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Critical Perspectives on Social Work and Social Policy Practice with Vulnerable Migrants in an Era of Emergencies

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Introduction

The acceleration of global warming and climate change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2021), alongside democratic decay and the escalation of authoritarianism worldwide (Daly, 2020), the Covid-19 global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2021a), a rise in global inequality and extreme poverty (United Nations, 2020), economic and humanitarian crises affecting the safety and wellbeing of large groups of people (Save the Children, 2021), followed by the return of fascism and violent extremism in Europe and elsewhere (Coolsaet, 2017; Le Roux, 2019): all might be indicative that we may be living in an '*Era of Emergencies*' (Celermajer and Nassar, 2020; Lopez, 2020)[1]. Contrary to what liberal internationalists have preached at the end of the Second World War, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights did not pave the way for 'a world made new' (Glendon, 2002). In fact, we are facing similar, if not worse problems than the past generations. The recent calls for hope in human rights activism in the twenty-first century (Sikkink, 2017) is contrasted with other far from hopeful empirical analyses that indicate that human civilization and the economic growth-based world we live in might come to a collapse in the near future (Branderhorst, 2020; Helmore 2021; Spratt and Dunlop, 2019).

Extreme events such as pandemics, climate change, and economic crises, are all drivers of migration, either internally or transnationally. On top of these socio-environmental emergencies, vulnerable migrants often need to deal with institutional or structural violence (Artero and Fontanari, 2019), rights violations on a daily basis (Oxfam International, 2021; Riley et al, 2020), social welfare exclusion (Vintila and Lafleur, 2020), and the enduring effects of colonisation, racism, and inequality (Adeyanju and Oriola, 2011). Every human being will experience some level of vulnerability throughout their lives, however, there are particular groups in society who are more vulnerable than others to abuse and/or human rights violations: for various reasons, they were historically put under weak and vulnerable positions and therefore require special protective measures. Legal protection of vulnerable groups has demonstrated to be a crucial component of human rights law (Nifosi-Sutton, 2017), for example. Equally, for the fields of Health and Social Care, vulnerability has been a key concept in defining intervention strategies (Gitterman, 2001; Larkin, 2009). Even though there is no universally accepted definition of 'vulnerable groups' let alone 'vulnerable migrants'[2], the concept of vulnerability is key to understanding how individuals in different contexts have been marginalized, abused, discriminated against, and given limited opportunities and resources. Thus, the focus here is not necessarily on individual factors, but rather on 'structural/contextual/environmental' forces that render migrants vulnerable in the first place (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019; Larkin, 2009).

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on the mobility of migrant workers: travel bans, social distancing, and the deceleration of many economic activities have had a pervasive effect when viewed through a migration lens (World Bank Group, 2020). What is the role of the social worker in the midst of this? Social work professionals

are constantly engaged with vulnerable and marginalized individuals. However, to create effective social change, social workers are required to engage not only with service users, but with social policy practice and politics. Therefore, there is an urgent need to decolonize Social Work and embrace its inherently political nature, which means not only incorporating post-colonial theory and approaches into the profession but questioning and calling out the colonial and oppressive practices often reproduced through welfare and social assistance programs, in order to provide effective political and social emancipation for the recipients of social services.

Taking that into account, this Chapter engages with social work practice with vulnerable and/or marginalized migrants by exploring critical voices in the fields of social work, social policy, and human rights, to address the long-lasting effects of neoliberalism, colonisation, and capitalist oppression in times of social, environmental, and health emergencies. The main argument is that social work practice with migrants in vulnerable situations, especially in Europe, can no longer be disassociated from the larger historical legacies of European colonialism, or the from the current (and future) effects of global capitalist expansion. Moreover, I argue for the application of intersectionality as a framework for analysis not only of the personal level of an individual's social and political identities, but also to the external factors and issues here explored, i.e., we cannot fully meet the needs of vulnerable and marginalized migrants without understanding the interrelatedness of the social phenomena that allow them to be in such positions of vulnerability.

This Chapter is divided into four main sections, which will discuss, in the following order: (i) the need to decolonise critical social work; (ii) the role of post-colonial human rights practice in social work and social policy; (iii) welfare provision in the context of environmental and climate migration; and (iv) migration amid public health emergencies. The overall goal is to convey a holistic, intersectional, and postcolonial account of social work and social policy practice in the field of migration given the new challenges brought about in the era of emergencies.

How critical is critical social work? Contributions of social work knowledges from the 'other side of the line'

In a more general definition, Healy (2014, p 183) states that modern critical social work '[…] is concerned with the analysis and transformation of power relations at every level of social work practice'. Critical social work scholarship proposes, amongst other things, a change in focus from the 'psy' discourses (that favour clinical work with so-called clients) to structural approaches to service users' problems (Healy, 2014). Healy (2014) categorizes at least five branches of modern critical social work: (1) radical; (2) Marxist; (3) feminist; (4) structural social work; and (5) anti-oppressive practice. It is important to highlight, however, that critical theory or thinking is not native to the Social Work discipline. In the narrow sense, 'Critical Theory' was born from several generations of German philosophers and social theorists in the Western, European Marxist tradition usually known as the Frankfurt School (Bohman, 2005). For instance, Granter (2019) argues that critical theory is essential to critical social work and demonstrates the points of intersection between the two, showing how the perspectives of the Frankfurt School can inform emancipatory theory and social work practice.

In that sense, critical social workers are preoccupied with social structural analyses of class, race, and gender in order to achieve political emancipation as well as social transformation and social justice (Granter, 2019; Healy, 2001). Overall, 'modern critical social work is oriented towards understanding the structural conditions that impact

on the genesis and maintenance of social problems and in which social work practitioners operate' (Healy, 2014, p 184). This structural focus however is not the only narrative on critical social work, as poststructuralists have advocated for more 'Foucauldian' analysis focusing on identity, language, and power relations at the personal level (Fook, 2003).

Despite the diversity in approaches, one can say that the core of the modern critical social work theory is built on the concepts of empowerment, collective action, social justice, and social change (Healy, 2014). For Adams et al (2002, p 1) critical social work practice '[…] seeks growth and empowerment as human beings for the people we serve, development and social progress for the communities we work in and greater justice and equality in the societies to which we contribute'. Modern critical social work also draws attention to oppression and oppressive structures in society and the need to change societal and institutional conditions through critical social work practice (Healy, 2014; Adams et al, 2002). Therefore, critical social workers are committed to critically reflective thinking processes and to transforming the unjust aspects of both the social work profession and society in general (Campbell and Baikie, 2012).

On the other hand, since the late 1990s postmodern discourses on critical social work (CSW) have advocated for the adoption of concepts such as discourse, subjectivity, power, positioning and (self-) reflection into social work theory and practice (Healy, 2014; Fook and Pease, 1999). Nonetheless, many authors are sceptical of the relevance and applicability of postmodern CSW. Mullaly (2001) for example argues that some postmodern authors in Social Work adopt an uncritical acceptance of postmodernism. For Ungar (2004, p 488), 'social workers interested in postmodernism have been provided an abundance of theory, but little to guide them in direct practice […]'. In fact, postmodernism has often been neglected as a useful framework for social work. Noble (2004) believes that despite the fact that the postmodern discourse in contemporary social work literature has captured a growing audience, the postmodern 'turn' does little towards addressing economic, gender and colonial issues which are often reproduced by structural forces. The postmodern rejection of theory is also dangerous to the organization of social work as a specific field of knowledge, as well as the rejection of values, given that social work essentially is a value-based profession:

> *'the social work profession is by definition a political activity that is value laden. Therefore, the demands postmodernists make of social workers prevent us from pursuing micro and macro social justice goals. Postmodernism thus denies and absorbs our essence'* (Wood, 1997, p 27).

Overall, neither modern or postmodern CSW have contributed substantially to the decolonisation of social work knowledge and practice. Modern and postmodern critical Social Work (SW) scholarship is built on knowledge produced mostly by Western, European scholars - which led SW to emerge as a discipline disconnected from the material and mental aspects of colonialism (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011). Dittfeld (2020, p 1) explains that 'social work is a profession based on (White) Euro-American concepts, problems and historicity in which Indigenous knowledges and cultures are marginalised, and the effects of colonisation are obscured to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers'. Therefore, the postcolonial or decolonial movement in social work aims at critically looking at social work education, practice, and research aiming at decolonising the field and discipline of SW (Kleibl, 2020). A key strategy towards that might involve looking into and acknowledging social work knowledge (as well as Indigenous knowledge) and epistemologies produced outside the Global North, which will be referred here as SW knowledges from the 'other side of the line'.

Overall, one of the main challenges is to overcome what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has called 'abyssal thinking' in modern Western thought - a dichotomous, colonial

way of thinking that divides the world in two sides: 'this side of the line', and 'the other side of the line', whereas the first defines the content and debates of scientific knowledge, and the latter (usually 'popular', traditional, or indigenous knowledges from former colonies) is made invisible, unacceptable and unapplicable (Santos, 2007). Thus, there is a need to advocate for post-abyssal thinking in Social Work and Social Policy scholarship, in order to recognize and accept the knowledges that lay now on 'the other side of the line'.

Before proceeding, it is important to say that this Chapter does not completely reject the existing body of literature on CSW. In fact, there are many theoretical and practical tools such as structural analysis and emancipatory theory that can indeed be used in favour of vulnerable or marginalized migrants in SW practice. A central argument is that, for CSW to live up to its name, critical social workers must be aware of the effects that colonialism and global capitalism still produce in the lived experiences of migrant persons worldwide, especially those in the Global South[3]. With that said, it is not an easy task to define the postcolonial or postcoloniality – for the purposes of this research, the interpretation of Robert J. C. Young will serve as the compass that guides the understandings over the place of postcolonial thinking in SW theory and practice:

> *Postcolonialism, therefore, begins from its own counter-knowledges, and from the diversity of its cultural experiences, and starts from the premise that those in the West, particularly, both within and outside the academy, should relinquish their monopoly on knowledge, and take other knowledges, other perspectives, as seriously as those of the West. Postcolonialism, or tricontinentalism as I have also called [...], that is the language and perspective of the three continents of the South—Africa, Asia, and Latin America—represents a general name for these insurgent knowledges, particularly those that originate with the subaltern, the dispossessed, that seek to change the terms and values under which we all live* (Young, 2003, p 15).

Therefore, postcolonial theories and movements have not only confronted the political, economic, historical, and social impact and legacy of European colonialism from the eighteenth to the twentieth century around the world (Elam, 2019), they are also worried with the persistency of a 'colonial mentality', i.e., the perception of ethnic and cultural inferiority and internalized forms of racial oppression (Decena, 2014), which - amongst other things – contribute to maintaining the Western, Global North's monopoly on what it is valid knowledge, and particularly in this case, what counts as Social Work knowledge. With that said, it is an urgent (albeit far from easy) task for social workers to decolonize their minds, to acknowledge the persistency of colonial or neocolonial structures in social policy and fight against them.

One important addition to this debate might be the conceptual category of 'Social Work of the South'. According to Lutz et al (2021, para. 3), this particular discourse on SW aims '[…] to establish independent social work in the Global South which, on the basis of its historical, political and social backgrounds, addresses its own issues and aims to find its own answers, in contrast to colonial imports'. In their view, this category does not wish to homogenize the diversity by which social work in the South is constituted, but rather to critique the universality of Western and Northern concepts of SW. Therefore, they argue, amongst other things, for independence from 'colonial clutches', referring to indigenisation, localization, authentization or reconceptualization of SW theory and practice (Lutz et al, 2021). That is to say that countries and schools in the Global South

should structure their social work education to deal with specific conditions and cultures (Mogorosi and Thabede, 2018), rejecting automatic, non-critical imports from the North. The book on Global Social Work edited by Noble et al (2014) was a substantial attempt at establishing culturally sensitive SW practice and it introduces a range of different practices and theories from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, but also Europe and North America. However, it does not engage deeply with postcoloniality.

A great deal of the Western, Northern literature on SW with forced migrants, for example, has been published by authors based in North America (52%), Western Europe (26%) and Australasia (13%) (Gonzalez-Benson et al, 2020). In their scoping review, Gonzalez-Benson et al (2020) demonstrate that the second most common topic in the literature on social work and forced migration focuses on questions of health and mental health, whereas issues of human rights, social justice, and poverty represent only 9% or less of all articles reviewed. Thus, the claim from CSW scholars that the SW literature from Europe and North America is vastly focused on clinical work and individual interventions remains valid, even in the field of forced migration. Equally, the highest amount of knowledge in that field continues to be produced from this side of the line, with little influence from authors in the Global South.

In the field of Social Policy, authors have equally argued for the necessity to look at countries in the Global South to understand the global dynamics of social policy and social protection, stating that 'Southern countries have their own social policy histories, external influences from foreign powers notwithstanding, and that these histories are under-researched' (Leisering, 2021, p VI). In sum, to have really critical and transformative social work and social policy practice, scholars and practitioners in the field have to look for traditions and examples from the other side of the line (including but not limited to Postcolonial SW, Southern SW, and Indigenous SW, and post-colonial policy analysis), facilitating the construction of an 'ecology of knowledges'. Midgley (1998) has argued that contemporary social policies in previously colonized societies have been largely influenced by the colonial experience, therefore, they would benefit from a post-colonial analysis in order to reformulate these policies and properly address the urgent and localized social needs faced by vulnerable populations, including migrants. Social policy can play a crucial role in protecting vulnerable migrants and preventing destitution especially amid public health emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Sengupta and Jha, 2020), however, the 'common knowledge' around migration management in the Global North cannot be uncritically used to guide intervention strategies (either in the field of social work or social policy) across the Global South, given the particularities of cross-border mobility in Southern nations (Sadiq and Tsourapas, 2021).

In sum, a key component of present and future Critical Social Work and Social Policy global research agendas may be related to the abandonment and rejection of all cultural-genocidal, abyssal views still deeply rooted in Western thought and academia, which is the only route to acknowledge and recognize the validity of non-Western practices and knowledges often silenced or overlooked. Migrants in vulnerable situations might benefit from cultural, historical-sensitive, and postcolonial practice that addresses not only their immediate situation, but the challenges and structures that allow them to be in a position of increased vulnerability in the first place – usually linked to colonial legacies, imperial policies of power and control, and the effects of global capitalist expansion.

Seeking a post-colonial human rights framework for social workers and policy practitioners

Social work has long been recognized as a human rights profession and to have incorporated human rights values into the core of its activities (United Nations, 1994; International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 1996; Mapp et al, 2019), however, anticolonial human rights narratives have largely been left out of the conversation. The main argument is that, if social workers engage with and reproduce the 'liberal' and 'Western-centred' conceptions of human rights in their practice with vulnerable migrants (especially those deemed 'irregular' or 'undocumented') they may fail to properly address the structural challenges posed by colonial legacies in receiving countries and the impact they have upon these persons' lives and livelihoods. Considering that, this section will explore the foundations of postcolonial thinking in the field of human rights, and how it may be translated into social work and social policy practice.

As much as authors and practitioners have talked about the importance of human rights for the SW profession in articles, textbooks, guidebooks, and training materials, they have often failed to engage more deeply with the philosophical and political nature of rights, reproducing (even if unintentionally) the Modern, Liberal traditions of human rights scholarship and practice. To develop truly critical human rights practice, social workers and policy practitioners need to look beyond the liberal human rights schemes that are often accused of reinforcing colonial and imperialistic structures, which are harmful especially to non-Western societies. In the British Association of Social Workers' practice guide on Human Rights and Social Work for example, authors make the case for a rights-based social work practice that envisions human rights as 'universal entitlements', as well as ethical and legal obligations (Nicholls et al, 2019). Despite being well intentioned, these guidelines tend to legitimize one view of what human rights are or should be, assuming the 'self-evident' universality of Western, European narratives on human rights.

In *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, Antony Anghie (2004) argued that imperialism and colonialism were central to the constitution of international law, thereby tracing the colonial origins of the modern international legal system and examining the relationship between the emergence of international law and the European 'civilizing mission' that '[…] has justified colonialism as a means of redeeming the backward, aberrant, violent, oppressed, undeveloped people of the non-European world by incorporating them into the universal civilization of Europe' (Anghie, 2004, p 3). To a certain extent, the Western and Northern traditions of international human rights - which have gained global prominence in the aftermath of World War II - has been caught up in the business of empire and colonialism, without confronting these historical legacies. In Colin Samson's (2020) book *The Colonialism of Human Rights: Ongoing Hypocrisies of Western Liberalism*, the author critically analyses the paradoxical emergence of 'universal human rights' narratives from nations that were once colonial powers, settler colonists and sponsors of slavery. These two ground-breaking works may be a good starting point to anyone interested in a critical, anticolonial view of human rights and international law.
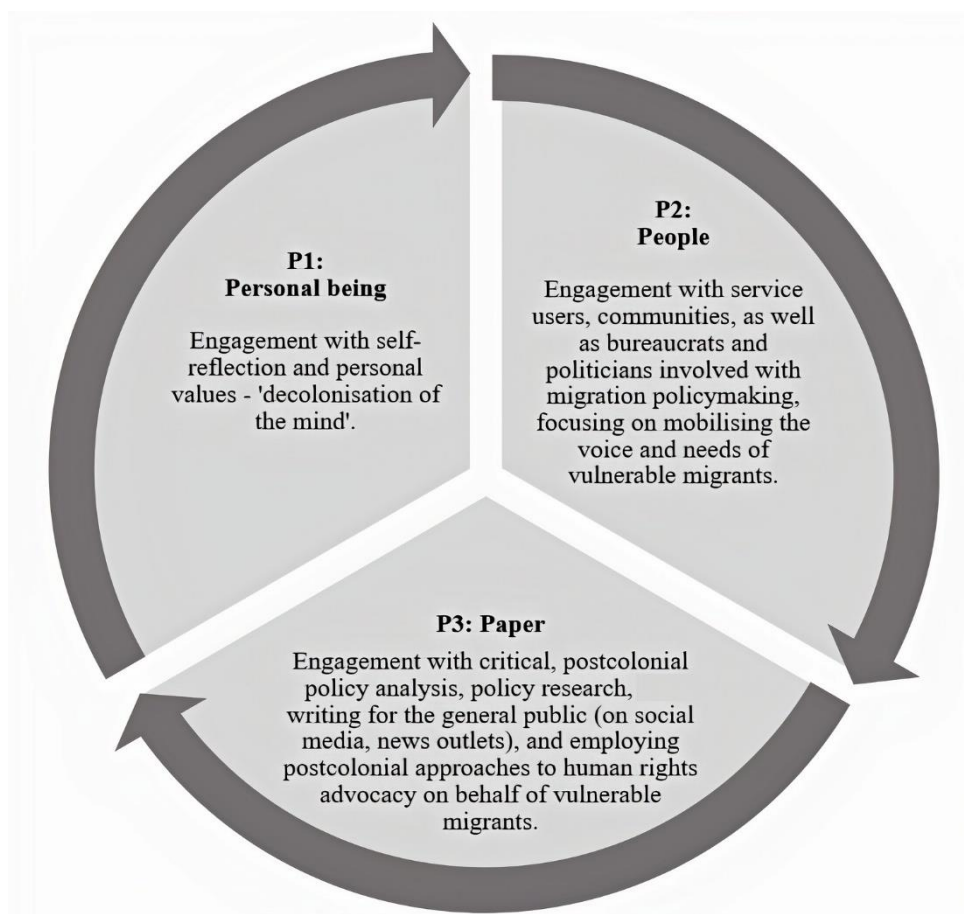
Therefore, even though the language of human rights has permeated the SW profession, it does not mean that human rights values should be adopted and implemented uncritically in everyday practice. Thus, a central argument here is that rights-based social work should be reconceptualized in order to make room for human rights idioms founded outside European and North American liberal conceptualizations. It is not at all about abandoning the 'rights talk' but broadening our understandings of it by embracing various definitions of human rights beyond Western traditions and legalism (Grovogui, 2007; 2011; Brown, 2014).

Social workers involved either with service users or policy work need then to constantly question if themselves are not unintendedly reproducing colonial narratives on human rights, looking critically at the set of values that guide their practice. For instance, Ife's (2012) seminal work on *Human Rights and Social Work*, suggests that formal rights documents, treaties, and conventions, are only one aspect of human rights discourses, in fact, social workers can and should engage communities, groups and individuals in the process of defining and signifying human rights from their own perspective. On that account, elements of a postcolonial human rights discourse in Social Work and Social Policy might entail - amongst other things - acknowledging the colonial roots of modern international human rights law, rejecting the 'universality' of Western and Northern notions of human rights, and accepting the validity of rights narratives from 'the other side of the line'.

As opposed to social work, human rights have not been central to social policy research or practice, mainly because 'social rights continue to be a relatively marginalised or qualified element of the human rights agenda' (Dean, 2008, p 1), therefore, there is still a need for social policy researchers and practitioners to engage on a deeper level with rights-based approaches to their work. Such engagement needs also to consider the decolonising efforts of Western human rights discourses (Brydon, 2015), and how they still influence social intervention and policy practice with vulnerable groups in different settings. When discussing the experiences of vulnerable migrants, 'migrants in an irregular situation are often disproportionately affected by human rights violations when compared to nationals of a State, or even when compared to other migrants in a regular situation' (OHCHR, 2017, p 2). Therefore, policies should be designed in a way to prevent human rights abuses from happening through an honest commitment to protect migrants in vulnerable situations. Here, the post-colonial critique can be used to address and challenge historical and ongoing inequalities that allow vulnerable migrants to experience positions of rightlessness in host countries.

Policy practice may include (but is not limited to) legislative advocacy, litigation (national and international), social action, and policy analysis (Pawar, 2019). Through these channels, social workers, policymakers, and anyone involved with human and/or social services can employ strategies to decolonise different aspects of daily interventions, interactions, and practices with migrants in situations of vulnerability (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: A 'Three Ps Model' for post-colonial policy practice and intervention with vulnerable migrants.

P1:
Personal being

Engagement with self-reflection and personal values - 'decolonisation of the mind'.

P2:
People

Engagement with service users, communities, as well as bureaucrats and politicians involved with migration policymaking, focusing on mobilising the voice and needs of vulnerable migrants.

P3: Paper
Engagement with critical, postcolonial policy analysis, policy research, writing for the general public (on social media, news outlets), and employing postcolonial approaches to human rights advocacy on behalf of vulnerable migrants.

Source: Elaborated by the author, based on Pawar (2019).

Nonetheless, there are still limitations on how postcoloniality and human rights can be translated into social work and policy practice, and the suggestion for future research on this topic is to further explore this gap. In the next section, the nexus between environmental/climate migration and welfare studies will be explored, given that global warming and climate change pose a huge challenge to human rights protection regimes and have become central themes in the contemporary global agenda for social intervention and postcolonial studies.

Environmental and climate migration: theories and interventions in welfare studies

Environmental change and disasters, alongside climate change, extreme weather, and other ecological events, can be (and often are) drivers of environmentally-induced migration and displacement. However, it is very challenging to quantify environmental or climate migration, given the lack of adequate methodologies and a coherent conceptual or legal framework. Nonetheless, the estimates generated indicate that '[…] 25 million to one billion people could be displaced by climate change over the next 40 years' (IOM, 2009, p 9). Therefore, environmental and climate migration is a key feature of contemporary migration flows in the Era of Emergencies. In that sense, social workers required to engage with policy work need to be aware of these trends and prepare

for the specific challenges in working with persons and communities affected by environmental and climate change. Environmental challenges in SW and the limitations to growth-based welfare policies have been discussed before, predominantly through the concepts of 'sustainable welfare' (Koch, 2021) and 'green social work' (Dominelli, 2012), however the extent to which these views address the history and effects of colonisation and global inequality is questionable, therefore they will also be contrasted with other theories, mainly postcolonial approaches to climate change (Chakrabarty, 2012) and contributions from ecosocialism (Löwy, 2005).

According to the *Routledge Handbook of Green Social Work*, Green Social Work (GSW) is a new approach to the social work profession that aims at bridging the gap between social justice and environmental justice in SW scholarship and practice (Dominelli et al, 2018). Moreover, GSW '[…] reminds the profession of its origins and seeks to transcend the limitations of those early beginnings to include the duty to care for the environment within its jurisdiction. As a result, green social work opens new doors in dealing with environmental crises' (Dominelli et al, 2018, p 1). In Chapter 26 of the Handbook, Wroe et al (2018) argue extensively that social workers need to be aware of climate change and environmental degradation and how these processes function as migration or displacement drivers. Social and environmental justice becomes then a central theme to social work practice with forced migrants displaced by climate change and other environmental-related events. However, despite the proliferation of publications on social work and environmental issues in the last decade or so, Ramsay and Boddy (2017, p 69) argue that many authors have highlighted a relative absence of SW in recent public environmental discourse, a lack of environmental content in SW curricula, and a continued focus on human-centred, clinical, modernist interventions (a.k.a. the 'psy' discourses) - which renders the application of environmental social work, in practice, limited at least.

On the other hand, more policy-oriented concepts such as 'sustainable welfare' or 'green social policy' point out that social policies and welfare states altogether will have to be reformed to address future global ecological demands and the climate emergency. The history of welfare states is intimately linked to industrial capitalism, modernization, and the use of fossil energy: thus, welfare states have also been dependent on an expansionary economic model or national economic growth (Hirvilammi and Koch, 2020). Koch (2021) argues then for a post-growth model for the welfare state, where social policies need to be aligned with environmental policies due to present and future socio-ecological emergencies. In that sense, the author uses '"sustainable welfare" as an umbrella term to conceptualise the intersection of social and environmental goals and policies' (Koch, 2021, p 2). That is to say that the idea of endless growth as the fuel of modern capitalism is not only harming the environment but posing an existential threat to our very existence on the Earth, therefore, there is an urgent need to imagine a 'zero-growth world' (Strauss, 2008). However, oftentimes authors on sustainable welfare (Hirvilammi and Koch, 2020; Koch, 2021) and green social policy (Fitzpatrick and Cahill, 2002) fail to address the connection between environmental policies and migration policies, therefore, they could benefit from a crossover with GSW scholarship.

Nonetheless, what these different approaches might fail to do is look for the nexus between environmental emergencies, climate change, and colonialism. According to Agarwal and Narain (2019), the issue of global warming raises questions of justice and morality across the North/South divide. They argue that Third World nations are frequently blamed for 'heating up the Earth' and destabilizing its climate, whereas the heavier burden is posed upon the 'survival emissions' of the poor and not on 'luxury emissions' of the rich (Agarwal and Narain, 2019). Thus, climate change is not politically

neutral: late capitalism plays a crucial role in global warming and the current political choices regarding the environment have long-lasting effects on the life of future generations (Maxwell, 2009)[4]. The relationship between colonialism and the environment is rather a complex one, however, what is indeed known is that '[…] western imperialism radically altered the landscapes of the colonized lands at an unprecedented speed and scale; colonialism can thus be understood as a major factor in the degradation of the environment' (Mount and O'Brien, 2013, p 3).

Migrants affected by environmental and climate events are often in a position of increased vulnerability that stems from – amongst other things – the unequal outcomes of late capitalist expansion and its endless exploitation of the environment, in that sense, social intervention in this area should take into account not only the need for immediate responses and crisis management but also look at the structures that allow vulnerabilities to be (re)produced every day. There is an urgent need to recognize the connection between colonial legacies and present-day ecological catastrophe (Poray-Wybranowska, 2020), which often leads to environmental induced migration and displacement.

When combined with critical post-colonial scholarship, GSW and Sustainable Welfare can indeed be used to guide social workers and policymakers in imagining and practising values of social and environmental justice in the context of environmental and climate migration. Yet, another aspect often overlooked by academics writing on sustainable welfare and environmental and social policy are the findings from radical economy and ecosocialism - which argue that we might not be able to stop the imminent ecological catastrophe from happening within the realms of capitalism, i.e., the fact that we would have to dismantle capitalism altogether to achieve and maintain a healthy, balanced, and liveable environment for all species (Fisher, 2014; Löwy, 2015). Even though ecosocialists have yet to engage on a deeper level with values such as social justice and human rights (Pepper, 1993; Silva and Scherf, 2020) which are essential to social work and social policy practice, this framework can be used to critically analyse current strategies that address the ongoing global environmental emergencies. Climate change also brings about unequal health hazards, which can potentially increase the number of diseases and deaths in the context of 'climate-sensitive health outcomes' (Ebi and Hess, 2020, p 2056). Thus, the upcoming section will explore the intersection of migration and public health emergencies, as well as the role of welfare provision during such times.

Migration, public health emergencies, and welfare provision

Historically, the social work profession has challenged society's most difficult social problems and issues, beginning with poverty and deprivation and expanding its reach to other areas such as mental health, racial disparities, community engagement, amongst others (Rank, 2020). Moreover, "as we have entered the 21st century, there is a renewed call for the profession to once again commit itself to addressing the most pressing problems of our times" (Rank, 2020, p 1). For instance, the global coronavirus pandemic has affected people's livelihoods, health, and general wellbeing. Not only it has caused an enormous number of deaths worldwide, but the socioeconomic disruption also caused by the pandemic is devastating - millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, the number of undernourished people has risen, and nearly half of the world's global workforce is at risk of losing their income and livelihood (World Health Organization, 2020).

Therefore, the public health risks posed by Covid-19 converge with social policy issues and need to be addressed transversally and collectively by a range of professionals in human services, including social workers. Public health emergencies - such as the

ongoing coronavirus pandemic - render migrants in a vulnerable position even more vulnerable: internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants are at particular risk of facing xenophobia, encountering discriminatory policies and programmes, experiencing inequality in health care access, and disproportionate biomedical risk factors directly linked to systemic, historical inequality (Mukumbang, 2021). With that said, this section explores the role of social work and social policy professionals in advocating for transformative changes in migration policies and inclusive welfare policies focused on vulnerable migrant populations during and after public health emergencies.

Carruth et al (2021) refer to the term 'structural vulnerability' when describing the challenges in clinical care and healthcare for migrants in different social contexts. According to their findings, "vulnerabilities caused by the social, political, and economic structures inherent to global migration and asylum systems increase the risk of poor health outcomes among migrants and also place clinicians at risk" (Carruth et al, 2021, p 1). Therefore, migrants (especially those who are 'irregular' or undocumented') are positioned in a situation of vulnerability because there are structures that produce and reproduce these vulnerabilities through institutional arrangements, legal systems, policies, and even welfare services. During public health emergencies where resources are limited and health policies can be even stricter in scope and reach, many migrants experience exacerbated situations of vulnerability. In the United Kingdom (UK), a joint report recently released by Doctors of the World, the Nuffield Foundation, and the University of Birmingham has revealed that migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers experienced increasing levels of bad health and inadequate housing during the Covid-19 pandemic (Lessard-Phillips et al, 2021), facing several barriers when trying to access healthcare (Wise, 2021), whereas in some cases migrants were charged 150% of the cost of the treatment by the NHS (Gardner, 2021). Most undocumented migrants in the UK fear seeking medical attention because their data can be transferred from the NHS to the Home Office/Home Department which could later result in imprisonment, fines, or deportation:

> '*It's like walking through thick dark unending tunnels. It's dehumanising, lacking dignity, mentally exhausting, no hope in future, not likely to visit GP or hospital if I contracted Covid-19*' (undocumented cleaner interviewed by Gardner, 2021, p 2).

Thus, public health emergencies (such as the ongoing new coronavirus pandemic) tend to exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities that are particularly harmful to migrants and other vulnerable groups. Additionally, they might also suffer from the lack or poor levels of welfare provision in other areas such as housing and employment. Piccoli (2021) has demonstrated how some governments used the Covid-19 health emergency as an excuse to exclude groups of migrants from welfare provision measures such as monthly emergency income stipends and business relief funds (see also Vintila and Lafleur, 2020). Many vulnerable migrants have been not been included in policy responses around the world, leaving them at greater risk of dying from the virus or losing their income and livelihoods (Testaverde, 2020). It is also important to note that these persons are not only 'victims', but they have also shown resilience and have managed to cope with the troubling effects of these emergencies through remittances and informal social support networks (see, for example, Shimizutani and Yamada, 2021).

Nevertheless, the ongoing global pandemic gives a textbook example of the need for an integrated approach from service providers and policy actors to the situation of vulnerable migrants, especially amid public health emergencies. Most health care problems are not solved by the health services system alone (Mera, 2002), but instead are

dependent on other factors such as housing, nutrition, social support systems, ecological balance, healthy environmental conditions, and so on. In addition, postcolonial scholars in the field of health studies argue that there is an ongoing role of colonialism in producing health inequities (Beavis et al, 2015), which points out the need for a postcolonial analysis of healthcare policies (Horrill et al, 2018). In sum, social intervention and policy responses to the situation of vulnerable migrants amid (and after) public health emergencies should provide pathways for them to overcome structural vulnerabilities and inequalities through social inclusion, active participation, and social rights expansion, as well as acknowledge and challenge the neocolonial aspects (Browne et al, 2005) of many health care services.

Conclusion: global emergencies, migration, and the future of social work and social policy

One of the main goals of this Chapter was to investigate social work and policy practice with vulnerable and/or marginalized migrants by exploring critical voices in the fields of social work, social policy, and human rights, to address the long-lasting effects of neoliberalism, colonisation, and capitalist oppression in times of social, environmental, and health emergencies. A theoretical discussion on critical social work was introduced, contrasted with the recent calls to decolonize social work and social policy knowledges produced in Northern, Western societies, to embrace traditions and examples from 'the other side of the line'. That is one of many routes that practitioners can take to create intervention strategies that favour vulnerable migrants by not only addressing their immediate situation but the cultural, historical, and social structures that serve as vulnerability drivers, especially during emergency times.

In the wake of COP26 in Glasgow, the IOM, the World Health Organization, and Lancet Migration have called out world leaders to pay attention to the direct linkages between climate change, health, and migration. According to them, those who are migrating due to the direct impacts of climate change are particularly vulnerable, with increased physical and mental health needs linked to their exposure to climate and environmental conditions, alongside other stressors such as economic insecurity, abuse, exploitation, lack of support, and xenophobia (World Health Organization, 2021b).

Therefore, there is an urgent need to look at the intersectionality of socio-environmental phenomena in order to deliver effective social interventions at different levels, especially with vulnerable migrants. Social workers can no longer remain outside the public debate spheres and policy decision-making forums. Decisions made in the social policy sphere have a direct impact on the delivery of social services, therefore, welfare professionals need to look beyond the immediate, individual needs of service users, and engage with the larger structures of social and environmental policy practice.

Social policy researchers and practitioners have for a long time not engaged with the human rights agenda (Dean, 2008), and as a discipline, it has failed to address racism in welfare provision or the experiences and struggles of Black people concerning the welfare state (Williams, 1987). Even this Chapter has failed to discuss the importance of critical race studies to address the situation of vulnerable migrants, especially migrant persons of colour. The ongoing socio-environmental emergencies require social work and social policy practitioners to revisit their priorities and to understand the interrelatedness of these crises, seeing beyond the knowledge that is produced in and for the Global North and acknowledging the subaltern voices often silenced in academia, politics, in the media, as well as in other public spheres.

Migration needs to be embraced as a normal feature of human life on this planet, instead of repelled and criminalised. Moreover, future research on social work and social policy interventions with vulnerable migrants must consider the need to decolonize our professions, which means not only incorporating post-colonial theory and approaches into research and practice but questioning and calling out the neocolonial and oppressive practices often reproduced through services and policies. If social policy does not bring about social change in favour of vulnerable and marginalized populations, then it is not social policy but something else. Therefore, anyone directly involved with these issues or writing about them need to be aware of the political nature of their work and actively denounce and fight against the negative effects that colonialism and global capitalism and other oppressive structures still produce in the lived experiences of migrants worldwide.

Notes

1. The acclaimed British historian Eric Hobsbawm had divided Modern History in 'Ages': the (i) Age of Revolution: 1789–1848; (ii) The Age of Capital: 1848–1875; (iii) The Age of Empire: 1875–1914; and (iv) The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991. Similarly, some authors have argued that we are entering an Age or Era of Emergencies, in the sense that emergency situations may be one of the *defining* aspects of present and future life on Earth.

2. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2018, p 5): 'The concept of vulnerability is a foundational element of the human rights framework. […] 'Migrants in vulnerable situations' are thus persons who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care'.

3. The Global North-South divide is a category that emerged in the 1980s with the famous 'Brandt Line', to account for the considerable income gap between countries located in the Northern and Southern Hemisphere. Over time, the concept evolved to embrace not only differences in wealth and geographic location but also access to public goods (healthcare, education, etc) and the unequal distribution of power (Trefzer et al, 2014).

4. The production of 'scientific knowledge' on climate change is also not neutral. Researchers from the Global South - often from regions worst affected by climate change and sea-level risings – are struggling to get published, and in fact, recent figures have shown that 90 percent of climate change research papers from 2016-2020 were published by academics affiliated to institutions in North America, Europe, or Australia (Tandon, 2021).

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