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Introduction
Transnational Social Policy

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Social policy and the social sciences more generally, have tended to emphasise links, activities and processes occurring 'within' nation states to the neglect of those cutting across them. This 'methodological nationalism' is increasingly being questioned as transnational processes, be they 'from above' or 'from below', institutionalised or non-institutionalised, formal or informal, have become more significant over the last half century. The spread of activities, links and ties beyond national borders has become more extensive and the interactions themselves have become more intensive. In the light of these changes, the aim of this themed section is to draw attention to the transnational dimensions of social policy and advance the study of transnationalism in relation to social policy and welfare.

We do not suggest that this focus should eclipse attention to 'national' institutional arrangements and their various manifestations around the world, but it does imply foregrounding contemporary social, economic and political processes that transcend international borders and influence the dynamics of social policy development and experiences of social welfare. It also has more fundamental ramifications for the study of social policy. Thus, a central idea here is that an emphasis on the transnational dimensions of policy and welfare can be a means of revealing the constructed parameters of the 'national'. Appropriately, then, the section opens with an article by John Clarke in which he issues a general invitation for us to consider the idea that the 'national' welfare state can be understood by reference to the transnational conditions and processes, both past and contemporary, that shape its construction. Countering the representation of national and supra-national/global formations as mutually exclusive, separate spaces, he convincingly argues that they are multiply connected and intertwined.

This recognition that transnationalism entails not only delineating different levels and sites of governance (sub-national, national, regional and global) in social policy but also involves accounting for the processes that link these levels/sites runs through other contributors' papers. The two subsequent papers address these issues with particular reference to different policy areas. With a focus on the field of education, Rob Hulme discusses how analytical work on policy transfer assists our understanding of the transnational processes informing the development of 'national' social policy, while Chris Holden's article examines the methodological issues involved in attempting to integrate diverse forms of statistical data and multiple levels of analysis in the field of health and social care provision.

Bob Deacon's review of the contemporary politics of global social policy provides an account of contemporary mechanisms of social governance at the global level and

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addresses the potential conflicts that arise from this complexity of policy interests. Through exploration of domestic violence and child welfare, the two following papers reinforce the significance of transnationalism to social policy analysis as well as the capabilities and deficiencies of transnational policy making and implementation. In a comparative analysis of England and China, Marianne Hester demonstrates that domestic violence is a key site of transnational as well as national policy activism in both countries. Her paper lucidly illustrates the importance of integrating the supra-national sphere in understanding the development of social policies as well as understanding the continuing importance of different political, institutional and cultural contexts in accounting for country variations in policy responses to domestic violence. Siobhan Laird's article explores the the Northern construction of child welfare policy as implemented in a developing country of the South. Drawing on anthropological evidence, her insightful analysis of the normative underpinnings of UNICEF's Country Programme for Ghana expands the remit of transnational social policy analysis to a policy area and an international governmental institution often neglected by critics of global social policy and extends understanding of transnational policy processes and their impacts.

The final substantive article, authored by ourselves in collaboration with Pat Young, approaches the overall theme from a teaching and learning perspective. With a mind to the recent debate about the future of social policy in Britain that was aired at SPA2004,[1] this article makes the case for raising the profile of a transnational, particularly a global, perspective within social policy curricula. As the article points out, other subjects have succeeded in embracing these dimensions and adapting educational programmes to meet changes in student interests and demands. While there are potential pedagogical and resource challenges that arise from the integration of global perspectives, we suggest that social policy has much to gain from this endeavour. The themed section concludes with two further reviews. The first of these is a review essay by Huck-ju Kwon assessing the content of three recently published books that address issues pertinent to the theme of this section. The second is a brief guide to useful sources, summarising key texts and selected web resources that would be helpful to those who wish to pursue study in this area.

The contents of this section do not necessarily constitute a representative cross-section of current issues and debates in transnational social policy, either as a field of academic study or as political practice. Nevertheless, we have aimed to present a collection of articles that will serve to stimulate awareness and discussion of the dimensions and conditions of social policy that exist beyond, across and beneath traditional borders. While the 'national' and 'sub-national' as sites of study remain important, these papers indicate the emergence of a rich intellectual agenda from exploration of the transnational. We hope readers find these papers relevant and stimulating contribution to the study of social policy and that the analyses presented will encourage further exploration of transnationalism both as an academic methodology and in terms of its wider implications for social policy.

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Note

1 The annual conference of the Social Policy Association (UK) held at Nottingham University.

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