

The Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Social Work: Challenges and Counter Movements Second Edition

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Structure

This is a second edition of the abovementioned title and will cover six continents with at least five contributions from each continent.

Objectives

The book seeks to:

- encourage a rethink of postcolonial approaches
- inspire both theoretical and practical engagements with the transformed realities and emerging topics in the field of postcolonial social work.

This book aims to contribute to, and consolidate current debates, pertaining to postcolonial social work in this volatile global environment while empowering and encouraging contributors to proffer their critiques, critical reflections and positionalities on these issues.

Background and Context

The first two decades of the 21st century were marked by multiple and multidimensional crises that exposed the fragility of both local and global settings. These developments signalled profound ruptures and turning points that threatened global stability. The shifts and transformations also altered our lives in fundamental ways and continue to do so in present times. Furthermore, these crises deeply impacted humanity and societal systems and were not limited to the consequences of climate change. The lingering effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, escalating financial and economic crises, growing social and global inequalities, multiple wars, especially in Ukraine, the Middle East and Africa; the rise of authoritarianism and nationalism, fundamentalism and populism, threats of terrorism and increased forced migration flows emerged from previous decades of global disequilibrium. However, they have now been amplified into multi-crises of epic proportions while accelerating at a rapid pace.

These pressing and tangible threats are accompanied by serious political and social discord in many parts of the world, leading to diminished capacities for autonomous actions among states and institutions. In the same vein, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are restricting civil society actors across the globe and closing spaces for contestation. This trend has been increasing since the beginning of the century. The conflicts between autocracies and democracies and between the so-called Global North and Global South¹ are intensifying, while becoming more urgent and dangerous. Clearly, we are witnessing epochal geopolitical shifts. While national identity movements are gaining strength, the most striking characteristic of these

¹ We are using the term „Global South” to refer to the “Majority World Population” which in most cases have and has been affected by colonialism and economic exploitation.

developments is that their global impacts largely elude national control as well as interventions from multilateral and supranational organisations such as the United Nations even though they cannot be resolved using traditional political instruments.

It is important to note that the cited turbulent global environment has resulted in a paralysis of thought and action while making postcolonial critique, which initially flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, to fall silent in some contexts or to retreat into identity politics instead of engaging in outward systemic critiques. This trend is also evident in social work, which, as a critical and emancipatory profession, increasingly finds itself in political defensive battles and must continually defend its transformative positions. This is particularly true in contexts where the Western hegemonic model of social work has been challenged through processes of localisation and indigenisation and reconfigured by incorporating indigenous epistemologies.

Organisation of the Book

Against the background outlined above, the book aims to reassess both the necessity and substance of the profession of social work that is not merely international - as has been widely discussed in existing publications - but explicitly postcolonial in its design, understanding and dialogical approach. Although the idea of social work of this nature is not new and has been the subject of prior publications, including the *Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Social Work*, there is now a need to revise and expand this body of work. The goal is to reposition the field and articulate new responses to emerging challenges. This endeavour is of fundamental importance. Given the current situation and the topics at hand, it is imperative, both globally and on a planetary scale, to develop emancipatory and transformative approaches in the spirit of postcolonial thinking. These approaches must also be reimagined.

Postcolonial social work must critically and autonomously revisit its established themes and significantly expand its focus. It must increasingly engage with the broad spectrum of issues confronting the “social” (in the widest sense) within increasingly conservative and authoritarian national and international contexts. These include growing restrictions on human rights and emancipatory values and freedoms, commonly referred to in research as “shrinking spaces.” Colonialism and imperialism are being reframed, sometimes even reinterpreted as “histories of progress.” Simultaneously, they are reemerging in new forms: the Russian war against Ukraine, debates around European supply chain regulations, China’s geopolitical and economic strategies (e.g., the “New Silk Road”), U.S. protectionism that exacerbates social crises in the Global South (e.g., the termination of USAID or withdrawal from the WHO), and conflicts in the Middle East and African regions are just a few prominent examples.

More broadly, postcolonial thought must reposition itself and engage in critical self-reflection. Given substantial criticism of some of its theses and practices, as well as of its claim to offer an emancipatory alternative to the epistemic violence of Western hegemonic thought, it must confront these critiques, particularly the accusation of perpetuating violence itself. At the same time, it must generate resistance to restoration, conceive and implement emancipatory and transformative projects, and join with social movements to organise resistance. A range of current developments (outlined below) must be interrogated and examined, as they significantly impact the future trajectory of post- and decolonial social work.

Within this landscape, there is also an urgent need to revisit and discuss the alternative, emancipatory models and programmes from the Global South, which have long offered resistance to these upheavals. This also raises the question of whether similar movements are emerging in the Global North, and how postcolonial and decolonial social work is understood

and applied in Western contexts. The questions to pose are: how do regional and historical factors shape the reception of postcolonial theory? And how do these differences influence identity politics, which, as already observed, tend to fragment collective struggles for justice and thereby also affect the practice of social work? What are Social Work's responses to the outlined postcolonial challenges? We welcome practice examples of decolonial Social Work and empirical studies connected to real world Social Work issues and resistances to colonial continuities.

Possible topics include:

Social Work and Pluriversality

Epistemologies and research methodologies

Ethics and values

Decolonizing knowledge production, valuing the local

Power and Ideology

Postcolonialism, neocolonialism, decolonization and its critique

Necropolitics, externalisation and migration

Authoritarianism, nationalism, populism, fundamentalism, resurgence of conservatism

New geopolitics, militarization and "Readiness for War", Post-COVID and anti-humanism

Social Work, diversity and critical position on Posthumanism

Identity

New masculinities: manospheres, social media and AI

Feminism

Postmigrant ambivalences

The crisis of identity politics

Culture wars and identity politics

Vulnerable groups' rights (indigenous people, youth, children, people with disabilities, older persons, refugees etc...)

Environment and planetary thinking

Anthropocentrism and biocentrism

Socio-ecological transformation

Social protection and climate crisis in the face of poverty, inequality, vulnerabilities

Social Change

Conflict transformation, peacebuilding and social work

Social movements and resistance, Gen Z

Transformative education

Please submit the title and abstract (maximum 250 words) of your proposed chapter, along with a short bio (maximum 150 words), to the following email address:

mrm-abroad.fas@thws.de by 31 May 2026.

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Please Note: Preferred language of chapters is English. If you would like to publish in another language, please contact us.