A qualitative application of Amartya Sen's 'development as freedom' theory to an understanding of social grants in South Africa.

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Abstract

Amartya Sen argued that poverty is the "deprivation" of a person's capability to lead a "good life", therefore ending poverty means meeting basic physical and social needs, and enabling meaningful economic and political choices. The aim of this paper is to investigate whether and how social grants enable "choices" in Sen's sense. In-depth interviews conducted with social grants recipients' in this study provided evidence that social grants reduce poverty, both in terms of helping grants recipients to meet basic needs, and enabling them to make more choices, such as buying food, accessing education and health care, as well as facilitating job searches and starting small businesses. However, there was also evidence that showed that grants are inadequate to entirely remove the "unfreedoms" facing the poor because the grants are too small to adequately cover basic needs in the context of large family sizes, a serious and long-term lack of resources, persistent unemployment, and high indebtedness. Further, these grants could enable only a limited expansion of "choices". This paper argues that social grants in South Africa do enable recipients some "choices" although access to these "choices" is limited. It is envisaged that this paper will help academics to think more about the extent of the developmental impact of social grants in South Africa.
Key words*: Amartya Sen, poverty, social grants, choices, development as freedom.*

Résumé

Amartya Sen a soutenu que la pauvreté est la «privation» de la capacité d'une personne à mener une «Bonne Vie", donc la fin de la pauvreté signifie répondre aux besoins physiques et sociaux de base et permettre des choix économiques et politiques significatifs . Le but de cet article est d'étudier si et comment les Subventions permettent des «choix» sociaux au sens de Sen. Des entrevues approfondies menées avec des bénéficiaires de Subventions sociales dans cette étude ont démontré que les Subventions sociales réduisent la pauvreté, tant pour aider les bénéficiaires de Subventions à répondre aux besoins fondamentaux que pour leur permettre de faire plus de choix, comme l'achat de nourriture, l'accès à l'éducation et la santé ainsi que la facilitation de la recherche d'emploi et le démarrage de petites entreprises. Cependant, il y avait aussi des preuves qui montraient que les Subventions sont insuffisantes pour éliminer completement les «non-libertés» auxquelles sont confrontés les pauvres parce que les Subventions sont trop petites pour couvrir adéquatement les besoins de base dans le contexte de familles nombreuses , Le chômage persistant et l'endettement eleve. En outre, ces Subventions, ells ne pourraient permettre qu'une expansion limitée des «choix». Cet article soutient que les Subventions sociales en Afrique du Sud permettent aux bénéficiaires de certains «choix» bien que l'accès à ces «choix» soit limité. Il est prévu que ce document aidera les universitaires à réfléchir davantage sur l'ampleur de l'impact sur le développement des Subventions sociales en Afrique du Sud.
Mots clés*: Amartya Sen, pauvreté, Subventions sociales, choix, développement comme liberté.*

Introduction

Sen (1999:87) argues that "poverty" cannot be understood in terms of low incomes only: poverty should also be understood as a "deprivation" of the capabilities to lead a "good life". These capabilities include meeting basic physical needs, but also the ability to make economic and political "choices" in society. Sen views poverty as a state of "unfreedom" or incapacity, and a disabling proposition on the part of a poor people in terms of their inability to access a good quality life (Sen, 1999:20). This "unfreedom" deprives people of their freedom to satisfy hunger, or to get adequate nutrition, or to get remedies for treatable illnesses, or the chance to get proper clothing, or shelter or to enjoy clean water and sanitary facilities (Sen, 1999:4). Poverty is not only a lack of access to basic *physical* needs such as food, water, education, health, but also to other *social* necessities. Therefore, Sen, (1999:87) views poverty is a deprivation of choices on the part of a poor person to lead a life that they have reason to value.

The literature on social grants in South Africa indicates that there is an on-going debate on the aims, role and impact of social grants. This debate has not been about whether grants reduce poverty, but whether they help people overcome poverty. Although scholars express different arguments about the role and impact of social grants on the livelihood of recipients, there is general agreement that social grants play a positive role in the lives of many poor South Africans (using any measure of poverty reduction) (Africa Check, 2015; Samson, Lee, Ndlebe, MacQuene, van Niekerk, Gandhi, & Abrahams, 2004:08; Xaba, 2013:02; Department of Social Welfare, South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2011:01; Xaba, 2015:01). For most poor households, grants are the sole source of income (Samson, at al, 2004:08; Siebrets and van der Berg, 2011:85). This research is in line with international research that show that grants improve the wellbeing of recipients and beneficiaries.

However, whether the grants can end "poverty", in the broader sense that Sen (1999) has in mind, has not been explored fully (Xaba, 2015:10). Less is known about whether and how state-provided, non-contributory, cash social grants enable economic and political "choices" in Amartya Sen's sense. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to interrogate the role and impact of social grants further by looking at the ways (if any) in which social grants enable recipients to access "choices" as described by Amartya Sen (1999).

A qualitative approach was applied, in the form of in-depth interviews to gain a deeper insight into the role of social grants in alleviating poverty.

The main argument in this paper is that social grants in South Africa do enable recipients to access some "choices" although access to these "choices" is limited because these "choices" are accessed under dire straits. Many respondents interviewed said that while they are able to access basic needs, they are constantly stressed because they are in debt indicating that their needs are greater than the value of the social grants. Additionally, grants seem to limit political choices as most respondents felt that they should vote for the party that gives them grants, which happens to be the African National Congress (ANC).

This paper is structured as follows; I will begin by discussing South African social grants in general as well as the debates on social grants and the theoretical framework used in the study. The next section will be on the methods used to collect data. Results will follow the methods section. The final section is the discussion and conclusion which explains the significance of the paper and conclusions of the paper.

Literature survey and theoretical discussion

The state-run social welfare system in South Africa was initially racialised during apartheid as it covered whites only (Haarman, 2000:10). Although other racial groups were gradually included, the social welfare system during apartheid was based on discriminatory practices (Woolard, Harttgen and Klasen, 2010:09). This means that after defeating apartheid the incoming African National Congress (ANC) government inherited a racially fragmented social welfare system in 1994 which was not initially crafted for the whole population (Haarman, 2000:10). The ANC government has made steady and modest progress in addressing poverty and creating an equitable society for all South Africans (Bernstein, de Kadt, Roodt and Schirmer, 2014:15).

The two goals of the post-apartheid government are to address poverty and to reduce inequality (The World Bank, 2014: v) and the primary objective of social welfare policy in South Africa is poverty alleviation (Van der Berg, 1998a, cited in Triegaardt, 2005:249). The ANC government has tried to increase the social welfare pie while at the same time it has tried to grow the economy with market-oriented policies like the Growth Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR). The GEAR strategy holds that the basic solution to poverty is jobs, not welfare, and imposes significant fiscal constraints on welfare (van der Walt, 2000:71).

Social grants in South Africa come from a right to social security in the Constitution

of Republic of South Africa (RSA) (1996), although the Constitution does not specify this policy (RSA, 1996, Section 27, Subsection 1; Rosa, Leatt and Hall, 2005:06). The eligibility for these grants is based on an income-based means test to cater for the most needy and deserving poor South Africans (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005:363; SASSA, 2012:07), and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) is responsible for the implementation of the social grants in South Africa (Green, 2015; Woolard, Harttgen and Klasen, 2010:04).

Social grants are means-tested non-contributory cash transfers that are tax-funded and targeted at specific categories (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2011:364). Means testing is done to distinguish between the "deserving poor" and the "non-deserving citizens" (Leubolt, 2014:11). This is how means testing has shaped the post-apartheid system of social assistance as grants are exclusively designed for individuals who are not able to work, such as pensioners, family caretakers, the disabled and those who are chronically ill. Grants are mainly for the elderly, the disabled, and children, as well as anyone who lives with the recipients (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005:377).

Since 1994, the welfare spending and coverage has, by most measures increased substantially (Phaahla, 2015). The number of non-contributory cash social grants increased from 537.5 percent in 1996 when 2. 4 million people received some form of government grant, to 16.3 million people in 2014 who had access to grants (Paton, 2014; Africa Check, 2015). In 2015, over 16 million South Africans have been receiving social grants (Daily Maverick, 2015) and in 2013, 60 percent of the government's budget was channelled towards social spending (Paton, 2014).

Debates

As I have indicated above, grants in South Africa have been a contested terrain as critics including members of the public, policy-makers, academics and other stakeholders view grants with scepticism. Liberals generally hold the view that social grants limit individual freedom (Friedman, 1982:2, 12), and that grants, for all their benefits, also lead to "welfare dependency," discourage employment, support lazy behaviour, encourage teenage pregnancy, reduce payment of remittances, and enable inappropriate spending (UNDP 2011:379; for more, see e.g. Friedman 1982, chs 2 and 11). In this view, grants pay people to be irresponsible, and unproductive, in the long run creating a pool of dependant citizens (Mazibuko, 2008:08), and all of this distorts labour markets while consuming resources through taxation and state spending. In other words, the liberals' argument is that the structure of social grants has the effect of keeping the recipients from taking steps that would help them reduce poverty. In this sense, grants are viewed as not playing an effective role in alleviating poverty. The real solution, for this view, is less welfare and more free markets.

It is alleged that in South Africa, poor women and teenage girls get pregnant to access government Child Support Grants (CSGs) (e.g. The Sowetan, 2014, Daily Maverick, 2015) and this belief has gotten stronger (News 24, 2012). Some even describe the CSG as the "thigh grant", because girls allegedly "spread their legs" to "get the grant" (Marais, 2011:253). However, findings by (Potts, 2012:80) reveal that there is no link between social grants and teenage pregnancy. The view that access to grants leads the able-bodied to avoid work, has also been refuted because there is no real evidence for the claim (Leubolt, 2014:12-13; Makiwane, Udjo, Richter and Desmond, 2006). In fact, the economy has serious problems that prevent it from creating adequate jobs, and this creates dependency on welfare (Marais, 2011:176, 179) and lack of land in some cases forces dependency on grants (Conway and Xipu, 2010:131).

Another related argument is that as welfare spending grows, it could become unsustainable, taking South Africa to a "fiscal cliff" where the "welfare bubble" will bursts (Business Day, 2014). This also comes at the time when the South African government is considering extending the eligibility age for CSGs from 18 to 23 (Oderson, 2014; Africa Check, 2015). Adding to the "dependency syndrome" argument South African president Jacob Zuma once said, that the government "cannot sustain a situation where social grants are growing all the time and think it can be a permanent feature" (Daily Maverick, 2015).

It is not clear whether funding the social grants is fiscally sustainable although the government insists that funding the social grants is fiscally sustainable (Paton, 2013), but Pauw and Mncube, (2007:4) assert that grants are often regarded as fiscally unsustainable because there are more people on welfare than people who are working (financing welfare). It is also argued that the current expenditure on social grants will be sustainable as long as the South African economy keeps growing by 3 percent although the 3 percent growth rate provides a slim margin for additional spending (Africa Check, 2015). However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected a 2, 1 percent economic growth rate for South Africa in 2015 and a 2, 5 percent in 2016 (Africa Check, 2015; Phaahla, 2015).

For Marxists, poverty is inherent in capitalism and cannot be "cured" by capitalism. However, welfare may be desirable as it provides some temporary protection from capitalism. Anarchists/ syndicalists agree with Marxists on the above arguments (van der Walt, 2006:01), but add that state welfare is problematic in that it is administered in authoritarian and inefficient ways by self-interested state elites (Millet, 1997). Welfare is seen as benefiting the working class, but as an inevitable "symptom" of the inequities of the current social order (van der Walt, 2005:56-57). It cannot provide a "cure" for the problems of poverty, but can help blunt the worst effects. The solution for this view is more welfare (for now), but in the end the overthrow of markets and the (welfare) state to create a society where no one *needs* welfare.

Put differently, Liberals, Marxists and Anarchist view the provision of social grants as an attempt to "bandage a broken arm" because it does not help recipients to break the cycle of poverty. If people are given social grants, they argue, they will always be poor anyway.

For Keynesians, markets are imperfect in that they do not always adjust and that even if they adjust they do so slowly (Wolff and Resnick, 2012:115). So the point is that if an economy is in a depression, it should spend out of that problem via state expenditure. Increased state expenditure means increased real incomes and increased incomes will lead to increased consumption which will eventually lead to a high aggregate demand (Wolff and Resnick, 2012:122). Keynesians believe that investors are attracted to economies with a high aggregate demand (Williams and Williams, 1995:72) and since welfare boosts aggregate demand, it should attract investment and thus generate employment (Stewart, 1986:82; Wolff and Resnick, 2012:122). Thus welfare should not be seen as a threat to the capitalist economy as welfare can benefit capitalism and profits, as well as the underprivileged.

These debates have influenced South African policies. The ANC's 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which aimed at expanding and deracialising welfare (RSA, 1994, Section 1.2; Stacey, 2014:98) was influenced by Keynesian ideas (De Wet and Harmse, 1997:23). The RDP document even describes welfare as a necessary step to "build the economy". On the contrary, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR), which was neoliberal in thrust (Stacey, 2014:98), viewed welfare as a limited, temporary, safety net. Thus, the real solution to poverty has always been seen as job creation through free markets (van der Walt, 2000:71).

Amartya Sen's "development as freedom" theory

Sen's core argument is that poverty should be seen as a form of "unfreedom" or a deprivation of choices on the poor person's capability to access a life that he/she has reason to value (Sen, 1999:87). Poverty involves a lack of ability to exercise capabilities, due to factors such as low income, poor education and health, or lack of human and civil rights, poor economic opportunities, neglect of public facilities, and intolerance and repression (Sen, 1999:04). In this case, poverty is viewed in terms of shortfall of "basic capabilities" or "basic capability failure" (Clark and Qizilibash, 2005:07). In Sen's view, one can be fed but still poor, which means that meeting basic needs only is not enough (Clark, 2003:173). Although income is important in understanding poverty, Sen, (1999) argued that income should not be seen as the main indicator of poverty which is what the poverty line is all about.

Thus, development for Sen entails removing these "unfreedoms" that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency (Selwyn, 2011:69). Development should be about increasing human choices and freedom to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value (Sen, 1999:291). Freedom entails the processes of decision making as well as opportunities to achieve valued outcomes (Sen, 1999:291). Freedom, entails having the ability to achieve what one considers valuable after thinking it through (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007:02). Hence, development should be about an engagement with freedom's possibilities (Sen, 1999:291, 298). Therefore, expanding human freedom should be the "primary end and …principal means" of development efforts (Sen, 1999: xii, 01).

"The general enhancement of political and civil freedoms is central", and these "freedoms include the liberty of acting as citizens who matter and whose voices count, rather than living as well fed, well clothed and entertained vassals (Sen, 1999:288). Besides meeting basic needs, capabilities also mean having the ability to make political and economic choices. In order to enable people to be participating citizens, public discussions are important. Public discussions can be enabled by a variety of public policies such as "press freedom and media independence (including the absence of censorship), expansion of basic education and schooling (including female education), enhancement of economic independence (especially through employment, including female employment, and other social and economic changes that help individuals to be participating citizens (Sen, 1999:281).

Most importantly, poor people know their position better and hence what people choose to do with their capabilities is their choice because "selection and weighting of capabilities depends of personal value judgement" (Clark, 2005:05). Poor people should be given the opportunity to participate in decision making not local elites or cultural experts (Clark, 2005:08). Valued capabilities include the ability to "live long, escape available morbidity, be well nourished, be able to read, write and communicate, take part in literary and scientific pursuits and so forth", but not everyone would want to have this capability (Sen, 1984:497, cited in Clark, 2005:05).

I have discussed how Liberals, Marxist, Anarchists and Keynesians view social grants in general. I have also provided a section that details Amartya Sen's capability approach. A section on the description of the research area follows. Then there is section that deals with methods and results before the final section on discussion and conclusion.

Description of the area

This research was done in Queenstown that is situated in Eastern Cape. Queenstown in Lukhanji is the administrative centre of the Chris Hani District Municipality in Eastern Cape. According to a document written by the Municipality in 2007, the CHDM has an extremely high rate of dependency on social grants as a result of widespread pervasive chronic poverty, scarce jobs and low household incomes in the district (Chris Hani District Municipality, 2007:43). These poverty rates in CHDM were confirmed by a

research in 2014 that was done by researchers (Eward Webster, Anthea Metcalfe, Robert van Niekerk, Michael Noble, John Reynolds, Ulandi Du Plessis, Xoliswa Dilata, Vijay Makanjee, Russell Grinker and Jeff Peires) who found that 87 percent of the population received one or more social grants (Webster, Metcalfe, van Niekerk, Noble, Reynolds, Du Plessis, Dilata, Makanjee, Grinker and Peires, 2014:35). According to the 2011 national statistics census, Queenstown has a total population of about 43 971, 11 206 households and 46, 4 percent of the population is female headed while 68, 8 percent is of the working age (15-64) (Stats SA, 2017; Email Correspondence with Stats SA official, 2017).

Methodology and Results

I have used a qualitative approach because issues like poverty and access to grants are sensitive in that those who access grants are by definition poor as determined through means testing (Makino, 2004:01). Moseotsa, (2006:17, 87) adds that issues such as low incomes, hunger, poverty, hopes and disappointments are sensitive, so it would have been difficult (although possible) to collect data using a quantitative approach. A qualitative approach also helps to gain people's trust (Moseotsa, 2006:17, 87) and allows access to information about experiences and meanings (Lune, Pumar and Koppel, 2010:79; Tracey, 2013:05).

Data was collected using in-depth interviews with residents of the Ezibeleni Township, a historically black working class township situated in Queenstown, in the Eastern Cape. I interviewed household heads including pensioners, middle-aged parents and young mothers. This study selected households that received at least one grant, regardless of whether the household also received income from other sources. I used semi-structured interviews, with the questions repeated in the same order and in the same wording which allowed probing of issues across the data set (as advised by Tracey, 2013:139). I also analysed secondary data in the form of government reports and newspapers to get a broader picture of the geographical area and topic than that provided by the individual interviewees (Mathews and Ross, 2010:278), and also to allow statements in interviews to be cross-checked and contextualised.

I accessed respondents via snowball sampling, starting with contacts in Ezibeleni, who introduced me to social grant recipients. When using the snowball sampling, members of the initial sample (grant recipients) were asked to identify others with the same characteristics as them (grant recipients), whom I, as the researcher, then contacted (Mathews and Ross, 2010:162). The study was carried out in an ethical manner, without coercion or persuasion and everyone was told clearly that they could withdraw at any stage. I used pseudonyms to protect the confidentially and privacy of respondents. The methods section has detailed how I collected data to support my argument in this paper, the following section presents the results of my fieldwork in Ezibeleni.

Role of Grants

The results obtained in this study indicated that grants play a very important role in the livelihoods of recipients and without these grants, poor South Africans would have more stressed lives (Interview: Bukeka Sitela, 4 November 2014). Social grants enable recipients to access food, funeral policies, education and health care, as well as assisting them to start small businesses and funding job searches. Without these grants, the livelihoods of these recipients would have been more stressed and many recipients even indicated that without the grants they would not have been alive. Although most recipients complained about the small monetary value of grants, most of them conceded that without the grants their lives would be worse "*Without grants, life would be hard because I would not have had what I have. It was going to be hard to have something to eat*" (Interview: Nomvelo Klaas, 4 November 2014).

Grants help recipients to buy food and clothes, pay rent, school fees, electricity, funeral covers and other basic needs, as well as to sometimes to buy items like furniture with one respondent claiming that grants also help her to cover her medical costs. Asked about how they survive on grants one respondent had this to say: *"Well, it's not the same, my son, at least we manage to go to shops, doctors and buy some stuff. It is things like that: we can manage our lives with these grants. You see, we buy food and we go to doctors when we are sick"* (Interview: Bukeka Sitela, 4 November 2014). One woman even claimed that she will send her grandson to the mountain (a Xhosa practice for every boy to become a man) using the grant money (Interview: NoRepublic Khwephe, 3 November 2014).

However, the small monetary value of grants meant that recipients have to borrow money from loan sharks (and elsewhere) as well as buying larger goods on credit which attracts interest because they are not able to meet their needs with the cash paid (grants) (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014). In one case, a grant recipient did not get his grant at all because it (cash grant) went straight to deductions from a furniture shop from which he had purchased furniture (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014). This has a negative effect on happiness and "choices" which are critical in getting a "good life" as envisaged by Sen, (1999) because being in debt is stressful, as they fail to meet some needs because of monthly deductions. In the meantime, debts will increase and to make matters worse, being in debt means that recipients cannot borrow money (from neighbours or even loan sharks) because they will not be able to pay back that money. This keeps recipients in a cycle of *debt*, a situation that I describe as a "debt curse" (Xaba, 2015:47). Bearing in mind that some grants recipients are illiterate, many unscrupulous business people take advantage and make them sign documents that the grants recipients do not understand (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014).

Physical needs: life, health and grants

Most households interviewed said that grants decrease hunger and that they eat three times a day with one household claiming that their food lasts the whole month (Interview: Ntombomzi Khumalo, 3 November 2014, Interview: Nomvelo Klaas, 4 November 2014). However, they added that they do not eat what they prefer, but they "eat what is there" (Interview: Ntombomzi Khumalo, 3 November 2014). A few households complained that grants do not help them reduce poverty because their food does not last the whole month (Interviews: Akhona Ntshika, 3 November 2014; Nolwazi Potwana and her granddaughter, name not provided; Vuyisile Mancam, 3 November 2014; NoRepublic Khwephe, 3 November 2014; Gwiba Xaba, 3 November 2014). These mixed messages indicate that although the grants help, they are not decreasing hunger overall.

In this sense, the grants are decreasing hunger, but there is also the issue of the quality of the food, and the small "choices" involved, to think about. Most households said they do not eat the best meals, rather they eat what they afford and not what they prefer because food is expensive. Out of 16 households interviewed, there are only three households that said they ate what they preferred (Interviews: Bukeka Sitela, 4 November 2014; Silindokuhle Mntwazi, 4 November 2014; Vuyokazi, 4 November 2014). In this way, recipients are merely surviving on these grants; at the most basic physical level, they have few choices and serious gaps.

There is too much pressure on finances as most household heads are old and they are constantly sick which means that they constantly need medication. Most households said grants were not enough for them to go to hospital and that they use free clinics which have inferior facilities. Failure to access proper medical attention is so bad such that some people are reported to have died because of lack of proper medication. In some households, prepaid electricity usually finishes before month end which means that recipients will then have to use candles and firewood (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014).

Economic choices and dignity

Despite all the hardships they face in the form of fewer resources (small grants) versus greater needs, the recipients could make "choices", even though these "choices" are limited; they all wanted to see themselves as having dignity and respectability. Recipients are able to have funeral policies, to look for jobs and start small businesses (micro-trading businesses) using grants. Most importantly, the majority of recipients valued paid work because grants are smaller than salaries and they say they were tired of being dependant on grants. Therefore, they believed that it is possible for them to generate their own income (Xaba, 2015:49). One recipient even said that grants can only help those who are clever to start businesses (Interview: Kamva Toli), meaning that grants can only help those individuals who have a sense of self-reliance.

Interestingly, a number of older grant recipients believed that grants lead to laziness because *"some people do not bother looking for jobs because of grants. They [lazy recipients] know that each and every month they would get money"* (Interview: Nolwazi Potwana and her granddaughter, name not provided, 3 November 2014). In the end, access to these grants may lead to tensions because adult children do not want to contribute towards the household's expenditure. They (adult children) allegedly buy alcohol using grants (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso). It was alleged that in households that get different grants, members of the same households fight over these grants because it is difficult to coordinate expenditure thereby rising stress levels.

Adult children were allegedly abusing the grant system to avoid work and to abuse alcohol. Asked about whether grants lead to laziness or nor, one elderly recipient said:

> *Ja!, I do agree with that statement … but I am also not accepting this argument because people are different. Some people always say there are no jobs, but who will create a job for you? Jobs are there; it's just that people do not look for opportunities. There is no employer who will go around looking for people; people have to go and look for jobs. Jobs are there, be it garden jobs or any other odd jobs. Some people will even tell you point-blank that they do not want garden jobs. That is not right. I do not understand that* (Interview: Kamva Toli, 4 November 2014).

Recipients also reported that there is animosity between non-recipients and recipients because non-recipients view social grants recipients as people "with money" (Interview: Ncebakazi Busaphi and friends, 3 November 2014). This leads to a situation whereby non-recipients do not want to borrow recipient's money. On the other hand, those who are working do no respect grants recipients as they assume that recipients are abusing grants (Interview: Sihle Booi, 3 November 2014).

Grants also help recipients to look find jobs as they gave job seekers money for taxi fares, to look for jobs in different places with one recipient claiming that her grandchild who is in Cape Town got the job through grants (Interview: Akhona Ntshika, 3 November 2014). Grants help job seekers to print CVs and make other necessary arrangements for job seeking (Interviews: Silindokuhle Mntwazi, 4 November 2014; Kamva Toli, 4 November 2014; Bukeka Sitela, 4 November 2014; NoRepublic Khwephe, 3 November 2014; anonymous, 3 November 2014; Nolwazi Potwana and her granddaughter, name not provided, 3 November 2014).

On the contrary, some grant recipients said their grants got finished before they could even think about job seeking (Interview: Vuyisile Mancam, 3 November 2014). The

grant application system was said to be annoying and that SASSA officials were said to be rude and not helpful (Interview: Nolwazi Potwana and her granddaughter, name not provided, 3 November 2014) while some said the grants application process was relieving as they know that they would "get something" (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014).

Social expectations and stress

In an emotional interview, one elderly recipient complained that grants were too small and that the government seems to forget that they (elderly grant recipients) also paid taxes during apartheid (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso). In their view, the black government is neglecting them. With the high costs of living, recipients are always stressed as they are unable to fully meet basic needs. As a result, cash grants could make the stress of poverty worse because of the debts that get incurred; and they did not feel safe at night as robbers target them (Interview: Nolwazi Potwana and her granddaughter, name not provided, 3 November 2014).

At the end of the day, stress and worry about the future is always there because of fewer resources versus bigger needs. Grants could worsen family relations causing problems because there were not enough resources and different people (in the same household) had different needs and wants. "*My child might want this whereas my sister's child may want something different; but with less money it causes stress*" explained one young mother (Interview: Sihle Booi, 3 November 2014). Also grants do not always enable self-respect as recipients fail to fully partake in community life church and funerals.

However, there was mixed message on grants and family relations. Most respondents interviewed said grants improved their relations as they had money to buy food, clothes and furniture (Interview: Ncebakazi Busaphi and friends, 3 November 2014). Generally, when people describe family relations that have been strained by access to grants, they were speaking of the households of *other* people they had "heard" about (Xaba, 2015:54). Thus in some households, grants reduced stress. There was also evidence that suggested that grants reduced stress as most respondents said grants reduced stress as they are able to meet basic needs like food, clothes, etc. Most respondents, said the grants help them to partake in community life and that grants helped to keep their households safe as security was fitted (Interview: Ncebakazi Busaphi and friends).

Importantly, most respondents said grants gave them self-respect, at the very least because they have enough food to eat. These means that they are able to be "indoors" all the time, without bothering anyone (Interview: Ncebakazi Busaphi and friends, 3 November 2014). "*There isn't much worry because of these grants*" added one recipient (Interview: Nomvelo Klaas, 4 November 2014).

For those without any income, the grants are appreciated. "*Well, it's better. It's not the* *same, you know. The children understand that there is no other source of income"* explained one recipient (Interview: Bukeka Sitela, 4 November 2014). Another recipient said *"It decreases stress: when I was in hospital, my family members were able to buy a few things that are needed in this household. They used to come and visit me, using this money. This money protects me from many things. I am able to buy my son a few things that are needed at school"* (Interview: Kamva Toli, 4 November 2014).

Political: choices and information

From what I have observed from these interviews, the mantra amongst grant recipients is that *the ANC gave us grants, so we vote for ANC or else if any other party takes over, the grants would be gone*. Some recipients vote because they believe that if they do not, the grants would taken away while others said they vote because they are exercising their rights. Most recipients were active voters except in one case where the recipient said she does not vote because she does not see the need to vote as she remains poor anyway (Interview: Vuyisile Mancam, 3 November 2014).

By voting, they said they are appreciating what the government is doing for them (grants). Some vote to escape the stigmatisation tied to people who do not vote (Xaba, 2015:55). All recipients said they will "never vote" for a party that wants to remove grants. Asked if she would vote for a party that wanted to remove grants, one recipient said *"Never! What will we eat?"* (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014). *"How will we survive without grants?"* one woman asked: *"We survive on these grants"* (Interview: Nomvelo Klaas, 4 November 2014).

Bearing in mind that all of them seem to be voting for ANC because they believe that grants come from the ANC, this seems to confirms the view that grants act as a vote buying mechanism for the ANC (Patel, 2013:10). All respondents said no one coerces them to vote for a particular party. One respondent boasted that politicians will not be able to remove grants because if politicians remove grants, they will not vote for the ANC (Interview: Vuyokazi, 4 November 2014). So, I would suggest that the grant recipients are coerced indirectly and psychologically and that grant recipients' political choices are limited by the existence of the grant system itself. Recipients access information via polling stations political campaigns, pamphlets and television. Most recipients are unable to pay for TV licences because the grants are small.

Good life and grants

Most recipients believe that grants put them in charge of their lives and make them better people because at least they can send their children to school (Interview: Ncebakazi Busaphi and friends, 3 November 2014). Most recipients value independence, money and one of them described a "good life" as a *"new life, a life with peace of mind, stress-free, where people afford to buy what they want or need, and without corrupt businesses"* (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014), *"a life that is full of happiness, a life that is free of poverty"* (Interview: Vuyisile Mancam, 3 November 2014). However, one recipients argued that grants do not give them a "good life" because loan sharks keep harassing them at night (Interview: Thuba Mayekiso, 3 November 2014). The results discussed above provides evidence for my main argument of the paper, in the next section, I will discuss the significance of the paper and tie the literature with the findings of the study.

Discussion and Conclusion

The main argument in this paper is that social grants do play a positive role in the livelihoods of recipients and that they enable some "choices" to recipients although these "choices" are limited. The data collected at Ezibeleni, Queenstown, suggests that social grants, paid in cash transfers by the post-apartheid state, not only assist people in meeting some basic physical needs but offer a limited means to exercise increased economic and political choices – all of which Sen (1999: xii) argues are keys to escaping the "unfreedom" of poverty. In most of the households I interviewed, grants are the sole income. It becomes safe to conclude that without these grants, recipients would have more stressed lives as they would lack access to food, clothes, electricity, healthcare, education and other basic needs.

But these grants do not fully end poverty both in the sense of fully meeting basic physical and social needs, and in Sen's sense (1999) of allowing the full exercise of human capabilities through "choices". These "choices" are limited by the small size of the grants, large family sizes versus greater needs, a serious and long-term lack of resources, persistent unemployment, and high indebtedness. This means that grants meet these needs to a limited extent only and under stressful conditions. Therefore, recipients do not have the capability to defeat poverty or "unfreedoms" seen by Sen and they do not live the life they would prefer. For instance, most recipients said they eat what they can afford, not what they prefer, as food is expensive.

Although social grants help recipients to generate additional income by starting small businesses and funding job searches, some recipients exhaust their funds before such actions can even be considered because of poverty, large families and small amounts of grants. This is related to the view by (Williams, 2007:14-15; Kane-Berman, 2016:8) that grant income may be used to finance small enterprise creation, through accessing credit, hiring equipment and buying inputs. It is important to stress that these businesses are micro-trading and that there is very limited scope to move beyond micro-trading. There is no investment in mutual aid systems like self-administered benefit funds, which the anarchists/ syndicalists (e.g. Ward, 2011) favour.

This study also confirms the findings by Jacobs, Ngcobo, Hart and Baipheti (2010:04) that people living in low-income households that receive grants may have a higher rate of employment than low-income households that do not receive grants as grants are helpful in funding job searches and application.

Contrary to the view by critics that receiving social grants lead to a "dependency syndrome" and laziness, I found that recipients value paid work, independence and that they do not like being dependent on grants. Most recipients show a determination to find jobs and stop receiving social grants because these grants are inadequate for solving their poverty related problems whereas paid work would provide a higher income and more benefits, while for others, employment means a higher status in the community.

While grants enable recipients to access furniture and desired clothes this is usually through debt financing and recipients remain poor. Recipients are also able to meet various social needs such as participating in local community life, child-rearing and family roles, attending church, and obtaining more expensive items that are considered to be vital. The small size of grants keeps the recipients in severe debt as they try to meet their needs. When recipients run out of money, they are seen as abusing the grants by non-recipients which means that they cannot borrow money from neighbours. Thus, there is a belief that grants promote laziness, disrespect to elders and that adult children on social welfare abuse grants.

Grants limit political "choices" in that all respondents believe that they have to vote for the ANC as a form of appreciating grants. Although all of them say that no one coerces them, I suggest that grants coerce recipients psychologically and indirectly. Recipients assume that grants come from the ANC party and not from the post-apartheid legislation. Although much of that legislation and policy is driven by the ANC the link made between voting and grants is so strong that it also seems to mean that people would overlook other problems in the ANC since they will tend to "vote for grants".

It becomes difficult to imagine another political party making headway as long as the state grants are seen as ANC grants, bearing in mind that grants recipients are eligible for voting and that they form a big chunk of the voting population. Most of them felt that if they do not vote for the ANC, the grants would be taken away and this explains the striking pattern of recipients being active voters. Therefore, the mantra is, *let us vote for the ANC in numbers, to keep our grants.* This confirms the view by (Patel, 2013:10) that grants act as a vote buying mechanism for the ruling party in South Africa. Hence it can be political suicidal for the ANC to cut grants, even if the grant system led to a fiscal crisis (Financial Mail, 2014). Hence, the political choice for grant recipients becomes the ANC.

This is not to ignore the ANC's efforts in expanding the social grants, the point is that political choices for recipients seem to be limited as a result of receiving grants. Most importantly, this also creates a dependency on "state philanthropy" in a highly unequal capitalist society, as pointed out by Marxists (van Driel, 2009:139) or involves using grants to control working class people, as the anarchists/ syndicalists argue (Holton, 1980).

Also, respondents feel that they had no control over their grants and that SASSA officials are usually rule bound and strict. This becomes financially strenuous for the extremely poor as they have to call Pretoria if they have a serious problem with their grants. This confirms the view by Ward (2011) that that state-run social welfare tends to be top-down in approach, rather than enabling bottom-up actions.

In closing, while the positive role of grants in poorest households is evident, one must also mention that "choices" are limited by bigger families, unemployment, and the small amount of grants as well as the general cycle of poverty that most families are in. However, this is done to a limited extent only, and the stressful conditions that people endure continue. Social grants have a positive role in most households and offer more choices, but are inadequate to fully offer choices – and end poverty – as conceptualised by Sen. Grants do not remove the "unfreedom" as described by Sen (1999) *per se*, they only reduce the "unfreedom".

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