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# Social Policies for Social Politics: How Conditional Cash Transfers are Undermining Traditional Patrons in Northeast Brazil

*Les politiques sociales pour les entités sociales : comment les transferts conditionnels en espèces sapent le clientélisme traditionnel dans le nord-est du Brésil*

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“To any planned, built, or legislated form of social life, one may apply a comparable test: to what degree does it promise to enhance the skills, knowledge, and responsibility of those who are part of it?”

— James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State* (1998:355)

## 1. Introduction

- 1 This edition of the journal looks into recent poverty-reduction strategies over the course of the last decade in Latin America. It asks which policies have helped countries in their fight against poverty. In particular, it concerns itself with Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), a set of social programs which award parents below given poverty lines regular cash grants upon the fulfillment of certain conditions, usually regular school attendance and health check-ups for their children. CCTs have been prominent – and indeed, some might say dominant – on the continent over the past decade. What are their results and impacts on vulnerable populations?
- 2 This paper approaches this question from the perspective of political-democratic citizenship. The question of citizenship is the question of who is included and how in

society, and goes beyond the question of material poverty, although they are related. Inclusion, in turn, can be variously interpreted, but is here understood mainly in the limited sense of autonomous political participation in democratic proceedings. The question asked in this paper is whether fighting poverty – through CCTs – can also have beneficial impacts on the citizenry.

- 3 Latin American politics – including the country of focus in this article, Brazil – has long been beset by a common practice: that the few, rich and powerful, purchase and control the votes of the many, poor and marginalised, by dispensing personalised favours. This practice, known as clientelism, biases electoral results, disenfranchises large sectors of the population, entrenches inequities, and undermines democratic accountability and competition.
- 4 The literature on clientelism has argued that economic development gradually undermines clientelism, and that it does so largely by reducing the poverty of clients (Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007; Stokes et al. 2013; Weitz-Shapiro 2012). Indeed, it is widely accepted that it is material necessity that drives the poor's dependence on patrons.<sup>1</sup> However, economic development does not always or automatically reduce poverty, despite general correlations established in the econometric literature (cf. Dollar & Kraay 2002). Growth needs to be accompanied by strategies and policies – including *social* policies – in order to be widely distributed. If certain social policies can contribute to poverty-reduction, then can they contribute to undermining clientelism, and thereby strengthening citizenship? The 'transitions-from-clientelism'-literature cited above has paid limited attention to this question.
- 5 The 'political effects of social policies'-literature, however, has long recognised that policies can make – or 'break' – democratic citizens. As Smith and Ingram (1993:15) note:
 

“It is usually believed that in a democracy citizens shape policies. It is less commonly realized that the far-reaching policies of modern governments shape citizens. [...] Citizenship cannot be taken for granted in the modern state, but instead must be nurtured by good policy designs.”
- 6 However, current Latin American debates about social policy have largely focussed on the concern that programs like CCTs aggravate rather than alleviate clientelism and inequality. In particular, conditional cash transfers have been attacked on two grounds. First, for allegedly being a new way of exchanging cash for votes and undermining political accountability and competition (Hunter & Power 2007; Soares & Terron 2008; Zucco 2008); and second, for making citizens dependent, lazy, and anaemic in economic and political terms (Hall 2008), thus facilitating their control, entrenching their poverty, and preventing 'real' change (Oxhorn 2011).
- 7 These debates are complex and multi-faceted. General supporters of CCTs, for instance, reject the idea that social assistance buys votes or disincentivises recipients from working, but do fear that its 'neoliberal', individualistic nature may undermine their willingness to collectively mobilise for political change (e.g. Ansell, 2014; Grimes & Wängnerud 2010; Martins 2004). General opponents of CCTs, in turn, worry beneficiaries will give up on productive activities, but believe them quite capable of turning up in large amounts to support those who finance their cheques (e.g., Hall 2008). Both sides' perspectives are contradictory, and somewhat perplexing.
- 8 This article does not cover all aspects of the issue, but constitutes a think piece that introduces the idea that social policies such as CCTs can play a part in the “difficult transition from clientelism to citizenship” (Fox 1994) in Latin America. To do so, the

paper draws upon existing scholarship as well as upon 29 original interviews conducted in 2014 in Recife, Pernambuco, with recipients of the Brazilian *Bolsa Família* program (Family Grant), the world's largest CCT.<sup>2</sup>

- 9 Recife was chosen for several reasons: both Recife and the Northeast share clientelistic histories (Montambeault 2009; Montero 2010); 51.5% of BF beneficiaries live in the Northeast; and over 80% of Brazilians live in urban areas and 51% live in municipalities of 100.000 or more.<sup>3</sup> Institutional support from Recife's Municipal Social Assistance Secretariat and from the Federal University of Pernambuco further facilitated the research on the ground. Interviews proceeded in two neighbourhoods chosen for their contrasting locations and histories, as well as in the main *Bolsa Família* registration site in Recife. Interviewee selection relied on the assistance of local informants (e.g. nurse, NGO worker, civil servants) who were *not* present at the interviews. These lasted from 25 minutes to two hours, and broadly discussed beneficiaries' attitudes towards the *Bolsa Família* and politics, as well as daily lives and most common sources of assistance. Interviews were then transcribed and analysed for relevant themes and patterns.
- 10 Like any methodology, the above possesses its own limitations. In terms of internal validity, interviewees may be reluctant to speak openly about their lives and about illegal processes like clientelism. Indirect questions and confidentiality were thus used as partial mitigation measures. Additionally, because qualitative research involves a lot of guesswork and re-interpretation, the empirical findings should be read as but a 'researcher's perspective' on a 'client's perspective'; or, as Bourdieu (1990) puts it, as "a point of view on a point of view". In turn, in terms of external validity, interviewees were too few (albeit diverse) to form a representative sample of Recife's, much less Brazil's population, an issue compounded by the regional particularities of the Northeast's clientelistic history. This article's insights therefore cannot claim to accurately describe CTs in other contexts; but it does at least claim to provide an exploratory approach to understanding a potentially powerful, and so far understudied, mechanism in the undoing of clientelism and the construction of citizenship. This empirical strategy leaning on Weber's (1949) idea of *Verstehen*: by better understanding what is happening in the lives of a very specific set of *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries in Recife, we develop the tools to better interpret the lives of other beneficiaries, of other CCTs, elsewhere. The conclusion of the paper returns to the broader question of CCTs' effects beyond Brazil.
- 11 The rest of the text proceeds in three parts. First, it briefly argues that CCTs like the *Bolsa Família* should not themselves be considered clientelistic on any reasonable definition of the term. The article then turns to the reverse hypothesis: if the *Bolsa Família* is not clientelistic but a genuine help to its beneficiaries, can it perhaps help them to leave behind their 'familiar bosses'? Can it contribute to a gradual weakening of clientelism, as some (Hunter & Sugiyama 2009; Rêgo & Pinzani 2013a) have suggested it might? The paper identifies some evidence in favour of that hypothesis, before cautiously suggesting that the evidence remains too tentative and preliminary for definite conclusions. In the final part, the text overcomes the question of clientelism to reflect more broadly upon what kind of citizenship the *Bolsa Família* currently promotes, and in so doing emphasises both positive aspects and current limitations.

## 2. Recapitulation: Why the *Bolsa Família* is not Clientelistic

- 12 Early after the *Bolsa Família*'s inception, a debate emerged regarding whether CCTs were nothing but a new form of clientelism, in two possible senses explained below: by intent, or by accident. Later authors, however, have since rejected or revised that assessment on both counts (cf. Daïeff 2015a, where I explain at some length why the program cannot be considered clientelistic). This section briefly recapitulates these debates and their conclusions.
- 13 In the first sense, CCTs were suspected of being clientelistic by their very logic, in that they may have been designed to consolidate an electoral clientele and to 'buy' political support from the poor. In Brazil, such suspicions emerged largely after President Lula's 2006 re-election, which witnessed a significant shift in his electoral base from the wealthier South to the more impoverished Northeast. Because the Northeast was also the region with most *Bolsa Família* cash transfers recipients, and because it turned out that the roll-out of the program accelerated just three months before the elections (Hall 2008:806), commentators were quick to suspect that the *Bolsa Família* may have been politically motivated. Early analyses indeed confirmed that the *Bolsa Família* had generated significant electoral payoffs (Hunter & Power 2007; Soares & Terron 2008; Zucco 2008). However, concerns about political manipulation of the program to electoral ends were later alleviated by evidence that the distribution of the *Bolsa Família* mapped 'objective need' closely (Fenwick 2009; Rodrigues-Silveira 2011; Fried 2012). The accelerated rolling out of the *Bolsa Família* thus ultimately only served to incorporate those who indeed had a right to the transfer. The *Bolsa Família* did, of course, still generate electoral returns, but given the widespread approval of the program,<sup>4</sup> scholars began to wonder how one might more clearly distinguish between retrospective support (which rewards politicians for good performance in office, and is perceived as legitimate) and clientelistic support (which thanks politicians for private gifts and is seen as illegitimate). Zucco (2013) thus investigated whether the electoral gains from the *Bolsa Família* endured across elections (indicating an electoral clientele), or whether they faded over time (suggesting standard retrospective voting). Seeing as they did fade, Zucco – who had himself initially claimed that “*Bolsa Família* is a [...] way to 'buy' votes” (2008:48) – was forced to conclude that “[T]here is evidence that CCTs have not created 'partisan clienteles'... In this context, CCTs do not seem like a tool with which to build overall political dominance” (2013:820). Evidence from another large CCT-program in Mexico confirms this 'programmatic' interpretation (De la O 2013; Stokes et al. 2013; Weitz-Shapiro 2014).
- 14 In the second sense, CCTs were suspected of being clientelistic by a perversion of their logic, in the sense that local patrons may capture or divert the programs, and use their resources to strengthen their own clientelistic networks. After all, as programmatic as the *Bolsa Família* might be, “It would certainly not be the first time in Brazil's history that federal government transfers were turned into grist for patronage at sub-national levels” (Hunter and Sugiyama 2009:13). Moreover, factors like past legacies of clientelism, the poverty of beneficiaries, and the discretion of municipal officials in beneficiary registration and monitoring seemed to provide fertile ground for abuses. Some instances of corruption and attempted vote-buying inevitably occurred and were avidly

documented by the media (Lindert and Vincensini 2010). That notwithstanding, subsequent research ultimately again largely dispelled concerns: in an article titled “Whither Clientelism”, Sugiyama and Hunter (2013:30) report that beneficiaries do not perceive the *Bolsa Família* to be distributed according to political criteria, even in environments which are otherwise rife with vote-buying. The authors’ conclusion is, accordingly, encouraging:

“In sum, we found consistent evidence that the *Bolsa Família* provides tangible benefits to the poor without subjecting them to manipulation by local political patrons or arguably even to concerns of such a prospect occurring.”

- 15 In addition to the above literature, in-depth interviews I conducted with *Bolsa Família*-beneficiaries sought to further explore the relationship between the *Bolsa Família* and clientelism. Although a variety of opinions were expressed on any given topic, the general picture that emerged from the discussions further confirms the findings above: *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries did not appear to uniformly think or act in ways that marked them out as ‘clients’. Instead, many saw the program as a right instead of a favour, and thus did not ‘reciprocate’ for the cash (cf. Daïeff 2015a). Moreover, they felt the *Bolsa Família* was distributed fairly, without political interference by local patrons or party representatives (*ibid*).
- 16 Overall, the *Bolsa Família* is not clientelistic in either of the two possible senses discussed above. Some scholars have thus started to wonder what other kinds of ‘political’ impacts the program might have on beneficiaries. After all, as Campbell (2003) has argued in relation to the American welfare state, “Policies make citizens” – or ‘break’ them, for that matter. But if policy design matters, then what are the *Bolsa Família*’s effects? In considering this issue, scholars have let their questions be guided by their dichotomies: if the Bolsa does not ‘break’ citizens through clientelism, might it ‘make’ citizens by breaking clientelism?<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Might the *Bolsa Família* erode Clientelism?

- 17 In order to understand whether and how the *Bolsa Família* interacts with clientelism, one must first establish if and how patrons interact with program beneficiaries. A large part of the interviews was dedicated to this task, and this section starts by a review of the matter.
- 18 So far in this paper, clientelism has been treated as one general phenomenon in which patrons’ favours elicit clients’ support. However, clientelism can come in many shapes or forms. For present purposes, one can differentiate between two main versions of it: (a) spot exchanges, and what I call (b) “diffuse loyalty”. The most prominent example of a spot exchange is vote-buying: money is exchanged against the (immediate) promise of a vote, which is fulfilled at a given date via a given action. Other examples include paying somebody to attend a political rally. Diffuse loyalty, in turn, involves a more continuous relationship which generally hinges upon an implicit promise of mutual assistance.<sup>6</sup>
- 19 What spot exchanges and diffuse loyalties have in common – what makes them both clientelistic – is, first, that they usually involve a richer patron and a poorer client, and secondly that the patron usually provides material support in exchange of the client’s political support. As such, they are both usually considered means of segmenting, coopting, and disenfranchising the poor, who end up voting for the candidate with the

most particularistic resources to distribute, rather than with the best intentions, programs, or public projects (Escobar 1992).<sup>7</sup> Clientelism, in short, entrenches inequality, and makes poor communities dependent upon a series of patrons, rather than upon their collective agency. It is thus deleterious to citizenship.

20 However, spot exchanges and diffuse loyalties are also different, in significant ways. One is their legality: vote-buying is generally illegal, but assisting a family with food without explicitly demanding anything in return is not. A second difference is how clients perceive the interactions: spot exchanges are acts in which clients may be conscious of what they are trading away. Diffuse loyalty, however, may often not be conceived of as an exchange, since the payoffs are deferred and unspecified. Instead, the patron may be thought of as a friend, or simply as a helpful and fortunate relation; many patrons actively portray themselves (to others and themselves) as benevolent and hard-working ‘for the people’ (Auyero 2001).<sup>8</sup> This directly leads to the third difference between spot exchanges and diffuse loyalties: their observability for the researcher. Spot exchanges, such as vote-buying, are individual events whose occurrence can be discussed and evaluated in frequency; diffuse loyalties, in turn, are hard to measure, and difficult to capture in an interview (the best sociological accounts rely on ethnography of a given community, cf. Auyero 2001). Consequently, explicit discussions of clientelism during the interviews concentrated on spot exchanges, and specifically vote-buying. For brevity’s sake, we concentrate on the latter below.

21 Regarding vote-buying, interviewees in general agreed on two main points. First, most freely acknowledged that vote-buying was a common practice in their neighbourhood.<sup>9</sup> Second, with rare exceptions, all roundly condemned the practice and rejected partaking in it.<sup>10</sup> But if everybody is (professedly) against it, who sells their vote, and why? For this apparent paradox most beneficiaries put the blame on others around them, and gave one of three explanations:

1. **It is a matter of character** (or ‘culture’, or ‘education’): some people always want more, or have no education and do not know their rights, or have no scruples.
2. **Vote-buying does not work**: voting is secret, so one might as well take the money and then vote the way one wants to anyway.<sup>11</sup>
3. **It is a matter of necessity**: people are poor and need the money from their vote.

22 Can, then, the *Bolsa Família* diminish the incidence of vote-buying and -selling? Inasmuch as vote-selling is a matter of necessity, it might. After all, if one lives in an environment where most people disapprove of the practice, there is a social cost to selling one’s vote. Moreover, as Ansell (2014) explains, it is stigmatising to reveal one’s neediness, one of the signs of which is that one is reduced to degrading ‘spot exchanges’. In this context, the increased income security and reduced misery afforded by the *Bolsa Família* may make a real difference: now that one can afford to eat and that one knows that money is coming next month, there may be less of a need to be loyal to a local patron, and still less to sell one’s vote for 20, 30, or 50 Reais every few years. Indeed, interviewees stressed that the *Bolsa Família*’s predictability and regularity mattered greatly:

“Before, when something was lacking, we couldn’t even... sometimes his dad is unemployed, his dad... [So] it already helps that I can rely, right, on this money. It’s sure money that I know will be there every month, that won’t be missing”\* (*Isabela*)

<sup>12</sup>

“Every month, every month we know that it’s there, every month it helps, is good. Rain or sunshine, it is there [‘Faça chuva ou faça sol, está ali’]”\* (*Elisabeth*)



"So you already feel calmer ['mais sossegado'], you already know that it's on a given day, a day that's guaranteed... you already know you've got your money there for sure, from the government."\* (Jose)

- 23 Along similar lines argues the Brazilian scholar Walquíria Rêgo, who recently published a book about her interviews with *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries in rural areas (Rêgo & Pinzani 2013a). When interviewed in the *Folha de S. Paulo*, a major Brazilian daily, Rêgo argued that the program weakened clientelism (or, as it is called in the Brazilian Northeast, 'coronelismo', in reference to traditional 'coronels', i.e. colonels, bosses, patrons):

"The colonel lost weight because she [*Bolsa Família* beneficiary] acquired a freedom she did not have. She does not need to go to the mayor. She can ask for a better street, but not food, which is the way *coronelismo* worked."\*<sup>13</sup>

- 24 Several parts of Rêgo's statement are of interest here, including the idea that Brazilians now have the liberty to buy their own food. Indeed, both external data and my interviews confirmed that Brazil has made significant progress in terms of food security in the course of the past decade. As an interviewed doctor working on the poor outskirts of Recife recounted to me, when the *Bolsa Família* was launched in 2003 she used to see many malnourished children. Ten years on, she sees them no more, and hunger has fallen dramatically. Indeed, according to Tereza Campello, the Minister for Social Development and the Fight against Hunger (MDS), the number of undernourished Brazilians fell by 82% between 2002 and 2012 (Gomes 2014). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) further stresses that in Brazil "the decrease in food insecurity was greater among people living in extreme poverty" (FAO 2014:23; IBGE 2010). Whilst economic growth and other policies have helped in this regard, cash transfers have been an important part of the state's food and nutrition policy: the *Bolsa Família* "currently accounts for approximately one-third of Federal expenditures on food security and nutrition" (FAO 2014:24). Indeed, interviewees considered the program key to the change in their lives:

"These families, in the past, we saw the reports on television, on the radio ... saw that many malnourished children died ... A lot of terrible suffering, terrible suffering ... because before there was no government program to help and they didn't even have their own food ... Many families just went hungry. They didn't even sleep, because there wasn't, really, anything to eat ... Nowadays, thank God, it has improved a lot ... now, this income means that they have the basics."\* (Lenira)

"There's one [neighbour], I think he doesn't get the *Bolsa Família*, no... That's why I think he goes hungry, you see"\* (Karina)

"These days many people go hungry, but not that many given that help from the government, because many... There, where I live, there are mothers with seven, eight children. They are in need, but not as much because they know that at the end of the month they will receive that money"\* (Lucilene)

- 25 Indeed, food purchases were the most frequently cited use of *Bolsa Família* cash in interviews. This reduction in hunger goes hand in hand with a stark reduction in poverty (FAO 2014:23-24):

"Overall poverty fell from 24.3 percent to 8.4 percent of the population between 2001 and 2012, while extreme poverty dropped from 14.0 percent to 3.5 percent. [...] An additional 22.1 million Brazilians have been lifted out of extreme poverty since 2011."\*<sup>14</sup>

- 26 When asked how families lived before the program, Cristina spoke for many when she bluntly stated: "Boy... let's put it like that, they suffered necessity ['passavam necessidade']".



- 27 Where 'poor people's lives' change so starkly, changes in 'poor people's politics' are likely to follow suit. Indeed, when asked, some beneficiaries reckoned that the *Bolsa Família* had reduced the frequency of vote-buying. In order to understand this a little better, we turn to an excerpt of a conversation with Roselia, a 28-year-old single mother of five with four years of schooling and six years of *Bolsa Família* transfers (R\$370/month at the time of the interview). As she emphasises, candidates usually cunningly target the poorest areas because they know that destitute citizens will sell their vote against small, one-off benefits, even though these gifts will leave them hungry again the next day:

**Question:** You said that politicians come, make promises... Now I don't know if this happens in your neighbourhood, but do they sometimes even promise money or jobs?

**Roselia:** Yes, yes, they promise.

**Q:** And is there any vote-buying?

**R:** There is, there is. Everybody knows this. Now everybody keeps quiet on this, right, like, that the politicians go, offer money for you to vote. He arrives like that in a community that he sees, he knows, they are rascals ['malandros']. They are rascals. He arrives in a community, like that, let's assume that there are only houses on stilts ['palafita'], people in great need. [...] There they make promises, give food packages ['dão cesta básica'], give money for cooking gas, and buy a vote. Because there, that person, what is she? Ne-e-dy. ['Ne-ce-ssi-ta-da']. That person there needs cooking gas. [...] 'I need gas'... and you, 'hey, Dona Rose. Hey, here is the money for the gas. But you will vote for me'. 'Aaah, I'm in great need, with my children, I don't have food'... 'Hey, Dona Rose, here's a food package'. Only that this will fix you up once ['suprir'], it won't be for life. There are a lot of people who don't understand that.

**Q:** Fix you up?

**R:** Fix up... the need, in that hour. [...] After that, it's over! O-ver. ['A-ca-bou']. He doesn't even put a foot back in the community, because he knows the community is in need, he knows that he got a few nice votes, because he gave food, he gave gas...\*

- 28 When asked, however, Roselia expressed the belief that the *Bolsa Família* undermined the influence of politicians, because the government now 'covers some needs':

**Q:** And do you think that, now that some people have the *Bolsa Família*, the politician has less influence, because people already have...?

**R:** Yes, yes. For sure. Now you get to the point... They definitely have less influence, because of the government, which is already meeting some need. They can come, of course they can come, say like that, I want to give you this much for your vote, and you have to give me the number of your voting card. There... it's up to you to accept, yes or no. Of course, we choose what we want and don't want, of course, for our life. Like good things, bad things... we decide, right? But I think, see, that they don't have as much influence as they used to have. Thank God! That they don't have as much influence as they used to have... Back in the time of my mother, of my grand-parents... I think they had more influence. Because there wasn't this project, this, the *Bolsa Família*, it didn't exist, so the situation was precarious.\*

- 29 Now that some of the poorest receive the *Bolsa Família*, Roselia suggests, the gifts of politicians are less needed, or anyway carry less weight. Interestingly, a similar view was expressed by the president of a neighbourhood association, in the midst of our conversation about the *Bolsa Família*. Neighbourhood associations are usually closely tied to political parties, and are an established part of the Northeastern clientelistic machine (Ansell, 2014). As the president recounted to me, he discontinued certain food gifts after the *Bolsa Família* eliminated the need for them:

**Question:** So, about the *Bolsa Família*. ...

**Respondent:** *Bolsa Família*, I am in favour of the *Bolsa Família*. I am in favour. I am in favour of the *Bolsa Família* because here, end of the year, myself and my son, we used to get together and buy some food to give people. Nowadays, the people receive ['as pessoas ganham']. They receive their money... even though it's little, but they receive it.

**Q:** So they don't need the food anymore?

**R:** No. You see. Because the people aren't in need ['passando necessidade'].\*

30 That the leader is in favour of the *Bolsa Família* suggests, encouragingly, that he cares more about his community's welfare than about the electoral return on his favours. Yet the same leader later explained that he helped higher-up candidates gather votes, and the food gifts at Christmas were presumably one of many means to sustain the loyalty of poor voters.<sup>15</sup> That the *Bolsa Família* undermined this practice is, then, but one example of the way in which it changes poor people's politics: not dramatically – since the leader still asks his followers for votes – but by reducing voters' material dependence on their broker. Citizens might still accept food, if it is offered to them; but since they are less hungry, these gifts may only impress a limited gratitude on their conscience.

31 However, both Roselia's and the leader's accounts, though telling, are not necessarily representative of the general spirit of the interviews. In particular, although many *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries indeed mentioned changes in their material lives, most nonetheless suggested that the *Bolsa Família* had had no effect on vote-buying whatsoever. This is either because they thought that one might well take both the *Bolsa Família* and the politician's money; or because they considered vote-buying a matter of character or education, which the *Bolsa Família* would not be able to transform:

[Question asked: do you think the *Bolsa Família* led to a reduction in vote-selling?]

"I think it didn't change much, that didn't happen, no. People continue with that mentality, that gaining something when the time comes is good. It still exists."\* (Lenira)

"It's difficult to change that, no? Because it's like this, it isn't even the *Bolsa Família*, it's the human head, that human head is complicated, right, the more it has the more it wants. So that's a flaw in humans."\* (Cristina)

"But even like that [with the *Bolsa Família*]... the people still... they could receive up to 2-3 minimum wages, and they'd go after [politicians]... Because, that's how it is: the Brazilian has this habit."\* (Aldenine)

32 Consequently, although some interviewees did indeed notice a decrease in vote-buying over the years, they attributed this squarely to increased monitoring and punishment of the practice by the electoral commission in recent elections (cf. Nichter 2011b):

"It happened in the past as well, it happened a lot. These days, if they do it, they are arrested. But they do it, hidden. Around here, on Election Day, they circulate, the police, everything. If caught you're arrested."\* (Edeleuza)

"These days it's more difficult. [...] Vote-buying these days is already more, it's already tighter, they are more organized on this front... He [the politician] can prejudice himself. In the election. Because of that, there's a risk. To lose your mandate... Up to now... up to now it's making progress, you see, it's getting better step by step"\* (Jose)

33 In so responding, many beneficiaries unknowingly mirrored the arguments of one of the most outspoken critics of the thesis that the *Bolsa Família* has undermined clientelism in the Northeast. In a series of articles, Alfred P. Montero (2010; 2012) uses aggregate electoral data to track the progress of leftist parties across various states of the Northeast, which he takes as a measure of how strongly *coronelismo* – the traditional hold of conservative parties over poor voters – is receding. He shows that conservatives

retained many rural areas full of *Bolsa Família*-beneficiaries, and thus questions the ability of the *Bolsa Família* to undermine enduring networks of patronage. Mirroring explanations found in the interviews, Montero on the one hand concedes that, theoretically, the *Bolsa Família* “obviates the need for the poor to turn to local clientele networks since they are no longer prodded to do so by necessity” (2010:118); but he goes on to reject that argument because “It is plausible that voters [...] will maximize their income by taking federal support and the governor’s patronage” (p.119). And though his figures do reveal progress by the left in cities, Montero argues that this was not the *Bolsa Família*’s work, but instead caused by increased grassroots activism by urban leftist activists. He thus concludes, along with a majority of the interviewed beneficiaries, that the *Bolsa Família* did not significantly and independently reduce vote-buying.

- 34 The quantitative-electoral evidence, however, is mixed. Whereas Montero finds no correlation between the distributions of the *Bolsa Família* and of the leftist vote share in the Northeast, Borges (2007; 2011) finds a relationship, despite using similar datasets, variables and estimations. The latter thus credits the *Bolsa Família* with the reduced dominance of conservatives in the Northeast, as does Llyod (2012).
- 35 In the absence of its own data, this study cannot, unfortunately, adjudicate the debate about the exact effect of the *Bolsa Família* on the extension and intensity of clientelistic networks. Opinions on the matter diverge, be it between scholars such as Rêgo, Montero, and Borges, who have carried out studies of the program, or between beneficiaries themselves. What is almost certain, however, is that vote-buying has diminished over the years, just as *coronelismo* is itself not what it used to be.<sup>16</sup> The reasons for this certainly partly pertain to Brazil’s general economic transformation, as Montero (2010) is keen to stress; but they equally certainly pertain to the striking revamping and extension of the Brazilian welfare state, which goes much beyond the *Bolsa Família*, and in some ways started with the 1988 constitution.<sup>17</sup> After all, as the Brazilian scholar Elisa P. Reis already argued back then: “the bureaucratization of power and the extension of social benefits to the *campo* constitute a process of nation-building, through which a new social identity forms that substitutes those traditionally based on local loyalty” (Reis 1988:203-4).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Stokes et al.’s (2013:231) account of the transformation of the ‘American electorate’ over decades can easily be read as describing contemporary Brazil:

“The American electorate of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries [...] is unlike that of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had nowhere to turn but to party agents and the charitable organizations, in search of transfers or protection from risk. Now government fulfils these functions. Isolated manipulations of programs [...] notwithstanding, the vast majority of the social spending by governments at all levels in the United States, especially that going to individual beneficiaries, is constrained by rules, means tests, and other abstract formulae.”<sup>19</sup>

- 36 Before closing this section, it is worth noting two further factors which, although not fully elaborated on here for reasons of space, are relevant to whether the *Bolsa Família* can undermine historical patterns of clientelism (a more comprehensive treatment is found in Daïeff 2015b). On the one hand, because vote-buying was more prominently discussed in the interviews, this article has focussed on spot exchanges rather than diffuse loyalty. However, it may be more difficult to undermine diffuse loyalty than to undermine spot exchanges, because the former involve not just material gains (although they are grounded in that) but also trust, friendship, and, potentially, fun: patrons may sponsor local festivities, trips to the sea, or even drug consumption (Auyero 1999). If this is the

case, the *Bolsa Família* may struggle to ‘compete’ with patrons. On the other hand, however, the paper has only focussed on material ways in which the *Bolsa Família* might undermine clientelism: namely, by reducing poverty. However, as Reis’ quote suggests, social programs can also have psychological effects on beneficiaries. If so, the fact that clientelism is partly a character trait, as interviewees claimed, need not signify that the *Bolsa Família* cannot undermine it. The next section turns to these wider psychological effects – good or bad.

## 4. Social Policy and Citizenry

37 To date, two lessons have emerged from the above: first, that the *Bolsa Família* is not clientelistic – but second, that it cannot definitely be shown to eliminate patronage networks, either. Does it, then, have no effect whatsoever on the political realities of its beneficiaries? Not necessarily. Several authors have suggested that, beyond reshaping clientelism, the *Bolsa Família* directly affects citizenship. For instance, in the quote above, Reis (Reis 1988:203-4) argues that new social programs “constitute a process of nation-building, through which a new social identity forms”. But which new social identity?

38 Conditional Cash Transfers may transform recipients’ view of the state, and of their and its duties, through two broad means. The first, more tangible, are the ‘conditionalities’. As Recife’s former *Bolsa Família* administrator noted in an interview, although CCTs *prima facie* impose state conditionalities on beneficiaries, this in return requires the state to provide said services:

“What happened is that the program generated these obligations for you. When you obligate the throwing of kids into school, the government auto-obligates itself to have space in school, to open new schools, to contract new teachers.”\*

39 Moreover, obligations create in beneficiaries an expectation that these services be of an appropriate quality; and where they are not, many interviewees in Recife stressed the importance of insisting on and claiming their rights, or ‘*cobrar*’ in Portuguese:

“Mothers go there, to know why the teacher was absent, why he didn’t come. And he says, he was ill, something... When the kids come without homework, we go there to know why they don’t have homework, because it’s the teacher’s responsibility to give homework.”\* (Rosana)

“If somebody messes with my rights I’m going to go run after them, no?”\* (Cristina)

40 In other words, CCTs’ conditionalities can create a feedback loop of bottom-up accountability for better social services, an essential component of citizenship. Whilst it is not possible to directly attribute this insistence on one’s rights to the *Bolsa Família*, studies in other contexts have similarly suggest that social service quality was engaged by the ‘empowerment’ of CCT beneficiaries, who became more inclined to monitor and complain about bad clinics (Barber & Gertler, 2009). To quote the Recife’s former *Bolsa Família* administrator once more:

“The question is, but without this benefit, would there be this insistence on education? Probably not, because their preoccupation would be to survive!”

41 Beyond conditionalities, CCTs may transform recipients’ view of the sense in a more diffuse manner, by creating a broader sense of social inclusion. For instance, Sugiyama and Hunter (2013) concluded from focus groups with *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries that “[t]he sense of social inclusion that the program has created was strikingly evident”. In turn, from their interviews with very poor recipients in rural areas of Brazil, Rêgo and Pinzani

(2013:362b) came back convinced that the *Bolsa Família* enhanced the dignity and autonomy of recipients:

“The German sociologist Georg Simmel [...] showed that money possesses liberating aspects, because it introduces, even in minimal amounts, the abilities of *choosing* and *desiring* to people. It is endowed with strong symbolical functions, since it turns its owners into ‘more determined persons’, more respectable and respected in a world dominated by mercantile relationships; it makes them better able to decide their lives, and, therefore, more equal to others. Finally, it frees individuals from personal ties of economic dependence (on their family or other people). The economist Amartya Sen theorises that people’s liberty hinges on their range of concrete options which allow them to realise actions or reach states that they consider valuable [...]. These options depend not only on individual capacities, but also on the material conditions in which people live. When these conditions change, so do the possibilities to make their lives more free and autonomous.”\*

- 42 A significant literature backs the idea that social policy can transform citizens – and can work for rights and democracy (or, indeed, against it). Nor is mere money the key aspect – but rather, how it is handed out. As Soss (1999) argues, how welfare recipients interact with the state at the point-of-service shapes their wider beliefs about government, and thereby their political efficacy and orientations:

“[T]hrough their experiences under a given policy design, welfare clients develop program-specific beliefs about the wisdom and efficacy of asserting themselves. Because clients interpret their experiences with welfare bureaucracies as evidence of how government works more generally, beliefs about the welfare agency and client involvement become the basis for broader political orientations. [...] the views of government that citizens develop through program participation help explain broader patterns of political action and quiescence.” (p.363)

- 43 The best policies, according to these authors, are those which do not submit the recipient to a constant, stressful and degrading review regarding their desert of the benefit. Campbell (2003) illustrates that argument, as she shows how seniors and war veterans in the US flourished as citizens – i.e. participated more and gained more political clout – after they were guaranteed unconditional pensions. Social security in old age empowers seniors because they are cast as full-blown, responsible citizens. As Ingram and Schneider (1993:89) note, the ‘social construction’ of target groups for state benefits casts some as passive-dependent and others as active-deserving. These policy messages shape recipients’ experiences, beliefs, and behaviour:

“The unvarying experience people have with policy informs them of their status as citizens and how they and people like themselves are likely to be treated by government. Such information becomes internalized. These continually reiterated messages people receive tell them whether they are viewed as active participants in government and bureaucracy or whether they are passive recipients in the process. Experience with policy tells people whether they need to deal directly with government and bureaucracy as individuals to press their own claims, or whether they can join with others in solving problems collectively for the common good.”<sup>20</sup>

- 44 Unfortunately, social policy can also have detrimental effects on citizenship. Auyero (2012) demonstrates this flipside by showing how the neutral and seemingly ‘fair’ bureaucratic Argentine state uses technology and delay to control, demobilise and stress poor populations. On the basis of his ethnographic observation of welfare offices in Buenos Aires, Auyero argues that the poor are moulded into ‘patients of the state’ (in all senses of the term) by a combination of ever-changing and unclear instructions, as well as by repeated and interminable waits for assistance. The arbitrariness and slowness of the

process teaches claimants that they are impotent and unimportant witnesses to the operations of a Kafkaesque machine, left to do little else than to wait for vital state benevolence to finally appear (or not), like Godot on Beckett's stage. Although some kind of support is usually and ultimately granted, the process inhibits collective action, participation, and feelings of dignified citizenry. As Ingram and Schneider (1993:89) muse, "the long lines in front of welfare offices that are frequently closed tell dependents more about government than short lines for the voting booth."

- 45 Unfortunately, as a week of non-participant observation at the main *Bolsa Família* registration facility in Recife revealed, the treatment experienced by *Bolsa Família* beneficiaries mirrors that of Auyero's Argentinian poor more than that of Campbell's American seniors. *Bolsa Família* claimants are not always explained the program, often fear being cut off for some fault of theirs or of the system's, and sometimes have to sleep outside the registration facility in order to even be attended to. The constant stress this generates dominates the minds of many recipients. The following accounts, by claimants and beneficiaries waiting to be attended to, illustrate the burdens of the process:

"Look at the site in which we are: everything is wet, everything is dirty... mud... it's all dirty... this is horrible... it needs to improve more"\* (Gabriela)

"Last time I went I had to sleep there... I slept, I left at ten at night to be attended at nine in the morning the next day..."\* (Elisabeth)

"I left the house at half past four [am], got here around ten to six, twenty to six. From there I drew the number 110. I'm still waiting... Many people. Already many... you spend the entire day"\* (Cristina)

"Many people come here, but don't bring the right document and there they go back, and have to come back again. It's really bad, you have to leave at four in the morning... Four in the morning, I'm still here. A lot of time."\* (Mariana)

"I left at five in the morning. They only renew if you have all the documents. If not, you have to come another day... It's, like, a bit complicated. And for me, after the first registration, it took a year."\* (Rosana)

"It's a lot of bureaucracy, there, for us to be able to do this registration... I already came here, but they told me I needed the certificate, in my name, so there, I went after it, in the residency association, picked it up there, now I am back here"\* (Andrea)

- 46 As long as this is the case, the *Bolsa Família* will arguably not reach its full capacity in terms of empowering Brazil's most vulnerable citizens. After all, given the efforts required to get the *Bolsa Família*, the benefit is unlikely to feel like much of a right. Instead, as Ahlert (2013:73) notes on the basis of her own interviews, it often feels more like the product of a protracted battle with the state:

"These difficulties [...] characterize the idea of a struggle ['luta'] to get the benefit. The interlocutors during the research [...] understand the obtention of the *Bolsa Família* as a part of the struggle they are engaged in with the State based on their living conditions"\*

- 47 Consequently, the process is unlikely to make claimants feel like rights-bearers and citizens:

**Interviewer** Do you feel like a citizen?

**Beneficiary** Sometimes. Sometimes not. In relation, for example, to chasing after things ['correr atrás']... (Andrea)\*

- 48 This image of *correr atrás*, of chasing or running behind, was used frequently by interviewees in Recife, and captures the tiring aspect of the *Bolsa Família* registration process. What the poor previously expected to be given from the corrupt but 'cordial' local patron (cf. Holanda 1936), they now have to implore from the fair but impersonal



state. Some have even openly question whether such a transformation necessarily constitutes an improvement, since clientelistic interactions involve “intimate exchanges”, a “mutual sympathy and vulnerability” and a “shared humanity” which the cold and computerised welfare state lacks (Ansell 2014:194; Auyero 2012; Gay 1998:16). As Robert K. Merton (1949:74) noted, the political machine “fulfils the important social function of humanizing and personalizing all manner of assistance to those in need”.

- 49 However, all this alleged ‘humanity’ of clientelism does not erase its unequal and dominating nature. One can simultaneously defend poor people’s involvement in clientelistic networks, arguing that “if we were in [their] shoes we would doubtless be and think just like [them]” (Auyero 1999:312), and criticise clientelism by noting that “the solutions, services, and protection provided by brokers [...] are inclined to legitimate a de facto state of affairs that is an unequal balance of power” (ibid, p.324-5). After all, patron’s efforts are dedicated to ‘obscuring’ the fact that an exchange is even taking place. Brokers rarely request their clients to reciprocate, as favours are masqueraded as generosity and hierarchy hides behind kindness (Auyero 2001; Bourdieu, 1996; Mauss 1923; Sales 1994a).
- 50 Overall, then, clientelism is deleterious to democratic citizenship. One sign is that, perversely, it works best when inequalities are the greatest, because the powerful have the most to lose from change, and the poor are the least capable of refusing side-payments. Whilst the buying of support may constitute an improvement over its violent commanding in the past (Scott 1969),<sup>21</sup> and whilst the local benefits of clientelism might be real when state services are poor, these advantages are likely to pale relative to those of an effective welfare state (Stokes et al. 2013).

## 5. Conclusion

- 51 In conclusion, social policy does not simply have economic or electoral effects, but can be the engine of a more sustained transformation which promotes an inclusive, democratic citizenship, and demotes conservative-traditional patrons who have long controlled politics.
- 52 This article in particular has made several points. For one, it has showed that the *Bolsa Família* has substantially changed the lives of its beneficiaries, in ways borne out in existing scholarship, third-party data, and qualitative interviews conducted in Recife. Accordingly, it has suggested that such changes in one’s economic realities may induce changes in political realities, after having shown that the *Bolsa Família* is not itself a clientelistic program. Finally, the text has outlined avenues in which the program may affect citizenship, sometimes in detrimental ways.
- 53 The idea that social policies like the *Bolsa Família* may interact with patterns of clientelism is, admittedly, not entirely new. As we saw, Rêgo has suggested that “The colonel lost weight” due to the *Bolsa Família*. Other authors have made similar statements: “the [*Bolsa Família*] program contributed to the decline of dominant state political machines in Brazil’s North and Northeast” (Nichter 2014b:135); “the *Bolsa Família* [...] transformed the norms and expectations of beneficiaries toward other state-run programs and undercut the basis for patronage politics in Northeast Brazil” (Sugiyama & Hunter 2009:30). However, these claims remained conjectures, backed by indirect or limited evidence.<sup>22</sup> As Weitz-Shapiro confides:



“[T]he question of exactly how and why these [CCT] programs have succeeded in breaking with clientelism is not a settled one” (Weitz-Shapiro 2014:73)

- 54 Indeed, the matter remains somewhat unclear. This article itself has not offered fundamental, transformative evidence that the *Bolsa Família* has indeed decisively undermined traditional patrons. However, it has hinted at the existence of dynamics which have been recognized even by patrons themselves (in the words of the interviewed community leader cited in section 3).
- 55 Ultimately, the paper closes on two confident and optimistic notes. The first is that, although the *Bolsa Família* in all evidence does not eradicate clientelism, it is likely to undermine its ‘worst’ forms. As interviewees noted, when clientelism is driven by material need, patrons exploit clients’ necessity. Since the *Bolsa Família* reduces extreme poverty and hunger, it makes clients’ decisions more meaningful and autonomous. At the same time, it introduces competition for patrons’ favours: their assistance and support needs to be all the more dedicated and valuable to gain the support of *Bolsa Família* recipients. This is good news in the long-run, because the rising cost and falling effectiveness of local brokers is one of the reasons party leaders decide to switch from clientelistic to programmatic appeals (Stokes et al. 2013).
- 56 The second piece of good news is that in Brazil at least, the *Bolsa Família* may only be the tip of the iceberg. Although the program contributes its small share, the bulk of the transformation is arguably carried by a combination of three processes. The first is the recent *Brasil Sem Miséria* (Brazil Without Misery, BSM) agenda, a comprehensive social assistance policy that aims to finally eradicate extreme poverty, and goes beyond cash transfers (Fenwick 2014). The second is the general, growth- and policy-driven transformation in the lives of poor Brazilians, which has lifted millions out of poverty and into formal jobs (Birdsall, Lustig & McLeod 2011). The third, finally, is the rising level of electoral competition in the Northeast, which partly derives from the former factors, but also further limits patrons’ access to resources (Borges 2007).
- 57 The *Bolsa Família* is therefore part of a larger changing socio-economic context. While it cannot end clientelism alone, it reinforces other factors that together favour patrons’ decline. Whether this decline is terminal cannot here be asserted with certainty; but as conservative parties continue to see their support across the Northeast erode (Borges 2011; Lloyd 2012; Montero 2012), and as some historically conservative governorships slip into the hand of the opposition (such as for the first time ever in 2014, Maranhão to the Communist Party), traditional patrons, facing ever-fewer resources and ever-more competition, have reason to worry.
- 58 Of course, none of the above transformations have resolved the current and historical problems of poverty, injustice and violence in Brazil, nor do they augur an era of enlightened electoral politics free of the inevitable influence of power, money, and interest. However, “In Brazil, a *better-being* has taken hold” (Duraud 2010). Clientelism is on the decline, and social programs are pulling an important weight in this transformation.
- 59 Can these tentative insights from the *Bolsa Família*, and indeed from the particular contexts that are the Brazilian Northeast in general and Recife in particular, be generalized to other regions, and other CCTs? This paper has not systematically investigated this question, despite, perhaps, claiming so in its title. It has, however, tightly nested its exploration of the *Bolsa Família*’s effects in Recife in scholarship about

other social programs and societies: clientelism in Colombia (Escobar), CCTs in Mexico (De la O 2013), state welfare in Argentina (Auyero), American social assistance (Campbell, Soss) and 19<sup>th</sup>-century vote-buying in the US (Stokes et al.). By closely focusing on a highly particular case, the paper has attempted to open a new avenue for explanation and interpretation in the struggle for inclusive citizenship. Daieff (2015b) unpacks the citizenship-building aspects of 'cash transfers' and 'conditionalities' – rather than simply of the *Bolsa Família* – and builds a broader-based argument for the transformative power of CCTs. In doing so, the usual caveats apply: for CCTs to do what the *Bolsa Família* may be slowly doing in Recife, they need to be long-lasting; well-administered; supported by broader social transformation; and built with citizens, as partners, in mind. The *Bolsa Família* and Recife do not live up to all of these conditions, as indeed do few CCTs; but to the extent that they strive for these aims, this chapter suggests that programmatic social policies – such as CCTs – can contribute to the making of programmatic social politics, in Latin America, and elsewhere.

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## NOTES

1. For instance, Auyero (1999:302) notes that “one of the available means of satisfying the poor's basic needs for food and health care is through the political party”. See also Ansell & Mitchell 2011:299; Borges 2007, 2011; Diaz-Cayeros & Magaloni 2003:19-20; Grimes & Wängnerud 2010:676,

688; Lloyd 2012; Nichter 2011a:11; Osterkatz 2012:6. Conversely, the ‘transitions from clientelism’ literature argues that increased wealth undermines patrons, as modernisation theory would predict (Kitschelt & Wilkinson 2007; Stokes et al. 2013; Weitz-Shapiro 2012).

2. Depending on number and age of children, households who are below a certain poverty line are eligible to receive R\$77-337 monthly if their children attend school and health check-ups regularly (US\$ ~30-135 in early 2015, plus extra amounts if the children are particularly young or the family particularly poor). The money reaches families directly via special debit cards which are usually in the name of the female head of household, and allow cash withdrawals at government-run ATMs. Transfers can go on for many years, until all children are eighteen.

3. The 51.5 / 80 / 51 data is, respectively, from Rocha (2013:200), Barbosa (2011:86), and Nichter (2011:7).

4. After the 2010 election, 86% of respondents to a nationally representative survey approved specifically of the Bolsa Família (Ames et al. 2010).

5. The clientelism/citizenship dichotomy has admittedly been criticised for being simplistic and unhelpful (e.g. Escobar 2002; Hilgers 2012). This is a valuable point, but for the sake of brevity it is not further elaborated on here.

6. Diffuse loyalty may or may not occasionally involve spot exchanges. Even if it does, the continuous interaction which surrounds these exchanges confers a different meaning on the exchange than if it were a one-off occurrence, even though the act may look the same to a passing observer. In turn, frequent spot exchanges can, but do not necessarily, imply or merge into a diffuse loyalty, any more than always buying one’s bread at the same bakery means does not necessarily lead to a good (or any) relationship with the baker.

7. Notwithstanding the fact that ‘patrons’ often sponsor communal events, such as lotteries, concerts, parties, etc.

8. Scholars disagree on how far the sociologist should depart from the client’s view about these relationships, and do so for different reasons. For a case that the clients’ views should be taken seriously and that patrons’ friendliness matters, see Ansell (2014). For a similar view, which further argues that clientelism may not always be harmful to democracy, see Hilgers (2009; 2012). For an author who describes clients’ views, but then re-analyses them in a more critical and broader context, see Auyero (1999). On the other side of the debate: for an author who stresses the inherent dependence and false consciousness involved in exchanges between the rich and the poor, see Scheper-Hughes (1993). Finally, for a classic Brazilian essay which roundly condemns any kind of clientelism, as well as the myth of the ‘cordial boss’ and the fetishization of ‘social equality’ in unequal societies, see Sales (1994).

9. This mirrors Hunter & Sugiyama’s 2009 focus groups in municipalities neighbouring Recife, during which most participants freely and willingly acknowledged the practice of vote-buying.

10. This differs from the region of Sucre, Colombia, where, as Escobar (2002:39) describes, “people believe that selling their vote is a right they have”. Only one interviewee in Recife made claims going in this direction.

11. This mirrors the spirit of the opening quote to Vincente’s (2014) paper on vote-buying in São Tomé and Príncipe: “We do like vote-buying. It is essential. That is the only way we have to see anything good coming from the politicians. Anyway, I can vote for whoever I want.” (anonymous, São Tomé).

12. All translations into English are mine unless otherwise indicated, and are marked by a star [\*]. Interviewed beneficiaries are referred to by underlined names, which have been modified whenever anonymity was requested.

13. “O coronel perdeu peso porque ela adquiriu uma liberdade que não tinha. Não precise ir ao prefeito. Pode pedir uma rua melhor, mas não comida, que era por aí que o coronelismo funcionava”. Quoted from Lucena (2013).



14. Original data sources: for poverty and extreme poverty figures since 2011, see CAISAN (2014); for extreme poverty since 2001, see IPEA (2014). Of course, the key question is how much of this fall can be attributed to the BF. On the one hand, estimates of the BF's impact on poverty have been surprisingly small. Soares (2012), who reviews several studies, attributes to the program a fall in absolute poverty of only 1.64% (from 21.7 to 20%, a relative reduction of 8%). Indeed, he notes that the BF appears to have more successfully reduced inequality than poverty! Similarly, Da Dalt (2013) shows that very few BF recipients have transitioned into the middle class. On the other hand, Soares (2012) shows that the program has contributed an 18% reduction in the poverty gap (the average distance between the poor's income and the poverty line), and an even slightly greater reduction in the severity of poverty (which weighs progress at the bottom of the distribution more heavily). However, even these estimates likely underestimate the BF's impact on poverty because of lags in data collection. Soares' 2012 paper rests on a 2009 study using 2006 data (Soares & Satyro 2009:27). Since then, however, the BF has been running for trice the time, has greatly expanded the number of its beneficiaries, and has steadily increased its benefits: under Dilma Rousseff (2011-2014), the average transfer has risen 44% in real terms (MDS 2014). Thus, although the BF may not have propelled families above the poverty line, it has pulled them some way away from the worst destitution (Bither-Terry 2014). Moreover, some of CCT's effects here may lie in the future: in Mexico, Gertler et al. (2012:164) find that CCT recipients 'invest' 26% of their transfers, which allows beneficiaries "to attain higher living standards that are sustained even after transitioning off the program".

15. As a 1835 report cited by Stokes et al. (2013:201) suggests, using Christmas Gifts as a way of 'influencing the votes of the poorer classes' was a practice already common in 19th-century England.

16. Even proponents of the 'clientelistic continuity' hypothesis have slowly acknowledged change in the Northeast. Whereas Montero's 2010 article was titled "No Country for Leftists: Clientelist Continuity and the 2006 Vote in the Brazilian Northeast", his 2012 paper was titled "A Reversal of Political Fortune. The Transitional Dynamics of Conservative Rule in the Brazilian Northeast". By 2012, he came around to emphasising change over continuity in the Northeast.

17. This includes: the building of CRASs (local social assistance centres) across the country, the Bolsa Família program and more recent upgrades (e.g. *Brasil Sem Miséria*, Brazil Without Misery), repeated raises in the minimum wage, free public job training courses, university quotas and scholarships, the significant drop in effective school costs, and more. The 1988 constitution also created free health and social assistance services. Although quality and coverage were initially poor, interviewees in Recife suggested they have gradually improved.

18. Original quote: "a burocratização do poder e a extensão dos benefícios sociais ao campo constituem um processo de *nation-building*, na medida em que fomentam uma nova identidade social em substituição àquela tradicionalmente baseada na lealdade local" (Reis 1988:203-4).

19. Foucault might not disagree, although he may not be as sanguine about the process and its consequences.

20. Similarly, Schram (1995) emphasises the important role that 'words of welfare' play in shaping both beneficiaries' realities, and that of society around them.

21. As Stokes et al. (2013) note: "Several studies underscore the progressive elements of clientelist social and political relations, in comparison with relations of utter dependence and intimidation that they are assumed to displace. Scott's [1969] classic study of machine politics locate it at an intermediate stage of social development. A prior stage is one in which subordinate actors follow the dictates of their superiors, treating them with deference and subservience. By contrast, the political machine has almost democratic features. At the stage of development in which machines supplant landlords and notables, erstwhile dependents become clients who must be paid for their political support".

22. Rêgo & Pinzani (2013a) come closest to actually investigating the matter, having encountered a general sense of liberation in their qualitative interviews with rural BF recipients across the poorest areas of Brazil. Ultimately, however, their book devotes little time or attention to clientelism, *coronelismo*, or changes in the 'politics of the poor', and focusses more broadly on gender, autonomy and empowerment.

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## ABSTRACTS

Can conditional cash transfers (CCTs) – a popular form of social programs across Latin America and the world – transform poor people's politics, and foster inclusive citizenship? This paper sets out to explore the interconnections between state intervention, clientelism, and citizenship, on the basis of in-depth qualitative fieldwork in Recife, Northeast Brazil, a region historically marked by strong patron-client relationships. Through conversations with recipients and administrators of the *Bolsa Família* program, the world's largest CCT, the paper first refutes the idea that CCTs are themselves a form of vote-buying, and goes on to suggest that they may instead be contributing to the decline of clientelistic politics. The paper then turns to the question of whether the *Bolsa Família* may, in Recife, be fostering a new form of inclusive citizenship for beneficiaries, and explores competing considerations. It closes on a cautiously optimistic note, and briefly considers the implications for CCTs in other countries and contexts.

Les transferts conditionnels en espèces (TCEs) – une forme de programme social répandue à travers l'Amérique Latine et le monde – peuvent-ils transformer la vie politique des pauvres, et favoriser une citoyenneté inclusive? Cet article explore les interconnexions entre les politiques d'État, le clientélisme et la citoyenneté, sur la base d'un travail de terrain à Recife, dans un Nord-Est brésilien historiquement marqué par un fort clientélisme. À travers des conversations avec bénéficiaires et administrateurs du programme *Bolsa Família*, le plus grand TCE du monde, le chapitre réfute d'abord l'idée que les TCEs sont eux-mêmes une forme d'achat de votes, et suggère au contraire qu'ils peuvent plutôt contribuer au déclin du clientélisme. L'article s'interroge ensuite sur le potentiel du *Bolsa Família* à favoriser une nouvelle forme de citoyenneté pour les bénéficiaires de Recife, et explore diverses hypothèses. Il conclut, finalement, sur une note prudemment optimiste, et examine brièvement les implications pour les TCEs dans d'autres pays et contextes.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** politique sociale, transferts conditionnels en espèces, clientélisme, citoyenneté, Brésil

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