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Misaligned Social Policy? Explaining the Origins and Limitations of Cash Transfers in Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This article examines whether the transitional government in the wake of the December 2018 Sudanese revolution succeeded in realigning social policy with public demands. The article focuses on the evolution of cash transfer programmes from the 2012 cash programme under the Ingaz regime to the transitional government's programme 2021. While the recent programme was popularly viewed as a 'World Bank programme', its originators were in fact Sudanese professionals. Similarly, the Ingaz regime experimented with cash transfers before seeking out World Bank technical support. In this sense, cash transfers cannot be seen as an external imposition, as domestic actors have favoured them across different regimes. Yet, their appeal may still reflect the 'choicelessness' that Thandika Mkandawire associated with structural adjustment, as in both cases cash transfers were introduced as part of broader economic reform. Sudan's case is distinct in the sense that its domestic policy makers did not begrudgingly accept cash transfers but were enthusiastic instigators of them. The article traces the origins of this enthusiasm within Sudan's recent political history and explores the way in which alignment with international mainstream policy making locks Sudan into a bind. The country urgently needs to reverse the fragmentation of social policy along geographic and racial lines, yet these programmes do little to overcome such regional and racial inequalities. Thus, even after a popular revolution displaced the prevailing political settlement and called for radical change, policy makers remain misaligned to public demands.

INTRODUCTION

A revolution is supposed to overturn the status quo, not simply change the names of ministers. When Sudanese people took to the streets in December

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2018 demanding the fall of the Ingaz regime,[1] they were not calling for a new government to do the same things for a new set of constituents. They wanted transformative change that would address the fundamental challenges of regional inequality and racialized prejudices. This article examines the degree to which the Sudanese revolution (December 2018 – September 2019) opened up Sudanese policy making to the possibility of change. We focus on the country's social policy programmes, with particular attention to the transitional government's flagship social policy programme, the Sudan Family Support Programme (SFSP). The SFSP is a time-bound cash transfer programme that initially aimed to provide 80 per cent of the population with US$ 5 per person per month, later to be scaled back to 20 per cent of the most vulnerable. At the time of our fieldwork, the programme was popularly described as a 'World Bank programme' but our research revealed a more complicated origin story.

By the time Sudan adopted the SFSP in February 2021, it had two prior experiences of cash transfers: World Food Programme (WFP) pilot programmes starting in 2009 and the Social Initiatives Programme (SIP), a state-led effort under the previous Ingaz regime (1989–2019). During the Ingaz regime and the transitional government, Sudanese professionals were the initiators, motivated by a combination of political, ideological and pragmatic considerations. This experience contrasts with the origins of cash transfer programmes in other African countries where external actors have had to overcome domestic contestation. One interviewee who was familiar with WFP cash transfers across multiple African countries contrasted Sudan's experience of domestic support with the concerted push-back of domestic actors in Mozambique.[2]

Based on our findings, we argue that while cash transfers have strong domestic support, their adoption nevertheless reflects the 'choicelessness' that Thandika Mkandawire (1999) associated with structural adjustment: under reform conditionalities, policy makers have little choice but to accept international ideas. Both under the Ingaz regime and the transitional government, cash transfers were introduced as part of broader reform measures and in the case of the latter, there was little appetite from donors to support other more transformative programmes. Yet we still found evidence that policy makers exercised choice — and in fact, real enthusiasm — for cash transfers. Our article explores this 'choice' and enthusiasm in the context of Sudan's recent political history.

1. Ingaz is the unofficial name of the political regime during Omar Al Bashir's presidency (1989–2019). In Sudan, the term 'the Ingaz regime' is used interchangeably with the names of the two parties that he led: the National Islamic Front (NIF) from 1989–99, which later became the National Congress Party from 1999–2019. 'Ingaz' is an Arabic word that roughly translates to rescue, salvage or salvation, referencing the justification made by the NIF that its usurpation of power through a military coup in 1989 was a salvation.
2. Online interview, former WFP employee, 23 November 2022. See also Adésínà (2020) and Ouma and Adésínà (2019).

We argue that the support of mainstream development ideas by domestic actors did not come about simply through external imposition, but rather through a more complex process of intellectual narrowing in which both international and domestic pressures played a role. While Sudan is similar to other countries in that reform pressures curtailed policy autonomy, domestic political processes have also played a significant role. Specifically, as a neoliberal political movement, the Ingaz regime sought to re-engineer the state and liberalize its economic and social policies. In the process, it set off parallel transformations outside the state, prompting unaffiliated policy professionals to emigrate or take up positions at international organizations operating in the country. Through this political re-engineering, the domestic intellectual environment became curiously consensual. Both regime and oppositional networks tended towards neoliberal (or at least, neo-classical) understandings of economic growth and residual approaches to social policy. Meanwhile, the prioritization of security and military concerns by the state in marginal areas such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and South Sudan created vacuums for international actors and Sudanese professionals employed in these organizations to shape social policy in these areas in line with international ideas and technologies. Together, these political processes, along with broader reform pressures, pushed social policy towards greater alignment with international ideas and norms.

We proceed to explore how this convergence places Sudan in a bind. On the one hand, Sudan desperately needs to confront regional and racial inequalities head-on and counter the fragmentation of social policy along geographic and racial lines. And yet, as we shall explain, cash transfer programmes do little to address the regional inequality and racialized prejudices that inflame conflict and political instability in the country. While the most recent cash transfer programme did attempt to build a stronger relationship between the central state and individuals in historically marginalized communities, it maintained heavily privatized and segmented service delivery channels and thus did not seek to transform relationships between citizens in different geographic areas. Social policy remained segmented even as the poor had some cash in their pockets.

Our case points to a more profound and lasting impact of neoliberal reforms; the misalignment between domestic policy making and popular demands and public opinion. As Olukoshi and Laakso (1996: 22) remarked a quarter of a century ago regarding the displacement of the middle class amidst structural adjustment, 'the "disappearance" of the middle class is little helped by the attempts by foreign donors to employ some of them outside the state system since what it means is that they mostly become dependent on distant political institutions and decision-making processes and lose an important part of their organic relation to their own society'. At least in Sudan, this fear seems to have been borne out. Yet our research also revealed some remaining domestic autonomy. While donors were happy to provide funding for cash transfers as a social protection measure (i.e. as a form of social policy specifically aimed at reducing vulnerability), Sudanese policy makers saw potential in using them for more complementary roles, hoping to accompany cash transfers with greater spending on health, education and economic investment. Ultimately, during the transition, external donors still held the purse strings and were unwilling to fund such programmes.

The analysis in this article is based on secondary historical literature, policy documentation of the three programmes (WFP, SIP and SFSP) and interviews with 16 policy experts in academia, government, donor missions and international organizations, some of whom were involved in their implementation. It also draws on the professional experiences of Muez Ali in his capacity as a technical expert to the SFSP in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP) (2020–21). The article is structured as follows. First, it provides theoretical background to the impacts of neoliberal reforms on social policy in African countries, and particularly the way in which reforms unmoored public policy from domestic deliberation and popular sovereignty. The focus then shifts to Sudan's experiences, tracking both domestic and international drivers of social policy fragmentation and regional conflict. Following on, Sudan's experiences are examined to determine whether cash transfers have countered or aggravated regional inequalities and animosities. Ultimately, it is concluded that bolder, more far-sighted social policy is required to address Sudan's uneven development, but that the current intellectual and professional environment makes it difficult to imagine such ideas emerging and gaining favour among external donors.

SUPRANATIONAL ENGINEERING AND THE CURTAILMENT OF CHOICE

In the warmth of the Arab Spring, it seemed that democracy was blossoming across North Africa and West Asia. Encircled by ever growing crowds of protesters, dictator after dictator faced his day of reckoning. When Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak finally resigned in 2011, it appeared that even his erstwhile patron, the United States, was giddy with hope. Yet, three years later, and following a brief spurt of democracy in which the Muslim Brotherhood won a popular election, President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi stepped up and put a spigot in the wellspring of Egypt's transition to democracy. 'He may be a bastard', F.D. Roosevelt is said to have quipped in an earlier time, 'But he's our bastard'. Obama seemed inclined to agree.

Elite suspicions of democracy are as old as democracy itself, but they seem particularly pronounced in relationships between richer and poorer nations. When the independent states of Africa, Asia and Latin America sent their representatives to the United Nations to call for a 'New International Economic Order' in 1974, some neoliberal thinkers in Washington and Europe began to strategize new forms of global oversight that would limit democratic interference in 'free' markets (Slobodian, 2018). They embarked on processes of institution building at the supranational level, creating investor rights treaties, international courts and trade agreements that would lever market access and financial assistance in exchange for constraints on national sovereignty. The debt crisis in the 1970s–1980s provided further entry points, allowing neoliberals to use financial assistance as a lever to restrict policy space and shifting policy making deeper into supranational bodies. Some neoliberal economists had grown quite forthright in expressing their doubts about democracy in low- and middle-income countries, claiming it had been tainted by organized special interests. While rural voters might be more numerous, they argued, it was the urban middle classes who had the organizational capacities to 'do politics' and capture policy making (Bates, 1989/2005; World Bank, 1981).[3] Critical voices on the political left had also started questioning state-led development, describing it as having an urban, elite and capital-intensive bias and constituting a drain on the rural poor (Lipton, 1977; Singer and Jolly, 1972; Stryker 1979). As it transpired, neoliberals had nothing to fear from the democracies that emerged in the 1990s. In countries such as Zambia, Tanzania and South Africa, the new democrats 'talked left' but walked decisively right (Bond, 2004; Mkandawire, 2006). Mkandawire explained this outcome as an effect of the conditionalities imposed by international financial institutions (IFIs), which had effectively stripped democracies of real choice. Once conditionalities were in place, he argued, policy choices were so circumscribed that all parties were compelled to embrace similar policies of privatization, stabilization and liberalization and, later, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, eerily similar in their content despite being 'supposedly domestically driven' (Craig and Porter, 2003).

Mkandawire noted some exceptions: the older democracies of Botswana and Mauritius had undertaken more gradual and strategic reforms, tailoring adjustment to suit domestic needs. Such moderation was partly explained by their fiscal health and therefore autonomy, but it was also due to their corporatist social pacts, which had forced policy makers to place 'political coherence' above 'technically coherent economic policies' (Mkandawire, 2006: 18). These pacts ensured that external policy prescriptions were adapted and 'socially embedded' (Ruggie, 1982) and that voters felt democracy provided them with meaningful choice.

By the end of the 1990s, political scientists were beginning to link structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) with the onset of rising ethnic and civil conflicts in many African countries, arguing that reforms had removed the mechanisms through which states had balanced competing demands and had forged national consciousness across uneven economic geographies (Boone, 2007; Meagher, 2010; Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996). The middle classes were particularly demonized as 'rent seeking' and 'parasitic' despite the fact that their occupational identities 'had endowed them with a national outlook that [had been] central to the construction of a post-colonial national-territorial

3. For a critical review, see Mkandawire (2015).

space' (Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996: 22). Indeed, what made the curtailment of sovereignty so dangerous was how it unmoored domestic policy makers from political accountability (Mkandawire, 2010). While citizens experienced the devastating impacts of structural adjustment, they perceived their own leaders as responsible. African states and civil servants were stripped twice: losing sovereignty from above and legitimacy from below.

While adjustment fractured domestic sovereignty, so too were the state's responsibilities splintered on the ground. In the realm of social policy, donors increasingly allocated funding towards specific activities, administered by humanitarian organizations in place of direct budgetary support to governments. In other cases, self-help and 'social capital' were promoted as empowering alternatives (Fine, 2010).[4] Social policy became increasingly fragmented across regional and class lines and dislocated from the crucial related tasks of nation building and economic development. Old cost- and risk-pooling models were replaced by segmentation; those with money paid their way while those who couldn't came to rely on poor-quality public services or charitable provision (Mkandawire, 2005: 7). In Sudan, this fragmentation additionally mapped onto older patterns of racialized capitalism[5] and deepened identity-based saliences and prejudices (Bedasso, 2017; Deng, 1995; Johnson, 2003).

Over time, donors moved away from the aim of broad-based economic development towards the much more targeted and measurable UN Millennium Development Goals (Morgan and Bach, 2018). This shift also entailed the individualization of aid (Kabeer, 2020). In place of conceiving of development as a society-wide transformation, donors increasingly framed it in terms of individual empowerment and measured growth in productivity gains and/or reductions in transaction costs (Sen, 1999; Whitfield, 2012). Social policy was re-imagined as poverty reduction (Tendler, 2004). Such 'residual' social policy was, of course, in stark contrast to the historical experiences of donor countries, whose welfare regimes had evolved out of productivist strategies to equip workers with skills and safety nets (Jallade, 1988; Kwon et al., 2009; Rodgers, 2000).

Cash transfers are arguably the culmination of these trends. While initially developed within distinct political contexts in Central and South America, they have since exploded worldwide, favoured by donors wishing to target aid in an individualized and controlled manner (Handa and Davis, 2006; Ouma and Adésínà, 2019). Proponents claim they are pro-poor and give individuals freedom of choice. Economically, they are said to smooth

4. For a discussion of Sudan, see Mann (2011) and Pratten (2000).
5. Racial capitalism is a term developed by Cedric Robinson (1983) to refer to the historical accumulation of economic and social capital by European groups at the expense of non-European groups (Melamed, 2015). Within the Sudanese context, we use the term to refer to the accumulation of economic and social capital by central, riverine, Arab-dominated groups (*qabila)* at the expense of other groups in the geographic and economic margins of the country.

consumption and help reduce the risks of shocks and price fluctuations. Targeted at individuals, they embody methodological individualism and reflect the idea of financial inclusion and entrepreneurship as key drivers of growth. Critics assert that they do nothing to reverse the privatization and segmentation of public services and that they fail to coordinate social policy with broader growth and nation-building strategies (Adésínà, 2020; Mkandawire, 2005, 2006; Ouma and Adésínà, 2019). In effect, they provide individuals with the means to purchase health and education on the private market and can neglect how an individual's entrepreneurial strategies can depend on the broader structure of the economy (Bateman et al., 2019; Handa and Davis, 2006). Critics also charge that cash transfers are underpinned by the fiscal imperatives of aid rather than domestic resource mobilization (Mkandawire, 2005: 13). While taxpayers in donor countries might favour social policy oriented towards the very poor, middle-class taxpayers in recipient countries have historically preferred universal policies, which include them and thus help build cross-class solidarity (ibid.).

Materially and symbolically, cash transfers operate in different registers. In official documents, they are portrayed as transparent and technical, administered by supposedly neutral banks and telecommunication partners. In practice, however, large networks of people are still required for enrolment and governments can use such enrolment to reward loyalty and/or build legitimacy. We therefore see how cash transfers offer contradictory promises to different audiences. On the one hand, they promise 'hard data' to donors seeking quantified monitoring and evaluation, and who wish to conduct impact evaluations and randomized controlled trials across regions (Kabeer, 2020; Mann and Iazzolino, 2021). But, on the other hand, the processes through which such quantitative data are produced requires enrolment, and the politicization of this process can bias the sample. For recipients, cash represents a highly visible and direct form of social spending in contrast to the much more indirect, long-term processes of structural change and development.

Jimi Adésínà has identified a certain irony in the way cash transfers have spread within Africa. He identifies four stages in a process of 'policy merchandising': first, donors 'seek … out soft government departments as client agencies' to 'secure a foothold'. Second, they 'initiate pilot schemes … fully funded and managed by the donor or multilateral agency' which gather evidence on effectiveness. Third, they 'manufactur[e] … civil society organizations … to invent a local demand and advocacy', and finally, they 'secur[e] the support of local politicians — in both the legislature and the executive' by appealing to their potential use in electoral politics (Adésínà, 2020: 573–74). Adésínà concludes:

"The effect of the role of extra-territorial actors — from donors, international NGOs to consultants — has been to weaken the anchoring of policy making on domestic deliberative governance. Those who bemoan neo-patrimonialism in African politics do not seem to have any difficulties in leveraging neo-patrimonial instruments for pushing their policy preferences. In place of associational organs of society, we have diverse cases of manufactured NGOs, created and funded by the same extra-territorial forces that initiated the policy instruments for which the local NGOs will advocate. (ibid.: 577)"

One might say that the choicelessness generated by supranational engineering has helped to promote neo-patrimonial forms of politics on the ground. By emptying politics of organic ideas, IFIs and donors are in danger of reducing politics to a competition over resources and implementation control and losing sight of broader roles that social policy can play in nation building and structural change.

This article analyses the genesis of cash transfer programmes in Sudan within a broader political history of the country in order to trace both their origins and limitations. While international organizations and reform pressures have been important ingredients in the adoption process, Sudan's experiences do not fit so neatly within the merchandizing process described above. First, support from Sudanese policy makers did not come last, but early on. In both the transitional government and the previous Ingaz regime, domestic policy makers regarded cash transfers as an efficient, non-distortionary form of social protection that fit with their professional training and ideological beliefs. Electoral considerations may have contributed to their appeal within the Ingaz regime but were not relevant during the transitional government (2019–21). Instead, key actors in the transitional government stated and appeared to genuinely believe that cash transfers could help counter regional inequality and conflict by integrating recipients from humanitarian and government databases, thus meeting the needs of historically marginalized communities. We found little evidence of domestic criticisms of these programmes even amongst those most critical of the transitional government's wider policies.

Sudan also differs from the model above in the sense that 'manufactured NGOs' are absent. In place of manufactured NGOs, we have highly visible revolutionaries calling for much more radical change but unable to influence the policy-making process in concrete ways. Thus, while one might agree that domestic policy making has lost its anchor in deliberative governance, this dislocation does not stem from the activities of extra-territorial actors alone in manufacturing support or merchandizing their ideas through neo-patrimonial political bargains, but rather from a more complex inter-action between domestic political developments and exposure to international pressures, ideas and professional opportunities. The next section traces the roots of cash transfers in Sudan, first in WFP initiatives and then later in the Ingaz regime. We draw attention to both the domestic and external pressures that have contributed to the regional and racialized fragmentation of social policy as well as the narrowing and concentration of intellectual space around neoclassical economics and residual approaches to social policy.

FRAGMENTATION: FIRST THROUGH THE STATE AND THEN THROUGH THE MARKET

Sudan has a long history of uneven economic incorporation and development accompanied by racialized and regional conflict. Under the Anglo-Egyptian condominium government (1899–1956), Sudanese political development had broadly proceeded along Mamdani's (1996) characterization of the bifurcated colonial state: citizens from central riverine areas were recognized as literate Muslims and were incorporated into the 'national economy' through state-led infrastructural and development programmes. Their economic activities were recognized and counted in official statistics and planning and they were able to receive public goods and exert formal power through political parties, university associations and trade unions (Young, 2018). As a result, Sudanese 'national identity' was heavily shaped by their own culture, religion, ethnic identity and language (Sharkey, 2008). In contrast, those in marginal areas were more excluded from formal economic participation and were subject to a hybrid racial categorization first by European colonial officials, and then by the new Sudanese elites who had come to occupy positions of economic and political authority (ibid.; Young, 2018).[6] These groups were racialized as 'others' and developed a much more tenuous relationship with the formal state. In the coming years, they would increasingly resort to political violence to assert their political interests (Adwok Nyaba, 2019).

Upon independence in 1956, Sudanese policy makers inherited an economy with relatively high social spending but stark patterns of regional, and increasingly racialized, inequality. At the time, policy makers debated whether to continue down the path of large-scale commodity production that had been established by colonial authorities (in keeping with mainstream development theories of the time) or to instead cultivate regionally distinct industries that would potentially be less efficient but more likely to reduce racialized inequalities and strengthen national cohesion (Young, 2018). Policy makers opted for the former, eager to generate high export earnings and thus the funding necessary for decolonization (ibid.). There was much commendable about social policy making during this era. The government invested in public health and education, unified primary and secondary curricula, and helped transform Gordon Memorial College into the University of Khartoum, one of finest universities in Africa. Although secondary and tertiary education policy maintained the colonial legacy of restricted access (closely coordinated to the demand for skills), the system was at least structured so that regional elites (largely from across the North) could take part in a unified domestic intellectual and professional network. Prestigious secondary schools like Hantoub, Wadi Sedna, Rumbek and El

6. For a wider discussion of the hybrid development of anti-black racism in African Muslim societies, see Young and Weitzberg (2022).

Fasher acted as 'feeders', drawing individuals from across the country into the University of Khartoum (Sanyal and Yacoub, 1975; Umbadda, 1990).

Although this decision to reproduce colonial patterns of formal incorporation was partly shaped by economic theory and supported by international financial institutions at the time (Young, 2018), the resulting patterns of uneven development fed identity-based explanations for inequality and contributed to political conflict and resentment in the coming years (Deng, 1995; Johnson, 2003; Mann, 2011: 268; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004). In conflict areas, citizens came to rely on charitable and humanitarian aid as well as on militia groups to govern everyday life (El Gizouli, 2020; Pendle, 2015; Rolandsen, 2015). Thus a negative feedback emerged which continues to this day. Government underinvestment into marginal areas created a structured system of racial capitalism and contributed to racialized grievances and conflict which introduced parallel delivery channels for social policy, entrenching separation and racialized prejudices that further fuelled animosity and conflict. From this history, one might deduce that a central aim of Sudanese social policy ought to be to counter this slide towards fragmentation and to use social policy as a tool of nation building and more equitable growth.

As in other countries, however, structural adjustment fuelled the fire. In 1977, President Nimeiry agreed to structural adjustment in exchange for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The democratically elected government of Prime Minister Sadiq Al Mahdi accepted similar conditions in 1986. In both instances, Sudanese experts warned 'of the folly of following the IMF blindfolded' (Ali, 1986: 68). Ali (1990) argued that the adoption of IMF policies by Sudan's third democracy in 1986 created the conditions for the 1989 coup that brought the Ingaz regime to power, and one can arguably say the same about the impact of reform pressures on the political stability of the transitional government in 2019. However, it is important to stress that structural adjustment policies adopted in 1990 under the Ingaz regime were homegrown, implemented without the financial and programmatic support and conditionalities of the World Bank and IMF (Ali and El-Battahani, 2011: 302) and went much further in reducing spending on social services. This orientation can be explained by the context within which the regime emerged: amidst protracted debt arrears and a political history in which the two dominant parties of the Umma and the National Unionist Party/Democratic Unionist Party had monopolized party politics and state power since independence. As an opposition movement, Ingaz ideologues therefore regarded statist development as neocolonial, morally corrupt, politically exclusionary and developmentally disastrous. In place of state-led development, this new government would favour private sector development, particularly among small and medium enterprises, and would shift social policy towards both liberal and Islamic and community-led models (Abdalla, 2017; Badr El Din, 2004; Gallab, 2001; Jamal, 1991; Mann, 2014; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004).

Having come to power in 1989, the Ingaz regime embarked on a fiscal transformation in 1991 to reduce the budget deficit (a move viewed favourably by the IMF). Compared to the previous SAPs imposed by the IMF on Nimeiry and Sadiq Al Mahdi's governments in 1977 and 1986 respectively, the Ingaz regime's policies went further. They undertook harsh cuts to development expenditure, including health and education, which decreased from 14.6 per cent of total domestic expenditure in 1991 to 3.6 per cent in 1996. This reduction accounted for 40 per cent of overall cuts (IMF, 1999). These policies were part of broader deregulation and liberalization reforms aimed at increasing private sector participation. The regime used privatization, Islamic finance, microcredit and remittances from the Gulf to create new networks among the urban middle classes (Jamal, 1991). In 1997, the government engaged in its first Staff Monitored Programme with the IMF, initiating more reforms aimed at reducing the fiscal deficit, unifying the exchange rate and tightening monetary policy. On IMF advice, the government also introduced VAT in 1997 (ibid.) in response to decreasing tax revenues in the early 1990s due to weak tax administration, widespread exemptions, weak tax performance on international trade and a shift to taxation of local consumption. From 1997, the economy underwent a second transformation as oil rents began to allow the government to finance its political project in the absence of growth in agriculture or manufacturing.

In line with these cuts, education and health were both commercialized (Ali and Abdalla, 2021; Mann, 2014), and power and resources were shifted away from established administrative units onto more informal political networks including 'local popular committees' controlled by loyal patrons (Abdalla, 2017; El Gizouli, 2020; de Waal and Abdel Salam, 2004). These patrons were given discretionary control over social benefits, commercial permits and state certifications, and were able to impose their own preferences and moral judgements onto beneficiaries, determining, for example, which single mothers were worthy of benefits (El Gizouli, 2020: 2). When needed, these patrons could then be activated to strengthen loyalty during elections (Musso, 2012; Willis and El-Battahani, 2010).

As part of the 'education revolution', the Ingaz regime increased the number of public universities from four to 27, turning many of those prestigious secondary schools into regional universities and encouraging new private universities to open, thereby altering the intellectual geography of the country and weakening key institutions through which the traditional parties had reproduced their power at the national level (Mann, 2011). The regime also initiated *tamkeen* ('empowerment') in government institutions, replacing experienced civil servants with politically loyal individuals and imprinting state policy with the regime's ideology and moral beliefs (Gallab, 2001; Mann, 2014). They empowered new actors such as the Zakat

Chamber (administrator of the Islamic tax, *zakat*) to oversee national state programmes (Abdallah, 2017; Hassanain and Saaid, 2016).

Donors observed such politicization and grew increasingly unwilling to provide direct budgetary support to the government, particularly after formal sanctions were imposed by the United States in 1997, followed by the UN in 2005. Donors concentrated resources in rural communities in conflict regions. Here, their immediate concern was subsistence rather than economic growth.[7] Meanwhile, non-affiliated Sudanese professionals responded to *tamkeen* by either emigrating or seeking employment in international institutions working in Sudan. In both cases, they became credentialed and enmeshed in international norms and best practices, seeing themselves as part of international expert policy networks (Mann, 2013). Those based in conflict areas operated within the frameworks set by international organizations and UN bodies and had some influence over the direction of social policy as the government was largely concerned with security.

Over time, Sudanese citizens in all parts of the country became increasingly reliant on non-state entities such as private healthcare providers or NGOs, as well as on semi-formal governance mechanisms such as militias and social networks to access social services (Abdalla, 2017; Beckedorf, 2012; Koumurian and Hussein, 2016). Such restructuring resulted in heavily segmented provision in which wealthier communities enjoyed better access, but it also elevated the importance of charitable provision, which allowed wealthier groups to project their moral and ideological beliefs onto beneficiaries (Abdalla, 2017). Such segmentation reinforced regional disparities that had been seeded by state planning and hardened the social boundaries between the 'self-sufficient' moral communities, principally of central and northern Sudan, and those portrayed as requiring charitable benevolence and moral instruction in marginal areas. This splintering did not just have material consequences but also contributed to racialized prejudices and support for conflict, further weakening any semblance of a national frame.

Thus, we see how social policy was fragmented by forces both external and domestic. Among Sudanese officials, political conflict and ideological shifts drove segmentation by class and region, and at the supranational level, fragmentation emanated through structural adjustment and neocolonial control over social policy, as well as from the increasing importance of international actors such as the UN and WFP as both providers of services in marginal areas and employers of unaffiliated professionals. This is the historical and political context in which cash transfer programmes first took root in Sudan.

In 2006, the WFP's Office of Evaluation contracted economists from the University of Khartoum to examine the suitability of cash transfers as an alternative to food aid in Darfur. Lack of infrastructure and distance

7. Online interview, Social protection expert, 27 May 2021.

from Port Sudan meant that food aid only accounted for 20 per cent of operational budgets. Yet the authors ultimately concluded that cash transfers were not practical. First, they felt that local markets were unable to satisfy needs. Second, food aid had indirect benefits, as beneficiaries sold food in local markets to purchase other foodstuffs and cover milling costs, the latter helping to lower cereal prices. Replacing aid with cash, they argued, might have knock-on effects, raising prices and potentially causing broader food insecurity beyond the target population. Finally, the authors concluded that the WFP did not have the operational capacity, and therefore recommended that other options be explored to increase efficiency, such as supporting milling costs and/or buying back excess WFP food aid from the market (WFP, 2006).

Despite these reservations, a team within the WFP convinced the organization to launch a pilot voucher programme in 2009 in Kassala, North Kordofan and Red Sea state, providing ex-combatants with paper vouchers for food assistance (WFP, 2017). While there was resistance from within the Sudan office, the team received support from WFP headquarters as well as key donors like the UK, who viewed it as offering more accountability and more dignity to beneficiaries. With their backing, the initial scheme then expanded to include general food distribution in internally displaced peoples (IDP) camps in North, West and South Darfur. By 2014, vouchers were being used in refugee programmes in Kassala, in emergency programming in North Kordofan and in the largest IDP camp in Sudan, Zamzam in North Darfur. In 2015, electronic vouchers were introduced for the first time, initially in an IDP camp in South Darfur. By 2016, through such cash-based transfers (CBT), the WFP had transferred the equivalent of US$ 40 million to well over half a million people and had built up databases of marginal communities, previously under-represented in government records (ibid.). CBT works in the same way as cash transfers: beneficiaries receive vouchers to meet needs in local markets. This followed a 2008 WFP corporate strategy to shift from food aid to food assistance. The 2009 voucher assistance programme of the WFP thus established a precedent for the use of cash transfers in Sudan and, very quickly, resistance against the programme melted away within the WFP Sudan office.

While these programmes were administered by the WFP, they still required the approval of government actors and rural political figures. One interviewee, who was familiar with social protection programmes in the 2010s, commented that government authorities had prioritized security over social policy concerns in Darfur, and were therefore happy for other parties to take the lead in administering social protection programmes.[8] Proponents within the WFP further believed that replacing imported food aid with locally produced and traded agricultural products would help strengthen the

8. Online interview, Musa Abdeljalil, 27 May 2021.

Sudanese economy. IDPs in Darfur would principally benefit as recipients, but larger established businesses and local power brokers would benefit economically and politically. In this way, the intervention did not aim to disrupt established patterns of economic development but did allow foreign and Sudanese professionals working in international organizations to begin to shape social policy in line with new international ideas.

After the secession of South Sudan in 2011, Sudan lost most of its oil, and thus half of its government revenues and over 90 per cent of exports. In response, the Sudanese government introduced a reform package, decreasing public expenditure, reducing fossil fuel subsidies, increasing taxes, and devaluing the Sudanese pound (SDG). It also created the Social Initiatives Programme (SIP), Sudan's first state-administered cash transfer programme, to soften the impact on poor households.

Administered by the then Ministry of Welfare and Social Security (MoWSS), the SIP's main objective was to increase the resilience of the most vulnerable households through a package of social protection services. These included cash transfers, health insurance and microfinance credit. Eligible households were identified using the 2009 National Baseline Household Survey (NBHS) and the 2011 Zakat Poverty Census. The inclusion process involved three steps: community-based targeting, proxy means testing based on the 2009 NBHS and verification with the community. The broader target was the bottom 60 per cent of the population. Each individual would receive SDG 100 per month (US$ 27) in 2011; and by 2019, each would receive the equivalent of SDG 400 per month (US$ 5)[9] but in less frequent disbursements.

The government allocated 15 per cent of the projected savings from the economic reforms to the SIP, approximately US$ 150 million per year at the time. Designed to take advantage of existing capacity in institutions with social protection mandates, it used the Zakat Chamber beneficiary registry for targeting and the Savings and Social Development Bank's (SSDB) microfinance arm to extend credit. This programme fit into a broader strategy from the 1990s onwards to promote microfinance (often through Islamic financial institutions) and to support small- and medium-sized businesses, a strategy that had allowed the Ingaz regime to generate popular support among new constituents.

Understandably, the SIP faced numerous challenges. The 2009 NBHS on which the targeting was based had several shortcomings (FAO, 2010). Lack of standardized measures and a diversity of local languages made it difficult to precisely measure household consumption, thereby introducing selection errors. More ominously, there was a sudden spike in violence in the southern states at the time of the scheduled survey period, which meant certain regions were inaccessible. The inconsistency of the budget allocation meant

9. The Sudanese pound lost value against the dollar between 2011 and 2019.

that payments to beneficiaries depended on cash flow and there were significant problems with financial reconciliation of payments made through the Zakat committees, compounded by the low monitoring and evaluation capacity of the MoWSS (ibid.). Moreover, the programme was characterized by personalized and politicized interference (Abdalla, 2017). For example, Salma Abdalla describes how ordinary people would typically wait outside offices for long periods while those with personal and political connections were able to get priority.

Over time, the government became more concerned about welfare dependency. In 2015, the government sought World Bank technical assistance to address the dependency issue and tackle implementation challenges (the government, however, would still provide the funding). The World Bank proposed expanding the SIP to include conditional cash transfers and livelihood support activities, such as training and capacity building for farmers and craftspeople. The proposed programme, renamed the Sudan Safety Net Programme (SSNP) by the World Bank, had two components. First, it aimed to strengthen the programme's management information systems, improve identification and targeting mechanisms, and increase the institutional and implementation capacity of the MoWSS. Second, it would pilot a productive safety net (PSN) approach, modelled after Ethiopia's, which would support community resilience building and provide access to livelihood-enhancing opportunities. This would be achieved by providing the most vulnerable households from pre-selected communities with skills training, financial services, and employment in public projects during lean agricultural seasons. The pilot was to be implemented first in North Kordofan, then in South Kordofan, West Kordofan, Blue Nile, Kassala and Red Sea State. North Kordofan was selected because of 'the relative strength of the MoWSS's implementation unit, and the high incidence of poverty and income inequality in the state' (World Bank, 2015: 5). The SSNP launched in June 2016 and was scheduled to end in December 2021.

The PSN's purported aim was 'consumption smoothing through resource transfers and promoting livelihood options for households to gradually transition out of poverty' (ibid.). The PSN used the CGAP-Ford Foundation model, a graduation model based on BRAC's Targeting the Ultra Poor programme in Bangladesh.[10] The SSNP sought to provide households, in a sequential way, with cash transfers, livelihood-support activities and access to finance to 'create pathways for the poorest households out of extreme poverty' (World Bank, 2015: 6). Their approach consisted of five components: 'limited consumption support, a savings component, an asset transfer, training on using the asset, and life skills coaching and mentoring' (Sheldon, 2016: 3).

10. See CGAP Ford-Foundation Graduation Program: www.cgap.org/blog/series/cgap-ford-foundation-graduation-programw https://www.cgap.org/blog/series/cgap-ford-foundation-ford-foundation-graduation-program

The World Bank also changed the payment mechanism. For example, after 2016, the provider depended on where the beneficiaries lived. Sudapost, a private postal services provider owned by the Sudanese Social Security Association, was tasked with payments in five states. Family Bank, a microlending institution, was to make payments in Khartoum state, and another institution, the SSDB, was to operate in 10 states. Finally, the Zakat Chamber was charged with direct cash disbursements in 12 states.

The first state cash transfer programme thus began as a domestic programme but evolved into a joint effort between the Ingaz regime and World Bank, accommodating their shared and divergent interests. The World Bank prioritized reforms, neoclassical models and efficient distributions of state social spending, while the regime shared the same broad economic framework but additionally found ways to embed it within its patronage networks and political strategies. While the programme expanded government social protection to new groups, it effectively reproduced old patterns of social and regional fragmentation by providing small amounts to isolated individuals. This is evidenced by the fact that the government lifted fossil fuel subsidies three more times after 2011, first in April 2012, then in August 2013, when the price of fuels increased by 70 per cent (James, 2014), and finally in 2018, but it did not adjust the benefits across areas with varied transport and food costs.

Ultimately, however, this programme was unsuccessful in countering the deleterious effects of economic reforms. The combination of the reforms, the continued marginalization of certain regions and a myriad of other politically charged policies led to popular calls for regime change, first in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2010, then following South Sudan's secession in 2011 and finally during the revolution of 2018–19. The next section explores the interconnections between social policy and the resentments that fuelled the revolution, before analysing the transitional government's new cash transfer programme in terms of its potential for addressing regional and racialized segmentation and grievances.

REVOLUTIONARY STATUS QUO

The revolution started in Damazin, the capital of Blue Nile state, on 13 December 2018, sparked by an increase in bread prices. It soon spread to other cities, first Atbara, then Gadarif, and eventually Khartoum. By the end of December, the revolution was raging across seven cities. The chants of protestors, initially decrying food prices, now called for the fall of the regime. In February 2019, President Bashir announced a state of emergency, which only served to intensify protests, especially in Khartoum. If the increase in bread prices was the spark, the politicization, regional bias and fragmentation of social policy were the fuels that kept the fires of protest burning.

Economic reforms had increased prices, but a lack of a cohesive social policy meant citizens were left to fend for themselves. Those in marginal regions were most at risk. Not only were their incomes lower and livelihoods more vulnerable to political and climatic events, but transportation costs due to poor infrastructure inflated costs, making them triply disadvantaged. The adoption of slogans such as 'You arrogant racist, the whole country is Darfur', refers to the marginalization of Darfur and, implicitly, other marginalized regions. A month into the protests, the popular slogan 'Freedom, Peace and Justice', became the revolution's defining chant, reflecting a clear rejection of prevailing policies, which the protestors viewed as neither achieving freedom, peace nor justice. By this time, there was broad unity between middle-class professionals represented by the Sudanese Professionals Association and 'local neighbourhood resistance committees' in both middle- and lower-class urban areas as well as militia groups from marginal areas opposed to the old regime.

On 6 April 2019, protestors from across Khartoum headed towards the headquarters of the armed forces, where they staged a sit-in, demanding a civilian government. President Bashir was forced to step down by his own security council, whose members formed the Transitional Military Council (TMC). Shortly thereafter, negotiations began between the TMC and Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), a coalition of opposition parties (dominated by urban professional groups). After two months, the TMC violently dispersed the sit-in, halted negotiations and severed communication channels. On 30 June, a million-strong march, organized by neighbourhood resistance committees, mostly through word of mouth, forced the TMC back to the negotiating table. A deal was reached in August 2019, and transitional Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was sworn in.

In September 2019, Sudan's transitional ministerial cabinet was announced. It had several mandates. One was to address economic instability, reduce inflation and improve the country's eligibility for debt relief, for which the government opted for macroeconomic reforms. The previous regime's political decentralization policies, in parallel with its politically motivated economic policies, had introduced significant distortions, including multiple exchange rates, budget deficits and the misuse of public resources. Reform would have two planks: fossil fuel subsidy reform and exchange rate liberalization, both of which were designed to curb inflation and stabilize the exchange rate. Fossil fuel subsidies amounted to more than a third of the government's budget, which the transitional government viewed as a major cause of inflation and exchange rate devaluation. Recognizing the effects of removing the fossil fuel subsidy and unifying the exchange rate on prices and, ultimately, on low-income households, the new government opted for a cash transfer programme, the Sudan Family Support Programme (SFSP).

The initiator of this idea was the newly appointed Minister of Finance,[11] who had completed his doctoral studies in the United States and had had a prestigious career as a World Bank economist. He and his colleagues hoped that the SFSP would strengthen the government's legitimacy through direct, visible assistance and would contribute to peacebuilding in conflict areas. At full scale, it would reach 80 per cent of the population or over 6 million households, paying them a monthly cash grant for 18 months. Thereafter, the programme would grow more targeted, providing the poorest 20 per cent of households with a permanent safety net. In essence, it sought to help the country weather reform, and prevent hunger among the poorest households. Its designers hoped to strengthen the digital payment network of mobile credit or mobile wallets under the auspices of a new government body, initially dubbed the Digital Transformation Agency. The initial stage was largely donor funded, with the Sudanese government only covering 15 per cent of the budget. Donor funds would be placed in a special Multi-donor Trust Fund administered by the World Bank. Eventually planners hoped it would become fully funded by the government. It launched in February 2021 and registration began in early March 2021.

Eligibility was tenuously based on the 2014 National Household Budget and Poverty Survey (NHBPS), which had estimated that 65 per cent of Sudan's population lived below the poverty line. However, like the 2009 NBHS, the 2014 NHBPS had implementation issues and, because it was conducted just before an election year, the results were politically charged. As a result, planners assumed poverty had been underreported and decided to extend coverage to 80 per cent of the population. The exclusion mechanism employed two methods. Using occupational information from the National Registry, public employees were automatically excluded. The programme then relied on a communication campaign to inform and attract the target population, and to encourage non-eligible households to self-exclude. Unlike the SIP, the SFSP targeted households, not individuals, with payments made to a household head depending on the size of the household (US$ 5 equivalent in SDG per person). The head was required to show evidence of each family member's national identification number to register and then choose one of four payment methods: mobile credit, mobile wallet, bank transfer or cash voucher.

To facilitate digital payments, the government partnered with three telecom operators and strengthened payment networks within the banking sector. The largest is run by Electronic Banking Services, a subsidiary of the Central Bank of Sudan. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning signed several memoranda with telecom operators. Other payment options included the then Ministry of Labour and Social Development's (MoLSD)

11. The Minister of Finance served from September 2019 until July 2020, two months before the government implemented the long-awaited and heavily debated fossil fuel subsidy reform plan.

(previously MoWSS, and now Ministry of Social Welfare) extensive network of distributed cash cards. It is important to note that MoLSD programmes used the ministry's existing database of poor households initially developed for the SIP and enhanced as part of the SSNP. This same database was originally proposed as a targeting mechanism for the new SFSP but was combined with WFP records to include beneficiaries in conflict areas. Over time, these records and capabilities were to be harmonized into a single government-administered system (World Bank, 2020: 16). Effectively, each iteration has lowered the entry barriers for the next programme, creating a legacy tool for the future. For example, in May 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic the MoLSD, using its existing social protection database, paid out cash grants to vulnerable households through cash cards linked to SSDB (UN, 2020).

In addition to this technical infrastructure, the new scheme also required a parallel human infrastructure for enrolment. In formal documents, coordination was said to be mobilized 'through local existing structures such as local NGOs, trusted community leaders, youth groups, and community resistance committees' (World Bank, 2020: 29). However, it was the neighbourhood resistance committees that constituted the backbone. Unlike the previous regime's local popular committees, which were ironically unpopular, resistance committees have enjoyed immense popular legitimacy and have played a major role in the protest movement. Undoubtedly, the planners hoped their cooperation would strengthen the programme's legitimacy (although implementation challenges later strained the relationship).

Indeed, a key political ambition, as articulated in the programme's proposal, was to demonstrate the new government's values and re-establish popular faith in government. However, in some senses, the programme undermined the role of government in social service delivery. In place of public services, citizens received monthly payments to use as they please. By giving citizens money, the government was implicitly trusting their choices. Yet, by shrinking the role on which the government's performance could be judged and prioritizing market-based service delivery, the government effectively transformed citizens into consumers and thereby complicated one of its political aims: to build trust within conflict-affected communities. It remains to be seen whether citizens affected by war will have their faith in government restored simply by being given money and told to fend for themselves. The programme's reliance on donor funding also carried risks, as it placed it at the mercy of geopolitical forces beyond Sudan's control. In the wake of the subsequent coup on 25 October 2021, donors were forced to re-evaluate, and all funding for the SFSP and other government programmes virtually stopped. Table 1 provides a summary of the evolution of cash transfer programmes, highlighting relevant implementation parties, funding structure and value.

How do the two government-led cash transfer programmes compare? Both were developed to cushion the effects of reform processes and in

Table 1. Summary of Programmes

	World Food Programme	**SIP/SSNP**	**SFSP**
Timeframe	2009 onwards.	2011–2021	2021 onwards, currently suspended due to coup.
Implementing bodies	WFP.	For SIP, MoWSS, Zakat Chamber and local popular committees. For SSNP, World Bank provided advice.	MoWSS, MoFEP, World Bank, telecommunication companies, private banks and neighbourhood resistance committees.
Funding source	100% donors.	100% government.	15% government, 85% donors for first 18 months, then 100% government for the indefinite safety net programme.
Type of programme	Project-specific cash voucher and cash transfer programmes.	Cash transfer programme at 60% in accessible parts of the country (Blue Nile, West Darfur and South Kordofan excluded).	Cash transfer programme set at 80% coverage for first 18 months, then 20% for the indefinite safety net programme.
Value of transfer	Variable.	100 SDG (US$ 27) in 2011, 400 SDG (US$ 5) in 2019.	US$ 5 per month in equivalent SDG (highly variable exchange rate).

both cases, external actors provided either technical or financial support. In the case of the former, the scheme failed to quell the political instability created by reforms. In the case of the latter, the revolutionary environment furnished the civilian government with some goodwill. The two schemes mapped on to different political configurations. The Ingaz regime's SIP flowed through the existing political networks of the Zakat Chamber and local popular committees. Prior to the coup on 25 October 2021, the transitional government's SFSP worked through neighbourhood resistance committees and sought to integrate different population databases; those from the MoWSS developed under the first programme, WFP databases on marginal communities and those of the central state's National Registry. In some sense, therefore, the SFSP did attempt to address the regional fragmentation, albeit on an individualized household basis. One could argue that citizens who have extremely low trust in state institutions might reasonably favour cash in hand over state-provided services. Yet, by relying on direct payments to isolated households, the scheme upheld privatized and segmented systems of health and education (the government's contribution to the programme equalled its spending on health and education combined). It also did nothing to counter the racialized moral economy of social policy, which has long separated urban tax-paying 'self-responsible' middle-class citizens and needier, more dependent lower-class citizens living in historically marginalized communities. Indeed, the top 20 per cent of the population who could afford health and education were excluded from the programme entirely and, eventually, the programme would target the bottom 20 per cent. Thus, whilst the scheme sought to mend the relationship between state and citizens in marginal communities, it did not endeavour to change the relationship between citizens from different class and regional backgrounds.

The scheme also did not alter the essentially neoclassical (or even neoliberal) framework favoured by the previous regime and upheld by Sudanese experts trained abroad and/or working within international institutions in the country, steering key ministries and social programmes during the transition. The Ministry of Finance had several Sudanese World Bank staff embedded within different departments, leading different programmes. The Family Support Programme, incubated within the Ministry of Finance, sought Sudanese candidates for programme management positions from both local and international organizations. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had several Sudanese experts with experience in international NGOs (INGOs) in advisory positions, including the minister herself. Similarly, the communications director of the Office of the Prime Minister, the prime minister's economic advisor and several of the senior administrative staff were either on secondments from or had previous work experience at INGOs. The Prime Minister spent more than 15 years in senior positions at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and was deputy secretary of UNECA before assuming the prime ministership. In a period when few opportunities existed for unaffiliated economists and policy makers within the state apparatus and when universities had been underfunded and politicized, international organizations had provided intellectual and professional homes, but ones that integrated policy makers into an environment oriented towards mainstream donor approaches.

Conceptualized and designed by these returnee professionals, the economic argument behind cash transfers was as follows: its cost beyond the initial three-year donor-funded period was a fraction of the fossil fuel subsidy bill. It was essentially a reallocation of the social protection budget away from blanket subsidies, which benefited the upper quintile disproportionately, to direct support to the most vulnerable. On paper, the programme was progressive and pro-poor. It also ticked the boxes of free agency and a lean state, characteristics that would portray the government in a good light for IFIs. Interviewees who were supportive of the programme, including donors and officials involved, emphasized how the programme would treat citizens as free-choosing individuals, just like citizens of high-income countries. This view, however, sidesteps the fact that the choices of those in marginalized areas are inherently restricted by their regions' poverty. Ultimately, therefore, the programme allowed policy makers, donors and advisors to ignore the structural, more complex problems of why such people are poor to begin with.

Opposition to cash transfers was limited, even among those most opposed to the broader economic reform package. Resistance to reforms came mostly from the economic committee of the FFC who, unlike senior officials in the new transitional government, did not have professional experience in international organizations. While committee members assumed that the cash transfer programme was a World Bank idea and were generally opposed to the influence of the World Bank, they did not critique the cash transfer programme in the same way as the fossil fuel subsidy reform, which took centre stage in most Sudanese media outlets between December 2019 and September 2020.[12] Discussions of the programme were also absent

12. There were extensive blogs and opinion pieces in Sudanese online newspapers in which local experts criticized the transitional government's 2020 budget. Tijani Eltayib , an ex-World Bank and IMF economist and former Undersecretary at the Ministry of Finance, published three articles in *Alrakoba*, a popular Sudanese online newspaper, on the 2020 government budget, the new minimum wage and public sector salary structure, and the outcome of the donor conference. Sidgi Kabalo, a member of the economic committee of the FFC, publicly criticized the 2020 government budget, specifically the fossil fuel subsidy reform, in several traditional media outlets and online newspapers, including *Alrakoba* and *Dabanga*. Kamal Karrar and Adil Khalfallah, also members of the economic committee of the FFC, were similarly vocal in their disapproval of the government's fossil fuel subsidy reform policy. The public debate included TV appearances, where the Minister of Finance defended the decision to cut fossil fuel subsidies and members of the economic committee of the FFC provided counter arguments. During a forum at the University of Khartoum, the Minister of Finance, members of various boards of trade and university lecturers presented arguments both for and against fossil fuel subsidy reform. Finally, this debate came to a

during cabinet meetings, where discussions of the 2020 budget had centred around subsidy reform. Since the programme was largely donor fund-ed and administered by the World Bank, it is likely that the FFC might have assumed it was being externally imposed and that its funding allocation was therefore not competing with other social and development spending within the government's budget. If the funding was seen as separate, why would they resist a programme targeted towards the most vulnerable? Furthermore, the FFC, being a coalition of political parties that were broadly supportive of the transition to democratic rule, drew its legitimacy from the broader Sudanese population. In this context, taking a public stand against the fossil fuel subsidy reform was politically profitable but critiquing the cash transfer programme was not. Furthermore, the impacts of subsidy reform are immediate and easy to understand. The fiscal implications and broader political economy of cash transfers were more complex, and, therefore, not an ideal subject for political point scoring in a public debate.

To be fair, compared to donor experts, Sudanese planners including the former Minister of Finance, Ibrahim Elbadawi, were more interested in how cash transfers might play a complementary role together with more generous spending on health and education.[13] He also saw how cash transfers could be integrated into broader economic programmes, similar to those favoured by the World Bank in the SSNP. However, the fact that the Sudanese government was only providing 15 per cent of the funding (which was still large in comparison to its combined health and education allocation) and that donors were unwilling to provide direct budgetary support for health and education meant that the cash transfer programme became the flagship social policy instrument.[14]

More broadly, the idea of development in Sudan was reduced from 'a better life for all' (Adésínà, 2020) to the much more circumscribed task of poverty reduction. This narrow, more residual conception of social policy conflicted with the demands of Sudanese protesters who had called for more radical change. Indeed, our interviewees privately acknowledged that the privatization and regional fragmentation of social policies were major contributors to the resentments behind the protests. In this way, Sudanese policy makers found themselves in a bind. They had been brought in by a revolution seeking radical change, and yet their policy choices were circumscribed and dislocated from the needs and demands of their fellow citizens.

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climax at the National Economic Conference in September 2020, where again, fossil fuel subsidy reform was a central issue. In these discussions, there was little reference to the cash transfer programme.

13. Online interview, policy maker, 20 August 2021.
14. Donors are, however, interested in funding their own specific educational programmes such as those focusing on girls' education. It must also be noted that these donors are supportive of funding broad public health and education within their own countries (online interview, donor, 29 April 2021).

CONCLUSION

Cash transfers first emerged in Sudan within the context of WFP attempts to transform food aid along more market-driven principles. In some ways, one might say that the WFP played the role of 'a client agency' as described by Adésínà (2020). However, while officials of the Ingaz regime might have gained familiarity with cash transfers through the WFP, their decision to launch the SIP was also driven by ideological motivations and political interests. It was only after they faced implementation issues that they sought out World Bank technical assistance. During the transitional government, the Minister of Finance selected cash transfers and then sought out donor support. He was not required to sell the programme to voters or legislatures (because there were none) and there was little resistance and few technical counterarguments made. The programme certainly reflected resource constraints and donor preferences, but it was still viewed as appropriate and potentially responsive to demands for regional inclusivity. Our analysis suggests that the policy transfer mechanism involved a complex and long-term interplay between domestic political processes, exposure to international ideas, and the long-term effects of failed social policy. As a result of both international pressures and domestic politics, the intellectual space for development ideas had been narrowed. While the revolution may have disrupted the old regime, the same ideas remain rooted at the heart of governance networks.

How are we to understand the agency of Sudanese development professionals who profess belief in neoliberal or otherwise 'internationally' dominant ideologies without reducing them to mere influence sponges from outside? Our analysis suggests the need to pay more attention to the professional and intellectual networks they inhabit, particularly in cases like Sudan, where authoritarian regimes have pushed remnants of the domestic intelligentsia into international institutions abroad or at home. Our case also draws attention to the perceptions of those who feel politically disadvantaged by state-led development in post-colonial contexts. The decision of the Ingaz regime to embark on market-led development was not simply circumstantial and related to reform pressures, but rather motivated by its ideological beliefs and professional experiences, which had formed in the shadow of the colonial state. Likewise, Sudanese professionals working within international organizations, often in direct opposition to state violence in marginalized areas, aligned themselves with these organizations as a kind of progressive counterforce. In this way, ideological orientations are formed by peoples' real experiences of the state.

Sudan, like many other African countries, desperately needs bolder, more transformative kinds of social policy, which will not merely provide minimal subsistence support to members of historically marginalized communities but will actively transform the country's underlying structure of racial capitalism. Even as Sudan's most recent cash transfer programme aimed to integrate all citizens into national poverty programming, it maintained privatized, segmented markets and thus left racialized notions of moral economy in place. Only bolder, more transformative social and industrial policies can undo these patterns. If we believe that the state must play such a role, then we must take seriously the perceptions and ideologies of those who have hostile perceptions of the state, and we must try to understand the origins of those subjectivities.

From a practical standpoint, the challenge of widening intellectual space is immense. How can Sudan accommodate divergent communities within a domestic intellectual and professional space that has historically been concentrated in Khartoum and now in international organizations? The Ingaz education revolution expanded universities across the country, potentially creating a more decentralized network for re-imagining development. But as this expansion was driven by commercialization pressures and finances have been spread thin, the quality of education and research has suffered as a result. Furthermore, even if new intellectual spaces can be opened and public deliberation revived, there is still the age-old problem of external dependence, both in funding and professional employment opportunities, and both of which make it difficult to imagine transformative change without donor and IFI buy-in. However, if public policy in Sudan does not address entrenched patterns of regional inequality and racism, then it's likely that political instability and conflict will continue. Let us hope therefore that Sudan's policy makers, donors and IFIs wake up to more transformative ideas and nurture new kinds of deliberative spaces. Those in the neighbourhood resistance committees are doing their best to create these spaces despite the recurring political instability: 'There is no turning back, a reversal from the current state is preposterous!', they declare.

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