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“Challenging assumptions that restrict and hierarchise most thinking about work, this exciting collection draws from experiences across the globe to help us imagine new futures.”

Bridget Anderson, University of Bristol

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Recent developments in the organisation of work and production have facilitated the decline of wage employment in many regions of the world. However, the idea of the wage continues to dominate the political imaginations of governments, researchers and activists, based on the historical experiences of industrial workers in the global North.

This edited collection revitalises debates on the future of work by challenging the idea of wage employment as the global norm. Taking theoretical inspiration from the global South, the authors compare lived experiences of ‘ordinary work’ across taken-for-granted conceptual and geographical boundaries; from Cambodian brick kilns to Catalanian cooperatives. Their contributions open up new possibilities for how work, identity and security might be woven together differently.

This volume is an invaluable resource for academics, students and readers interested in alternative and emerging forms of work around the world.



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ISBN 978-1-5292-0893-1



9 781529 208931



BEYOND THE WAGE EDITED BY WILLIAM MONTEITH, DORA-OLIVIA VICOL AND PHILIPPA WILLIAMS BRISTOL

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ORDINARY WORK IN DIVERSE ECONOMIES

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First published in Great Britain in 2021 by

Bristol University Press
University of Bristol
1-9 Old Park Hill
Bristol
BS2 8BB
UK
t: +44 (0)117 954 5940
e: bup-info@bristol.ac.uk

Details of international sales and distribution partners are available at
bristoluniversitypress.co.uk

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-5292-0893-1 hardcover
ISBN 978-1-5292-0895-5 ePub
ISBN 978-1-5292-0894-8 ePdf

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Cover design: Gareth Davies at Cube

Front cover image: GettyImages-180202370

Bristol University Press uses environmentally responsible print partners.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



In dedication to David Graeber
(1961–2020) and all those he has
inspired to make the world differently

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Defending the Wage: Visions of Work and Distribution in Namibia

E. Fouksman

The idea of giving people money – with no strings attached, simply to ensure a minimum standard of living – is enjoying a global moment. Over the last decade, the UN and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have been promoting the idea of universal social protection floors. Rather than the old-fashioned social safety net, which was there to catch those who fell, a social protection floor is a baseline to build on, typically in the form of cash to those who need it (often along with other public goods such as health care) (ILO, 2012). The 2016 Swiss referendum on instituting a universal basic income guarantee (a sum of money unconditionally and regularly disbursed to every resident – also known as a basic income grant, a negative income tax or a social dividend) garnered a huge amount of press attention around the world, despite the proposal being rejected by 77 per cent of Swiss voters. Finland, the Netherlands, Scotland, Kenya and the US are all sites of recent, ongoing or planned universal basic income experiments – some funded by national governments, some by municipalities or provinces, others by private philanthropy.

Meanwhile, conditional and unconditional cash transfers – both policy cousins of basic income – have become fashionable interventions in the world of international development. Cash transfers have moved from NGO and university-run experiments, to government welfare programmes,¹ and have garnered the support of large mainstream

development institutions. In 2015 World Bank president Jim Yong Kim and ILO director general Guy Ryder co-authored a joint mission and plan of action to promote universal social protection – to provide ‘*income security and support to all people ... Anyone who needs social protection should be able to access it*’ (ILO and World Bank, 2015, my emphasis).

At the root of these proposals lies the possibility of something novel and radical: a partial decommodification of labour, a separation between basic livelihood and wage work. As an increasing number of people around the globe are transformed into ‘surplus populations’ no longer needed by labour markets, nor able to access land in order to provide for their own subsistence (Li, 2010, 2013), wage work has begun to look untenable as the sole source of income security.

The surge of policy interest in universalizing social protection in both the global North and South has been greeted with excitement by a number of academics – James Ferguson has referred to it as the dawn of a ‘new politics of distribution’ (2015, 80) while Hanlon et al (2010) call it a quiet ‘revolution from the South’. Yet just how new are such proposals? Basic income of one form or another has been a policy proposal for at least 220 years, since Thomas Paine’s land-tax-funded proposal for a universal inheritance in *Agrarian Justice* (Paine, 1796; Birnbaum, 2016). There have been other historical moments in which universal redistribution stood at the brink of reality, for instance, in the UK in the years leading up to World War II, in the US in the 1970s, and in southern Africa in the early 2000s (Widerquist, 2017). In all these cases, universal systems of redistribution were ultimately rejected by policy makers, often in favour of either welfare schemes that only benefit those physically unable to engage in wage labour (children, the elderly, the disabled) or public work programmes. Why?

The obvious answer is elite interests. Economic and policy elites underscore the existences of the undeserving poor (see Strong, this volume), who misuse their welfare pay-outs. Politicians insist that money must come from work and worry about the lazy poor. In the words of Hein Marais, welfare and social protection systems everywhere tend to pivot on the idea that ‘waged work and entrepreneurial zest will provide a secure basis for well-being for the majority of society’ (2018, 84). The assumption is that such ideas and systems are the product of policy makers and politically influential elites.

But what about the attitudes of those who stand to benefit the most from universal income guarantees? This population represents a less obvious, more counter-intuitive source of resistance to universalizing social protection. Based on interviews in two rural sites in Namibia,

this chapter proposes that it is not only politicians, economic elites or even the middle classes who are reluctant to divorce income from wage labour, and who cling on to the idea that ‘employment is available to those who seek it and that waged work ensures well-being’ (Marais, 2018, 86). Instead, my research suggests that such attachment to wage labour as the key legitimate source of resources is often held by the very people to whom waged work is *unavailable* or is insufficient to ward off poverty and hardship. Rather than being imposed from above, this attachment is often held by the very people who are failed by the current workfarist system.

This chapter examines grassroots resistance to universal social protection policies, with a particular focus on poor unemployed and underemployed populations. Based on interviews with the long-term unemployed in Namibia (with some reference to more recent periods of fieldwork in urban South Africa), I highlight the existence of a deeply held resistance to receiving income from (or through) the state without labour – even among those that only survive thanks to social grants and other government transfers. I argue that the logic behind this resistance is rooted in three forms of attachment to wage labour: a *moral* attachment to wage labour as a source of worth and deservingness; a *psychological and physiological* categorization of wage labour as a source of mental and physical well-being; and a *social* attachment to wage labour as a source of community and social relationships.

The logics behind such broadly held attachment to wage labour must be understood and challenged if a new politics of distribution is to be realized. While governments and economists have claimed that universalizing social protection is neither fiscally feasible nor socially desirable (Barchiesi, 2011), scholars have focused on taking apart the dependency arguments against universal income security (Ferguson, 2013, 2015). In this chapter, I propose that it is moral, social and cultural logics and intuitions around the links between wage labour and income that lie at the root of broad-based resistance to the separation of employment and livelihood.

Grants, unemployment and poverty in Namibia

Namibia is an ideal lens through which to explore attachments to wage work. Like many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, wage labour and work discipline in Namibia was inflicted through both coercive and ideological means by first German and then White South African colonial rule (Seekings and Natrass, 2005; Natrass and Seekings, 2011; Wallace, 2011; Cooper, 2018).² First Christian missionaries

and then colonial administrators insisted upon the value of what they referred to as the ‘work ethic’ in transforming ‘lazy natives’ into hard-working labourers (Wallace, 2011). This ideology was enforced through centuries of land and water dispossession and the imposition of hut and land taxes which forced people into the cash economy, and thus into various forms of forced and bonded labour. These violent interventions produced a migrant labour system in which Namibians were compelled to work in mines (long a major source of national wealth in Namibia) and on White-owned farms for six-month to two-year periods, before returning to their communities and grazing lands. Forged in the colonial era, this system has left a lasting mark on Namibian culture, politics and society.

Under late nineteenth-century German rule, short-term contract labour in the diamond mines and on the road and railway crews was a way for young Black men to acquire material wealth and social status, as well as to ‘define new meanings of modernity in their behaviour, dress and language’ (Wallace, 2011, 95). And under twentieth-century apartheid South African rule – which reproduced the migrant contract labour system while deepening race-based dispossession and segregation – wage labour (and in particular labour unions) became the site of nationalist anti-apartheid organizing and resistance, often through contact with South African protest politics (Barchiesi, 2011; Wallace, 2011; Lawhon et al, 2018).

For much of Namibia’s colonial history, labour was a scarce resource. First German and then South African administrations attempted to coercively (and often violently) extract labour by depriving native people of land and mobility. These policies were backed by an ideological commitment to ‘prevent[ing] vagrancy and idleness’ (The Native Labour Commission, 1920, cited in Wallace, 2011, 219). Yet by the late 1970s, Namibia had shifted from a labour-scarce to a labour-surplus economy. A time of drought and recession, this period also saw the rise of organized labour resistance and mass strikes against the contract system in Namibia. The trade union movement expanded rapidly in the 1980s, along with labour militancy, which increasingly became a tactic against the apartheid South African regime (Wallace, 2011). Much as in South Africa and other parts of the continent, by the time Namibian independence was won in the 1990s, national liberation parties valorized the organized working class and the unionized worker as the site of resistance to not only economic, but also political oppression (Cooper, 2005; Barchiesi, 2011; Lawhon et al, 2018). In short, the history of wage labour and the capitalist productivist work ethic is a complicated one in Namibia, as it is in

southern Africa more broadly. Wage work has long been resisted as a site of racialized exploitation and coercion (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1987; Makhulu, 2012), yet simultaneously valorized and desired as a vehicle of urbanization and modernity, a symbol of socio-economic status, and a source of political action and citizenship.

These contradictions continue in contemporary Namibia, where endemic unemployment has persisted from the late 1970s. Namibia is classed as an upper middle-income country with high levels of poverty, unemployment (33 per cent overall, and 46 per cent for youth in 2018 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019)), and inequality (by some metrics Namibia is the second most unequal major country in the world, after South Africa) (World Bank, 2020). In response to these challenges Namibia operates a welfare grant system that is similar to, though less extensive, than South Africa's. These grants support the elderly through a pension scheme dating back to the 1960s, as well as disabled people and children in foster care via direct cash transfers. It is significant that these transfers go to those physically unable to work – indeed, unlike in South Africa, even children in poor households do not receive monetary support from the state, unless they are orphaned or in foster care. As Ferguson argues (2015, 156), the list of those requiring 'social' intervention continues to trace 'a kind of photographic negative of the figure of the wage-earning man'.

A coalition of churches, NGOs, labour unions and activists began to advocate for a basic income grant in Namibia in the 2000s. The feather in the Basic Income Grant Coalition's cap is a basic income pilot, which ran for two years (2008–9) in the small village of Otjivero and was financed by German church groups and NGOs. The results of the pilot were compelling: though only giving out 100 Namibian dollars (about US\$9) per month to each recipient, crime fell by 42 per cent, food poverty fell from 76 per cent to 16 per cent, school dropout rates went from 40 per cent to zero, and engagement in economic activities went up from 44 per cent to 55 per cent (Haarmann et al, 2009).

However, despite these apparent successes, then-President Pohamba rejected the proposal out of hand, emphasizing that 'we can't dish out money for free to people who do nothing' (Haarmann and Haarmann, 2012, 8). The labour unions followed his lead, leaving the Basic Income Grant (BIG) Coalition. Basic income activists thus waited in hope for a change in government policy following the election of President Geingob in 2015. Not only had Geingob paid for a family's basic income during the Otjivero pilot, but once in office he appointed the former head of the Coalition, Bishop Zephania Kameeta, as the head of the new Ministry of Poverty Eradication. Many activists around the

world saw this as a possible return of basic income to Namibia's main policy agenda. However, these hopes were dampened in 2016, when Geingob released the Harambee Prosperity Plan, which explicitly stated that basic income was *not* part of the plan. Instead it proposed instituting food banks and infrastructure-oriented youth work programmes (Republic of Namibia, 2016). This turn away from the enthusiasm around universal basic income seemed confirmed by Namibia's Fifth National Development Plan (2017–22), which makes no mention of basic income. The Ministry of Poverty Eradication's 2018 Strategic Plan and its 2018 Blueprint only mention basic income in passing and do not suggest implementing the policy (Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, 2018a, 2018b; Republic of Namibia, 2017).

But there are some recent signs of revival. The list of those eligible to receive social payments has been expanded to include unemployed adults who do not receive another form of grant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic (though this is only a one-off payment). Furthermore, President Geingob recently mentioned 'investigating the feasibility' of shifting from foodbanks to what he termed 'a modified basic income grant' in his State of the Nation address in June 2020 (The Presidency, 2020).

In this context of inequality, high unemployment and policy debates around universal forms of income security, how do Namibia's poor and unemployed think about the decoupling of income and work?

Income and labour in Namibia: a rooted attachment

Many of the long-term unemployed poor that I spoke with in Namibia had heard of basic income – though most did not recognize the term 'basic income grant'. The 2008–9 pilot project in Namibia may have spread the idea of universal basic income in ways that public policy discussions and advocacy campaigns simply cannot. Indeed, the Basic Income Grant Coalition had capitalized on the outreach possibilities of the pilot by sending pilot participants to speak about their experiences in other towns and cities (Herbert Jauch, personal communication, 8 April 2016).

I spent time interviewing some of those in the village of Otjivero who had taken part in the basic income pilot. Everyone I spoke with – the young and old, male and female – supported the proposal and spoke highly of their experience during the pilot. All wanted the basic income grant to resume, and insisted that even with its small size (NAM\$100 or what was then USD\$12 per month) the grant had made a real difference in their lives. One young woman told me that

the grant enabled her to leave the village to go to search for work in Windhoek (Namibia's capital, an hour's drive in a pricy shared taxi). Another noted that she opened a hair salon during the pilot and her customer base swelled, illustrating the knock-on effects of income transfer programmes in promoting local growth and entrepreneurship. Others told me that the grant provided them with food security so that they did not have to worry about feeding their children or grandchildren during that time. Many used the grant to buy food and travel to look for work, but also to buy phones and TVs, making them feel "connected to the world", in the words of the village's former school principal. Everyone expressed disappointment that the grant ended, though most were optimistic that the current president, who seemed to be widely liked, would do something similar to a basic income, even if it was not called such in name.

But some key nuances began to emerge when I asked people whether they would prefer the government to provide a basic income grant or a public work programme of some kind. Even when I proposed that the amount of money paid out would be same in both the grant and the work programme, and left the type of work and the hours in the work programme quite vague, many of my respondents told me that they would prefer the work programme. A middle-aged woman with ten dependents (children and grandchildren) who was enthusiastic in her initial support of the basic income pilot insisted that a work programme would suit her better than a grant because she is "at home doing nothing all day, and she wants to get out, to be active". When I asked what jobs would be ideal, she proposed sewing or ironing, which surprised me as this type of work is done inside, without much movement. When I pushed and asked why she did not simply choose to receive the grant and then look for work, or spend her time pursuing enjoyable but unpaid outdoor activities, she insisted "There is nothing to do here, the village is too small." In fact, her ideal state intervention would be for the government to build a factory near the village (in part because she thought the pay would be higher than any government grant).

Others in Otjivero echoed this preference for a work programme rather than cash transfers, even when the amount of money to be gained from each was the same. A young woman³ I spoke with in the village told me that while she thought a basic income grant was a good idea, she preferred a work programme because she wanted to "keep busy, not just stay at home." Similarly, two young men I spoke with told me that the basic income was a "good programme", that they would want the government to implement it, and when prompted even said

they would be willing to participate in a demonstration or protest in Windhoek in support of a basic income grant. Yet they both told me that they would prefer a work programme that paid the same amount because “there is nothing to do, and [we] need something to do.” Wage work, by contrast, “gives health, it’s not good to do nothing.” Boredom and physicality are key motifs in all of these responses. Work for my interlocutors represented a source of purpose, diversion and physical well-being.

However, not everyone in Otjivero shared this liking for work programmes. Several young women told me that they would prefer a grant over an employment programme because they would use the money to run a hair and beauty salon. One of these young women had in fact done exactly this during the basic income pilot, and the others were her sisters and friends. Inspired by her success during that time, they intended to pool together to do the same if a basic income ever reappeared in Otjivero. It is significant that even in these cases, those who preferred a transfer over a work programme had a clear business proposal in mind, which would give them easy access to work that would be facilitated by a grant. Work for payment (in this case for profit rather than wage) nevertheless remained the preferred choice.

This emphasis on the role of work in providing ‘busyness’ and relief from boredom was echoed by many of the people I spoke with in Otjivero, throwing new light on attachment to work among the unemployed and underemployed. Unlike my findings from comparative research in South Africa, where the long-term unemployed were apprehensive that giving money ‘for nothing’ to able-bodied adults might lead to idleness or misuse (Fouksman, 2020), the residents of Otjivero were not deeply bound up in moral concerns with the laziness of grant recipients. Instead, wage labour was understood to play a psychological and physiological, almost a medicinal role in people’s lives. My interlocutors seemed to value busyness as an end in itself (Weeks, 2011; Bellezza et al, 2017) – watching TV or talking with friends was not sufficient as a way to pass time, nor was there anything else to take wage work’s place. Work also seems to be needed as external motivation to activity, to action – and perhaps thus to meaning. When I asked whether such busyness could be gained outside of wage labour, the suggestion was quickly dismissed. André Gorz’s category of ‘non-commodity activities’, including ‘work for self’ (work that is necessary but not bought and sold, such as housework or child rearing) and ‘autonomous activity’ (activities for mastery and pleasure, such as creative or social activities like singing in a church choir), was not on the table, or even in the conversation in Namibia (Gorz, 1989).⁴

The preference for wage work over transfers was repeated in Spitzkoppe village in western Namibia. This small village is far from Otjivero, and most of the people I spoke with there had not heard of the pilot or the English term ‘basic income’, though many had heard about the idea of a universal grant. As in Otjivero, many of the people I spoke with thought the idea of a universal grant was a good one – though some did hold moral concerns regarding grants leading to laziness and misuse (Fouksman, 2020). And yet, as in Otjivero, almost everyone I spoke with said that they would prefer a public work programme over a grant, even if they paid the same amount.

There was of course variation in these responses. One young woman I spoke with wavered between a preference for a food-for-work programme – because she would not worry about others misspending grant money – and a cash for work programme – because she needed to buy her children clothing, not just feed them. Her concern with misspending echoed the moral concerns I heard in my fieldwork in South Africa, where many long-term underemployed people worried about the potential misuse of more universally accessible social grants on alcohol and drugs (Fouksman, 2020). Crucially, both of her suggestions were for work programmes, not cash transfers. When I asked about this preference, she repeated again and again that “one must work for money.” She saw no need for further explanation – it seemed to her to be something obvious, beyond explaining.

A group of men I spoke with in the village – one in his thirties, two middle aged and one the oldest man in the village at 90 years old – also expressed some difference of opinion overlying a uniform desire for wage labour. One of them, an artist who painted t-shirts, spoke the liturgy of entrepreneurship. He told me that rather than giving grants, the government should give everyone start-up loans so that they could grow businesses; that everyone should be a businessman. One of the middle-aged men agreed; he thought livestock was the way to go, and that the government should start everyone off with some chickens. They all initially thought a universal grant was a good idea (all agreed that they would be willing to go to the capital and agitate for it from the government), but one of the middle-aged men was concerned that it might make people ‘lazy’, even though he himself would invest it in a business. But as the conversation evolved all four men wavered in their assessment, and at times thought that it was better to work for money, that “money for free is bad” – once more, a definitive moral judgement, a moral grammar that seemed obvious to everyone. Another of the men was convinced that the government would eventually stop a basic income grant because of the “the lazy

people” that would take advantage of the grant, echoing the workerist discourses of both colonial and some present-day governing elites.

When I asked why a work programme was better than a grant that pays the same amount, one of the answers that emerged was that a work programme was likely to benefit the local community. My interlocutors suggested that it might help clean up the village or achieve essential public works. Indeed, although there was a broad agreement that it is “better to work for money, and money for free is bad”, the social and personal meaning of the work was as important as the moral. For example, when I asked if the men would be willing to dig a ditch and then fill it in over and over again in return for wages, all said absolutely not – they wanted their work to be helpful, to have purpose. The 90-year-old man added that cash grants were appropriate for the elderly, who had already worked their whole life, but a young person “mustn’t wait for money, must work”, and if the young “sit around and do nothing” they will remain like that “for their whole life” (a close echo of the discourse around the chronic nature of welfare dependency in the US and UK). After much probing, one of the middle-aged men agreed that a basic income could enable the community to self-organize and improve itself. But this took much discussion – and the other men remained doubtful that this would actually happen.

Reframing redistribution

What was missing from these discussions – in contrast to academic debates on basic income – was any mention of the moral imperative of redistribution, that the rich should be giving some of their wealth to the poor. I proposed this directly in Spitzkoppe, and the men agreed that the government should make the rich give up some of their money to the poor, but only after considerable prompting. Ferguson (2015) has argued that the increasing popularity of cash transfers and debates around basic income might be tied to a growing sense that such grants are a ‘rightful share’ of national wealth. However, this connection was not obvious to many of the people I spoke with. Despite appeals to distributory justice in the academic literature, most of the men and women I interviewed in Namibia did not see social grants in this light.

Yet when I reframed basic income as a matter of distribution, people enthusiastically supported the idea. Indeed, even those who were initially reluctant to support a basic income grant became enthusiastic when I described it as not a government ‘grant’ but a ‘dividend’ or a rightful share of the country’s wealth. This became clear when I conducted comparative fieldwork in South Africa, where I heard

largely the same sentiments as held by my interlocutors in Namibia. Initially, many expressed a preference for wage work over other forms of resource distribution and called on the state to provide jobs rather than to directly distribute cash grants (Fouksman, 2020). But I added new questions at the end of the interviews, asking what people thought of a universal natural resource dividend, a share of natural resource wealth that would be distributed to all citizens on a monthly basis. To my surprise, even the people who thought ‘getting money for nothing’ was categorically bad or would lead to laziness or misuse of the funds were in support of this proposal. Take, for instance, Mthokozisi, a 19-year-old who lived in an abandoned warehouse in inner-city Johannesburg, South Africa. When I first brought up the idea of a basic income grant, he insisted that this was a bad idea because “if you give people a grant, [people] will waste it, [they will] just sit around.” However, when I reframed the idea of a basic income grant as instead a share of South Africa’s natural resource wealth that could be given out to every citizen, he enthusiastically supported the idea, and his concern with laziness appeared to fade away. When I asked him the difference between receiving such a share and a grant, he told me, “We must benefit from our economy ... a social grant comes from the government, not the mine – that’s the difference.” The psychic space between grant and share, charity and right, seems to be vast for my interlocutors.

In order to understand why wage labour remains central to accessing income, even in a place of such high systemic unemployment and inequality as in Namibia, we must pay attention to the nuances of the way ordinary people think about distribution, and the deeply rooted links between cash, work ethic and deservingness. As I have argued elsewhere (see Dawson and Fouksman, 2020; Fouksman, 2020), my interlocutors were not resistant to all forms of redistribution; nor did they think that the state has no role to play in distributory justice. Indeed, many of them were dependent on networks of distribution between family members, romantic partners and patrons, wherein distribution becomes a social as well as an economic activity (Ferguson, 2013, 2015). They emphasized that the state *should* provide them with education, health, housing, land and services such as sewage, electricity and water, as well as income-generating jobs. And as Mthokozisi’s comments show, they did not oppose the distribution of what is seen as collective wealth, such as land or natural resources. Indeed, as noted at the start of this chapter, a more just redistribution of land and natural resources formed a key focal point of anti-colonial struggles in Namibia. Yet it is worth noting that the idea of a natural resource

dividend did not come up spontaneously in my interviews, but only emerged when introduced by me. While for my interlocutors land seemed a natural place to claim a share of collective resource, cash – and in particular livelihood and social protection – still seemed to be associated with wage labour.

Many theorists of post-work take as a given that shortening working hours, guaranteeing income security to all regardless of wage labour, and decommoditizing work to allow more ‘autonomous activity’ (Gorz, 1989) would be popular among ‘ordinary’ people (Frayne, 2015, 119). For instance, while acknowledging the ongoing centrality of the capitalist work ethic, Gorz (1999) argues that people prefer to engage in meaningful ‘multi-activity’ that is not bought and sold for a wage or a profit. But the evidence for these assumptions is almost exclusively based on the opinions of well-educated middle class or upper middle class workers in the global North, who are either employed or have the option to be employed in relatively stable, secure, decently paid white-collar jobs. This group critiques wage labour for being unfulfilling, full of ‘bullshit’ tasks with no real value, or too all-consuming in the face of other forms of necessary and meaningful activity (Gorz, 1999; Frayne, 2015; Graeber, 2018). Yet the empirical research presented in this chapter calls into question how much can be generalized from such a group. It might seem intuitive to assume that if people with relatively privileged positions in the global labour market are dissatisfied with the centrality of wage labour and the productivist work ethic in their everyday lives, then those most disadvantaged by this system – such as those quoted in this chapter – would be even more critical. Yet my research suggests the opposite. My interlocutors expressed deep nostalgia for a mid-twentieth-century Fordist vision of social membership and citizenship via universally available wage work. This ‘post-Fordist affect’ (Muehlebach and Shoshan, 2012) has been shaped by Namibia’s history of national liberation and the political centrality of wage workers during the colonial and apartheid period, as well as the pervasive normalization of inequality through the rhetoric of hard work, meritocracy and deservingness.

Conclusion: towards new post-work imaginaries

In the words of Frederick Cooper, ‘imaginative projects have material consequences’ (1996, 457). Despite a context of wide-ranging structural unemployment and high inequality, my interlocutors do not all believe that income security should be unconditionally guaranteed. Their resistance to the idea of redistribution via universal *cash grants* (when

framed as welfare or social protection) seems to stem from three types of attachment to wage work: moral, psychological and social. The first is concerned with ways in which social payments might produce ‘laziness’ and misuse of money by absolving recipients of their obligation to engage in paid employment. The second is based on a longing for the structure, activeness and busyness that work is seen to bring. And the last is concerned with the ways in which paid work provides collective goods and builds social relationships. All three of these attachments are ultimately linked to *time use* – how, where, and with whom our time is spent, and what this says about us, our moral worth, our place in the world.

The testimonies presented here thus invite us – as workers and as researchers – to reflect on our own ideas of the right and wrong ways to spend time. It is these assumptions that must be ‘made strange’ if universalist redistributory systems and the decommmodification of labour could ever become widely accepted and demanded. Current debates on automation and a post-work future (Coote et al, 2010; Srnicek and Williams, 2015) must then be tied to new political and social imaginaries around both resource distribution and time use that go *beyond* the idea that basic income provides compensation for the unemployment caused by automation. We need to try to imagine what meaningful activity and the just distribution of time and resources could look like in such a future.

There are two possible utopian approaches here: one political, one academic, but both integral to the other. The first approach is to connect current interest in social protection floors and universal basic income to the campaign for shorter working hours. This approach would distribute available opportunities for wage work in an era of wage work attachment while destabilizing the moral assertion that ‘hard work’ is the key to deserving income and wealth. Alongside this, we must reframe proposals for universal income security not as a form of welfare or poverty alleviation, but rather as a way of justly distributing shares of collective wealth that is already rightfully ours.

The second approach is to reimagine social, cultural and political institutions that are able to replace the meaning-making and relational dimensions of work (Standing, 2009). This terrain is largely missing from the public imagination and would include the resurgence of voluntary associations, the defence of public and community space, the reform of education systems, and the rise of ‘leisure unions’ alongside labour unions. We must take seriously current moral, social and psychological attachments to wage labour, not to defend such attachments but rather to reimagine how they could be fulfilled outside

of labour markets. This will require empirical work that unpicks what people think and desire – and to what extent these desires are a response to the normalization of wealth accumulation and inequality. Only with such ‘thick’ understanding can we really begin to reimagine new categories and structures to challenge and replace the current attachment to wage employment.

In order to realize a new politics of distribution, we first need to engage in the long-term political work of reclaiming livelihood, identity and community from the confines of wage labour. We need interventions that are sensitive to the social, psychological and moral as well as the economic role that wage labour plays in people’s lives, and the way this is varied and differentiated across geography and class. We need to understand the broader social role of wage labour in mediating facets of our social experience – particularly the imposition of structure, value, order and hierarchy. People chose to engage in wage labour not simply for income, but to be embedded in capitalist relationships of dependence (Ferguson, 2013) and discipline. In a world in which the promise of stable, full-time wage employment has become a form of ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2006), we must create a new social imaginary in which our livelihoods, identities and communities are built upon mechanisms beyond the wage.

Acknowledgements

This work has been made possible by the funding support from the Ford Foundation and the Leverhulme Trust. It has also benefited from the support and feedback of members of the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP), where the chapter was first workshopped, the African Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, and participants in the Post-Wage Economy Workshop at Queen Mary University London. My sincere thanks to all of them, as well as the editors of this volume, for their time, engagement and insight.

Notes

- ¹ The most well-known large-scale cash transfer programmes include Mexico’s Oportunidades (more recently called Prospera) and Brazil’s Bolsa Família (both government run, conditional and targeted at low-income families), as well as the NGO GiveDirectly’s unconditional (but targeted) cash transfer programme in East Africa. Universal basic income grants have been piloted in Namibia and India, and now are about to be experimented with in East Africa (by GiveDirectly), Europe, Canada and the US. All of these are small-scale pilots. For a recent meta-review of cash transfers see Bastagli et al (2016).
- ² While Namibia officially became a German colony in 1884, and was then ruled by South Africa from 1920 to 1990, the colonial encounter in Namibia dates back

to 1485, intensified from the early nineteenth century, and included not only the Germans, but also the Portuguese, British and Dutch.

- ³ This interview subject had not received the grant during the pilot because she was working outside the area at the time, but her sisters had been recipients.
- ⁴ It is beyond this chapter and even this project to hypothesize in detail the reasons and histories behind these attachments, though potential explanations could range from the history of capitalism in southern Africa to contemporary education to socialization to a cultural and public world that is built around the idea of full-time work for all. ‘Work for self’ and ‘autonomous activity’ might require teachers, equipment, space and places of interaction, as well as a society that no longer valorizes wage work – all of which are missing in a place like Otjivero.

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