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‘That Child Support Grant Gives Me Powers’ – Exploring Social and Relational Aspects of Cash Transfers in South Africa in Times of Livelihood Change

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ABSTRACT *This article builds on existing literature on the material effects of cash transfers. It explores people’s own perceptions of the role of unconditional cash transfers in building, maintaining, and transforming social relations in a small village in rural South Africa. Much of the literature studying the impacts of cash transfers in the global South relies on quantitative measures. Thus, there is a paucity of micro-level qualitative research on beneficiaries’ own perspectives on the social impacts of cash transfers. To this end, we explored whether the Child Support Grant, a small cash transfer given to impoverished caregivers of children, changed individual and intra-household relationships, as well as community solidarity in this village. We argue that South Africa’s cash transfers have largely had positive social transformative effects on individuals, in relation to a sense of dignity, autonomy and increased decision-making powers for primary caregivers, usually mothers or grandmothers. Positive effects were also perceived in relation to these households and communities, although some contested effects and limitations were also found. These findings are of interest in the ongoing broader debates around the effects of cash transfers globally as well as regionally in Sub-Saharan Africa.*

1. Introduction

In a context of low levels of formal employment, a relatively small informal sector and declining household agricultural production in rural South Africa, the importance of cash transfers distributed by the state, known as social grants, has greatly expanded. Seventeen million individuals received social grants in 2017. Of these, 12 million received the Child Support Grant (CSG), a modest monthly amount (in 2018 ZAR400/USD33 per child), targeting the primary caregiver of children under 18 years who qualify through a means test.¹ The CSG targets the ‘primary caregiver’ instead of the child’s mother, as in South Africa many children are raised away from their biological parents, due to expansive kinship structures, the detrimental effects of the HIV and AIDS pandemic on households, and the legacy of economic migration. Nevertheless, the majority of primary caregivers who apply for the CSG are biological mothers (Budlender & Lund, 2011).

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Research has shown significant value that the CSG has for poor households, particularly in relation to improved nutrition and food security (Agüero, Carter, & Woolard, 2006; DSD, SASSA, & UNICEF, 2012), and positive educational effects (DSD, SASSA, & UNICEF, 2011, 2012). Recent qualitative cross-country studies performed elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa also show positive livelihood effects of cash transfers (Fisher et al., 2017). However, concerns have also been raised about the ability of cash transfers, currently undergoing a global boom as tool for poverty reduction across the world, to bring about more lasting and positive changes in ways that can be seen as ‘transformative’ (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Molyneux, Jones, & Samuels, 2016). The CSG was primarily intended to supplement income for the purpose of improving children’s food security, which it is achieving (DSD, SASSA, & UNICEF, 2012). However, there has been growing interest in social changes occurring due to the CSG, such as in gender relations and ‘women’s empowerment’ (Patel, Knijn, & van Wel, 2015), and care practices (Patel, Hochfeld, Moodley, & Mutwali, 2012). Nevertheless, there are gaps in the literature on beneficiaries’ own perspectives on the livelihood impacts of cash transfers (Fisher et al., 2017), including how social dynamics shape these impacts (cf. Harman, 2006).

The notion of ‘transformative social protection’ is a broad concept and has been applied variously in the literature.² Molyneux et al. (2016, p. 1088) suggest that the term refers to interventions that ‘aim to enhance the potential of poor people to move out of poverty’, rather than simply having ‘palliative’ effects that lack positive change dynamics, that is ameliorate the hardships of the poor without actually changing their status as poor. A cash transfer alone does not alter the economic and political roots of poverty which are largely structurally determined. However, access to a social grant could be merely ameliorative in terms of the structural conditions of poverty, and yet also elicit changes at the individual level that could have socially transformative effects, such as widely reported empowerment effects of cash transfers in a number of different contexts (Bastagli et al., 2016). This article speaks to such micro-level subjective transformations rather than broader transformations of poverty status, in which evidence of substantial and enduring change require longitudinal data (Molyneux et al., 2016).

In this research, we ask *what perceived role the CSG plays in the changing social relations in households and communities in a small rural village of South Africa, as a means to assess the degree to which it has potential transformative social/relational implications for recipients*. In particular, we asked about experiences of effects of the CSG on three different levels: Individual (for example, feelings of dignity, worry and stress, dependence/independence); intra-household (gender and inter-generational relations); and community (for example, distributive claims, solidarity and reciprocity).

This is a qualitative study drawing from 33 in-depth interviews exploring the lived experiences of rural CSG primary caregiver recipients and their perceptions as a result of these experiences.³ We assessed the social effects of the CSG, although the term ‘effects’ is understood as how the participants themselves perceive the CSG as influencing social relations, rather than denoting causal relations.

In this article, we argue that the CSG has had individual-level impacts in the form of micro-level transformations, by expanding women’s autonomy, choices, dignity and social recognition, and at an intra-household level by its equalising tendencies in gender relations. In addition, the CSG has reduced recipients’ unequal or unfavourable relations of dependence on others in the community.

The next section describes the changing livelihoods context in South Africa and the role of distributive politics, followed by a review of selected literature on the potential transformative effects of cash transfers on three different levels. An empirical section describes the study area and presents and analyses the effects of the CSG. A final section contains a discussion and conclusions.

2. Distributive politics and social transformation in times of livelihood change

In light of the fact that 37 per cent (StatsSA, 2017) of South Africa’s working-age population are unemployed with slim chances of acquiring waged work in the near future, Ferguson (2015) points to

the increasing importance of ‘being granted distributive allocations from other individuals, institutions, or both’ through social claims on individuals, households and communities, or claims on the state (Ferguson, 2015, p. 22). The most prominent of these formal distributive claims are social grants, state cash transfers paid to 12.1 million children (0–18 years) through their primary caregivers, 3.3 million old age pensioners above the age of 60 and 1.1 million people living with disabilities.⁴ These direct distributive claims to publically funded resources is how large proportions of the South African population survive by means other than wage labour (market exchange) or agriculture.

Recent decades have seen largely jobless growth in South Africa, with a marked decline in wage labour. According to Seekings and Natrass (2005), mass unemployment existed already from the 1970s into post-apartheid South Africa, in conjunction with economic growth (Ferguson, 2015). There is no longer a need for large reserves of low-skilled workers to serve primarily the mining industry, which was one of the enabling factors of the apartheid economy, as jobs in mining have steadily declined since then. As Du Toit and Neves (2007, p. iv) put it, South Africa has long experienced ‘simultaneously monetization, de-agrarianisation and de-industrialization’. The post-apartheid state has had to deal with deterioration of agrarian livelihoods in rural areas with extreme and rising levels of unemployment (Ferguson, 2015). Thus, Ferguson points to an emerging politics:

... it is unmistakably the case that (for the present and foreseeable near future, and across much of the world) people lacking access both to land and to waged employment form an increasingly prominent part of our social and political reality. Equally important, those occupying such precarious and ill-defined social locations are both pioneering new modes of livelihood and making new kinds of political demands. It is in this context that distributive practices and distributive politics are acquiring a new centrality ... Many of the key political and economic dynamics in the region today, I will suggest, turn on distributional claims, including claims made on the state (Ferguson, 2015, p. 23, 47)

While the politics of distribution is gaining more and more interest as an analytical field (Murray Li, 2017), the importance of social grants for livelihoods in South Africa is well established (Du Toit & Neves, 2014; Marais, 2011; Meth, 2004; Neves & Du Toit, 2013; Seekings, 2002; Seekings & Natrass, 2005). Social grants have also been criticised, for example, that South Africa’s social welfare system is simply a tokenistic gesture towards the poor, failing to redress poverty and inequality, while the capitalist system remains intact (Bond, 2014; Khan, 2013; Pons-Vignon & Segatti, 2013). While that criticism deals with transformation (or lack of) on the structural level of economic inequalities and political power disparities, the scope of this article is on potential social transformation on an individual level.⁵

2.1. Transformative effects at individual level

Much of the literature on cash transfers describes their material benefits. Cash transfers may also have positive social/relational transformative effects for recipients. Increased economic security and financial independence can lead to greater control over one’s life (Bonilla et al., 2017; Molyneux et al., 2016). The individual’s own personal experiences of changes brought about through cash transfers have been termed ‘micro level subjective transformations’ (Molyneux et al., 2016, p. 1090). Studies elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa show some positive effects regarding feelings of dignity and increased participation in social life, and also some positive, although limited, effects on general ‘psychosocial’ health and wellbeing (Attah et al., 2016; Samuels & Stavropoulou, 2016), all contributing to increased social ‘recognition’ (Fraser, 2000; Ulriksen, Plagerson, & Hochfeld, 2016). ‘Recognition’ here means participation as a full partner in social life and perceived by society as worthy of respect (Fraser, 2000).

There could also be negative social implications for individuals receiving a grant. A common criticism in South Africa is the notion that grants promote dependency on the state (Devereux, 2011; Surrender, Noble, Wright, & Ntshongwana, 2010). Opposition to social protection is often based on conservative claims that dependency on cash transfers leads to a range of social ills, such as erosion of a work ethic, promotion of laziness, misuse of the money on, for example, alcohol or drugs, or perverse incentives such as increased fertility rates, despite a substantial body of research in South Africa and globally refuting these claims (Davis et al., 2016; Devereux, 2011; Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Cash transfers are regularly referred to as ‘handouts’ by politicians and state representatives (Surrender et al., 2010), an attitude also fuelled by the media (Wright, Neves, Ntshongwana, & Noble, 2015) which can lead to stigma for CSG recipients (Hochfeld & Plagerson, 2011). Progressive critics (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Meth, 2004) point out that the poor are always dependent, on family and others, and workers dependent on their employer. Thus cash transfers are, instead, a way to ‘enable less malevolent sorts of dependence to take root and a circuit of reciprocities to unfold within which one-sided relations of dependence can become more egalitarian forms of interdependence’ (Ferguson, 2015, p. 138).

In this article, we engage with notions of dependence and independence at the level of individual and social relations, and explore possible improvements to individuals’ sense of wellbeing and dignity.

2.2. Transformative effects at intra-household level

The literature is somewhat divided on the transformative effects of cash transfers on intra-household relationships, for example, as regards transformative change in gender relations (Bonilla et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2017). Research in South Africa shows positive outcomes for women’s financial independence and decision-making power due to access to the CSG (Patel et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2015). This may function through expanding the choices available to women in impoverished areas (Liebenberg, 2007). Gaining access to an independent income, in this case, the CSG, offers the potential to challenge a subordinate role with less economic and social power within the family and community, and therefore potentially rebalance unequal power relations (Bank, 2011; Dubbeld, 2017; Patel et al., 2015).

However, the CSG may also have more ambiguous effects on gender relations. For example, it has been argued that ‘reversed dependencies’ now exist in rural South Africa where men rely on women’s income through the CSG or a relative’s income through an old age pension, due to the massive decline in wage labour in male-dominated fields such as mining (Bähre, 2011; Ferguson, 2015). Male identities remain powerfully intertwined with labour as an expected norm in South Africa, which could potentially lead to feelings of shame of not fulfilling one’s role (Barchiesi, 2011; Ferguson, 2015). Bank’s (2011, p. 186) example of grant-receiving women jokingly referring to ‘the government as their new husband’ does indicate a new set of social dynamics. Hence, an important aspect of the new politics of distribution is the reversed dependencies and the central distributive role that women and the elderly now play.

Small amounts of cash sustains far more people in the household indirectly through income pooling (Neves & Du Toit, 2013). Distributive claims are therefore directed not only towards the state but also towards the recipients themselves as a source of income, since accessing resources as a dependent is a very common and important livelihood strategy among South Africa’s poor (Du Toit & Neves, 2014). For impoverished and marginalised young people with little education and facing a shrinking labour market, staying and/or moving to a household which has social grants (for example, a grandparent with a pension) is a favourable option and/or a necessity for many (Bähre, 2011). Literature on the effects of the old age pension shows that pensioners enjoy higher status and a stronger position in household as a result of that stable income (Moller & Sotshongaye, 1996).

Therefore, gaining access directly or indirectly to state cash transfers is, according to Du Toit and Neves (2014), probably the single most important component in the ‘arts of survival’ among those living at the margins of formal economy in South Africa. Social grants have a substantial impact on social dynamics across poor households (Bähre, 2011). The most destitute households are often those with no eligibility for state distribution of grants (no children under 18, no adults over 60) and few social networks of distribution (Ferguson, 2015).

2.3. Transformative effects at community level

Elsewhere, cash transfers have helped impoverished people engage in relations of reciprocity in the community, for example, by participating in traditional and family ceremonies through enabling purchases of gifts and thereby becoming more active participants in their communities (Molyneux et al., 2016; Pavanello et al., 2016). Increased reciprocity leads to stronger social ties through increased participation in social life and increased community informal sharing arrangements around in-kind support, primarily food (Pellerano et al., 2016). In addition, cash transfers can boost participation in rotating savings associations (*stokvels*) in South Africa. In addition to mutual financial assistance, *stokvels* also build a spirit of togetherness and co-operation by creating social networks (Patel, 2015).

However, heavily targeted cash transfer programmes with unclear or arbitrary eligibility criteria run the risk of having unintended negative effects on community level, due to creating stigma or jealousy among people who do not qualify (MacAuslan & Riemenschneider, 2011; Pavanello, Watson, Onyango-Ouma, & Bukuluki, 2016). However, there is only limited evidence of negative effects of targeting in South Africa due to the ‘universalistic’ categorical targeting of primary caregivers of children, and pensioners over the age of 60, using a generous means test (Ellis, 2012). Tensions can arise, however, when the CSG is perceived by the traditional elderly as a direct result of a rights-based system, at odds with ‘tradition’ and culture and as damaging the social fabric in the community (Dubbeld, 2013).

3. Potential micro-level transformative effects of the Child Support Grant in rural South Africa

This article is part of a larger project exploring the potential of cash transfers to produce long-term livelihoods effects in poor rural areas. From a database of household survey data from 2016, we purposively selected households for in-depth interviews. We chose households receiving a range of CSGs (from one to seven), and selected for a mix of different primary caregiver ages, ranging from 19 to 60 years old. The 33 semi-structured interviews were held with CSG primary caregiver recipients in 2017–2018, together with observations and informal conversations in the village. All the interviewees were women, reflecting the strongly gendered nature of care in South Africa.⁶

The data collection took place in Cutwini, a village in the Eastern Cape (Figure 1). Rural areas of Eastern Cape are some of poorest regions in South Africa, due to the legacy of apartheid with relatively poor quality of education and poor service delivery (Shackleton & Luckert, 2015). Cutwini, now electrified, has spacious grazing and agricultural lands, although due to the marked deagrarianisation across rural South Africa (de la Hey & Beinart, 2017), agricultural activity is low. The

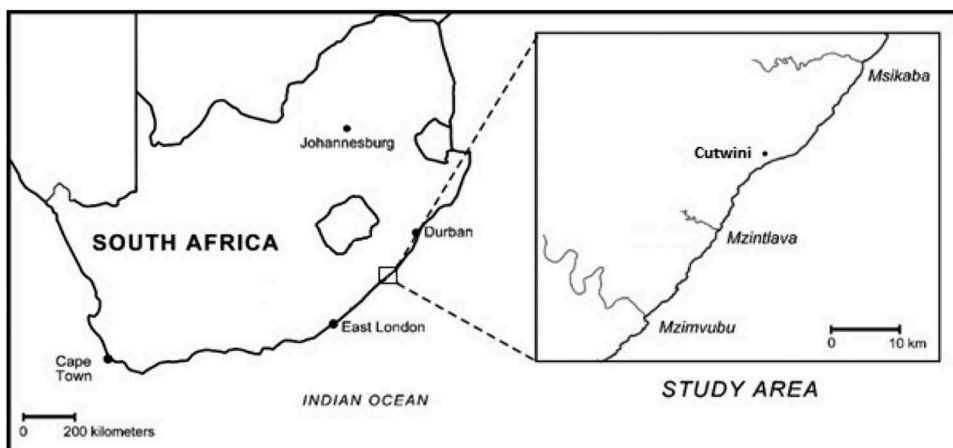


Figure 1. Map of South Africa showing the village Cutwini.

closest hub of supermarkets and stores is the small town of Lusikisiki, 26 km away which is about an hour's drive due to poor road conditions. Minibus taxis commute at least twice a day, but there is no other form of public transport. Residents in Cutwini are largely unemployed, but around half of all households receive *some* form of income from jobs, both formal and informal, including public works programmes and casual work like selling traditional beer, fruit or clothes and monetary remittances from relatives living elsewhere. Based on 2016 household survey data, 85 per cent of all 174 households in Cutwini received at least some form of state cash transfer monthly and by far the most prominent is the CSG, which the villagers first started receiving in 2002.

Drawing on the literature on distributive politics and transformative effects of cash transfers, we explored different social/relational effects of the CSG in Cutwini at three different levels (individual, intra-household, community). The aim was to gain a broader understanding of the role social grants play in rural South Africa. However, the distinction between the different levels was not clear-cut, reflecting the different roles of the CSG on multiple levels.

4. Individual-level experiences

On the individual level, three prominent themes emerged. First, we found increased feelings of dignity and improved status in the household related to access of the grant and the ability to make decisions. Second, there was reduced worry and stress due to improved financial security and planning; having money to spend allowed people to worry less about food security and also improved their ability to plan ahead and save money. Third, we found feelings of 'independence', with access to CSG leading to greater personal autonomy or independence for the primary caregiver, replacing a previous dependence on family members or relatives.

4.1. Increased feelings of dignity and improved status in household

Although the CSG is small in monetary value compared with the old age pension, most participants expressed feelings of increased dignity due to the CSG. Dignity, or *isidima* in isiXhosa (the local language), is in this context similar to being respected. Thembeke, in her 50s, has three children. She described how the CSG is linked to *isidima* and how it helps her manage her household:

For me, the grant plays the role of the father, [because the real father of my children] is not employed, it also plays a role of [parents because I] do not have parents who could help me ... It also plays a role because I am not employed, you cannot see that I am not employed since I plan everything for this household with the grant.

For Thembeke, the grant substitutes for social relations of kinship obligations, which speaks to similar reports on the old age pension in the Eastern Cape being likened to 'the son of the homestead' (Mtero, 2014, p. 202), the source of her livelihood. Thembeke's parents have passed away and, due to the lack of jobs, her husband is unable to fulfil the breadwinner role in the household. Thus, the CSG assumes that role in the household, a reminder of the 'reversed dependencies' taking place in many parts of rural South Africa (Bähre, 2011; Ferguson, 2015, p. 104). When asked what the CSG contributes to in her life, Thembeke did not answer immediately, she first smiled and waved her arm around, pointing at her house and then to herself: *If there was no grant, you would have found me in very dirty form. I am clean because of this grant*. This speaks to the 'micro-level subjective transformations' of, for instance, increased sense of dignity and wellbeing that comes from having some economic security in times of income insecurity (Molyneux et al., 2016).

Other participants also spoke of dignity, not just in an individual sense, but the dignity which comes from the CSG enabling solidarity and reciprocity within the household and the community

(discussed below). For instance, Fundiswa, a 40-year-old woman with two children, described how the grant gives her ‘powers’ and the importance of being able to share:

Fundiswa: *Most people respect me as I have this child grant. They will come to borrow money, they will come to ask for food. The food I bought with the money. So that child support grant gives me powers. So people respect me.*

Interviewer: *You said it gives you powers? Can you give an example of that?*

Fundiswa: *Like, (Stefan), I got this 400 Rand for my child grant. So if someone comes to ask me for some airtime, obviously I will give her. And I know this person gives me power. You know, now I am a person because someone say something to me, they want my help [with emphasis]. So obviously when you get that child grant, someone somewhere will respect you. Maybe you don't have food in your house so you come to me and borrow some money and I will give it to you so that you can buy a packet of mealie meal [the staple food].*

The feeling of ‘power’ and dignity that Fundiswa attributes to the CSG comes from a sense of recognition of her as a ‘person’ in the community, who can help in times of need, someone worthy of respect, which for Fundiswa is a source of wellbeing. This resonates as well with the Africanist and anthropological literature on wealth-in-people (wealth as a relational value, Rakopoulos & Rio, 2018). Fundiswa, in this case through being needed by others, acquires power and status through expanded social ties and relationships, itself a resource and another source of wealth. Sindisiwe, 37 years old, also referred to the links between sharing and dignity (*isidima*):

There is isidima since I am able to help other people and I am not looked down upon, just because I receive the grant. A person is able to come and ask for something from me and I then give that thing to that person, then I am viewed as someone who has isidima since I am able to help other people.

For Sindisiwe, being a grant recipient and a source of distribution does not entail feelings of stigma and shame (being looked down upon), but rather she acquires a sense of respect and dignity (*isidima*) from it. In this sense, being a source of distribution also affects your personhood. Similarly, Khanyiswa, a 20-year-old mother living with her parents, described the feeling of being able to contribute to the communal needs of the household and how it has changed her:

I can say this thing of receiving the grant makes me a mature person ..., since I am able to do things that are done by mature people. I mean for instance [now I can] buy clothes for my child, I am able to buy things that are needed in this household ... it [gives me] dignity to act as a mature person.

In her case, having the CSG acts as marker of entering adulthood. She is able to help out in household in a new way and the CSG gives her power to undertake things she could not do before. Therefore, similarly to Fundiswa and Sindisiwe, the CSG enables Khanyiswa to acquire a sense of recognition in the household and the community as a peer (Fraser, 2000). Khanyiswa’s sentiments regarding maturity/adulthood may stand in contrast to the growing literature around youth in Africa not being able to reach adulthood and being left in form of ‘waithood’ (Honwana, 2012). ‘Waithood’ and ‘adulthood’ can also exist uncomfortably together, as illustrated by Nombeko. She is only 22 years old, head of the household and lives with her sister and children. She is looking for work but can’t find any: *‘I feel stressed because as it is now I don't know what I will do with myself, I mean my future, I don't know the stage at which I am ... I'm not working, I'm not doing anything, I'm just at home, I can say I feel worried about my future’.*

Nombeko’s stress around her future shows the complexity around adulthood. Her CSGs enable her to live independently, exert autonomy, and look after the children. The stress and worry she experiences is around

her distant future, not more immediate household security. She is both ‘adult’ and a young person ‘waiting’, both able to fulfil her very adult responsibilities, but seeing little opportunities for her personal future.

4.2. Reduced worry and stress due to financial security and planning

Livelihood security is achieved through a number of strategies and activities, but in Cutwini social grants are a key feature of improved financial security. In contrast to Nombeko (above), many participants described how the CSG helps them plan ahead and make strategic livelihood choices. Almost all mentioned the marked reduced worry and stress of not knowing whether there would be food in the household. The CSG was described as the key factor reducing stress.

Ndiliswa, 40 years old, said that *‘the Child Support Grant helps me dream good ... you manage to do the things you couldn’t do before. The things you plan to do, one, two, three. So therefore, sometimes dreams come true’*. This is consistent with claims in the literature that cash transfers have the potential to lead to increased financial empowerment for women, as they are able to control spending of the cash, such as for savings or household investments (Bonilla et al., 2017), and consequently attain more control over their lives (Molyneux et al., 2016).

As the CSG and the old age pension are regular and predictable incomes every month, the monthly ‘payday’ as it is called becomes a central part of the rural village economy. It is a day of joy and has a festive atmosphere with the villagers often using the phrase ‘Christmas day once a month’. It is the day when most economic activity takes place in the village. People gather for the local market that takes place only on payday, to borrow money, pay back loans, pay funeral insurance and pay savings associations. Contrary to reports on predatory practices surrounding payments of social grants (Vally, 2016), in this village at the time of fieldwork (2016–2018) deductions from their grant prior to payment were not seen as a big problem according to these participants.

4.3. Issues regarding ‘dependence’ and ‘independence’

A striking feature in the interviews was that, in opposition to common public discourses that the CSG leads to dependency (as described in Devereux, 2011; Meth, 2004), most beneficiaries described feelings of increased *independence*. They did not express concerns around dependence on the state, rather, they saw the grant as relieving unwanted dependence on family or community. Lulama, 43 years old, who used to rely on her mother- and father-in-law for money to buy food for the household, can see a clear change in her life: *‘I am now not dependent, I am independent’* [said with emphasis]. For Lulama, this means not being forced into unfavourable relations of dependence, and hence subservience. Being a CSG recipient entails being less dependent on other family members or neighbours to survive. Thenjiwe, in her late 40s, reported similar experiences. She lives with her grandchildren and stressed the importance of the three CSGs she receives. When asked to reflect on life before the CSG, she said: *‘It was not pleasant. I didn’t have hope for any money, there was no one to give me money. At least now each and every month, I know what to expect’*. Even though she still sometimes asks her family or neighbours for support, she says, *‘there is a difference, even if I ask, I don’t do it the way I used to do it before’*. This implies a shift towards greater bargaining power for Thenjiwe, as she knows she has a secure and stable income every month and is not in a state of desperation.

The CSG is de facto a women’s grant, and often the only source of income for many women in the village. Thembeke also clearly stated how the CSG strengthens her decision-making power and autonomy: *‘I see myself as being important because I don’t depend on a person. I have a date on which I go to receive my children’s money and do what I want to do with it’*. The importance of being able to care for yourself in general was seen as important as Thabisa, in her 20s, said when asked about the importance of the CSG in not being forced to ask food from others, *‘when you appear, people disappear’*.

The notion of ‘independence’ must here be thought of as a matter of degree. No-one is completely ‘independent’ in Cutwini and the grant does not make recipients fully independent in other areas of their

livelihoods, but it contributes to a sense of autonomy that is highly valued. Study participants claimed they prefer to be dependent on government, as it does not lead to unequal power relations between family members or relatives. This is in contrast to some assertions in Ferguson (2013) around the important social belonging that comes from being dependent on someone. The CSG offered Lulama increased autonomy from her parents-in-law, to which she aspired. We can see this as *inter-dependence* (Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Meth, 2004), as previous more one-sided relations of income dependence has been transformed into more egalitarian forms of inter-dependence. The grant therefore contributes to a decrease in unequal power relations (Ferguson, 2015). However, while CSG caregivers may exert a form of power through the income they possess, they are still overwhelmingly responsible for unpaid care work/household labour which is generally unrecognised and thus a form of continued inequality (Fraser & Gordon, 1994).

5. Intrahousehold-level relationships

The women interviewed perceived changes in gender relations, specifically decision-making power, bargaining power and higher status due to the CSG. However, they also reported their husbands' or partners' increased feelings of shame on losing their identity as the male breadwinner and in some cases on the CSG being used as an excuse not to provide parental monetary support. As regards inter-generational relations, the CSG was appreciated for relieving pressure on pensioners' incomes in the household, but some elderly also viewed it as reinforcing a longer trend of young people deserting agriculture.

5.1. Changing gender relations

Interlinked to feelings of increased 'independence', the women perceived changes in gender relations in the village, especially in the household. Many participants mentioned that women have higher status in the village since the introduction of the grant, since (together with pensioners) they now have a secure, regular income that contributes to the entire household. The participants often mentioned men asking for small sums of money, such as for transport or airtime for mobile phones. Lulama described her agency in dealing with claims on her as a distributional resource by her husband. *'He has the right to ask me for some of the money, if he asks me nicely. And I can say no, sometimes yes, sometimes no'*.

The ability to both provide and withhold money is rather new for the participants and provides them with enhanced bargaining and decision-making powers. The views offered hereby Lulama and Fundiswa corroborate quantitative research of CSG recipients of, for example, increased financial independence and decision-making power for women (Patel et al., 2015).

However, the CSG can potentially also be a source of tension in the household as Nandipha, 45 years old, elaborates:

The men don't see the way we see it ... no, men see it as if you are superior when there is money you receive just for free ... If a woman receives money that she did not work for since we get it from government, to a man it can play a role of creating conflict.

Nevertheless, conversations in the village over time indicated that partners and other household members broadly agree that the CSG money is being spent responsibly and that it also benefits men as members of the household. Instead of conflict, the women tended to remark on men's loss of identity as a breadwinner, leading to feelings of shame. Sindisiwe commented:

I can say that [my husband] is not happy, since he is not working, he is telling himself he is making a living out of these children's money ... Sometimes I see [his] shame, and he is suffering because he is not bringing anything since he is not employed. He does appreciate it but he keeps beating himself up since he is not doing anything which gives him money.

These comments reveal the complexities of the ‘reversed dependencies’ and changes in social and economic power in the region (Bähre, 2011; Reed, 2016).

Some women reported that fathers of beneficiary children can use the grant as an excuse not to provide monetary support for their biological children who live in other households. This was especially true in the case of younger unmarried couples, as Thabisa, argues: *‘The men are happy because even if a person does not pay maintenance for the child, they know you will get paid’*. Absentee fathers are very common in South Africa (Patel & Mavungu, 2016), and Cutwini is no exception.

5.2. Inter-generational relations

The old age pension/older persons grant (in 2018 ZAR1690/USD122 per month) has long been a stable and reliable source of livelihood for many people in rural South Africa. It is also a household income benefiting more household members than just the pensioner (Neves & Du Toit, 2013). Therefore, the introduction of the CSG has relieved pressure on pensioners’ income in sustaining other household members (Bähre, 2011). Most participants claimed that the elderly appreciate the CSG greatly because, as one participant described it, *‘having to ask people all the time is annoying to others’*, as well demeaning to oneself. And similar to Dubbeld (2017), for younger women, it also means less dependence on the older generation and a corresponding increase in autonomy.

While intergenerational friction due to the CSG was not pronounced in Cutwini some tension emerged with regards to farming as a source of livelihood. The elderly lamented that fields have been largely abandoned in favour of small vegetable gardens. Some partly blamed this development on the CSG, which is perceived as ‘easy money’, and others blamed young people in general for being ‘lazier’. Nobantu, a grandmother of 73, described a commonly held view among the elderly in the village:

It’s tough now, but this government grant helps us a lot, otherwise we would have died since crop farming was stopped, young people do not want to work, we old people know it since we used to eat mealies [the staple food—maize porridge/pap], we used to crush it [ourselves by hand].

However, the reasons for deagrarianisation in these areas are more complex than ‘lazy young people’. There is no simple causative link between grant payments and deagrarianisation, and this trend started long before the introduction of the CSG (de la Hey & Beinart, 2017).

These sentiments echo discourses noted in other literature, such as negative societal stereotypes of unemployed youth being ‘lazy’ (Jeske, 2018), and ‘nostalgia’ for a more stable past (Reed, 2016) when unemployment and decreasing marriage rates wasn’t so pronounced. Discussions in the village among a few of the elderly suggested that new democratic rights post 1994, such as discourses of ‘children’s rights’, undermined the ‘old’ social order, but there were few concerns that the CSG diluted ‘culture’, in contrast to Dubbeld’s (2013) findings from Kwazulu-Natal.

6. Community-level relationships

At the community level, the grant facilitates and reproduces solidarity and reciprocity through its regularity and predictability, and is an enabler of primarily women coming together in informal savings associations. For grant recipients, being a *source* of income also entails navigating between different forms of claims on them and can be both a source of strengthened social relationships and sometimes a strain on household income (Du Toit & Neves, 2014).

6.1. Claims on grant recipients as a source of income

As already described in several quotes, recipients of the CSG have to deal with claims on them as a source of income, which is not necessarily seen as a bad thing as it can reinforce social ties and

reciprocal relationships leading to status and power.⁷ As the CSG is often pooled in the household, meaning it doesn't only benefit the child but benefits the entire household, the injection of state money into the community also enables other actors to claim part of the income. There are many different demands on that money during the month. One of the oldest participants interviewed mentioned how she paid her local church at least ZAR100/USD7 per month in donations and sometimes even up to ZAR200/USD14, which is a significant amount of her total household income. During the field study, a village meeting with the sub-headman decided that every household should contribute ZAR50/USD3.50 in order to present the new king in the region with the gift of a cow. The CSG and the old age pension 'indubitably provides uncommon cash liquidity in rural areas' (Neves & Du Toit, 2013, p. 107). While these payments are important for upholding or strengthening social relations, it must also be pointed out that the CSG is actually very small in value and that households with no other income from jobs or an old age pension spend most of it on food, and sometimes struggle when asked for money. As Thembeka said: '*I will not give [cash] even if they ask, it is already finished by the time I return from town*'.

6.2. Community-level solidarity and reciprocity

Many of the participants expressed just how important the grants are in enabling them to share and help others. Lulama used the African philosophy of *ubuntu*⁸ as justification: '*Alright, you know (Stefan), because umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (a person is a person because of other people). So if a person has no-one, even in these communities if they have no salt, no cooking oil or what what, they must come into my home or even me I must go to my neighbour ... I take this one in my cupboard and collect this one and this one to take to go and cook for their children ... So ja, we support people*'.

Ndiliswa underlined the importance of solidarity in this community, and how it functions as an informal social safety net in times of crisis with an understanding of a reciprocal relationship: '*When a person asks for help I need to help them, not as an obligation but once a person comes to ask from you, you need to help them. Isn't it you will also need assistance?*' Thenjiwe said '*we help one another when we see that there is still someone who is in trouble*'.

The CSG does not create this sense of solidarity and reciprocity, but acts as an important *facilitator* of it in times of livelihood change, and in times of stress and shocks to the household. However, there are limits to reciprocity and sharing. The examples cited here should be seen in light of someone struggling occasionally rather than everyday sharing with other households. Indeed, informal social protection is frequently uneven and claims on resources and solidarity often an outcome of contestation, negotiation and power relations (Neves & Du Toit, 2013). Fundiswa says when it comes to borrowing and lending '*no one would lend you money if you don't have a grant*' and attaining credit at the local shop (*spaza* credit) is difficult without the possession of an old age pension. In these instances, it is often the men who are left out of the reciprocity and solidarity. Nevertheless, the social grants do serve as an important component in the circuits of mutual assistance and reciprocity upon which many impoverished rural South Africans eke out a living (Neves & Du Toit, 2013).

The CSG also enables recipients to engage in *stokvels*, well-known South African rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAS). They often entail saving a monthly sum together with several households (around 10 people) and buying in bulk or acquiring assets, such as buying a water tank or fridge. During the fieldwork there were around five active *stokvels* in Cutwini. Several participants mentioned how important and helpful the *stokvels* are, for example, since non-perishable food bought at the end of the year can sometime last several months in a household. For many, the CSG is a precondition for engaging with a *stokvel*. Thembi said: '*If [CSG] was not there, I would not be able to pay, actually I would not have joined the stokvel, you see*'. Apart from the benefits of providing security during household shocks, *stokvels* may also create and/or help reproduce community solidarity and co-operation (Patel, 2015). The *stokvel* members (almost always women) in the village hold monthly meetings after payday to deposit savings and share information, and this is an enduring social network.

This section has illustrated that the CSG can help strengthen social relationships with neighbours and relatives in the community (Pavanello et al., 2016; Pellerano et al., 2016). The primary benefits of the grants come from the reliability and predictability it offers women and in so doing becomes a vehicle for coming together in savings groups. However, its low value does limit its community benefits, and its impact should not be overstated.

7. Discussion and concluding remarks

We have in this article discussed rural women's perceptions of the social effects of the CSG. This research casts light on social dynamics in rural South Africa and we tentatively suggest these trends are towards social transformation on a micro-level. As an independent, unconditional source of income, the CSG has had individual-level impacts in the form of micro-level transformations, by expanding women's autonomy, choices, dignity and social recognition, and at an intra-household level by its equalising tendencies in gender relations. In addition, the CSG has reduced recipients' unequal or unfavourable relations of dependence on others in the community. It appears that the CSG has not affected the gendered division of labour (Patel & Hochfeld, 2011), and social reproductive labour is still overwhelmingly a woman's domain in Cutwini. Therefore, although we see noticeable shifts in gender relations, which are certainly influenced by the CSG, a cash transfer needs to work in tandem with other interventions in order to transform gender relations more substantively (Bonilla et al., 2017; Holmes & Jones, 2013).

At the community level, the CSG helps facilitate solidarity and reciprocity in Cutwini. By creating a new stream of distribution through the CSG beneficiaries, individual, household and community claims are both made and met. The grant also enables ROSCA to grow, which strengthens social networks among women. Increased solidarity within the village is positive change, although not socially transformative as ROSCA existed long before the CSG. Also, grants are important in circuits of mutual assistance but their effects shouldn't be romanticised as reciprocity and solidarity is never afforded perfectly equally to all and often are mediated by power relations.

When the CSG was first introduced, it was never intended to be 'structurally transformative' in terms of poverty eradication (Lund, 2008), and the actual sums are still very small. Neither was the CSG designed to transform gender relations (Lund, 2008). Social change is complex, and contradictions and inconsistencies are evident in this interview data. The different effects of the grant we explored here do not work in simple causative ways, are not always unidirectional, and cannot single-handedly 'move people out of poverty'. However, there is evidence of effects that could be socially transformative on a micro-level, with the potential to lead to positive social change over time. Indeed, in the face of jobless growth and ongoing deagrarianisation, the grants have opened up new possibilities, primarily for women and pensioners, to increase their status and position in households and communities in South Africa. Social grants are indeed key to survival in impoverished rural communities in South Africa and those who traditionally had less economic power, are today an important source of distribution. The role of the CSG in Cutwini is therefore, as Harman (2006) argues, not simply an economic transfer which keeps individuals in households and communities afloat, it also becomes part of, and reshapes, social relations. The social impacts of cash transfers are of great interest internationally as they have become ubiquitous as a poverty reduction strategy in the South. These findings, therefore, have potential to offer new insights beyond South Africa in order to deepen our knowledge of the role cash transfers are currently playing. Distribution and distributive politics (with all its current limitations) is a political reality not only in South Africa and warrants greater attention internationally (Murray Li, 2017). A politics of distribution (in which cash transfers play a major part), we contend, will in all likelihood play an even greater role in the future in times of absence of decent waged work for 'surplus' populations (Ferguson & Li, 2018; Murray Li, 2017) across many parts of the world.

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Notes

1. To qualify for the CSG, an individual must earn less than ZAR48 000/USD3500 per year if single or ZARR96 000/USD7000 combined income if married.
2. See Devereux & McGregor (2014) for a broader definition including structural reforms such as anti-discrimination laws aimed at correcting social injustices.
3. Here we are using the term perceptions as has been methodologically described in Pozarny & Barrington (2016, p. 72).
4. Other smaller categories make up a further nearly 800,000 grants, totalling 17.3 million cash transfers paid every month (SASSA, 2017).
5. This article seeks to build on a special issue on transformative effects of cash transfers in *The Journal of Development Studies* Vol.52, issue 8 (2016).
6. All participants have been given pseudonyms. All granted oral and written consent to participate in interviews. The interviews were conducted by the first author, who lived in a local interpreter's household in Cutwini, for about 2 months at a time in 2016, 2017, and 2018. With the exception of four held in English, the interviews were conducted in isiXhosa and interpreted simultaneously by a local trained interpreter.
7. See Ferguson (2013) for more on wealth-in-people and status acquired through relations of dependence and Guyer (1997, p. 115) on how the goal with material wealth was seen as 'the transformation of goods into rights in people'.
8. Ubuntu is a communitarian philosophy which sees the individual embedded in broader relational ties to the family and surrounding society and emphasises values such as sharing, solidarity and reciprocity (Whitworth & Wilkinson, 2013).

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