The Nexus of Social Integration, Poverty Reduction and Full Employment:
A *Transformative Social Policy* Agenda

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Introduction

The objective of social integration is perhaps best understood in the context of efforts at creating and nurturing an *inclusive society.* This raises two related questions: first is what such objective is concerned with averting or overcoming. The second relates to the contents of an inclusive society—what might it involve or its constitutive character? Addressing both questions involves, among other things, mapping the nexus of social integration, poverty reduction, and full employment, as well as the obverse of social integration. Making sense of the nexus of social integration, poverty eradication, and full employment—and this relates as well to the idea of 'decent work'—requires an overarching framing of the epistemic aspects of the analysis as well as mapping the policy agenda. I would argue that *Transformative Social Policy* offers a useful basis for framing the epistemic and policy dimensions of building inclusive societies (cf. UNRISD 2006; Mkandawire 2005, 2007; Adesina 2007, 2008). I will set out the latter in the final section of this paper.

In the following sections I will address the framing of 'social exclusion' as the challenge that social integration is meant to address, and the links with poverty and employment. This will be in terms of the epistemic-conceptual and empirical-policy aspects of the concept and the links to a transformative approach to Social Policy.

Social Exclusion: beyond conceptual fuzziness

Social exclusion,[1] broadly, refers to "the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live" (Thorat 2008). Its initial use by Lenoir (1974) was omnibus, referring to diversity of people: the "mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons, and other social 'misfits." Essentially, its concern was with those who had fallen through the 'cracks of society' (rather than simply the 'poor'), and the weakening of the social fabric (cf. Silver 1995, de Haan 1999, Sen 2000).

In its first run within the scholarly literature and public debates, social exclusion became so "versatile and adaptable that there may be a temptation to dress up every deprivation as a case of social exclusion" (Sen 2000: 9). Since then, there has been a progressive effort at giv-

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[1] Like the idea of "decent work", later in this paper, "social exclusion" is strongly associated with the work of the ILO/International Institute of Labour Studies (cf. Rodgers, et al., 1995; Silver, 1994; de Haan & Nayak, 1995).

ing greater analytical focus and clarity to the concept. Beyond an earlier framing of exclusion and inclusion as binary opposites, there have been efforts at making the concept more nuanced. Contrary to the earlier blunt use of the concept, Sen argued that:

> While exclusion is one route to capability failure and poverty, what may be called 'unfavourable inclusion' can also be a considerable danger. Indeed, many problems of deprivation arise from unfavourable terms of inclusion and adverse participation, rather than what can be sensibly seen primarily as a case of exclusion as such (2000: 28).

He argued further that:

> It is... very important to distinguish between the nature of a problem where some people are being *kept out* (or at least *left out*) and the characteristics of a different problem where some people are being included—may even be forced to be included—in deeply unfavourable terms (2000: 29).

'Unfavourable inclusion' can be differentiated further into 'adverse inclusion' and 'constrained inclusion' (Kantor 2009); the former refers to the quality of inclusion (as to make the terms of inclusion unfavourable), and the latter the options available to a person in the context of unfavourable inclusion. In all these instances, social exclusion, inclusion, or unfavourable inclusion are strongly linked to employment and livelihood.

Within the largely Northern literature, the idea of 'social exclusion' is claimed to have its groundings in the French Republican norms of solidarity, in contrast to the assumed individualistic Anglo-Saxon 'norms' and idea of 'poverty' (Silver 1994, de Haan 1999). Sen (2000) has drawn attention to the more universal nature of the norms of solidarity. Much more, however, I would suggest that a spatial/geographic framing of the problematic of social integration and how to avert or overcome exclusion (or adverse inclusion) is unhelpful. Rather, a preferred handle is **visionary** agenda (or 'vision', simply put) and collective social will in imagining and constructing the social policy instruments for an inclusive society. This ideational framing of social policy is shared by a variety of social policy models: from the 'Nordic model' to the Beveridgean model, and the Nationalist framework (Adesina 2008, 2009), or social policy in the Cuban context, for that matter. The Nordic model, for instance, draws strongly on the norms of equality and solidarity. While many of the leading African 'nationalist' leaders (from Kwame Nkrumah to Julius Nyerere) might have been influenced by European social democratic/Fabian socialist ideas, it was the traditional norms of solidarity—*Ubuntu* in Southern Africa Nguni languages—that shaped their social policy agenda **and** the imperative of mutual embedding of the economic and social policy objectives.

In each of these cases, social integration is strongly grounded in the activation of labour market participation, poverty-reduction, redistribution, and social cohesion. Even in the Anglo-Saxon literature, the value of the contents that TH Marshall gave the idea of citizenship—and even more so in the works of Richard Titmus—is in the norms of social solidarity. They all placed strong emphasis on not simply the equality of access but equity of outcome.

Apart from the problematic nature of geographical delineation of norms—as between solidaristic continental Europe and individualistic Anglo-Saxon, especially the United States—there is a deeper problem with regards to global social policy agenda and ideational flows. The idea of an Anglo-Saxon norm of individualism (in the social policy context), for instance, imposes a mono-discourse on what is a highly contested policy environment. Each ideational framing of the policy domain is driven by agency and interest. The claims of path dependence in social policy trajectories often fail to acknowledge how what is taken as 'the

model' was hotly fought for and subject to reinforcement or retrenchment. The conservatives within the US policy terrain may want to project 'rugged individualism' as the quintessential 'American Way' but that will leave us unable to explain the diversity of social policy frameworks within the country or the extensive public role in domains as diverse as education and public transport. It would, in effect, evacuate the contestation of the policy terrain for the conservative elements.

The consensus regarding the value of social exclusion, as a heuristic devise, is in focusing attention on the *relational* aspects of capability failure rather than the initial claim that this was unique to it—relative to the idea of poverty or deprivation. Sen (2000: 6-7), again, drew attention to the long tradition of relational dimension of poverty and deprivation and its functioning as a social exclusion device. Adam Smith noted how any man or woman in England would be "ashamed to appear in public" without leather shoes. Again, it is difficult to think through any of the social policy 'models' mentioned above in which the effort at social integration was not concerned with the relational and institutional bases of entitlement and capability failures or social exclusion.

The value of the ideas of social exclusion and adverse inclusion is in drawing attention to the possibility of exclusion from "full participation in the society in which they live" in the absence of material deprivation or poverty. Beyond poverty, discrimination and adverse social incorporation may isolate, humiliate or diminish the victims' sense of self-worth. Finally, rather than a marker of both process and outcome, it might be more useful to see social exclusion (and the different forms of unfavourable inclusion) as the cumulative **outcome** of a diversity of capability failures, which may function in concert or singly.

Social Integration, Full Employment, and Poverty Reduction:

If the concern of social integration is the objective of social inclusivity, then the agenda is not only in terms of social exclusion but the variety of unfavourable inclusion, as well. Flowing from this is that the nexus of social integration and full employment (even in the context of 'decent work') or poverty reduction is more nuanced than in the blunt use of 'social exclusion' (cf. DFID 2005). Material poverty may occur in the absence of social exclusion, even adverse inclusion. Indeed, the deprivation of material poverty may be mediated by strong 'social capital' at a village level. More importantly, social exclusion or adverse inclusion may occur in the absence of material poverty (relative or absolute). In the context of adverse racial, caste or gender biases that shape the habitus of social relations and involving what Pierre Bourdieu referred to as 'symbolic violence', the form that 'social integration' takes may be acutely adverse. The experiences of long gestation of socially embedded racism, sexism, or caste system, may have debilitating effects on those who are being adversely incorporated. It is instructive that it was in the context of the French assimilation policy that Frantz Fanon (1952: 192), spoke of the 'French Negro' living "an ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic." Negritude was, in a sense, a response to such ambiguous location, yet in none of the leading 'Negritude' intellectuals could one speak of educational deprivation or material poverty. Similarly, as Jeffrey *et al* (2004) show, educational attainment and job quotas in Uttar Pradesh were not enough to guarantee employment to the 'Dalit' youth in their study. As evidence from South Africa and the United States demonstrate, employment—in clearly 'decent work' contexts—does not necessarily shield people from adverse inclusion and the othering that suffuses an environment of routine racism or sexism.

Making sense of how poverty functions and the debilitating impact of inter-generational poverty should draw our attention to the nuanced interaction with social exclusion or adverse inclusion. Sen (2000: 4-6) refers to Adam Smith's discussion of "constitutively relevant relational deprivation" in which one is unable "to do things that one has reason to want to do". The issue, one would suggest, is not simply about capability deprivation but conceiving of capabilities in the first instance. The power of poverty is in subverting aspiration. The "freedom to choose" is often a function of hope; something that chronic inter-generational poverty tends to kill. Indeed a characteristic of extended, inter-generational exclusion and chronic poverty is the active discouragement of aspiring beyond one's "station in life." Being crushed by the weight of unrealised hope in others is often used to discourage the 'hopeful', aspiring ones. In other words, freedom to live non-impoverished lives is not the same as the aspiration "not to live nonimpoverished lives" much less choosing not to. As Moose (2007) shows, the "social mechanisms for durable inequality and poverty" function through a myriad of cultural, economic, and political power relations in which the poor and the adversely included forego their dreams in order to function at the guaranteed margin of existence. Similarly, adverse inclusion and social exclusion are not beneficiary-free phenomena. The social structuring that produce disadvantage, on the one hand, produces advantage for others, on the other hand.

The existence of constitutional rights or legislative instruments is not a sufficient basis for averting adverse inclusion or poverty. The claims of making the law work for the poor often proceed without fundamentally questioning how the legal system upholds the very socio-economic arrangements that produce poverty in the first instance. Rather than simply a demographic category, 'the poor' are products of how, structurally, the economy and society function. Raising the issue of poverty and exclusion requires asking more fundamental structural questions about ownership and use of resources generated in society.

High levels of unemployment and underemployment are onerous in individual and social terms. The problem of long-term unemployment or large segments of society that had never held down a job is a distinct instance of capability failure. The extent to which it cascades into poverty-inducing entitlement failure depends on the available resources to provide social protection. Extended unemployment does not in itself produce social exclusion. Indeed, it is feasible to be without any form of work but experience no sense of social exclusion. A young man or woman with a trust fund (the *Trustafarians*) has no need to work; there is no one-to-one relationship between expenditure of labour-power and economic wellbeing. A Briton who had "Gentleman" inscribed as 'occupation' in his passport in the 1930s had little need for employment; gainful or otherwise. Indeed, employment would be considered a mark of a decline in social standing: needing to work! It is when extended and chronic unemployment are linked to the absence of command over social and economic resources that they becomes private troubles; they become social problem when they cascade into being characteristics of a significantly large segment of society and a threat to the dominant segments of society. The value of 'social exclusion' as an organising concept—in making sense of the impact of long-term unemployment on those who experience it—is in the diminution of a sense of worth, usefulness, and autonomy. Work is not simply what we do; work is often what we are. Work defines us, socially, not simply a way to access economic resources that allow us to exercise command over other life-enriching resources. Generalised unemployment also has adverse effects on economic output, tax revenue, the demand-side stimulation of economic activities. In societies with income protection for the

unemployed, sustained unemployment further 'depletes' society-wide resources. Sustainable social policy involves paying attention to the production side of economic balance-sheet, much the same way that social policy's production function is concerned with stimulating and sustaining economic activities.

The point, which bears reiterating, is that there is no automatic relationship between forms of employment and social integration or poverty and mitigation of adverse inclusion. Successful efforts at building socially inclusive societies have depended on a number of factors. Fundamental among these factors are the norms of egalitarianism (or equality) and social solidarity. Both are grounded in a shared vision of the desired society—Titmus's 'Good Society' or "Better Life for All" in African nationalist movements' language. The shared vision combines the agency of those previously disadvantaged with the buy-in of other segments of society. It is not in the initial numerical strength that the vision is sustained but in the sufficient initial coalescing of social forces adequate to get the initial steps through. The initial coalescing of social forces is sustained by the norms of Encompassing Social Policy (Korpi & Palme 1998), which rest on universal access, supplemented by targeted instruments to protect the vulnerable, *inter alia*. The universality of coverage not only enhances socio-political commitment to the social policy regime, but makes reforming the system and recovery from shocks easier and faster (Kangas and Palme 2005).

In other words, the important point in the emergence of an inclusive society and social integration that is undergirded by the norms of equality and social solidarity is where the 'non-poor' and the 'non-excluded' stand. Sometimes, this is framed as the dominant politics of the middle class, but as we can see, it goes beyond the middle class; it has racial, caste, gender and ethnic characteristics, among others.

A Transformative Social Policy Agenda and Social Integration

We can further articulate the discussion in the preceding paragraphs in terms of a transformative approach to social policy. In specifying the link with full employment in the context of dignity, poverty reduction, and social inclusion or integration, it is worth noting the multiple functions of social policy (UNRISD 2006, Mkandawire 2007, Adesina 2007), as follows:

- Production;
- Protection;
- Reproduction (social and demographic);
- Redistribution;
- Social Cohesion and Nation-Building.

The retreat of Social Policy into a predominant concern with social protection dimension of social policy—even when the data and evidence from which scholars are working speak to the production functions, for instance—has led to a diminution of the vision of social policy. The dominance of the market-transactional logic in the last quarter of a century has similarly has sought to decouple economic and social policies, with the latter allocated the residual functions of addressing market failure. The erosion of the solidaristic and egalitarian norms further narrowed the vision of social policy. What the transformative social policy framework suggests is a return to the wider vision of social policy. The linkages between production, protection, reproduction, and social cohesion functions undergirded the Bismarckian model as it did the Beveridgean model. The 1942 Beveridge Report (1942) sets out as the second of its three principles, the idea that "social insurance should be treated as one

part only of a comprehensive policy of social progress." The second report in 1945 was concerned with "full employment." Both represent two sides of the same coin in dealing with what he called the "five giants on the road to reconstruction': Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness" (Beveridge 1942). The Bismarckian model was more directly driven by the imperatives of industrialisation, nation-building, and weaning the working class from socialist ideology. Similarly, the 'Nationalist approach' was driven by the assumption that independence was the initial step in the long road to a post-colonial reconstruction, with the objectives of rapid economic development and defeating "the trinity of ignorance, poverty and disease" (Mkandawire 2005). The Nordic model similarly addressed the multiple functions outlined above. Perhaps more than any other model, the Nordic model was focused on the norms of egalitarianism. In all the cases, the default position with regards to the labour market was full-employment. Combining production with dignity ('decent work') was positively reinforced by the normative framework in which both economic and social policies function—equality and solidarity. The solidaristic basis of social policy underscored the universalist approach to social policy delivery. It combines low levels of inequality with low poverty rates, and much better social development outcomes than the alternatives framework that is grounded in the ontological claims of Neoclassical Economics. As Mkandawire (2007) demonstrated, transformative social policy approach enhances labour market efficiency and innovation. When they get into crisis, evidence shows that encompassing social policy regimes are better able to tap into their solidaristic base in effecting positive turnaround (Kangas and Palme 2005).

The transformative social policy relates not only to the economy or protection from destitution but in the transformation of social relations. Social policy regimes grounded in solidarity and norms of equality are much better in producing social cohesion and inclusivity.

I would end by noting that while social policy has generally been framed as something "the state does," it would be more useful to see it as multifaceted, with diverse delivery mechanisms—within and outside the state. State-Community partnership in setting social policy agenda, delivery, monitoring, and fine-tuning is not only about fiscal sustainability in low-income countries but ensuring community buy-in into the process of building an inclusive society.

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