cash transfer programme *Bolsa Família* has undermined land reform by providing an alternative approach for fighting rural poverty (Morton 2015).

Inconsistent implementation of reform helps explain why land inequality remains high.[8] Current figures are unavailable, but data from the 2006 agricultural census show a level of inequality, measured in terms of the Gini coefficient, almost identical to that of 1985 (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE). Even within Latin America, which has the most skewed rural land distribution of any region, Brazil ranks among the five most unequal countries, with a Gini of 0.87 (Oxfam 2016: 22).

The institutional framework for land reform has played an ambivalent role in the fate of this policy under democracy (Mészáros 2013; Ondetti 2016). On the one hand, the new constitution ratified in 1988 follows the military era constitution in explicitly adhering to the social function principle and allowing the state to expropriate large rural properties that do not fulfil that function, compensating the owners with bonds. Furthermore, it seemingly sets a higher bar for satisfying the social function, requiring not only "rational and adequate exploitation" of the land but also preservation of the natural environment, observation of labour laws and "exploitation that favours the welfare of both owners and workers" (article 186). On the other hand, Article 185 states flatly that "productive property" cannot be expropriated. Inserted in response to landowner pressure, this article would seem to neutralise the last three social function criteria, since they can only serve as the basis for expropriation if the property is also unproductive. In addition, unlike the 1964 Land Statute, the 1988 constitution does not provide for the possibility of expropriation based on the sheer size of a property. In fact, by stating that productive land cannot be expropriated, it explicitly eliminates that possibility. Thus, although the 1988 constitution is widely known for its pioneering social provisions, with regard to land reform it is a deeply ambivalent document.

The ideas deployed during this period to justify land reform have for the most part been the same ones used by activists in earlier decades: land reform can alleviate rural poverty and hunger, both for humanitarian reasons and to slow down migration to the overcrowded cities; it can increase agricultural output by putting unutilised land into production; it can

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[8] Socio-economic trends, such as the growth of soybean production, which is characterised by strong economies of scale, may also contribute to inequality.

lower the prices of farm goods; and it can dynamise the economy by making consumers out of people who previously earned barely enough to meet subsistence needs. These arguments can be found in the public statements and documents of the MST, rural unions and CPT, as well as in hundreds of books, articles, theses and editorials published by left-leaning intellectuals and land reform activists.[9]

Nevertheless, recent decades have brought some ideational innovations, at least in a relative sense. These have come from both the advocates of land reform and their adversaries, who have grown in organisation. Among defenders of land redistribution, the most novel trend is the attempt to frame land reform as a policy favouring environmental protection and human health. In its early years, the MST leadership sought to mould its settlements into large cooperatives operating essentially as commercial farms, albeit within a socialist framework (Ondetti 2008a: 125–126; Andrade Neto 2015). The commitment to cooperativism has for the most part endured, despite often encountering resistance from settlers (Brenneisen 2002; Devore 2015). Over time, however, the MST's discourse has become increasingly critical of large-scale commercial farming methods, especially the use of technology packages marketed by multinational firms like Monsanto and Bayer, involving chemical fertilisers and pesticides and genetically modified seeds.

Initially, opposition to such technologies focused on the costs involved, which MST leaders argued were prohibitive for small-scale producers, as well as on the physical risks to farmers from applying highly toxic pesticides. Gradually, however, the MST has come to frame its rejection of modern farm technologies more broadly as reflecting a commitment to organic agriculture or "agroecology" (Coordenação Nacional do MST 2010; Bosatto and de Carmo 2013; De'Carli 2013). Since about the mid-2000s, it has increasingly sought to position land reform as a policy in harmony with the growing consumer interest in food that is free of pesticides and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). It promotes agroecological practices among MST settlers through courses and internal publications and advertises its achievements externally via urban

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[9] Stédile (2013a) and Stédile (2013b) provide a representative sample of contemporary pro-land reform writings, as well as some anti-reform views.

organic food markets, seminars and participation in pro-organic food coalitions. Among other achievements, it claims to be the largest producer of organic rice in Latin America (Camargo 2017). According to the president of an MST rice cooperative in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, organic production:

> isn't just an economic alternative, but a choice for an integral way of life, which views agriculture as an ecological activity for the benefit of both the families that produce and those that consume, with respect to the environment and biodiversity. Ideologically, we don't want to argue with anyone, but it's been proven that when you apply insecticides to crops, what will follow is toxicity." (Quoted in Camargo 2017)

In advancing this position, MST leaders have made common cause with politicians, celebrities, non-governmental organisations and other movement organisations that oppose the growing technification of food production. The MST forms part of such entities as the National Articulation for Agroecology and the Permanent Campaign against Chemical Pesticides and in Favour of Life, both of which promote organic farming within Brazil. It is also part of an international network called La Via Campesina, which opposes chemical and GMO use as part of a broader defence of small-scale agriculture that includes support for domestic production of foodstuffs (i.e. "food sovereignty"), domestic control of land and water resources and land reform (La Via Campesina 2019).

Thus, the largely Marxist emphasis on the class struggle and opposition to capitalism that characterised the MST's discourse for most of its history has gradually given way to one in which "post-material" concerns with the environment and food safety play a larger role. This transformation has been driven by the changing views of Brazilian society as a whole and, in all probability, a desire on the part of the MST to build a broader set of alliances. To some extent, this shift has also been embraced by other entities representing smallholders, such the Confederation of Workers in Agriculture (CONTAG), which brings together the rural unions, and the CPT (Sabourin et al. 2017: 365). In fact, over the last two decades, there has been a convergence of the land reform and organic farming

movements that has helped make Brazil one of the regional leaders in pro-organic agriculture policymaking (Sabourin et al. 2017).

However, the innovations have not been limited to pro-land reform forces. Faced with unprecedented challenges to their property rights, combined with an inability to fall back on military intervention, landowners have engaged in new efforts to defend their interests. During the mid-1980s, in response to the announcement of a land reform plan by Sarney, the first president of the democratic era, landowners from across Brazil created a peak organisation called the Democratic Rural Union (UDR). The UDR sought to both lobby against land redistribution at the national level and support local efforts to defend rural properties from land occupations. Its association with acts of violence eventually led to its disappearance as a national organisation, but during the 1990s landowning and commercial farming interests gradually constructed a legislative coalition whose breadth and discipline easily exceeded those of most of Brazil's numerous political parties. Since then, the Parliamentary Front for Agriculture[10] has typically controlled 20–25% of the seats in Brazil's Congress and used its weight to advance bills that favour big agriculture with regard to land, labour rights, environmental protection and other areas (Simionatto and Costa 2012; Corrêa 2018).

As part of its efforts to fight off land reform, Brazil's commercial farm sector and its allies and sympathisers in the state, press and intelligentsia have developed a discourse that emphasises stability, efficiency and economic growth. To a large extent, their messaging echoes that of past opponents of land reform. However, some themes are relatively new. First, to a greater extent than in earlier eras, opponents of land reform have argued that, due to the intense process of agricultural modernisation since the military era, the unproductive latifundium has been essentially extinguished from the countryside (Graziano Neto 1999; Navarro 2014; Bergamo 2015). Agriculture, they emphasise, is now the most efficient and internationally competitive sector of the Brazilian economy. At the same time, it employs relatively few people, due to mechanisation and urban-rural migration. From this perspective, land reform is an anachronism, a policy rendered irrelevant by economic progress. As one author

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[10] This group is better known by its informal name, *bancada ruralista*.

puts it, "…the economic and productive changes of the new phase of our agricultural history have laid to rest the Brazilian agrarian question and it is unlikely to be revived" (Navarro 2014: 700).

A second relatively new theme consists of attacks on existing land reform settlements, which barely existed prior to the current democratic period. Critics point out that settlements suffer from low levels of production, widespread poverty and heavy dependence on government income support programmes. Rather than thriving smallholder communities, they are miserable "rural shanty towns" (*favelas rurais*), offering residents few prospects for economic progress. As a result, many settlers end up selling or abandoning their plots (*O Estado de São Paulo* 2014). Opponents of land reform typically attribute these problems to both the settlers' lack of "vocation" for agriculture and the state's failure to provide settlements with adequate infrastructure (e.g. roads, electricity, irrigation), credit and extension services. The proper response to this situation, they argue, is to slow down or even halt the distribution of new land and instead focus on equipping settlements with needed infrastructure and services. To the extent that land reform continues, in their view, it should focus on granting plots to people selected on the basis of their proven experience in agriculture.

Of course, these points are disputed by land reform activists. The apparent productivity of large landholdings, they argue, has much to do with the failure to update the indices of agricultural production used to judge whether a property is fulfilling its social function. Advances in farm technology have made possible greater per hectare yields, yet the indices used date back to the 1970s.[11] Moreover, while acknowledging the poverty of many settlements, they insist that the state ought to improve settlement quality while at the same time also intensifying land redistribution. Nevertheless, the views endorsed by commercial farming interests and their supporters have clearly informed state policies over the last decade or so, as reflected in the sharp decline of land expropriations and new settlements, even under nominally left-leaning governments (Simonetti 2015).

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[11] The da Silva government proposed updating the indices, but backed down under pressure from farm interests (Éboli 2011).

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the evolution of the key ideas regarding the agrarian question in Brazil, as well as their interaction with actors, institutions and policy outputs. It has argued that the history of the agrarian question can be understood in terms of four periods defined by intellectual and political events that affected how it was understood and acted upon. The characteristics of each period are summarised in Table 10.2.

As the chapter has suggested, most of the core ideas supporting redistribution of rural land were already well established by the mid-twentieth century. Beginning in about the 1910s, land redistribution gradually came to be viewed by many Brazilians as a vital tool for relieving poverty, slowing down rural-urban migration and promoting economic development. To a large extent, these are the same notions propagated by land reform activists today.

Nevertheless, ideas about the agrarian question have not remained wholly static. New arguments have risen in favour of it, emphasising especially its coherence with Catholic social teachings and, later, concerns about the environment and human health. In addition, there have been changes in the criticisms of land reform, most (though not all) of which have come from conservatives. In recent decades, these have gone beyond the traditional emphasis on property rights and stability to underscore both the obsolescence of land reform, given the modernisation of agriculture and the accompanying rural exodus, and the failure of official settlement policy to produce thriving rural communities.

These ideational innovations have occurred not in isolation, but as initiatives in an ongoing political struggle over the distribution of land. For decades, pressure for land reform came mainly from urban middle-class reformers who championed it out of a blend of humanitarianism and concern for advancing industrialisation. Beginning in the late 1950s, however, the potential beneficiaries of land reform, that is, poor smallholders, tenant farmers, sharecroppers and rural wage workers, began to mobilise to demand this policy. Ironically, the result was not so much reform as repression and conservative agricultural modernisation. However, the military years did bring certain changes ultimately

Table 10.2 Land reform in Brazil, 1910 to the present: changing ideas and policies

Period	Political and economic context	New Ideas/Frames (Pro- and anti-reform)	Institutional Innovations	Key Actors	Policies
1910–1920	Stable oligarchic regime dominated by agrarian elites	Pro-reform: social costs of land inequality; social function of property. Anti-reform: none (too little threat to elicit a counter-frame).	None	None	None
1920–mid 1950s	Military revolts; Great Depression; 1930 military coup; import substitution industrialisation	Pro-reform: land reform as tactic for promoting industrialisation and capitalist development. Anti-reform: land reform as a threat to property rights and political stability.	Social function-like clauses of 1934 and 1946 constitutions	Tenentes; urban middle classes; Communist Party of Brazil (PCB); Getúlio Vargas	Limited colonisation of public lands
Late 1950s-early 1980s	Political polarisation followed by military dictatorship (1964–1985)	Pro-reform: liberation theology/preferential option for the poor. Anti-reform: labour rights as an alternative to land reform; technical modernisation as an alternative to land reform	Land Statute (1964); social function clause of 1967 Constitution	Peasant Leagues; rural unions; National Confederation of Catholic Bishops (CNBB); Pastoral Commission on Land (CPT)	Limited colonisation of public lands and occasional expropriation

| Mid-1980s-present | Sustained democratisation; market reforms (1990s); rise of moderate left to power (2003–2016) | Pro-reform: land reform and agroecology. Anti-reform: extinction of latifundium; settlements as rural *favelas* | Social function clauses of 1988 Constitution | Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST); Democratic Rural Union (UDR); Parliamentary Front for Agriculture | Significant land reform but limited change in land inequality |

favourable to land redistribution, most notably an institutional acknowledgement of the legitimacy of this policy and the rise of a progressive movement within the Catholic Church that placed great priority on land reform. The return to democracy since the mid-1980s has helped translate these advances (despite some backtracking in the institutional realm) into an unprecedented increase in expropriation and settlement activity, in part by facilitating the rise of a grassroots movement able to exert substantial pressure on the state.

Nevertheless, Brazil's agrarian structure remains highly unequal. In the last decade, moreover, the state has made little effort to redistribute additional land. Under President Jair Bolsonaro, who came to office in January 2019, land redistribution has even been officially suspended (Maisonnave 2019). The contrast between the broad acknowledgement of the importance of land reform in Brazilian society and the lack of actual reform can be understood as a product of the power imbalance between the landless and land-poor, who control few economic or political resources, and the owners of large landholdings, a group comprised of relatively wealthy people who often enjoy considerable influence within the state. While many Brazilians who are not members of either of these categories sympathise with the idea of land reform, their support for this policy is generally too tepid and wavering to overcome the determined resistance of landowners. Thus, Brazil seems likely to remain a country in which the agrarian question is broadly acknowledged ideationally and institutionally, but only superficially addressed in actual policy.

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Part VI

Conclusion

One Hundred Years of Social Protection: The Rise of the Social Question in Brazil, India, China, and South Africa, 1920–2020

Lutz Leisering

This volume ventures into a largely uncharted territory, enquiring if, when, and how the social question has been raised in four countries over the last hundred years—countries that are better known as "emerging markets" in the early twenty-first century. Assuming that the social question reflects problems of social integration in modernising societies against the background of modern ideas of equality and human rights, the contributors to this volume investigate social policies in the four countries, starting from the interwar years, with special emphasis on social protection.

The volume provides an analysis focused on ideas reflected in contemporary documents—ideas as a strand of social protection in their own right and as legitimising and constituting interests and institutions. Ideas are a key factor in explaining the rise of social protection, as depicted in

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Gough's summary explanatory model of the "Five Is" (see Chap. 1, Fig. 1.1). The volume takes a historical approach to overcome the presentist bias of the current literature on social policy in the Global South. Midgley's (1984) historical study, now a classic, went largely unnoticed at the time of publication.

In addition to our substantive research interest, we also seek to contribute to theorising Southern welfare. Accordingly, in this concluding chapter, I[1] present the main findings of the country-focused chapters in a comparative perspective and framed by five overarching concepts—historical evolution, social construction, political language, multireferentiality, and transnational diffusion—that build on the theoretical framework developed in Chap. 1. The five concepts can generally serve as a conceptual template for studies of social protection in Southern countries. For each of the five concepts, I give examples, counterexamples, and specifications from the country studies. The chapter closes with theoretically and empirically grounded thoughts about the future of social protection in middle-income countries.

The first finding relates to the *historical evolution* of social protection: the hundred years from 1920 to 2020 mark the rise of social protection programmes in the four countries. The second finding relates to the *social construction of the social*, that is, to the articulation of "social" issues: all four countries, except India, have articulated social issues in a generalised way as a social question, which is the core of a multi-layered configuration of social ideas, as conceptualised in the onion skin model (see Fig. 1.2, Chap. 1). The third finding concerns *political language*: the use of "social" semantics has spread in all four countries. The fourth finding concerns "*multireferentiality*", that is, the linkage of social protection to diverse ideas and interests beyond purely "social" ideas (like social justice or solidarity): social protection policies were largely driven and shaped by "non-social" ideas and interests that acted as frames. The fifth finding

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[1] As in Chap. 1, "I" refers to the author's views and arguments, while "we" refers to the volume's contributors' views and findings. I thank Sony Pellissery, Marianne Ulriksen, Gabriel Ondetti, Hu Aiqun, and Jeremy Seekings for comments which helped to improve the chapter (the latter gave particularly extensive comments). I am also indebted to John Berten for communication on the history of the terms "social insurance" and "social security", and to Ravi Ahuja for explaining to me the meaning of socialism in India.

describes the *transnational diffusion* of ideas: external ideas have pervaded domestic social protection policies from the beginning, testifying to the rise of world society, conceived as a global consciousness and shared world culture (Meyer 2007: 262f.).

Historical Evolution: 1920 to 2020 Was the Century of Social Protections for These Four Countries

In Europe, the social question arose in the 1830s and 1840s, and substantial social policy measures were taken from the 1880s onward. After World War II, the "welfare state" as a new type of state and society unfolded. Social policy in the Global South, including our four countries, came later but not as late as often assumed. When we initiated our collaborative research project, we first thought of starting with the 1940s. However, the empirical evidence taught us to start earlier. We found that all four countries had an *early start* regarding ideas and actual legislation. This is our first finding on the evolution of social protection policies. Between 1920 and 1950, many of the basic social categories that were used in later debates already figured in politics. The year 1920 is not a neat cut-off point, though. Some social ideas and (highly selective) measures started earlier, such as the ideas of Duguit and Torres on land reform (1911, 1914) that were applied in Brazil later, the famine codes in late nineteenth-century India, and the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century debates on the "cost of living" in Brazil.

We know that social protection policies do not simply reflect socioeconomic conditions, as the functionalist theory of the "logic of industrialisation" assumed in the 1960s. Instead, political factors mediate processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, and dislocation. Although the four countries started social protection roughly around the same years, they did so at different levels of economic development, except China and India which started from the same very low level (see Chap. 1, Table 1.3).

The second finding regarding the evolution of social protection is, as expected, the *expansion* of social protection over the last hundred years. The social question was articulated in an increasingly inclusive way, and new discourses, actors, and categories relating to the social emerged. Moreover, older debates, doctrines, and actors were "socialised", that is, they turned to social issues. Even in periods of upheaval, war, and civil war, and under democracy and dictatorship alike (the latter in Brazil from 1930 to 1945 and 1964 to 1985 and in China since 1949), social protections were debated and legislated. There were periods of intensified social policy activity, as in South Africa from 1924 to 1933, Brazil from 1930 to1945, India from 1946 to 1952, China from the 2000s until the early 2010s, and during the 1940s in all four countries. In South Africa, a key component of the national social protection arrangement, old-age pensions, did not change much during *apartheid*.

The finding of overall expansion needs *qualification*. First, there were periods of retrenchment, notably in China during the early reform era (1978–2000), similar to what Rimlinger (1971) calls a "liberal break" in his analysis of the rise of Northern social policy. This describes a period in which older welfare institutions (in the case of China: socialist welfare) are crumbling, while new institutions that would address the social problems ensuing from economic liberalisation are still rudimentary. Second, expansion mainly refers to the extension of coverage and not necessarily to raising benefit levels and improving the quality of services. Third, there was massive decoupling or delayed coupling between ideas and legislation and also between legislation and implementation, as in the case of the Employees' Social Insurance Act of 1948 in India. Implementation was often deficient or absent. Debates tended to produce an ideational surplus, which could reflect either empty promises or powerful ideas that would mobilise people and fuel later reforms. In Brazil, decades of calls for thoroughgoing land reform produced very modest results, even under leftist governments. In Brazil, there was also a gulf between the Constitution, which is rich in social promises, and the reality of social services and living conditions. India's history is replete with ideas that created a "horizon of expectation" (Ahuja), which largely remained a

horizon. In China, the implementation of the industrial accident insurance has been very patchy (Liu and Leisering 2017).

Did the early beginnings of social protection ideas and programmes constitute an institutional *path*? The answer is mixed. There is evidence of social protections' institutional continuity across major historical junctures (qualifying Piachaud and Midgley 2013: 267). This seems to indicate that the institutional arrangements of social protection may have acquired a dynamic of their own early on. Post-*apartheid* South Africa largely built on the institutional legacy of the *apartheid* era. Even the de-racialisation of social protection began in the early 1940s, accelerated in the 1980s, and was completed in the 1990s. New programmes like the Child Support Grant built on programmes set up under the *apartheid* regime and before. In Brazil, social protection remained labourist under both democratic and authoritarian governments, and even Vargas' far-reaching social reforms built on earlier institutionalisations of social protections.

However, the year of the foundation of the People's Republic of China, 1949, marked a break with earlier periods: socialist social protection and the Soviet variety of social insurance associated with Stalin replaced earlier institutions in the 1950s (but Taiwan built on the pre-1949 legacy). There were further significant departures from or extensions of historical paths. While Brazil remained labourist overall, Brazil's early introduction of a non-contributory rural pension in 1971 was remarkable, as was Brazil's pioneering role in the field of social cash transfers in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Regarding the latter, it is an open question whether the mushrooming of social cash transfers for the poor across the Global South indicates a new social model even in countries that had been labourist for a long time. China is the country with the most conspicuous path changes, from socialist social protections (1949/1951–1978), to a liberal period of retrenchment (1978–2000), then more inclusive social protections (2000–2012), and finally, more authoritarian "social governance" thereafter.

Constructing the Social: All Four Countries, India the Least, Have Articulated Social Issues as a Social Question

In all four countries, India the least, a social question was voiced, and generalised terms like social insurance and social security emerged. Social problems are ubiquitous in any society but they are not necessarily articulated, that is, turned into a public issue. In most societies, some social problems are articulated, but few societies voice a generalised concern for social issues as a threat to the integration of society to be tackled by the state, that is a social question.

The social question has three facets: first, the social question reflects "objective" socio-economic conditions, such as industrialisation, dislocation, urbanisation, wage labour, factory labour, and de-agrianisation. Second, it refers to intellectuals, experts, politicians, and social movements' articulation of such conditions as a general concern for society to be addressed by the state. These articulations may be ahead of the socio-economic conditions of the country, like raising the labour question in a largely agrarian society (as some early critics of social protection in India argued), or they may lag behind, underrating the scale of social problems. Third, the social question involves references to political measures to be taken in response to the articulated social problems. Each of these three facets or dimensions has its own history. They are related but in a contingent way—a loose coupling.

The country-centric chapters identify three main varieties of the social question—in historical order: the land question, the labour question, and a less distinct variety that I propose to call "exclusion/inclusion". Furthermore, there are variants of the three main types, and other, more specific social questions, such as the poverty question (which heralded "exclusion/inclusion") and the hunger question, which has been particularly central to Indian politics and is related to the issue of food security. The three main varieties of the social question do not represent distinct historical stages. The land question often co-existed with the labour question, and the seeds of "exclusion/inclusion" were sown early on, through the poverty question, as in South Africa from the 1920s.

The *land question*—or agrarian question—was first. This cannot come as a surprise, considering that agricultural production and related ways of living prevailed during the early years of industrialisation. Pellissery and Lødemel (2020) make a case that property rights in land remain an essential component of social citizenship today. In Brazil, both anti-feudalism and anti-capitalism played a role in the struggle over land reform, as did the ideas of early reformist thinkers, especially Duguit and Torres, and, towards the end of our observation period, novel ideas like agroecology and food safety that redefined the land question. In China in the 1920s, Sun Yat-Sen posited the land question as *the* social question, and in the aftermath of the revolution in 1949, the People's Republic of China achieved the only thorough land reform among the four countries.

The *labour question* or workers' question came second, confining the social question to workers and, more specifically, to formal workers and, originally, to selected groups of industrial workers only. As Ahuja argues for India, the distinction between formal and informal workers, which is crucial for social protection across the Global South, was created in the process. In India, even the very category of "labour" emerged as a legitimate political category in the decades before independence (Ahuja 2018: 319). The labour question revolved around work issues, especially working conditions, individual labour rights, and collective labour rights, that is, the right to collective action through unions to empower the workers vis-à-vis employers and markets. Social protection was part of the labour question in the shape of social insurance programmes. Most countries in the Global South introduced industrial accident insurance—sometimes called workmen's compensation—as the first branch of social insurance (Usui 1994), and this branch is most closely related to labour issues. Brazil was strongly labourist, with Vargas establishing state corporatism. China was labourist to a degree before 1949 but more narrowly so in succeeding decades. South Africa was mixed pauperist-labourist, focusing on the "poor white problem" in the 1920s and 1930s and the racialised "civilised workers' question" under *apartheid*; but public and semi-public social insurance was weakly developed. India was labourist with regard to a very small group of workers, and social protections even for these workers were limited; yet, the construction of the social question as the labour question culminated in the labour legislation of the 1940s.

The more universalistic question of *exclusion/inclusion* came later and extended beyond formal workers to the poor and possibly all citizens, including informal workers, the rural population, women, and persons with disabilities. In South Africa, the poverty of white persons was articulated as a social problem in the early and mid-twentieth century because it questioned the racial hierarchy. The "poor white problem" was primarily a problem of non-workers, especially persons who could not work due to age, infirmity, disability, or children (single mothers) and could not support themselves out of employment-related insurance. They should get work and the children should receive schooling. More inclusive policies started during the last decade of *apartheid* to be further developed in the 1990s, and during the 2000s, the discourse became more inclusive. In Brazil, the Constitution of 1988 was a major boost to social policy, and since 1988, belief in "social inclusion" became dominant across political ideologies (Pereira and Bertholini 2017). In China, the 2000s and early 2010s witnessed more inclusive policies associated with broader ideas, such as "inclusive growth", "humanity-based" policies, and "rights". In South Africa, "dignity" and "social rights" came to the fore in the same years, underpinning a universalistic agenda responsive to the needs of the poor; in a less pronounced way, this also happened in India. In India and South Africa, references to social rights introduced the courts as actors in social protection. Social protections geared to the poor, mainly cash transfers, were generally established late, spreading from the 2000s onward, with precursors in South Africa (1928) and in Brazil (1971). India had been concerned with the hunger question since the late-nineteenth century but gave prominence to the needs of the poor and hungry at a fairly late stage and in particularistic ways: the fifth Five-Year Plan (of 1974) first put poverty on the country's agenda. In South Africa, what could be called the "deviance question" also mattered. It referred to the problem of delinquency and morally improper behaviour by poor white persons, which the state tried to address through social work and institutional care.

The three social questions sometimes intertwined. For example, we can interpret the introduction of a non-contributory rural pension in 1971 in Brazil as a way of alleviating the land question. In South Africa, the poverty question also intersected with the land question. From the 1920s

through to the present, the expansion of social assistance in South Africa was necessitated by—and understood in terms of—the decline of agrarian society, first among "poor whites" because of the commercialisation of "white" farming and then among the black majority as a result of dispossession of and forced removals off the land.[2]

Remarkably, the earliest and most privileged welfare provisions, namely for persons close to the government—public sector employees, soldiers, teachers, and the like—were not normally discussed in the context of a social question. Instead, it seems that the need for these provisions was taken for granted, as in Europe, where provisions for persons in the public sector were the earliest forms of state social protection, starting in the eighteenth century, apart from public poor relief introduced in the sixteenth century.

The social question was not ubiquitous. China and India are examples of this. When China was socialist in the strict sense (1949–1978), the social question was dormant, assumed to be resolved in the institutions of socialism. Social protection was embedded in the socialist institutions of production: the rural People's Communes, the state-owned enterprises, and the urban work units. In sociological terms, these were functionally diffuse institutions in which the welfare function was weakly differentiated. Every person was assumed to be integrated into the socialist organisation of work and, thereby, covered by social protection. The state-owned enterprises provided social insurance but of the statist Soviet-type associated with Stalin (Hu and Manning 2010). In the People's Communes, a plot of land, to which every person had access by birth, sustained the members' welfare. In the socialist institutional setting, a social policy community could not develop, and the supremacy of the Communist Party left little room for the open articulation of social problems. Civil society and non-governmental organisations were non-existent.

The absence of the social question under socialism makes sense, at least theoretically, since socialism is designed to extinguish capitalist markets and the attendant social damages. During the negotiations that led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1946–1948, the Soviet Union

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[2] The early introduction of old-age pensions for farmers in European countries also reflected a link between social protection and the land question (Leisering et al. 2002: 58–61).

maintained that its socialist institutions already realised social rights—a socialist understanding of social rights as human rights that differed from liberal understandings (Davy 2014). In the communist German Democratic Republic (1949–1990), the very notion of "social policy" was suspect till the mid-1960s (Schmidt 2013: 30).

After the dormancy of the social question in socialist China, the Chinese government explicitly denied the social question during the liberal break period (1978–2000) when they delegated the social responsibility of the state to non-state actors under the flag of "socialisation". When I acted as a consultant to the Chinese government in 2001 (Leisering et al. 2002), many Chinese actors still denied the need for state-provided old-age pensions in rural areas; they referred to the land and family as sufficient resources for living. South African state officials used a similar argument to justify the exclusion of poor African people from social pensions and other kinds of social assistance in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as during the first decades of the *apartheid* regime.

In India, the social question was stifled throughout the last hundred years because of the cultural denial of equality in the Hinduist tradition. Individualised measures of social protection were weak, often eclipsed by "socialist" macroeconomic policies. In the late 1940s and the 1950s, the Indian Congress proclaimed a socialist orientation, and "socialism" was even included in the constitution in 1976. However, "socialism" only indicated a kind of etatism that comprised policies like Soviet-style planning, state regulation of industries, and Keynesianism. In later decades, particularistic, identity-based claims to social protections relating to the *dalits* and *adivasis* curtailed the social question.

State Responsibility, Policy Paradigms, and Welfare Models

In theoretical terms, the social question is the pivotal middle layer in the onion skin model of social ideas. It is related to the top and bottom layers of the model—to the social responsibility of the state, policy paradigms, and models of social protection—but in a contingent way.

State Responsibility. The articulation of the social question puts demands on the state as the addressee of social responsibility. Remarkably, all four countries hold strong notions of national statehood, even in the face of marked divisions based on ethnicity, religion, caste, and the rural/urban divide. Before 1949, the Chinese state was weak: warlords ruled in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Empire, and, afterwards, the conflict between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party led to civil war and regional divisions. The joint war against Japan added to the upheaval. During the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese intellectuals studied Western ideas of an organic society. After 1949, the People's Republic proclaimed state socialism, underpinned by a symbiosis between state and party. However, up until 1978, the social organisation of the country was actually decentralised, comprised of a large number of collectives, mainly the rural People's Communes, the state-owned enterprises, and the units of the state and party. In the first two decades of the reform era, that is, after 1978, the state retreated from social welfare provisioning. From 2012, the party-state has deepened.

Since independence, India has been a democracy and as such potentially responsive to social issues. Although the proclamation of "socialism" conjured up the notion of a strong state, the federal structure allowed for highly divergent social policies in the various Indian states, and some Indian states, such as Kerala, became quasi-welfare states (Singh 2015a, b). In the 1940s debates on the future of Indian society, Gandhi advocated a model of local communities that would have precluded a strong "social" state. The South African state was deeply racialised. Through the creation of separate "homelands" for black persons in the 1960s and 1970s, the state surrendered its social responsibility for many of its citizens in the most extreme form.

Policy Paradigms. What policymakers define as the problem to be tackled is a key element of a policy paradigm. Countries may define very different groups as problem groups that deserve state-provided social protection. In China, "social problems" were discussed in the 1920s in both Marxist and non-Marxist terms. Persons close to the government and, for example in South Africa, war veterans, were considered the most deserving. Socio-economically defined groups, above all workers, were the centre of the labour question, but countries differed as to which branches of

industry were covered by their social insurance programmes (for Brazil, see the historical study by Lewis and Lloyd-Sherlock 2009). Life-course groups, above all children and older persons, were also key addressees, mostly by means-tested programmes, that is, based on need. South Africa (old-age pensions in 1928) and Brazil (rural pensions in 1971) were pioneers. In the move towards social cash transfer programmes since the early 2000s, life-course groups are the main targets (Leisering 2019: 161, 181), while non-disabled persons of working age—the working poor, unemployed, and underemployed—mostly lack own entitlements (also in our four countries), calls for universal rights-based benefits notwithstanding. In India, social protection focuses on identity groups based on caste. Few countries define the addressees of basic income security in a non-categorical way, purely by need; the Chinese cash transfer programme *Dibao* and some provisions under Brazil's *Bolsa Família* are examples.[3]

Models of welfare institutions. A range of models emerged over the hundred years: the most common was and still is the model of social insurance, which is closely associated with the labour question. However, non-contributory social assistance programmes also figured early on, for example, in 1928 in South Africa. Towards the end of our observation period, since the 1990s, more universalistic models have arisen or been called for. The new social cash transfer programmes, mostly a variety of social assistance (only 20 per cent of the programmes are not means-tested; Leisering 2019: 169f.), are designed to make up for the limitations of social insurance programmes. State-regulated private protection, such as industrial accident insurance in Brazil in the 1920s, may also reflect a social concern of the state.

Tracing the Social Question

In Chap. 1, I have defined the concept of "social question": "Raising the 'social question' means that a society recognises social issues in a generalized way as a key concern of society, to be addressed by the state, linked

[3] The Indian Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a public works programme rather than a social cash transfer programme.

to a call for political remedies. The underlying assumption is that the state is responsible for individual welfare". When applying the concept in empirical studies, we need to operationalise it. How can we ascertain if the social question is raised in a particular country or not? Since some social issues are articulated in some way in almost any society, we need to define more precisely what we mean by the "social question". This is not normally done in the literature, for example, not even by Heclo in his article "The social question" (1995), who, like Castel (2003: xix f.), defines the social question through its intended effect, namely societal integration. Such a functionalist definition is unsatisfactory because there are functional equivalents to the social question: rulers may seek to secure societal integration through nationalism, mobilisation for war, or religious fundamentalism.

Based on the test of the concept in the chapters on the four countries, I propose eight criteria for ascertaining if, and to what degree, a society raises a social question:

1. Social issues must be seen as a challenge for a society or nation state as a whole—for societal cohesion and integration, as emphasised by Heclo (1995: 675) and Castel (2003: xix f.), or for the modernisation and development of a society—rather than only for sectional groups or particular institutions. Raising the social question implies a vision of society. In India and China during the 1920s, the call for social protection was part of a call for modernisation and overcoming the "backwardness" of the countries. In South Africa, the social question referred to the need to protect the existing racial hierarchy and the "civilisation" of the white settlers. In the new, post-2012 era in China, social protection is part of the Party's vision of a "middle well-off society" and the "Chinese Dream".

2. The social question reflects a generalised, comprehensive understanding of and interest in social issues rather than a reference to a particular social problem or welfare programme.

3. The social question is not just a list of measures to be taken by government, but involves the explication of an underlying idea or even "cosmology", as Kaufmann (2013a: 33) puts it (see the quote in Chap. 1).

4. The articulation of the social question needs to go along with the explicit attribution to the state of a social responsibility for the welfare of the citizens and calls for political action. The more the social question goes along with equally comprehensive concepts in the other layers of the onion skin models—the more it is linked to a far-reaching attribution of social responsibility to the state and the more it gives rise to elaborate policy paradigms and complex models of welfare institutions—the more it is entrenched in politics and society.

5. The social question must appear on the agendas of parliament, political parties, social movements, or in development plans or other relevant documents.

6. The social question must have a significant weight in public debates as compared to other societal concerns. To trace the social question, we need to find out how social issues are related to concerns like the national question or economic development.

7. Social issues must be referred to in terms of individual welfare, instead of only in terms of collective welfare to be achieved through economic growth. Accordingly, the social question needs to refer to the state and state policies rather than the economy. However, the reference to the state may include state regulation of the economy.

8. The social question, to be more than an empty promise, needs a degree of institutionalisation. This includes the creation of government departments specialising in welfare issues, as happened in all four countries. The department of labour or separate departments of social welfare may cover social issues. The emergence of epistemic and expert communities as well as political parties with "social" agendas and discourses give substance and sustainability to the social question. The social question also has a cognitive side: surveys of living conditions, commissions on social problems, social reports, and the like provide informational bases for social policies. In post-*apartheid* South Africa, there was a "mania for measurement", and social researchers played a role in conceptualising social reforms. The British tradition of parliamentary commissions influenced South Africa and India.

These eight defining characteristics of the social question can also be used as a template for comparative research. The range, depth, and

content of the social question also depend on the arenas of political deliberation and *discursive spaces*. Zacher (2013: 87–109) emphasises that the welfare state requires the institutions of liberty to enable free deliberations on the social question according to the changing needs of and ideals among citizens. Authoritarian regimes put severe constraints on public deliberations, including, among others, freedom of the media. Especially since 2012, China has constrained civil society activity, relying on GONGOs (government-organised non-governmental organisations) instead to secure Party policies. In democratic societies, illiteracy and high morbidity rates may act as constraints on public deliberations, as in India and South Africa, respectively (see Table 1.2 in Chap. 1).

Political Language: The Spread of "Social" Semantics

Ideas are closely connected to language. Changes in ideas may be associated with changing semantics, but new ideas can also emerge using existing language, through reinterpretation of terms—new wine in old bottles. And vice versa, old wine in new bottles, is also common. The rise of social ideas often corresponds with a new language for talking about social problems and welfare institutions (for Northern countries see Petersen and Béland 2014a).

In all four countries, social-oriented language has spread, including new terms that indicate a *generalised* understanding of social issues beyond miscellaneous social grievances that can be found in any society. The key comprehensive terms that figure in all four countries are "social insurance"—denoting a generalised model of welfare; "social security"—a generalised policy paradigm; and, less pronounced and more contested, "welfare state"—a term that reflects a generalised understanding of the state's social responsibilities. This list also outlines the historical order in which they appeared and the increasing abstraction of the concepts. "Social security" occupies an intermediate position between the narrower concept of "social insurance" and the wider concept of the "welfare state".

The term *social insurance* was the earliest term used that went beyond individual problems and programmes. The ILO, which champions the social insurance model (Seekings 2008), has used the term from the beginning of the period under review (e.g. ILO 1925; see Berten 2020). In the period's early years, the narrower term "labour insurance" was in use, as in China in the 1920s and 1930s and in China's 1931 Constitution. However, participants had already referenced "social insurance" in the Communist-led second Labour Conference in 1925, and the Nationalist government referred to it in 1941. Social insurance was (and still is) a comprehensive term, since it covered a comprehensive range of basic social "risks" that the ILO codified. In this way, "social insurance" bore the seeds for extending social protection beyond the group of formal workers because the list of covered risks extended beyond the risks of work to the general contingencies of everyday life, and the reference to the workers' families and dependents potentially opened up a broader range of addressees, including women.

Social security as a term came later, in the 1940s, and turned into a platform for extending the scope of social protection. In India, the Indian National Congress first mentioned the term in 1940, but mainly limited to labour welfare. In South Africa, a movement, committee, and plan all referred to the term in 1942. In China, the term became official from 1945 onwards and was even included in the Constitution in 1946/1947. China seems to be the only country in which the term disappeared for a significant period of time: the law of 1951 refers to "labour insurance" and the term "social security" did not appear in the Constitution of 1954, but reappeared in the 2004 Constitution (and already 1986 in the Seventh Five-Year Plan) and was put into practice in the policies of the 2000s. In Brazil, the term "social security" entered into law as late as 1988 in the new Constitution and encompassed social insurance, universal healthcare, and social assistance.

The welfare state is a broader concept than the other two (Petersen and Béland 2014b: 298) and, even more than the others, refers both to provisions and ideational underpinnings or even cultural beliefs. The term "welfare state" is less frequently used in the four countries and highly contested. In South Africa, President Zuma explicitly rejected the idea of a welfare state, as the National Party had emphatically done already under

apartheid, for example, in Parliament, although, remarkably, the National Party had been happy with the notion of a "social welfare state".

However, regarding the scope of social protections, actual developments, or at least policy goals developed towards what could be called a "welfare state". Seekings (Chap. 6) describes South Africa as a "nascent welfare state" by 1949. The "four principal social policies" that China's Nationalist Party (Guomindang) articulated in 1945 also came close. The welfare state is a key element of the self-image of societies in Britain, Germany, and the Nordic countries, but it is an open question if this will ever occur in the four countries that we investigate or many other Southern countries. Regarding social effort, even Southern countries with fairly comprehensive social protections spend much less on public welfare (see Fig. 1.5 in Chap. 1) than do Northern welfare states (which spend 20–35 per cent of their GDP).

There are several other comprehensive terms. The oldest and most comprehensive is "social policy", which was mentioned in South Africa as early as 1934. The term originated in mid-nineteenth-century Europe and spread globally throughout the twentieth century (Kaufmann 2013b: 36–39 and passim). More recent expressions, mostly spreading since circa 2000, include "social protection", which has a somewhat broader meaning than "social security", "social pensions", "corporate social responsibility", "social sustainability", "social safety nets" (World Bank 2018), and "social cash transfers" (for the origin of the latter term see von Gliszczynski 2015: 28–30). The proliferation of terms with the component *social* testifies to the increasing recognition of social issues across the globe.

What is the meaning of the inconspicuous word "social"? The precise meaning of "social" in the context of social policy is difficult to pin down: "the systemic character of social policy is not nearly as evident as that of the market economy. What 'the social' means in distinction to the economic and the political, or in other words: which social phenomena and problems are relevant as the effective sphere of social policy and why—to this day no clarity has emerged on this question" (Kaufmann 2013b: 97–98). In common usage, the "social" is often set in opposition to the economic or, alternatively, to the individual. Historically, "social" as an idea and a term originated in France and Germany in the 1830s and 1840s (Kaufmann 2012: chapter 2; Kaufmann 2013b, c) and was used in

the then-new terms "social reform", "social policy", "social question", and others (Pankoke 1970). "Social" implies the recognition of the cleavage between the modern political ideal of equality and the socio-economic inequalities of emerging industrial-capitalist societies, which the German philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) first explicated in systematic terms. While Marx's solution to this cleavage was to overthrow capitalism, his contemporary Lorenz von Stein (1815–1890), like Marx (1818–1883) a Hegelian, conceived of social policy *(sociale Politik)* as a way to bridge and mitigate this cleavage by reforming capitalism. Accordingly, social policy and the social question are reformist rather than revolutionary policy concepts.

The Career of "Social Security"

As expected, "social security" has been a key term and idea in the history of social policy in the four countries. Therefore, it is worth tracing the career of the term beyond its appearance in the four countries.

According to the authoritative study on the concept of security (Kaufmann 1973, 2012: chapter 5), "security" is a key normative idea of modern society or, more specifically, of the functionally differentiated society, as systems theorists conceive of modern society. Marx identified security as the overarching idea of civil society (or of capitalism, as he later termed it): "*Security* is the supreme social concept of civil society …" (Marx 1978: 43).[4] Social security is a variety of the broader concept of security. While "social", the "social question", and other related terms emerged in the second third of the nineteenth century, the term "social security" only emerged a century later. One might have expected "social security" to originate in Western and Northern Europe, but the first use of the term is commonly attributed to American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1934, and the term figured explicitly in the name of the US "Social Security Act" of 1935, which was part of the New Deal. Yet only the term was new; it hardly conveyed new ideas that were previously unknown in Europe (Kaufmann 2012: 135).

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[4] German original: "Die *Sicherheit* ist der höchste soziale Begriff der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft …" (Marx 1956: 365; written in 1843).

In international arenas, "social security" emerged in the 1940s as a key term and idea as part of the "welfare internationalism" of that decade, reflecting visions of a new post-war order (Kaufmann 2012: chapter 4). The term was mentioned in the Atlantic Charter of 1941, and the ILO used the term from 1940 onwards, officially from 1942 (Berten 2020). Latin American countries also took up the term at the Inter-American Conference on Social Security in Santiago de Chile in 1942. Although social security was defined rather narrowly at the conference, it was set in a wider context: the conference emphasised "the role of social insurance as the principal method of organising social security … social security policy … demands for its success concurrent measures to promote full employment, to increase national income, to raise the standard of living and education upon which health and capacity depend" (Inter-American Conference on Social Security 1942: 688).

From then on, the concept quickly spread globally, although (or just because) international organisations and states both interpreted it in very diverse ways. In 1948, social security became a human right under the newly founded United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Article 22, which lays down the right, and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, which restates this right in a more binding way, have just one sentence on this right, much less than for other rights. The articles name no standard and no agent in charge of specifying and implementing the right. This was left to the ILO (Davy 2014), which issued the key Convention no. 102, the "Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention" (ILO 1952). The ILO tended to refer to the term narrowly as social insurance but had mentioned social assistance in many documents right from the beginning (Berten 2020). Out of our four countries, only Brazil has ratified Convention no. 102, but all have ratified the ICESCR, although South Africa did so as late as 2015 (see Table 1.1 in Chap. 1).

The use of the term "social security" in relevant political contexts indicates the emergence of a substantial understanding of the social in four respects.

First, social security is a *comprehensive* term that may cover a range of welfare policies and programmes. The use of the term indicates that the

country in question has developed an overarching notion of the various common insecurities in individuals' lives and the need for political responses. To confront the "Five Giants"—Want, Ignorance, Disease, Squalor, and Idleness—William Beveridge in his report of 1942 designed a "plan for social security": "it is a plan all-embracing in scope of persons and of needs" (Beveridge 1942: 9). At the time, "social security" was a very recent term, and, although it pervades Beveridge's report, the report was actually entitled "Social Insurance and Allied Services". The term "social insurance" had played an overarching role before in policies and programmes, but a truly overarching term had been missing in the inter-war years (Berten 2019, 2020). "Social security" is potentially broader in scope than "social insurance", in particular because it includes non-contributory benefits for the poor, and, if fully realised, social services (Kaufmann 1973: 95).

Second, as Kaufmann emphasises, social security has a double character, denoting a set of welfare programmes and services as well as an *idea*, namely that the state should ameliorate the insecurity of its citizens' lives in a comprehensive sense. While the English language only has one term, "social security", the German distinction between *soziale Sicherung*, which denotes the institutional side, and *soziale Sicherheit*, which denotes the guiding idea, reflects the two sides of social security. When the idea of "social security" emerged globally in the 1940s, it was associated with visions of a new post-war society and new welfare ideas like prevention and rehabilitation (Kaufmann 1973: 95–98). However, it was a vision without specific instruments, "a normative concept … in search of institutional realisations" (Kaufmann 1973: 98; transl. L.L.). This might help to explain its trajectory, and it demonstrates that powerful ideas may take precedence over actual social protection measures.

The advent of the concept of social security also historically signalled a transition from the labour question to more universalistic ideas of inclusion. In the Global North after World War II, social policy changed in character from class-based politics, which had emphasised collective labour rights, working conditions, and "labour insurance", to redistributive policies for all citizens in order to enhance individual welfare—"social security" (Kaufmann 2013b). Redistribution was not so much between classes, but between older persons and the young (in the form of old-age

pensions and long-term care, often based on the idea of a contract between generations), between the sick and the healthy (in the form of medical services), and between families and persons without children.

Third, unlike traditional poor relief and charity, but similar to social insurance, social security is not only about welfare provisions in the here and now but also oriented to the *future*,[5] both providing and requiring a "long view" by citizens (de Swaan 1988, using a term by Norbert Elias). The designated outcome of social security programmes is not only financial betterment but also "security" for citizens in planning their lives. The idea of security includes self-assurance as psychological security of the self (Kaufmann 1973, ch. 4.5). Von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann (1994) have challenged the view that traditional societies in the Global South lack a concept of social security because their members are absorbed by daily exigencies, unable to plan for the future. Based on research in Indonesia, the von Benda-Beckmanns argue that traditional societies also have a notion of the future and develop distinct ideas of and rules for social security. However, social security is mostly embedded in functionally diffuse social settings like the family, kinship, and the village.

Fourth, social security reflects a *reformist* strategy, with an emphasis on achieving security within capitalism rather than challenging the structural inequalities of capitalism (Heclo 1995: 667). The above quote from Marx reads in full: "*Security* is the supreme social concept of civil society, the concept of the *police*. The whole society exists only in order to guarantee for each of its members the preservation of his person, his rights, and his property" (Marx 1978: 43).[6] That is, the concept of security is geared to securing rather than transcending civil society or capitalism (Marx 1956: 36). The idea of preserving a person and the person's rights and property, if extended to the social, encapsulates the thrust of the concept of social security or even the welfare state. Social security is about the livelihood of persons, their social rights, and "social property". Entitlements to social security, especially through social insurance

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[5] On the temporality of the idea of security in general see Kaufmann (1973: ch. 4.3).

[6] German original: "Die *Sicherheit* ist der höchste soziale Begriff der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, der Begriff der *Polizei*, daß die ganze Gesellschaft nur da ist, um jedem ihrer Mitglieder die Erhaltung seiner Person, seiner Rechte und seines Eigentums zu garantieren" (Marx 1956: 365f.; written in 1843).

programmes, may acquire the legal status of property for the property-less, as, for example, endorsed by the Supreme Court (Constitutional Court) in Germany (Zacher 2013: 95). Social security is about securing the livelihood of the wage labourer and other members of society, but leaves the basic relations of production intact, as does the general concept of security. The earlier concept of social insurance was similarly reformist, but social security implies a more far-reaching remoulding of living conditions under capitalism.

Multireferentiality: Social Protection Is Largely Driven and Shaped by "Non-social" Ideas and Interests

When talking about social policy ideas, one tends to think of "social" norms and values like social justice, solidarity, equality, and welfare. Such norms drive social movements and NGO work. Yet to promote social policies, referencing these norms is not enough. Kaufmann (1997, 2012: 277–285) holds that, historically, social policy in Europe only expanded because its collective utility beyond simply its welfare impacts—its economic, political, social, and cultural utility—could be demonstrated to the key actors. Similarly, Midgley (2013: 9–20) distinguishes several "functions of social protection" beyond the welfare function that need to be considered. Policymakers who seek to advance social policy need to create "synergies" between social and economic (and other) goals (Kaufmann 2012: 284; see also Rodgers 2013).

In all four countries references to the non-social functions of social protections figured explicitly and prominently in political debates. These references operated as *frames* of social protection, either supporting or countering extensions of social protection. This shows that opposition to social policy is not only about interests; rather, counter ideas are developed to justify the rejection of more substantial social protections. When tracing frames, we also found that counter ideas are more complex and less immediately interest driven than common terms like "neoliberalism" or, referring to South Africa, racism suggest. Marianne Ulriksen (Chap.

7) concludes that "the apartheid state is a reminder of how far policy can be pushed with reference to ideational and normative justifications".

In the introduction, I distinguish between three types of frames: non-social frames, global frames, and counter frames (see the onion skin model, Fig. 1.2; for global frames see the next section). Social policy is not just underpinned by "social" ideas but relies on ideas originating from other spheres of society (Achinger 1979). These frames of the social differ between the four countries and across time: social security was conceived, alternatively, as facilitating, counteracting, or irrelevant to other, potentially broader societal concerns, especially economic growth, development, nation-building, social cohesion, and social peace. Surprisingly, the key arguments and contestations about social protections were similar in the four countries, and they also resemble debates in the Global North, with similar arguments and frames for or against social protection.

We identified a broad range of frames that operated in the four countries. In South Africa under *apartheid* and before, the "native question" was the racialised national question, and it framed the social question. The native question was about securing the white and Christian "civilisation" and, in conjunction, the racial hierarchy. In post-*apartheid* South Africa, developmentalism was used to protest the extension of social protections or at least was indifferent to them. Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) were strong developmentalists. After *apartheid*, racial redress was another important frame that eclipsed the social question. However, anti-racism movements also helped to bring "dignity" to the fore, which became a key legitimising idea of more universalistic and rights-based social protection in the 2000s. Dignity is a strong frame because it is a basic value and can rally support from all political camps. In postcolonial India, the struggle for independence from foreign oppression and a developmentalist emphasis on economic growth tended to crowd out the social question. In China, securing social stability and the rule of the Communist Party have been the overarching frames of social protections in the reform era. In conjunction, the frame developmentalism or "GDPism" served to justify welfare retrenchment from 1978 to 2000. In Brazil and Argentina, developmentalist thinking was particularly influential in the 1950s and 1960s (Sikkink 1991).

There were other influential frames. In South Africa, a moral frame gave rise to what I have described above as the deviance question. Ideas on creating an ecological society also came in at the end of our observation period, in the debate on land reform in Brazil. Religious frames also mattered. Neo-Calvinism acted as a counter frame to social protections in South Africa from the late 1930s onward, and the Hindu culture in India generally stifled the social question. Liberation theology in Brazil, inspired by left Catholicism, was a forceful movement in favour of far-reaching social reforms.

Remarkably, reference to human rights sometimes counteracted the extension of social protections. According to T. H. Marshall (1950), citizenship is made up of three kinds of rights: political, civil, and social. Yet in political discourses, social rights often take a backseat, and social protections in particular are not "sexy". Calls for political and civil rights may crowd out demands for social rights. The fight against *apartheid* in South Africa was a case in point. It was primarily a fight for political and civil rights. Nelson Mandela was a freedom fighter and not much interested in issues of social protection. India has experienced strong movements for political and legal rights, while universal social rights are consistently underdeveloped. Political and legal equality can do little to counter the vast inequalities in Indian society. In international politics, for a long time, NGOs similarly focused on political and civil rather than social rights. For example, NGOs from all major political camps rejected or disregarded the idea of cash benefits for the poor well into the 1990s (Leisering 2019: 5f.).

Non-social ideas not only support or inhibit the extension of social protections but may also *shape* policies. Social ideas often mix with other ideas, leading to a hybridisation of the normative foundations of social protection, especially with regard to who is seen as deserving public benefits. For example, at the time of the early labour question, social protections were largely confined to industrial workers because they were seen as crucial to the economic development of the country. The social cash transfer programmes that have emerged since 2000 mostly focus on children (and older persons) while neglecting persons of working age. This reflects a developmentalist approach in a different way: the argument is that children are the economic agents of tomorrow (von Gliszczynski

2015: 132f.). South Africa's post-*apartheid* social reformer Zola Skweyiya was a paternalist conservative who balanced the idea of a caring society with developmentalism, which resulted in a hybrid understanding of the state's social responsibilities.

Frames are not static; they may be interpreted in different ways and change over time. Economic arguments have been brought forward against and in favour of the extension of social protection. Social protection for industrial workers, for example, was meant to bolster the import substitution model of economic growth, as in Brazil. Christian ideas can equally work against or in favour of social protection, as neo-Calvinism in South Africa and the liberation theology in Brazil illustrate. Proponents of social protection may also be ambivalent about the extension of social protections, for example, the National Party under *apartheid* South Africa or the ANC after *apartheid*.

Transnational Diffusion: External Ideas Have Pervaded Domestic Debates on Social Protection from the Beginning (the 1920s)

All four countries have experienced external influence in one way or another. Colonisation was Northern powers' most direct inroad into the Global South but in the strict sense, only one of the four countries was a colony, India under the British Raj, while South Africa and Brazil were not simply colonised but also settled by farmers, workers, and slaves at different stages, and China experienced "externally-induced modernisation" (see Table 1.1 in Chap. 1). Some colonial rulers introduced rudimentary social protections and shaped administrative traditions that have repercussions till the present day.[7] For settler societies, one can generally assume that the legacy of the settlers' countries of origin—Portugal, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany—played a role, and that later associations, especially the Commonwealth, had an influence on the nation's historical trajectory.

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[7] See Schmitt (2015) and Leisering (2019: 157) on present-day differences between anglophone and francophone countries in Africa.

Is there a reason to assume a wholesale domination by Northern powers? Or do Northern perspectives on the Global South unduly obscure indigenous ideas and practices? It is generally plausible to assume that external ideas had a formative influence on the field of social protection for several reasons (see Chap. 1: availability of Northern models, lack of domestic expertise, and international organisations' and donors' activity).

The chapters in this volume provide ample evidence that external ideas—concepts pertaining to society and social welfare, institutional models of welfare, and expert knowledge—were omnipresent in all four countries—even in China under authoritarian rule after 1949, the Communist Party's claim to self-governance notwithstanding. Our findings align with a key tenet of the bourgeoning literature on diffusion and policy transfer, namely that external ideas are not usually simply transplanted to the receiving country but are subject to translation, adaptation, interpretation, syncretisation, and combination with domestic ideas. Communism became Sino-communism in China. "Socialism" in India did not mean the overthrow of capitalist society, but a kind of etatism as explained above. In the Indian state of Kerala, the Communist Party had a strong nationalist tendency (Singh 2015a). The concept of social insurance, which the ILO propagated, took on different shapes in the countries of the South (for Brazil see Lewis and Lloyd-Sherlock 2009), and the socialist countries, including China in the 1950s, adopted the etatiste Stalinist version of social insurance rather than the Bismarckian (Hu and Manning 2010). In the 2000s, China almost completely copied the German model of industrial accident insurance but did not adopt the self-governance in the administration of the insurance, which was seen as a threat to Party rule (Liu and Leisering 2017). Our findings also confirm the general insight of diffusion research that "decoupling" (Meyer 2009: 182) between the adoption of international norms and ideas, on the one hand, and domestic policies, on the other hand, is endemic.

Some Latin American countries, including Brazil, were remarkably independent early proponents of extensive welfare commitments by governments and even pushed Northern governments to do more in international arenas. Latin American governments—not the Soviet Union as is sometimes assumed—were key drivers of social rights in the years

1946–1948 in the preparation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Davy 2013, 2014).

From the late twentieth century onwards, there were two almost parallel but incongruous ideational movements.[8] Economic liberalisation and marketisation, often described as "neo-liberalism", became globally hegemonic doctrines in the 1980s and 1990s that thoroughly transformed domestic politics worldwide, including our four countries (for the global spread of liberalization as a process of diffusion, see Simmons et al. 2008). This shift even affected "socialist" China, where it triggered economic reform and the attendant liberal break in social protection. However, almost simultaneously, from the 1990s onwards, an individualised understanding of social human rights also spread: the right to social security was interpreted as denoting individual entitlements to public benefits, superseding earlier collectivist, developmental or socialist, understandings (Davy 2013, 2014). The reference to "rights" and "rights-based" programmes and policies became part of the social discourse, and international organisations used this discourse to mobilise action on social protection and other social concerns. The new rights discourse also found its way into domestic politics, especially in South Africa and even in China during the 2000s and early 2010s. In operative terms, international organisations increasingly pushed for the extension of social protection through global campaigns and interventions in Southern policies (for social cash transfer programmes see von Gliszczynski 2015). From the early 2000s, even the ILO eventually took to actively advocating for non-contributory social cash transfers besides social insurance under the flag of "Social Security for All" (ILO 2003; see Leisering 2020). Brazil's, China's, and South Africa's pioneering models of social cash transfers (see Table 1.1 in Chap. 1) came earlier, though, testifying to a "development revolution from the global South" (Hanlon et al. 2010).

Our findings challenge two frames of reference of much of the policy transfer literature. First, the literature mostly analyses the activity of *one* sending agent, be it an international organisation or another country.

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[8] In international politics, Koehler (2015: 740f.) identifies a related disjunction between the "first UN" and the "second UN". In the UN system, neoliberalism came to dominate the "first UN", that is, the member states, while the "second UN", that is, the UN secretariat and UN agencies, restored the UN's ideals of the UN Charter by calling for social justice and human rights.

Second, studies mostly investigate the spread of *policies*—such as the World Bank's global campaign for a larger share of private old-age security in the 1990s and 2000s. In contrast, we detected a multiplicity of external agents and influences that shape several layers of the social (rather than only policies).

First, regarding the *multiplicity of external agents*, a range of Northern welfare states acted as agents of diffusion. British ideas, such as the Beveridge Report of 1942, impacted debates in India and South Africa. South African politicians observed not only models from Commonwealth countries, especially New Zealand and Australia, but also US casework models. The Netherlands played a role in South Africa's societal development through Dutch neo-Calvinist theologians. The German model of social insurance, which the ILO had taken up, was influential worldwide, except in socialist countries. However, in the reform era, even China adopted a Bismarckian industrial accident insurance programme. Marxism, originating in Germany, was a major influence on China since the 1920s. The Soviet Union influenced Chinese thinking as early as the 1920s and 1930s and more forcefully so after the Communist revolution in 1949, by spreading the Soviet Union's model of industrial development and the Stalinist model of labour insurance. Ideas from the Soviet Union also resonated in India. Furthermore, there were countries that acted as mediators between Northern and Southern ideas, above all Japan, which had taken in Northern ideas as early as the nineteenth century and influenced Chinese thinking before 1949. South Korea also acted as mediator. The Soviet Union was a mediator of Marxist ideas.

International organisations were also active in disseminating ideas around the world. Meyer (2009) conceives of these organisations as key proponents of "world culture", that is, globally shared principles—such as universalism, individualism, rationalism, and human rights—and models—such as statehood, constitutions, and education. The ILO was founded in 1919, with India as a founding member. The creation of the United Nations in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 gave rise to a diversifying landscape of international organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, that would become major social policy actors from the 1990s onwards (Deacon et al. 1997), such as UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and

Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), plus national development agencies and donors. The ILO, the key player in the field of social protection since the interwar years, lost its hegemony. Global religious organisations also played a role. The Latin American liberation theology echoed the new thinking of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

Diverse diffusion mechanisms were operative. Emulation, rather than policy learning, was frequent. Emulation is about receiving socially accepted ideas from select senders, that is, it is about social construction (e.g. of social problems and models of social security) rather than the close empirical observation and hard evidence that characterises policy learning (Dobbin et al. 2007: 450–454).

More concrete mechanisms of dissemination included the translation of Western academic literature, which was influential in domestic debates on "social problems", "social policy", and modernisation in China in the 1920s, and academic study abroad by thousands of Southern intellectuals. In China, students returning from Japan, Europe, and the USA discussed Marxist and non-Marxist concepts of society. The key architect of *apartheid* Hendrik Verwoerd and the major reformer in post-*apartheid* South Africa Zola Skweyiya both studied in Germany. During the last decade of *apartheid*, external pressure from the global public helped to loosen the hold on power of the racist regime.

These multiple external influences interacted in various ways. A synthesis of external influences, combined with domestic ideas and practices, may give rise to unique national solutions. The Chinese social assistance programme *Dibao* is a case in point (Leisering et al. 2017). The strength of various external influences also varied over time. China was the most extreme case among our four countries, switching to Soviet ideology in 1949 (before, the Communist Party had only been active in some regions) and repeatedly changing between external models in the field of old-age security during the reform era (Hu 2015, 2016). The conspicuous swings in social policy in China after 1978 pinpointed by Shih-Jiunn Shi partially happened in conjunction with swings in references to external models.

Second, regarding the *multi-layered nature of external influences*, we found that external influences operated on each of the four layers of the

onion skin model, rather than only on the policy level, and that the influences on the four layers were incongruent in some instances. Some influences only affected the most general layers—the state's social responsibility and the social question—without necessarily impacting policies or institutions. In the process, the language of social welfare changed to include new terms like "social insurance" and "social security" and, more recently, "social inclusion" or "social sustainability", but related changes in actual policies came much later or not at all ("decoupling"). In China, since 2012, it has worked the other way around. While China has been jettisoning references to rights and civil society, distancing itself from key "Western" ideas, actual social protection programmes remain largely unchanged. Some new social categories have even entered constitutions, thereby entrenching the social responsibility of the state. The Brazilian Constitutions of 1934 and 1946 reflected socially minded European constitutions, the Chinese constitution of 1946 adopted the term "social security", and, in 2004, even China added human rights to its Constitution as well as the aim of establishing a social security system.

All in all, the countries we study in this volume reveal a plethora of external influences but talk and action were often decoupled. Countries were subject to heterogeneous influences from several senders and in several layers of the social. An in-depth study of these types of diffusion processes remains a desideratum. Moreover, various influential senders that have exerted influence besides the ILO are not analysed in this volume.

The Social Question in Flux: Diversification and Traps

The four countries, except India, have achieved a degree of social protection coverage over the last hundred years, which ranks them among the leaders in the Global South (see Table 1.1 in Chap. 1). For some time, Western observers had held the view that India would demonstrate the superiority of democracy vis-à-vis communist China. However, around 1980, China took the lead in economic growth and, from the 2000s, also in the field of social protection. Will the four countries further expand

their social protection systems, even become welfare states? Or will they remain stuck at the current level of social protection—a "middle social protection trap", similar to the much discussed "middle income trap" with regard to economic development?[9] Or will they even fall back? What social questions will be raised?

While Northern welfare states reached "growth to limits" (Flora 1986) in the 1980s, covering almost all citizens by all major social services, countries in the Global South, even the most advanced ones, are far from this state: a restricted range of programmes, patchy coverage, low benefit levels, uneven quality of services, weak implementation, and clientelism and corruption are all widespread and social spending remains low (see Fig. 1.5 in Chap. 1). In the Global South, countries with comprehensive and universalistic social service programmes are rare. Few Southern countries are "proto-welfare state regimes"(including Brazil; see Table 1.1 and the discussion in Chap. 1). Only 16 out of 148 Southern countries have put in place social cash transfers that provide basic income security for all citizens, at least by law (in 2012/13; Leisering 2019: 194), and this includes Brazil and China, and South Africa is close (see Table 1.1). Only 29 per cent of the global population, North and South, are covered by social protection programmes in all key areas of protection (ILO 2017: 168), often with limited benefits. All in all, despite recent extensions, Southern social protections remain precarious and moderate at best.

The success model of social protection in the Global North and main pathway to universalism, social insurance, remains structurally limited in the Global South, due to the large share of informal workers. Breman and van der Linden (2014) even see informal work as a global threat that increasingly extends to the Global North. Therborn (2019: ix) and Breman et al. (2019) see evidence of a new global social question revolving around multiple forms of precarious labour. Yet, the ILO (2015) sticks to the notion of formal employment and seeks to spread it worldwide, and thereby also social insurance (see historically Seekings 2008). The Indian government is increasingly providing social security like

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[9] Real GDP per capita declined in Brazil during the 2010s and stagnated in South Africa (see Fig. 1.3 in Chap. 1).

maternity allowances and small pensions to informal workers but disjointed from job security.

"Exclusion/Inclusion": The New Social Question?

The social question had already started to shift beyond the workers' question in the 1940s, with "social security" as an ideational horizon. South Africa had focused on non-workers as early as the 1920s, under the flag of the "poor white problem". Since the 1990s, the social question has further moved towards ideas of universalistic "inclusion". "Inclusion", "inclusiveness", and "inclusive policies" have become standard terms in the global development community's lexicon (e.g. UN 2018). Yet, the potential new social question "exclusion/inclusion" is less distinct than the labour question or the land question. "Inclusion" seems to provide an open platform that can accommodate a variety of ideas and concepts.

What aspects of the social does "inclusion" address? The concept goes beyond the problems of the capitalist labour market and inequalities of class, which defined the labour question. The contributors to this volume demonstrate that social issues revolve around a range of fundamental inequalities besides economic class, including ethnicity/"race", caste, gender, land ownership, and the urban/rural divide. "Inclusion" is a very broad term that would cover all these forms of inequality. However, the concept of inclusion extends even further, by highlighting a new facet of inequalities. "Inequality" is an abstract and impersonal term, whereas the language of exclusion/inclusion is often used to specify who exactly is excluded, who excludes, and from what it is that persons are excluded. This perspective has particularly been applied to issues of gender, to persons with disabilities, and "vulnerable" persons. The latter term denotes diverse groups, such as children, especially handicapped or orphaned children, persons with disability, older persons, or women.

There is another usage of "inclusion", which further differs from "inequality". While addressing social inequalities presupposes a comparison of a person's or group's position with that of another, pointing out deficient inclusion can also refer to socially defined standards, without necessarily or primarily involving comparisons. In this sense, inclusion is

about enhancement, reflecting the welfare state's intellectual origins in the Enlightenment, especially the idea of the self-perfectibility of man (Janowitz 1976). Education and medical services, for example, aim to develop citizens' cognitive and physical capabilities. Amartya Sen (1983) links inequality and inclusion to emphasise the absolute core of relative poverty, arguing that economic inequalities (or relative poverty) may impair inclusion (defined in "absolute" terms of capabilities). Sen's concept of capabilities is part of this inclusion tradition, as is T. H. Marshall's concept of social citizenship (see Leisering 2019: 51f.).

In collective terms, enhancement may mean raising the general standard of living in poor countries, that is, tackling collective poverty rather than individual poverty or inequality in the first place. This concept of enhancement is akin to a developmental notion of welfare, which Drèze and Sen (1991: 22) call "growth-mediated security", which is market-driven, in contrast to "support-led security" provided by the state.

Deficiency of inclusion is socially defined. From a constructivist perspective, social policy attends to forms of inclusion that political actors deem insufficient in view of socially defined standards (Kaufmann 2012: 153). Marshall (1950: 11) defines the substance of social citizenship in an open way by referencing "the standards prevailing in the society". The constructivist understanding opens up the concept of inclusion to a wide range of social issues: to diverse kinds of inequality and related exclusions, and to collective enhancement in respect to diverse aspects of living. In political terms, the openness of the concept of inclusion may thus enable consensus between different stakeholders. However, the openness of the forms and standards of inclusion also blurs the social question. Diverse interpretations are possible, giving rise to strong or weak, individualist or collectivist notions of the social question.[10]

Some authors see dependence/autonomy as the most fundamental social question and the core concern of the welfare state (Vobruba 1997; Leisering 2019: 49). Vocalising the social question as exclusion/inclusion is indifferent to the question of dependence/autonomy. Dependence/autonomy reflects an individualistic interpretation of inclusion, which

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[10] This is similar to the use of "universalism" by international organisations. "Universalism" belongs to the semantic field of "inclusion" and is also vaguely defined (see Leisering 2020).

would, for example, require "de-familialisation" (Esping-Andersen 1999: 45) to secure individual autonomy particularly for women and children, analogous to and supplementing "decommodification" (Esping-Andersen 1990) in the labour market. By contrast, conservatives and socialists tend to conceive of including persons as members of their families or other collectivities, with pre-defined rights and duties, rather than individual rights bearers.[11] Autonomy would also require de-clientelisation of social relationships. Clientelism and patronage is especially widespread in the Global South and a major concern for social policymakers (Wood and Gough 2006: 1707–1709).

What is the future of the social question if defined as social exclusion/inclusion? I have distinguished three facets of social questions: "objective" socio-economic conditions, the articulation of problematic conditions as societal concerns, and welfare institutions set up in response. The first and third facets indicate problems that could limit or even halt the further extension of social protections in many countries in the Global South. I postulate that there are two potential traps: the "residualism trap", which refers to welfare institutions (third facet), and the "inequality trap", which refers to socio-economic conditions (first facet).

The Residualism Trap

Several countries in the Global South, including our four countries, have a reasonable amount of economic resources and administrative expertise to plan and create substantial welfare institutions. Indicators like education, literacy, means of transport, or the use of digital technologies have all improved, even in many poorer countries. However, with rising social problems and expectations, more resources will be needed. For example, health services for all citizens according to the standards of Western and Northern European welfare states, or comprehensive social assistance to those in need, are currently elusive for Southern countries. In consequence, as long as countries are caught in a middle-income trap, it is unlikely they will escape a middle-social protection trap.

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[11] I owe this distinction to Jeremy Seekings.

Rising expectations are particularly pronounced among members of the middle class who aspire to Northern standards of public welfare, such as generous pensions and high-quality health services. However, "inclusion" is often meant to be achieved through universal welfare programmes, which tend to provide meagre flat-rate benefits to all citizens, such as non-means-tested, non-contributory pensions and low-quality services. Such programmes may be appropriate in societies in which most people are in or near poverty but tend to be less attractive for the rising middle class, who then invest in private provisions. If many members of the middle class have done so, it might be too late to win them back to state-based provisions. As a result, the middle classes' political support for public welfare will dwindle, the fiscal space also for services for the poor will shrink, and the universalistic services for the poor will become residual[12]—a residualism trap. In addition, demographic ageing might be too advanced in some countries, especially in China, to make the case for large-scale contributory and earnings-related old-age pensions.

The Inequality Trap

Economic inequality is extreme in all four countries and has risen massively in the wake of neoliberal policies since the 1990s (see Fig. 1.4 in Chap. 1).[13] Social cash transfers to the poor have tangibly reduced extreme poverty in many countries but have hardly affected inequality (World Bank 2018: 61; for Brazil and South Africa see Barrientos et al. 2013). Social protection in general has done little to reduce inequality[14] and has even produced massive new cleavages (for socialist China see Dillon 2015). Social inequalities in the four countries have seemingly become too exaggerated to be contained by social protection programmes. Social

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[12] See Esping-Andersen (1990: 25), Korpi and Palme (1998), and the discussion in Leisering (2019: 340–343).

[13] For inequality and stratification in the four countries, see generally Li et al. (2013) and Frazier (2011).

[14] For welfare outcomes of social policies in the BRICS countries, see Maiorano and Manor (2017), for the role of employment policies for income inequality see OECD (2010). In a major study of the relationship between social protection and inequality, Midgley (2020) revitalises the egalitarian claim of social protection.

protection policies are facing the challenge of switching from "easy redistribution" to "hard redistribution" (Holland and Schneider 2017).

Wulfgramm and Starke (2017) argue that in societies with extreme socio-economic inequalities, attempts at more far-reaching redistribution can become divisive. Based on data that includes Brazil, South Africa, and other middle-income countries, they find (2017: 20f.) that "both market inequality and state redistribution have dividing effects on public opinion… while the problem of income inequality certainly is driving a wedge into societies, the solution of more redistribution may be equally divisive from a certain level onwards… for progressive policy advocates in advanced welfare states, keeping the primary distribution of incomes in check may be preferable to further redistribution in order to avoid a more divided public… However, … many of the institutional preconditions of egalitarian 'predistribution'… may be extremely difficult to create and sustain in countries without historical precedent". That is, even if social protection policies escaped the residualism trap and achieved hard redistribution, they risk being divisive, not to mention that changes in primary distribution are beyond the reach of social protection policies.

At this point, we are reminded of the reformist nature of the social question concept. Marx scorned the reformist ideas of his time. In his 1875 *Kritik des Gothaer Programms* (Critique of the Gotha Programme)—a critique of the draft of a programme for a unified social-democratic workers' party in Germany—Marx criticised the expression "social question" as empty journalist talk that suggested a state-led strategy, as opposed to class struggle that would bring down capitalism. That is, Marx rightly saw the "social question" as the key semantics of the then-emerging reformist concept of "social policy":

> the physic of the prophet! … In place of the existing class struggle appears a newspaper scribbler's phrase: '*the* social *question*', to the *'solution'* of which one 'paves the way'. Instead of arising from the revolutionary process of transformation of society, the 'socialist organization of the total labour' 'arises' from the 'state aid' that the state gives to the producers' co-operative societies and which *the state*, not the workers, *'calls into being'*. It is worthy

of Lassalle's imagination that with state loans one can build a new society just as well as a new railway! (Marx 1977: n.p.)[15]

In fact, social protection policies in the South have left private ownership of the means of production and capital largely untouched. Capitalism—more precisely: predatory capitalism and oligarchical rule—has persisted, most visibly in Brazil and South Africa, or has appeared in a new guise in China, combining state capitalism with oligarchical Party rule. The earliest form of the social question, the land question, was about property, but no thoroughgoing land reform has ever been achieved, except for China in the early years after the communist revolution, although the reform was dismantled during the era of socialist transition (1953–1956) with the agricultural collectivisation, which in turn has been tacitly upturned during the era of expanding state capitalism. In Brazil, even Duguit's reformist concept of a "social function of property", despite its prominent place in the constitution, had little substantive impact.

Marx, in the above quote, asserted the limitations of "state aid" for workers in the face of the structural constraints of capitalism and pleaded for class struggle instead. Pellissery et al. (2015) extend Marx' argument beyond capitalist structures and economic inequalities. They demonstrate that both targeted and universalistic social protection policies cannot redress the "durable inequalities" of caste in India, but that political participation and mobilisation are needed to bring about structural change.

All in all, social protection policies in the four countries might be trapped by extreme inequalities and the residualist tendencies of inclusive welfare institutions. While reformist social strategies are subject to these traps, socialist social protections put in place in China between 1949 and 1978 are no solution either, since they provided minimal security at best

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[15] German original: " das Heilmittel des Propheten! … An die Stelle des existierenden Klassenkampfs tritt eine Zeitungsschreiberphrase—*die* soziale *Frage*, deren *Lösung* man 'anbahnt'. Statt aus dem revolutionären Umwandlungsprozesse der Gesellschaft 'entsteht' die 'sozialistische Organisation der Gesamtarbeit' aus der 'Staatshilfe', die der Staat Produktivgenossenschaften gibt, die *er*, nicht der Arbeiter, *ins Leben ruft*. Es ist dies würdig der Einbildung Lassalles, daß man mit Staatsanlehn ebensogut eine neue Gesellschaft bauen kann wie eine neue Eisenbahn!" (Marx 1962: 26).

in a society characterised by collective poverty.[16] Moreover, social protection in socialist China was highly stratified (Dillon 2015). Developmentalist strategies geared to growth-mediated security (be it through markets or a socialist command economy) are no cure either; they have produced the high levels of inequality in the first place and are prone to incur environmental damages with new problems of securing livelihoods. Both socialist and unfettered developmentalist strategies fail to give adequate attention to the exigencies of social protection.

Since the 2010s, all four countries studied in this volume have had radical leaders—Bolsonaro, Modi, Xi Jinping, and Zuma (the latter till 2018)—who took to nationalist policies, which are, sociologically speaking, a functional equivalent to social policy as means of societal integration, especially in times of abating economic growth rates.

Renewing the Social Question

Authors in the Marxist political economy tradition, such as Breman et al. (2019) and Therborn (2019), paint a gloomy picture of the future of the global social question, focused on the global spread of precarious labour.[17] Nor do the residualism and inequality traps promise a glamorous future.

Yet, when examining the core facet of the social question—the articulation of problematic conditions as societal concerns—a somewhat brighter picture emerges. From the angle of neo-institutionalist world society theory, Meyer (2009: 199) argues: "the growing list of perceived 'social problems' in the world indicates not the weakness of world-cultural institutions but their strength. …. A world with so many widely discussed social problems is a world of Durkheimian and Simmelian integration, however much it may also seem driven by disintegrative tendencies". However, do these global perceptions and discussions actually matter? International organisations operate with a surplus of "social" ideas, as Southern countries have also increasingly done since the 1990s.

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[16] For the predicaments of socialist social policies in a relatively well-off country, the German Democratic Republic (1949–1990), see Schmidt (2013).

[17] Interestingly, Therborn (2019: ix) also speaks of "inclusion" as the new social question but conceives of it in narrow labour terms.

Representations and recognition of social problems and problem groups abound, but they are only loosely coupled with actual measures and are often phrased in vague terms (see Leisering 2020 for the indistinctive use of "universalism" in global debates). However, several studies by Meyer and associates and other authors show that international organisations' ideas and models do influence domestic policies, even if only in the long run (for social pensions see Böger and Leisering 2020).

Furthermore, global discussions have been broadening, effecting a diversification of the social question. Over the last two decades, migration, climate change, environmental decay, global epidemics, and digitalisation have emerged as new (or newly addressed) global phenomena that raise issues of exclusion and inclusion. In the process, new ideational resources and frames from these "non-social" spheres may revitalise the social question. For example, the concept of "sustainability" ties the social question to the ecological question, which has a broader constituency and more political clout. Hybrid terms like "social sustainability" and "social and ecological sustainability", as addressed in the UN Sustainable Development Goals of 2015, redefine the concept of development as well as the role of social protection policies. Climate activists, the digital community, gender-rights advocacy groups, and the disability movement also bring new power and ideas to social policies. However, the challenges of hard social divisions by race (South Africa, Brazil), caste (India), class, and gender (all four countries) remain.

The future seems neither gloomy nor bright, but diverse. Some countries are pursuing more successful reformist strategies than others. It might be that a few Southern countries will build up a generous, well-managed, and rights-based architecture of social protections that includes all strata of society, based on a culture of publicly addressing the social question and a socially responsible state. The common reference to "Northern welfare states" obscures that even in the Global North, genuine welfare statism in this cultural sense is largely confined to a few countries in Western and Northern Europe and the Commonwealth (Kaufmann 2013a, c).

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