Global social policy studies: Conceptual and analytical reflections

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Abstract

This article reviews the conceptual and analytical contribution of one strand of 'global social policy studies' since the mid-1990s. It outlines some of the strengths and weaknesses of the core conceptual basis of the approach acknowledging that the theoretical aspects have remained more implicit than explicit in many core texts. The article advances the case for using the 'Agency, Structure, Institution and Discourse' (ASID) approach as a framework within which to advance the analysis of the formation and transformation of 'global social policy'. The recent development of the ILO and UN policy on advancing social protection floors is then used to illustrate how the ASID approach might be applied to an actual global social policy change.

Defining 'global social policy studies'

It has been 15 years since studies bearing the explicit label of 'global social policy studies' began (Deacon et al., 1997: 13–27, 219–221). The journal *Global Social Policy* was launched in 2001, following on from the founding of the Globalism and Social Policy Programme (GASPP). A book on *Globalization and Social Policy* appeared in 2001 (Yeates, 2001). An overview text on *Global Social Policy and Governance* (Deacon, 2007) was published in 2007. The student text *Understanding Global Social Policy* (Yeates, 2008) appeared in 2008 and *The Global Social Policy Reader* (Yeates and Holden, 2009) followed in 2009. Other contributions sharing some of the features of the 'global social policy studies' approach include Mahon and McBride's (2008) *The OECD and Transnational Governance* and Ervik et al.'s (2009) *The Role of International*

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Organizations in Social Policy. As a subject for study, 'global social policy' is now institutionalized with many masters' courses across Europe and North America.

Within this same time period another approach to the study of global social issues has been applied to the field of global social policy. This is the body of work carried out within the framework of 'world society theory' reviewed by Tag in this issue. Elsewhere one of us (Deacon, 2010) compared and contrasted the two approaches pointing out that work within the 'global social policy studies' 'school' tended to emphasize the role of named international actors often contesting the contents of specific global social policy prescriptions for countries, whereas in work within 'world society theory' the emphasis tended to be on the processes of global cultural dissemination which enabled certain policy issues to be regarded as global. In the former, an emphasis on actors and specific policy alternatives drew attention to conflict and contestation, whereas in the latter a focus on the global dissemination of norms and concepts drew attention to processes of convergence and homogenization. The former mainly focused on the content of contestable *specific policies*, whereas the latter focused upon how a *particular policy field* became globalized. The difference between the two schools is not our main focus here, although our emphasis on the Agency, Structure, Institution and Discourse (ASID) analytical approach suggests some common ground with Tag's particular development of 'world society theory' in this issue, particularly around the use of the concept of 'discourse', if discourse is understood as an order of ideas and practices which is more than specific policy debates between specific policy actors. At the same time, her insistence that the 'processes of change world society research analyses are not attributed to (individual) actors but to larger cultural processes, logics, and mechanisms' reveals continuing differences in the approach and preoccupations of the two schools. It is certainly the case that Meyer has developed a rather sophisticated understanding of 'agency' as a 'cultural construction' (cf. Meyer and Jepperson, 2000); at the same time, a view of agency as 'highly standardized and scripted' (Meyer and Jepperson, 2000: 111) leaves little room for exceptional and particular individual actors who 'make a difference'.

In our own key texts, we suggest that two dimensions largely frame the subject area of 'global social policy studies'. One is the extent to which global structures and actors are shaping the development of social policies within countries. This is not to downplay the continued salience of national policy choices or, indeed, as we argue below, the impact of some national governments' policies on global social policy. It is, however, to restate the importance of a focus on the specific social policy recommendations which certain global players make to countries concerning their national social policies. The other dimension is the emergence and functioning of mechanisms of global social governance that address, at a supranational level, the content of social policy traditionally operating at a national level. This second dimension includes modes and mechanisms of *redistribution* and *regulation* across borders, as well as the articulation, advocacy and advancement of global social *rights*; 'the three Rs' of global social policy. 'Global social policy' is about aspects of the complex and changing relations between globalization and modes of governance, regimes of citizenship and practices of redistribution. As such, it represents a significant challenge to the 'methodological nationalism' underpinning dominant understandings of social policy, and adds to comparative analysis of welfare

arrangements between nation-states an understanding of the role and impacts of supranational and transnational forces, connections and imaginations (Burawoy, 2000: 28).

This body of work is, in some senses, quite new, but in other senses, an extension of a rather older set of concerns with the state of the world's welfare. 'Global social policy' as we define it here builds on a tradition of critical development theory which has sought a broader understanding of human development and addresses the social impacts of an international political economy through the lens of whether or not they meet basic human needs. Although much of what passes for a 'human development paradigm' has concentrated on adapting a global concept to diverse national contexts, in terms of expanding welfare, freedoms and capabilities (Alkire, 2010), it is noteworthy, for example, that the 2010 Global Human Development Report *Rethinking Human Development* (UNDP, 2010) addressed both the increasing negative impact of the global financial system and the challenges posed by global warming for human development.

Whether 'global social policy' can develop a critical transdisciplinary perspective capable of moving, both theoretically and empirically, beyond the boundaries of rather narrow conceptions of 'globalization' and of 'social policy' (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009a) is an open question. Certainly, in some of our earlier studies (e.g. Deacon, 2000, 2005), an urgent desire to 'mend the world' has led perhaps to a failure to pause long enough to 'understand the world'. However, suggestions that 'global social policy' is inevitably trapped within a kind of top-down, paternalistic paradigm articulating reformist ideas which are 'clearly linked to notions of social policy that have a strong cultural bias' (Rieger, 2005: 13; Rieger and Leibfried, 2003), may be overstating the case. Whilst it is by no means trivial that 'global social policy' has been largely, although not exclusively, 'defined and shaped by scholars in the Global North' (Midgley, 2004: 17), the quest for what Midgley terms 'a truly global understanding of social welfare' has to address the real, if uneven, impact of global power structures as well as 'recognizing hybridity' and incorporating 'diverse projects' (Midgley, 2004: 17).

At times, it is the lack of critical distance between analysis and advocacy, which is, perhaps, the main problem. This is inextricably linked to the usage of 'translation terms' defined as 'words of general application used for comparison in a strategic and contingent way' (Clifford, 1997: 39). In Clifford's argument, 'all translation terms used in global comparison' – and much of the lexicon of 'global social policy' surely falls into this category – 'get us some distance *and* fall apart' (Clifford, 1997: 39). The best illustration of this is in terms of work tracing a 'shifting tide' of global social policy prescriptions, away from neoliberal models of a 'targeted and means tested future' (Deacon, 2005: 19) and towards a new discourse of a 'socially responsible globalization' amongst key international organizations. The conflation of analysis and advocacy here is compounded by the use of a translation term, namely the idea of a '*universal* approach to social welfare provision' (Deacon, 2005: 19, our emphasis). While intended to refer to the concept of providing cash benefits to all within a given polity without a test of means, the term 'universal' risks alienating key constituencies which might be part of any concerted global opposition to residualist social policy prescriptions, who are likely to read the concept of 'universal' in a rather different, and rather antagonistic, way. Concretely, in the Copenhagen Plus Five UN Summit in 2000 the UK's advocacy of a progressive set of universal global social policy principles was

roundly rejected by many Southern states because they were perceived as another Northern imposition. We suggest below that the reincorporation of national actors, particularly those from within the Global South into the analysis might enable 'global social policy studies' to yet escape its intellectual origins and what Rieger called its cultural bias. In terms of global social policy as a practice, one such step might have been the agreement by the UN to a Recommendation on Social Protection Floors in 2012 that was strongly supported by Latin American and African states and which might rescue global social policy as a practice from its Northern roots.

'Global social policy studies', as we and others have developed it, draws eclectically, and some might argue haphazardly, from development studies, international relations and international organization theory, policy transfer and diffusion literature, global social movement studies, neo-Marxist concepts of hegemonic struggle, and from work on the ethnography of global policy. Within this complex intellectual *potpourri*, three different conceptualizations were considered as particularly useful as elements of an analytical framework for understanding global social policy formation and transformation in both its dimensions (Deacon, 2007). These were the notions of *complex multilateralism* (O'Brien et al., 2000), global *policy advocacy coalitions* (Orenstein, 2005, 2008) and the *politics of scale* (Clarke, 2004, 2005; Gould, 2005; Stubbs, 2005). We review these again here before going on to suggest that the ASID framework offers a more general and overarching framework within which these concepts find a place.

Complex multilateralism

'Complex multilateralism' seeks to critique the rather clumsy binary within political science and international relations between 'state-centrist' and 'global cosmopolitanist' analyses. Whereas the former sees international organizations as still conditioned, primarily, by inter-state bargaining (cf. Gilpin, 2001), the latter traces an emerging system of global regulation dominated by global actors and processes (Held et al., 1999). In a dynamic and contested terrain of emergent global governance, a multiplicity of actors and processes come together in rather unpredictable ways. There is no necessary correspondence between organizational forms and action in these complex governance arenas. As nation-states and supranational organizations are joined, amongst others, by transnational corporations, global knowledge elites and networks, organized criminal syndicates, the Catholic Church and global Islamic movements, international trade unions, private armies (Josselin and Wallace, 2001) as well as international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and consultancy companies (Stubbs, 2003), the stage of global governance becomes more complex and less framed in terms of dominant narratives.

The absence of a well-developed, rule-bound and effective system of formal global governance creates a vacuum in which diverse actors and partnerships themselves perform different kinds of informal or semi-formal transnational regulatory activity. Thus, transnational corporations may develop private international regimes of self-regulation in many spheres (Hall and Biersteker, 2004), and global or transnational social movements have a degree of influence in a new politics of globalization (Della Porta et al., 1999; Kaldor, 2003), bringing issues like world poverty, global taxation, international labour standards and access to pharmaceuticals in poorer countries onto the agenda of

global governance bodies. The World Social Forum provides a global organizing space for some of these activities which parallels the organizing space provided to international business by the World Economic Forum and which, discursively, promotes a global imagination that 'Another World is Possible' (Waterman and Sen, 2007).

An early study of the ways in which global social movements (GSM) interacted with, and influenced, the policies of multilateral economic institutions (MEI) (O'Brien et al., 2000) is particularly instructive. Examining the relations between the World Bank and the women's movement; the World Trade Organization (WTO) and organized labour; and the World Bank and WTO and the environmental social movement, the authors concluded:

> Our study has stressed the link between forms of international institutions and social movements in which the state is just one area of contact and struggle (albeit an important one). The MEI–GSM relationship can be direct and need not be mediated by the state. Social forces within and across state borders are a factor in determining the nature of international order and organisation. (O'Brien et al., 2000: 234)

Linking theory and politics, the relationship between international organizations and this 'pressure from below' is treated differently in the literature. Bøås and McNeill, studying the development policies of several international organizations, including the World Bank, the WTO and the OECD, are rather pessimistic in their assertion that:

> Powerful states (notably the USA), powerful organisations (such as the IMF) and even powerful disciplines (economics) exercise their power largely by 'framing': which serves to limit the power of potentially radical ideas to achieve change. (Bøås and McNeill, 2004: 1)

Based on a particular reading of Gramsci's notions of hegemonic struggle and of the importance of a 'war of position' and a 'war of manoeuvre', one of us has suggested that other states, such as China and Brazil; other organizations, such as the ILO; and other disciplines, such as social policy, political science and sociology, are engaged in a war of position regarding the nature of global social policy prescriptions (Deacon, 2007: 16). However, the theoretical and political implications of this, particularly regarding the rise of new challenges to hegemonic power, have not yet been well developed in the 'global social policy' literature. Within the example of the social protection floor reviewed below, the important role of Brazil in progressive global polices is becoming clearer, as is the role of India as a source of resistance to and dilution of global policies. At the same time the role of China remains opaque.

Global policy advocacy coalitions

In terms of the reproduction of particular kinds of global hegemonies, what Orenstein (2003, 2005, 2008) has referred to as *global policy advocacy coalitions* play a crucial role. He uses the concept to explore and explain the successful roll-out of a particular global pension policy preferred by the World Bank from about 1990 onwards. Here, transnational actors formed a coalition involving an epistemic community of scholars, private pension providers, international organizations including the World Bank, regional

development banks and others, persuading a number of governments of the desirability of a three-pillar pension reform (including a private pillar). The global agenda setting was led by a knowledge network of economists linked to the Chicago school of neoliberal economics, having a global reach through Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek and others (Valdés, 1995). The network became institutionalized through work in the World Bank initiated by Larry Summers (then chief economist), which eventually published in 1994 the seminal text *Averting the Old Age Crisis* (World Bank, 1994). The same transnational advocacy coalition which had influenced World Bank policy then acted to further the adoption of these reforms in Latin American and Central and Eastern European countries. This coalition included the World Bank, USAID, the Inter-American Development Bank and others (Orenstein, 2005: 193).

Clearly, this strand of 'global social policy studies' opens up a significant research agenda on the processes of the formation of international networks of knowledge-based experts who play a role in framing issues for global policy and, in many cases, present key political choices as if they were the subject of merely technical knowledge and 'evidence'. The proliferation of globalized, or at least international, knowledge networks (termed KNETS by Stone and Maxwell, 2005), is another key aspect of the multiplication of actors in the global policy arena. Whether understood as 'epistemic communities' who share a codified form of 'scientific' knowledge about an issue (such as pensions), 'discourse coalitions and communities' who use symbols, language and narrative as a source of power, or as 'embedded knowledge networks' who possess authority because of their track record for problem solving, the importance of networks as 'sites and forms of power' (Stone, 2003: 7) is crucial, tending to work against public scrutiny and traditional forms of political accountability.

Utilizing a more anthropological frame, Janine Wedel takes this further in terms of the role of multiplex networks of actors who utilize multiple identities, which she terms 'transidentities' (Wedel, 2004: 165). She points to the rise of a new global power elite of 'flexians' operating in 'flex nets', which 'draw their membership from a limited circle of players who interact with each other in multiple roles over time, both inside and outside government, to achieve mutual goals' (Wedel, 2009: 16). The idea of 'flex nets', including the US-based 'neo-conservatives' as 'resource pools', able to prescribe, coordinate, implement, promote and justify particular policy prescriptions, is an important aspect of a complex global governance environment.

The politics of scale

The *politics of scale* refers to the idea that it is not adequate to capture the complexity of policy-making in a globalized world by thinking in terms of levels of government or governance. Accounts of taken-for-granted notions of subnational, national, regional and global 'levels' misses an important aspect of policy-making in a globalized world. Scale – instead – like space and time, is both contingent and politically constructed, as 'an outcome of the tensions that exist between structural forces and the practices of human agents' (Marston, 2000: 222). What is important here is that policy-making is not only taking place at different taken-for-granted levels of governance but that key policy players are transcending 'levels' at any one moment. The policy-making process is, therefore,

multi-sited and multi-layered as well as multi-actored. Within this context, individuals as change agents and policy translators can and do act in the spaces between levels and organizations (cf. Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009a: 678–679). A politics of scale is concerned with 'the production, reconfiguration or contestation of particular differentiations, orderings and hierarchies *among* geographical scales' (Brenner, 2001: 600).

An emerging strand of the 'global social policy studies' literature traces the complexities of the actions of transnational, international and global actors *within* national and regional spaces (cf. Deacon and Stubbs, 2007; Gould, 2005). The importance of emergent political configurations in terms of 'transnational partnerships' (Gould, 2005: 146) or even 'the mutual assimilation of donor and state power' (Harrison, 2001: 669) needs to be studied across space and time. The 'global is in the local' and the 'local in the global' captures some of this, providing a notion of power in terms of 'uneven reach', 'differential intensity' of places and spaces and the differential ability to 'jump scale' (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006). In broad brush stroke terms, we would assert that certain policy spaces open up, and others close down, in the encounters between international organizations and actors and national governments and that those who are better able to travel between these scales: consultants, INGO experts, think-tankers, policy entrepreneurs and so on, are often better placed to influence policy. Studying changes in national policy-making processes necessitates an understanding that policies are always multiple and contested, and that they both create and limit forms of political mobilization, as well as constructing and deconstructing subjectivities and identities (Lendvai, 2007: 27).

We return to these analytical building blocks with which global social policy studies has been associated in a later section when advancing ideas for strengthening its analytical framework. First, we turn to a shift which we perceive has taken place since the inception of 'global social policy studies' in the locus of global social policy-making from the Global North to a more equal partnership between countries in the Global North and South.

From Northern-driven global social reformism to South–South social policy transfers?

One of the most serious charges laid against this tradition of work on global social policy concerns its framing within what might be said to be an uncritical normative 'social-reformism-from-above' paradigm, blind to the origins of this position within the Global North. Yeates's *Globalization and Social Policy* (2001) itself articulated and went beyond this criticism, giving more emphasis to voices in 'global civil society'. One of us has argued that much of the 'global social policy' literature shares similar problems with a longer 'Anglo-European' tradition of comparative social policy analysis in appearing 'profoundly unaware or uninterested in the historical relationship between citizens, colonial subjects and non-citizen others within the circuits of imperialism and colonialism' (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2009b: 223). It is true that a lack of historical analysis, and, above all, the failure to study 'colonial social policy' regimes, reinforces a kind of 'presentist realism' rendering prior 'imaginings of world space' (Larner and Walters, 2004: 499) largely invisible. Certainly, a literature on the relationship between practices in the colonial world and 'the formation of law, public institutions, cultural identities and ideologies

of rule in Europe' (Blom Hansen and Stepputat, 2005: 19) is worthy of close attention. British colonial rule in Egypt, for example, involved inscribing practices of control as 'civilising innovations' (Mitchell, 1991: 175), with the development of public health and hygiene supervision, model villages, schooling and army training forming a kind of colonial social policy regime (see also Kabeer, 2004).

In hindsight, however, the very attempt, within an Anglo-European context, to fashion a 'radical' or 'critical' social policy from the late 1970s onwards, was based on an internationalist, and explicitly anti-colonialist, understanding and critique of the ways in which 'race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality operate as intersecting and mutually constitutive social relations' (Williams, 1998: 173). Perhaps, over time, the feminist and anti-racist dimensions of this critique have been less influential in terms of both the main concerns, and theoretical approach, within much of 'global social policy studies', certainly when compared, *inter alia*, with critical international political economy. Nevertheless, a distrust of crude 'West is best' modernization discourse, and an attempt to move beyond various forms of essentialism, including those advocating a new cosmopolitan sensibility, have remained important. As early as 2000, based on observing the *realpolitik* surrounding the distinctly Western-framed 'global social policy principles', argued for by Gordon Brown (1999), resisted strongly by some governments of the South, one of us wrote that the time had come for the Global South to take the lead in articulating social welfare visions for the world (Deacon, 2000). Suspicious of a universalizing 'ethic of cosmopolitanism' (Thomas, 2000: 815), *Global Social Policy and Governance* (Deacon, 2007) ended by endorsing critiques of 'the transferability of Western institutions to countries with a different cultural foundation as well as our standards of measurement of progress in the development of a welfare state' (Rieger and Leibfried, 2003: 326), and shared Robert Cox's search for a 'post-hegemonic' and 'post-Westphalian' order, accepting of 'different paths towards the satisfaction of human needs' (Cox, 1993: 286).

The move towards addressing the social dimensions of new regionalisms throughout the world was, we would argue, a way of attempting to overcome many of the conceptual and political problems of a colonial gaze concerning questions of global social policy. Operating in a space between national and cross-border policies, on the one hand, and a mere subordination to global forces and supranational organizations on the other, emerging regions are perhaps able to construct more appropriate mechanisms of redistribution for securing rights and social justice, and for regulating markets, institutions and social structures, involving risk pooling, economies of scale, and to develop a more coherent, critical and influential 'voice' in international arenas (cf. Deacon et al., 2007b). Regional social policies could then be devised that gave due recognition to diverse social and labour standards and reflected different cultural and religious approaches to social rights. Such a regional approach to a global social policy might, we suggested (Deacon, 2007), chime with the sentiments of many Southern voices that reacted against a Northern-driven global social democracy as strongly as they reacted against a Northern-driven global neoliberalism (Bello, 2004).

The innovative and ambitious development of South–South lesson-learning between regions (Latin America to Africa and vice versa as a prime example), even if sometimes more rhetorical than real, is increasingly enabling a sharing of experiences of postcolonial

struggle for comprehensive social protection. The first meeting of African ministers of social development convened by the Africa Union in November 2008 saw Lesotho state officials explaining to their counterparts in Brazil and Malawi the benefits of a new old age cash pension for those over 70 delivered by mobile cash points and reaching a quarter of Lesotho families. This is at the heart of a new process of global diffusion which is based on the principle of regional ownership, constituting a revitalized, Southern-driven, radical reformist practice and awareness which, as we hinted at above, has been significant in enabling global social policy-making to move beyond the North–South impasse so evident in 2000.

Strengthening the theoretical framework of global social policy studies

In the dialectic between theory and practice, there is a need for 'global social policy studies' to address the cultural bias of its formative phase and attempt to develop a framework which, in part at least, goes beyond this. Given that many Southern states are now key players in global social policy debates, it is both desirable and possible to strengthen global social policy studies' broad theoretical framework by moving beyond the eclecticism of some of the concepts used in its earlier phase. In the search for a more systematic approach or analytical framework for understanding global social policy formation and change, attempts by Frank Moulaert and Bob Jessop (notably Moulaert and Jessop, 2006) to combine agency, structure, institutions and discourses (the ASID approach as they term it) may offer a way forward within which our earlier concepts might find a more holistic home. Referring to the problem of the relationship between agency and structure, which predates social science itself, they suggest that:

> … it is almost impossible to analyse any aspect of socio-economic growth and development without referring directly or indirectly to the actions that steer or interfere with these processes, the structures that constrain action, the institutions that guide or hamper action and mediate the relation between structures and action, and the discourses and discursive practices that are part of these interactions. (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006: 2)

They define the four key concepts as follows:

Agency is any type of meaningful human behaviour, individual or collective, that makes a significant difference in the natural and/or social worlds. …

Structure comprises those moments of natural and/or social realities that, in the short or medium run and in a concrete spatial context … cannot be changed by a given individual or collective agency. …

Institutions … can be considered as 'socialised structure', i.e., a relatively enduring ensemble of structural constraints and opportunities insofar as they appear in the form of a more or less coherent, interconnected set of routines, conventions, rules, sanctioning mechanisms, and practices that govern more or less specific domains of action. … [and]

Discourse is the inter-subjective production of meaning. (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006: 2–3)

The concept of conjuncture is also central to their framework. Thinking conjuncturally involves an examination of the different, and sometimes divergent, tendencies at work in a particular location at a particular moment in time (Clarke, 2010). Using the ASID framework as 'a generic toolkit or heuristic that can be applied to all forms of social engagement with the natural and social worlds' (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006: 10) for the analysis of 'global social policy' offers rich possibilities.

Any understanding of (global) social *structure* in our work is far from the rather functionalist notion of social structure found within much of 'world society theory' (Meyer and Hannan, 1979; Meyer et al., 1997). Of course, the aim of applying 'the framework of capitalism, patriarchy and a racially structured imperialism with its concomitant global social divisions of class, gender and ethnicity and associated struggles over work, family, and nation' (Deacon, 2007: 21) sets a rather grand agenda for global social policy studies consistent with the ASID framework. One strand of this which has been addressed is the analysis of the emergence of a globalized middle class whose identity and interests are increasingly transnational (Deacon and Cohen, 2011; Stubbs, 1996). The middle class of developing and transitional countries may be giving up their historic role as national (welfare) state builders and, instead, are seeking to 'obtain access to services formerly subsumed within the province of the state, that now, increasingly, comes from the non-located, heterogeneous social relations that signify and support globalisation' (Cohen, 2004: 114). As a result 'the social and political bond between elite and non-elite falls apart globally and locally, leaving only economic … exploitation' (Cohen, 2004: 114). An understanding of these profound changes in global social structure is central to any analysis of the prospects for global, regional and national social policies.

In terms of the contribution of *institutions* to the understanding of global social policy, the institutional legacy of intergovernmental organizations has some path dependency effects just as diverse welfare state institutional structures within single countries do. The tripartite governance structure of the ILO (Baccaro and Mele, 2012) has contributed to the continued emphasis on the desirability of countries adopting and retaining (reformed) Bismarkian style PAYG pension systems, although the attempt to win the organization over to a focus on a minimum (non-contributory) social protection floor package – as we discuss below – has made progress despite some initial institutional resistance. The World Bank's prime concern with global capital accumulation has, in turn, contributed to its promulgation of a pension system based on individual private savings accounts. The limits of path dependency are clear, however, in the context of a long-standing concern with debates both within and between intergovernmental organizations (Deacon et al., 1997).

Although seeing *agency* as 'individual', and even 'idiosyncratic' (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006) is an important corrective to over-structural analyses, it is also the case that political agency 'has a strong impact on collective action, institutional mediation and transformation and also affects social-structural relationships' (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006). Countering the primacy given to 'cultural processes, logics and mechanics' within 'world society theory', global social policy studies have argued that, at times, particular individuals can be important in pushing global and regional social policy ideas. The 'UN intellectual history project' (Emmerji et al., 2005) has traced the strong influence of Andrea Cornia and Richard Jolly of UNICEF in contributing to shifting the dominant

global discourse from 'structural adjustment' to 'adjustment with a human face'. The same figures later influenced the UNDP in terms of developing measures of human and social development (the HDR indicators) to challenge the World Bank's economic growth indicators. Too little has been written on the generational influences within global policy fora and institutions and it is also evident that the careers and biographies of civil servants (national, regional and global) matter in terms of preserving or changing institutions and policies. In our recent study of international interventions in the making of social policy in South East Europe (Deacon et al., 2007a: 223), individual policy advocates and translators acting in fleeting global policy spaces often result in what might appear as 'accidents' of policy 'choice'.

It is perhaps the concept of *discourse* which has proved to be most slippery in much of global social policy analyses, partly because of the failure, until recently (see Tag, this issue), to consider the relevance and value of a Foucauldian approach to the concept. At the same time, a rather under-theorized sense that discourse, ideologies and ideas matter has been present throughout. One strand of work has stressed the importance of understanding the shifting and sometimes contested policy debates within and between international actors and agencies (Deacon, 2005, 2007). Ideas about social policy and social change and their transnational contestation and promulgation by differentially powerful agencies (St Clair, 2006) and the role of epistemic communities and transnational networks (Stone and Maxwell, 2005) have also been addressed. Dostal's (2004) concept of 'organizational discourses' has been used by Mahon in her work on the OECD (Mahon, 2009). Schmidt's (2008) focus on the importance of 'discursive institutionalism', which emphasizes the scope for actors within institutions to challenge dominant discourses, is also relevant. It might be important, however, in future analysis to understand discourse as less concerned with the minutiae of policy debates between factions and rather as a more generalized ordering of ideas and practices which frame the context within which specific policy debates are situated.

What is, of course, most complex, both theoretically and practically, is to assemble the four concepts together as an analytical approach in the context of any empirical study. Whilst it is important to question the determinist formulations of Sklair (2002: 99) or Soederberg (2006) that the entire range of international organizations, the policies they formulate and the intellectuals working within and around them can be understood as a fraction of the global capitalist class, only challengeable by 'the multitude' (Hardt and Negri, 2005), seeing global social policy in terms of the condensation of processes of material struggles around gender, race, class and ethnicity is both legitimate and desirable. Social policies at both national and global levels continue to be shaped by class, gender and ethnic interests and mobilizations and linked discourses concerning work (*who gets it*), family (*the role of women and how it is to be lived*) and nation/citizenship (*who belongs*) (Williams, 1995). The ways in which struggles around class, gender and ethnicity take on cross-border and global dimensions need to be further addressed.

Within the World Bank, as Sen (2004, 2006) has shown, arguments developed by feminists about the positive developmental effects of putting women at the centre of development by, for example, ensuring equal opportunity for girls in education and micro-credit for women have become accepted, and therefore in some ways distorted of course, as mainstream. Sen (2004: 13) comments that 'the real struggle to transform the

new discourse into effective policy change has to move on to the level of changes in institutions, laws, practices and norms'. In short, to be path-creating in international institutions, it is first necessary to change the discourse. It should never be forgotten, in this context, that 'established rules' can also be transformed, 'sometimes with major path-shaping effects, as individuals, groups, and other social forces reinterpret, resist, or overturn them' (Jessop and Neilsen, 2003: 8).

Our suggestion for a synthetic analytical approach is that the concepts and analytical tools that have been used to date within global social policy studies: 'complex multilateralism', 'policy advocacy coalitions', the 'politics of scale', speak within the specific field of global social policy analysis to one or more elements of this broader framework. 'Complex multilateralism' focuses on the global *institutions* most concerned with social policy and addresses their capacity to act as *agents* to impede or impel change. While their policies may be framed to an extent by countries, they also exhibit autonomy, with their secretariats able to shift the discourse and in turn alter their global social policy prescriptions. Transnational 'policy advocacy coalitions' combine the *agency* of individuals and collectives, and contribute to shifts in the dominant global *discourse*, and in turn, therefore, to shifts in policy. The 'politics of scale' has drawn attention to the ways in which policy actors jump scale and link the global to the local and through subcontracting become *agents* for *institutions* and help spread ideas. Perhaps it is because none of these three concepts put to use by 'global social policy studies' addresses the broader social *structural* context within which institutions, actors and ideas work that global social policy studies was initially blind to its own location within the global social structural context of colonialism.

We turn finally to the development of the ILO, UN, G20 and World Bank endorsed social protection floor global policy to illustrate how the ASID analytical framework, combined with the lower level concepts, can be helpful in advancing global social policy studies.

Explaining the global social protection floor

The ILO agreed at the International Labour Conference in June 2012 to adopt a new standard setting instrument which recommends to all member countries that they should establish as soon as possible a Social Protection Floor (SPF) which would comprise at least the following social security guarantees:

(a) access to a nationally defined set of goods and services, constituting *essential health care*, including maternity care that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality;

(b) *basic income security for children*, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;

(c) *basic income security*, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, for persons *in active age* who are unable to earn sufficient income, including in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and

(d) *basic income security*, at least at a nationally defined minimum level, *for older persons*. (ILO, 2012: 8)

   Moreover, these floors should be designed within a set of principles which includes universalism, non-discrimination and respect for the dignity of the recipient. They should be funded from a progressive tax base with international cooperation and support to complement national funds.

   The concept of the SPF was endorsed by the UN as a whole when it was agreed in the context of the global economic crisis in 2009 to set up the SPF initiative as one of several UN approaches to the crisis. It subsequently became endorsed as a global policy by the G20 both in France in 2011 and Mexico in 2012 and is supported by the new World Bank Social Protection and Labour Strategy 2012–2020 (World Bank, 2012).

   The story of how such a campaign became institutionalized within the ILO and the United Nations, and endorsed by the G20 has been told elsewhere (Deacon, 2009, 2011a, 2013). Within those accounts an explanation is offered of how this quite significant shift in global social policy came about. There were several aspects of this development which demanded an explanation. As we noted above, in 2000 an earlier attempt to get the UN to agree to a set of Universal Social Policy Principles was unacceptable to much of the Global South. What changed between 2000 and 2012? Furthermore, these new principles for a social protection floor for all residents and children of all countries went far beyond the traditional concern of the ILO to fashion standards only for some 20% of the world's population, workers covered by contributory social security systems. Moreover, how did such a policy become endorsed by the UN normally resistant to acting as one and by the G20 not known for its concern with social protection? The World Bank's acceptance also needed explaining given the history of ILO–World Bank contestation on issues of social protection (Deacon, 2007).

   The explanation cannot be reproduced in detail in this article, but in summary, it is suggested that the SPF resulted from the intersection of the *biographies* and careers of three individuals: the Head of the Social Security Department at the ILO, the Director General of the ILO and his Social Protection Advisor in his Cabinet (obviously supported by others in their teams) with the *idea* that the world needed a global social floor which had, for some time, been advanced by a policy advocacy coalition. This was, essentially, an idea whose time had come with the new *circumstances* of the 2008 global economic crisis, which provided the opportunity for the UN Chief Executive Board to act; an idea that could find an unlikely home inside the *institution* of the ILO, which was open to a degree of policy change because of the de facto *circumstance* of the development of forms of social protection in Latin America and Africa, and through the skilful development of alliances within the tripartite governing process. The subsequent endorsement by the G20 was largely due to determined work by one of the individuals working in the context of the fortuitous interest by France in having social protection on its G20 agenda.

   To recast this in the terms of the broad ASID framework, we can suggest the following. Global *structural* considerations such as the economic impoverishment of many triggered by the attempt by global capitalism to address the perennial problem of overproduction and under-consumption through the folly of bringing forward future purchasing power through unregulated credit to the non-credit-worthy provided the context for policy innovation. The *institutional* conservatism of the ILO was overcome through the shifting of the dominant *discourse* within the ILO from workers to residents. This took some 12 years from when the concept of the SPF was coined to its adoption. Finally

seeing *agency* as 'individual', and even 'idiosyncratic' (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006) enables us to stop always seeing the drivers of global policy change within the ILO (and indeed within other intergovernmental institutions) as primarily governments or social movements, but also as the work of international civil servants. The quadripartite structure of the ILO within which the tripartite teams of workers, employers and governments all sit facing the Secretariat in committee and are briefed with the 'office' draft of policy empowers the officials in ways which are rarely acknowledged (Deacon, 2013).

Recasting this broader ASID framework in terms of the specific concepts of 'complex multilateralism', 'policy advocacy coalitions' and 'the politics of scale' is also possible. Members of the policy advocacy coalition for the global social protection floor (Deacon, 2011a) used their relative autonomy within the ILO Secretariat and worked within the framework of complex multilateralism to win support from the global workers' organization in alliance with a series of progressive governments to achieve the policy change. By jumping scale, global protagonists of the SPF had already found themselves acting within meetings of the Africa Union to inject ideas about universal social protection in the AU's Social Policy Framework for Africa (Deacon, 2011b), a factor influencing the African delegations to the ILO.

Conclusion

In this article, we have tried to acknowledge some of the under-development of the theoretical dimension of the school of global social policy studies with which we have both, in different ways, been associated. In particular, we were concerned to draw attention to its initial lack of reflexivity and self-awareness of its location within a colonial history. We have argued that, by reinserting the national as an important actor in global social policy formation, and by drawing attention to the role played by some Southern countries in current global social policy-making, global social policy-making and global social policy studies might be able to escape that initial cultural bias. At the same time, we have attempted to revisit the conceptual tools used in earlier work and argue for their location with a broader ASID framework. We concluded with a report of the attempt to utilize these approaches to explain the development of the global social protection floor policy. Whilst we have advanced the case for utilizing the ASID framework, there is still a need for greater theoretical, analytical and conceptual clarity within and between the different strands of 'global social policy studies'. The subject will be enriched, in the future, by more texts which are explicit about their basis in diverse, and contending, theoretical approaches.

Acknowledgements

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Résumé

Les études de politique sociale mondiale: réflexions conceptuelles et analytiques

Cet article examine la contribution conceptuelle et analytique d'un fil d'études 'politique sociale mondiale' depuis le milieu des années 1990. Il donne un aperçu des forces et faiblesses de la base noyau conceptuel de l'approche en reconnaissant que les aspects théoriques sont restées plus implicites qu'explicites dans les textes de base nombreuses. L'article avance le cas pour l'utilisation de l'approche de 'l'agence, la structure, l'institution et le discours' (ASID) comme cadre dans lequel nous pourrons progresser l'analyse de la formation et de la transformation de la 'politique sociale mondiale'. Le développement récent de la politique de l'OIT et de l'ONU sur la promotion de socles de protection sociale est ensuite utilisé pour illustrer comment l'approche ASID peut être appliquée à un réel changement politique sociale globale.

Mots-clés

cadre analytique, politique sociale mondiale, socles de protection sociale, théorie, acteurs transnationaux

Resumen

Estudios de política social global: reflexiones conceptuales y analíticas

Este artículo revisa la contribución conceptual y analítica a los estudios de Política Social Global realizada desde los años noventa por una corriente de pensamiento. Identifica fortalezas y debilidades de la base conceptual central de ese enfoque, reconociendo que

los aspectos teóricos han permanecido más implícitos que explícitos en muchos textos relevantes. El artículo propone utilizar el enfoque 'Agencia, Estructura, Institución y Discurso' (AEID) como marco analítico para avanzar en el análisis de la formación y transformación de la 'política social global'. El desarrollo reciente de las políticas de la OIT y las Naciones Unidas vinculadas con los Pisos de Protección Social sirve de base para ilustrar cómo el enfoque AEID podría ser aplicado para un cambio real en la política social global.

Palabras clave

marco analítico, política social global, Pisos de Protección Social, teória, actores transnacionales

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