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Oppression or liberation? The function of social work in migration management

Kurzfassung: Auf der Grundlage der Arbeiten von Antonio Gramsci und lateinamerikanischen Befreiungstheoretiker:innen untersucht der Artikel die Rolle der Sozialen Arbeit, sowohl als akademische Disziplin als auch als Praxis, im Zusammenhang mit der jüngsten Flüchtlingskrise. Diese Rolle spiegelt die historische Entwicklung der Sozialen Arbeit wider und wird anhand der jüngsten empirischen Erfahrungen mit Geflüchteten auf den griechischen Inseln weiter verdeutlicht. Die Autor:innen rufen zu einer aktiven politischen Koalition zwischen Sozialarbeiter:innen und Geflüchteten auf, mit dem Ziel, letztere in ihrem Streben nach Befreiung vom Regime des europäischen Flüchtlingsmanagements zu stärken.

Abstract: Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci and liberation scholars from Latin America, this article examines the role of social work, as both an academic discipline and a practice, in the context of the recent refugee crisis. This role mirrors the historical development of social work and is further highlighted by recent empirical studies of refugee experiences on Greek islands. The authors call for an active political coalition between social work practitioners and refugees, with the aim of empowering the latter in their quest for liberation from the regime of European refugee management.

1. Introduction

Antonio Gramsci (1971), one of the most frequently referenced political theorists and cultural critics of the twentieth century, starts his *Prison Notebooks* by profoundly questioning the historical roles of intellectuals associated with modern Western universities, as they arose about 400 years ago. In his notebooks, Gramsci asks an important question, which we have chosen as an orientation for this chapter: are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular, specialized category of intellectuals? We aim to apply this question to practitioners and educators in the field of social work, in order to analyze the specific functions that social workers fulfill in the current divisive system of migration management. The analysis will be undertaken from a range of perspectives – social, historical, post-colonial and that of political economy. The objective of this process is to consider the critical need for a re-orientation of the social work profession to bring it more in line with the teachings of Paulo Freire and Ignacio Martín-Baró on liberating social action centering on the notion of praxis, and reflection on action for transformation (Mayo, 2020)

2. The role and function of the intellectual, hegemony and the 'Southern Question'

'All men are potentially intellectuals in the sense of having an intellect and using it, but not all are intellectuals by social function' (Gramsci, 1971: 1). For Gramsci, the role of the 'new' intellectual – a role he certainly adopted and took very seriously during his lifetime – is to develop a consciousness for social groups that can bring meaning and understanding to their members' positions in society and their roles in life. Once this consciousness has been achieved, the role may be compared with the function of a 'glue' that bonds social and political forces in an alliance against oppression and for positive change. Types of education, cultural influences and geographic positionality are all influential factors in peoples' lives, embedded in their 'common sense', and informing their worldviews and practices, which, in turn, are influenced by various types of intellectuals. In this chapter, we take Gramsci's category of the 'intellectual', along with his analysis of the 'Southern Question' in a move towards developing a liberation theory, and combine them with the social action approaches of Paulo Freire and Ignacio Martín-Baró. Their transformative thoughts will guide our arguments for an urgent need to re-orient Social Work towards political empowerment, with a specific focus on refugees and migrants.

Capuzzo and Mezzadra (2012) underline the contemporary relevance of Gramsci's thought for understanding uneven global development, based on his conceptualization of the 'Southern Question'. Referring to Edward Said's (1979) work, the authors conclude that, in particular, the importance Gramsci attaches to 'space' opens up the 'possibility of using his concepts to reconstruct the historical and contemporary dynamics of global capitalism in its multi-scalar hierarchies, relations, and conflicts' (Capuzzo & Mezzadra, 2012: 48). Gramsci's international analysis and perspective on the worsening 'hierarchy of exploitation' (Young, 2012: 19) in the context of global capitalism puts further emphasis on critical global power dynamics. This analysis provides a useful approach to understanding the divisive relationship between former European colonizing states and their dominant social groups, and migrants and refugees¹ moving from formerly colonized regions towards Europe.

¹ The terms migrant and refugee will be used interchangeably in this paper, as the distinction between the two becomes

Considering the roles of intellectuals in migration management within the context of the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000) will allow us to take Gramsci's transformative thoughts and apply them analytically at a lower, more concrete level. The level in question is that of the flawed Western Migration Management system, and its associated 'helping system', in which Social Work operates within a dialectic of care and control (Lavalette, 2020). Gramsci (1971: 1) saw the world as dominated by various 'capitalist entrepreneurs' organized around their disciplines, e.g., Political Analysts, Organizers of New Cultures and, of course, Social Workers. For him it was the type of leadership, as well as technical and intellectual capacity, which distinguished 'traditional' from 'organic' intellectuals. This differentiation was crucial to his analysis of the influence of the elitist educational system, the role of intellectuals within it, the position of culture, as well as his understanding of the production of 'common sense', hegemony, and the role of political and civil society therein. Hegemony, a central term in Gramsci's conception of civil society, is best described using his own words:

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond, on the one hand, to the function of 'hegemony', which the dominant groups exercise throughout society and, on the other hand, to that of 'direct domination', or command exercised through the State and 'Juridical' government. The functions in question are precisely organizational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government (1971: 12).

Gramsci's attention to geographic and historical positionality gave rise to a new understanding of hegemony associated with his new interpretation of the 'philosophy of praxis' (in both space and time). In a Gramscian perspective, intellectuals do not interpret social movements from a neutral position, they are themselves organic elements in the structure of hegemony (Apitzsch, 2016). This is something which lies at the heart of our argument. Whilst organic intellectuals are the organizers of masses (and social groups or movements), traditional intellectuals (e.g., scholars, artists, clerics) have a specific association with the mode of production. This originates from the feudal mode of production, where they have been integrated, and where they have received new functions according to the new practices and needs of the capitalist system (Gramsci, 1971: 10-11). With expanding capitalism, Gramsci problematized the increasing co-optation of organic intellectuals into the hegemonic system of capitalist production, where they began to function as 'confidence builders' (Gramsci, 1971: 5-6). This co-optation distances intellectuals from the masses (see also Apitzsch, 2016: 30) and from any questioning of the powerful establishment.

From a subaltern perspective, which influenced what Gramsci wrote, intellectuals are tasked with developing an understanding of their problematic entanglement with hegemonic forces and their function as 'confidence builders'. This would imply associating themselves with members of subaltern social groups and movements (becoming intellectuals through a social function), identifying common concerns, building class alliances and, through this process, initiating the absorption of the body of intellectuals for a common counter-hegemonic struggle. The prerequisite for this would be the development of organic intellectuals as ideological leaders of their respective social groups, as well as the articulation of a principle capable of absorbing other classes and social groups into a new, emerging hegemonic system. This absorption can only happen within civil society, outside of political society, alongside the production of a new 'common sense'. Or, as Ramos (1982) states, the success of such a task would depend 'on the perception by these classes that the hegemonic class no longer assumes a representative appearance vis-a-vis subaltern class elements'. A principle that Jacques Rancière (2006) further conceptualized is his reformulation of the political, which he saw as a struggle between the established social order and its excluded parts. Indeed, Rancière, like Gramsci, considered the very idea that only traditional intellectuals occupy society's 'thinking space' to be preposterous (Garrett, 2020).

Fanon (1967), during his participation in, and analysis of, African decolonization struggles, attributes importance to the colonized/native intellectual, asking the intellectual to return to his people and articulate their revolutionary project through the creation of a national popular literature (cf. Srivastava, 2012). For Capuzzo and Mezzadra (2012: 49) it is 'in this framework that the figure of the "subaltern" becomes a subject of history, with a specific gaze on the cultural forms of expression'. Hence, the public struggle for social transformation by civil society, with the participation of the 'countless multitudes' in modern societies (cf. Buttigieg, 1995: 20) forges social alliances between intellectuals and social groups and begins to articulate alternative hegemonic projects, oriented by ideological intellectual leadership (Ilal, Kleibl & Munck, 2014).

Gramsci asserts that it is through activities and autonomous organizations in civil society that the subaltern masses can gain freedom, or independence from the ruling capitalist classes and their allied intellectuals, who uphold the ideology of the ruling classes. At this point, we can see parallels among Gramsci's conceptions of the intellectual, the educational system and civil society (1971), Paulo Freire's elaboration of the 'Pedagogy of the

increasingly arbitrary in the present context (Turton, 2003; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Furthermore, it represents a categorical classification that supports the institutional interests of European political and economic elites and not the lived experiences of people on the move in the 21st century.

Oppressed' (1970), and Franz Fanon's understanding of the role of colonized intellectuals (1967). Gramsci, like Freire and Fanon some years later, places the development of an independent political consciousness and ideological leadership of the subaltern, or oppressed masses, at the center of his theory of social and political change (based on critical analysis of the educational system and the types of intellectuals it produces):

Education, culture, the widespread organization of knowledge and experience constitute the independence of the masses from the intellectuals. The most intelligent phase of the struggle against the despotism of career intellectuals and against those who exercise authority by divine right consists in the effort to enrich culture and heighten consciousness. And this effort cannot be postponed until tomorrow or until such time as when we are politically free. It is itself freedom, it is itself the stimulus and the condition for action (Gramsci cited in Buttigieg, 1995: 20).

Looking at the continual denial of the recognition of refugees as equal citizens and associated with this, the rejection of their knowledge and agency, human rights, and dignity, we can see how the various roles of intellectuals are contributing to the coloniality of power, enshrined in the migration management system. Too often they distance themselves from the harsh reality of migrants rather than supporting collective alliances between different subaltern groups, including migrants, and therefore do not promote the confrontation of power structures. This, according to Apitzsch (2016), seems to be an 'under-analyzed' central argument of Gramsci's thought in the context of contemporary migration management debates. Turning then to the position of Social Workers within this system, it is unclear if, under the globally dominant Western understanding of Social Work, they could be categorized as 'organic' or 'traditional' intellectuals. This, as we will argue, depends on the Social Worker's political consciousness, understanding of culture, closeness to subaltern struggles and the approach being taken to issues of social justice. In order to explicate this, in the next section of this chapter we examine the historical developments and positionalities of Social Work, and the various functional changes it has gone through. This will be followed by a discussion of social work's entanglement with contemporary migration management.

3. Social Work – an historical perspective

Since its origin, Social Work has been closely associated with the emerging capitalist industrial society of the late 19th century. Whilst its history can be traced in different ways and from various perspectives, the confrontation with the 'social question' was always central to social work's ambitions. In Britain, the Charity Organisation Society (COS), founded in the 1870s, responded to the increasing misery of large parts of the population by distinguishing between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, a distinction supposedly based on a 'scientific case by case' analysis. The COS approach was later significantly challenged from the almost oppositional 'Settlement Movement', which began in Britain in the late 1800s, later also spreading to America (Ferguson, 2009).

The reformist Settlement Movement took a much broader social justice approach to alleviating poverty. It aimed to directly support the increasingly struggling urban poor, including immigrant worker communities. It reached its zenith in the 1920s, when British and American social workers began to follow the broad vision of the movement. They were inspired by the work of an American Settlement Movement theoretician, Jane Addams, who was also a feminist and peace activist. Her vision, and that of other Settlement leaders, was to bring the rich and the poor, as well as the various cultural influences from immigrant communities together, in physical proximity and social inter-connection. Through the establishment of so-called 'settlement houses' in poor urban neighborhoods, services such as daycare, education and health care were provided for the marginalized poor, alongside community organizing and support for the unionization of exploited workers (Wade, 2004). These Social Work strategies, in a Gramscian sense, could be viewed as an attempt to create a new 'common sense', linked to a multitude of cultural worldviews. They were also part of a political Social Work response to the structural barriers poor immigrant families were facing in their spatially segregated neighborhoods (ibid). In Germany, Social Work followed a similar dual approach of charity and social movement development (Niemeyer, 2012).

Around this time, the dominant classes in the Global North were trying to solve the enormous social question, exacerbated by the global economic crisis, through the institution of various social reforms within the existing capitalist system. In central Europe, the rise of the welfare state led to a certain professionalization of Social Work. In this context, Social Work became the executive organ of government social policies and responsible for counteracting the more negative impacts of the capitalist system on people at the lowest level of the capitalist class system. Co-opted as a 'confidence builder' by policy makers, Social Work was positioned between the state and the workers' precariat in a time of capitalist expansion. On the one side, it was tasked with the hierarchization, subordination and integration of the work force, alongside social categories such as race, class and gender. On the other, it was influenced by social movements such as those of women, workers and migrants, and their fight for the rights of their members. Within this incongruous system, social workers have often chosen contradictory responses to systemic exclusion and structural violence. In Germany, where the Nazis came to power in 1933, Social Work's initial emancipatory potential was replaced with fascist ideology, which eventually absorbed social workers into the National Socialist German Workers' Party's (NSDAP) Department of

Health. Here, they became front-line workers, tasked with identifying individuals and families considered 'life unworthy of life' (Salustowicz, 2012; Gehlenborg, 2001; Kunstreich, 2003), in a dehumanizing political system which killed millions of Jews, Sinti and Roma, Communists, People of Color, the Disabled and Homosexuals.

After World War II, British and American Social Workers, involved in the reconstruction of Western German social services and Social Work education (Salustowicz, 2012; Thole, 2012) opted to adopt the methods of clinical casework, despite some opposition from people linked with the 'settlement movement' (Ferguson, 2009). In contrast, in East Germany (GDR) and the greater Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Social policy and Social Work were designed to serve exclusively the goals of the communist state, and social work education focused broadly on theories of collective social justice and equality (Zaviršek, 2014). Towards the latter half of the 20th Century, new studies critiqued the Western mainstream individualist clinical approach to Social Work, pointing out its failure to address problems associated with increasing structural poverty (Ferguson, 2009). In the USA, Saul Alinsky's (1971) influential radical social work ideas emerged, associated with his book 'Rules for Radicals', inspiring social workers all around the world to reconnect to progressive social movements and community organizing. However, due to conservative governments coming to power around the 1980s, radical Social Work experienced a rapid decline, and the so-called 'cultural turn' moved Social Work further away from structural class-based Marxist analysis toward questions of identity and difference (Williams, 1996).

With the end of the Cold War in the late 1990s and the globalization of neo-liberalism, Social Work moved further towards an evidence-based managerial profession, linked to social administration of the poor and those considered deviant. Case management became the preferred method of Social Work intervention in the Global North (Thole, 2012) and beyond. What followed was the academization of Social Work and its approximation to modern positivist natural science methods. The profession tied itself more closely to the expansion of capitalism and neo-liberalism. Both are systems that view social problems as products of individual deviance, rather than, following Marx's analysis, as 'public causes of private pain' (Lavalette, 2020).

Looking to the Global South, where Social Work was 'imported' during colonial times, the same ideological orientation continued beyond national liberation. This led to an alienation of Social Work approaches from the deep structural and poverty-related problems associated with colonial and post-colonial violence. The neo-liberal structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), requiring African governments to privatize entire public service sectors, further amplified this trend. This led to an increase in the presence of Western INGOs, with which some Southern Social Workers found employment (Kleibl et al., 2020). To varying degrees, INGOs took over many of the post-colonial state tasks, in particular those related to poverty reduction and social cohesion. This, inevitably, led to a weakening of the newly created post-colonial states' capacity to meet their populations' needs, at a time when decolonization of the economic and social spheres was an unfinished endeavor. In this context, Social Work in the Global South became strongly associated with Western cultural imperialism and the continuation of colonial hegemony, through the implementation of a Western top-down civil society concept. It was applied through an apolitical INGO social service-delivery model subordinating local conceptions of civil society linked to revolutionary change (Kleibl, 2021). Gramsci's 'view from below' concept of civil society, providing space for counter-hegemonic activities, would have been more attuned to Southern realities.

It was in Latin America around the 1960s, where the profession turned again into a more critical and political profession, influenced by Dependency Theory:

Thirty-five years ago, when people began to talk about the reconceptualization of Social Work in Latin America, a process characterized by the conscious analysis of the reality and identity of Latin America was beginning. Philosophy and the theology of liberation, the awakening of the Dependency Theory, in education the rise of Liberalizing Popular Education in Social Work led to the reconceptualization (Eroles et al., 2004: 99).

This critical and political model of Social Work appears particularly well related to concepts Gramsci elaborated during his lifetime, in particular the 'Southern Question' in combination with his understanding of the 'new' intellectual. Under these influences, Social Work in the South started to develop its own intervention theories, approaches and methods, while in the Global North, it remained broadly tied to a positivist and individualist way of working. While Social Work representatives from the South are still impacted by colonial imports, they argue in favor of a model independent of its 'exploitive colonial roots' and recognizing 'indigenization, localization, authentication and reconceptualization' (Lutz, Kleibl & Neureither, 2021). Paulo Freire is one of the most influential representatives of this Southern approach, and his popular educational and liberation pedagogy have since been deconstructed and reconstructed in the contexts of changes caused by globalization and new forms of power (Mejía & Marco, 2016). All of this is part of a post-colonial critique of Western hegemonial Social Work approaches, with their often decontextualized human rights orientation that advocates regard as universal and context-independent (Röh, 2020).

We would argue that these anti-colonial and counter-hegemonic arguments are influenced by Gramsci's views on the 'Southern Question'. If he were writing his prison notebooks in the context of today's globalized world, he would certainly link the exploitation of raw materials and the need for cheap labor from countries of the Global South with the economic growth agenda of the Global North and the existence of its privileged welfare systems. Unequal development, which he wrote of in relation to the 'Southern Question', is the main stimulus of today's global forced migration regime. Looking back at the history of Social Work in Germany, as discussed above, it is striking to note that in today's migration management system, we see the revival of human categorization along national and religious lines, and the dispersal of people based on whether they are refugees, black, asylum seekers, Muslim Arab, 'economic migrants', etc. (Mayo, 2016: 143).

Consequently, examining the function(s) of Social Work in migration management requires consideration of the post-colonial context that assigns migrants in Europe to a subaltern position, based on their ex-colonial and post-colonial histories. This leads us to the crucial question of 'Identity Politics' and Social Work's ambivalent role in relation to migration policies. Hall (1978: 31) observes that 'race' can function as a key 'lens through which people come to perceive that a crisis is developing' and can be 'the framework through which the crisis is experienced.'

4. Migration Management and Social Work

In this section of the chapter, we focus on the social worker's role in migration management, specifically in the context of the 'refugee crisis'. There is one word that accurately summarizes the goal and principles underlying European management of the 'refugee crisis', and that is *deterrence*. From the moment the EU-Turkey deal was struck in 2016, it was evident that the intention was to deter prospective migrants from undertaking travel to Europe in the first place. The narrative pointed to the dangers of the perilous journey to, and across, the Mediterranean Sea, the extremely long periods of waiting in poor detention facilities and the insensitive, lengthy and, often biased, asylum granting processes. This view of the European approach was initially greeted with skepticism and attributed to a politically radical cohort. But in the light of continuing developments in the 'refugee crisis', it became more widely accepted and documented in academic analyses (Vedsted-Hansen, 1999; Mountz, 2011; Oliver, 2017; Xypolytas, 2018, 2019). Over the past seven years, it has become abundantly clear that the combination of obstacles and dangers faced by migrating people has produced countless traumatized migrants and a great, though unknown, number of deaths. While many individual cases of trauma and death have been reported, causing worldwide shock and outrage, official political discourse in the European Union and its member states continues to be characterized by a rhetoric of human rights and European values.

There is a profound irony in the fact that, despite the extreme efforts of European political elites, deterrent migration policies have proved unsuccessful. Not only have they failed to deter people from attempting to cross European borders, but they have also given rise to an unprecedented legitimization crisis within the European Union (Carrera et al., 2019). The cloaked rhetoric of benevolence stands in stark contrast to its malice in the light of migrants' misery and despair. However, the official response from Europe to increasing migration and its own internal crisis, was to increase the authoritarian character of migration policy, and pander to xenophobic and neo-colonial voices, in seeking a European-wide consensus on the necessity for this type of migration control (Schinkel, 2017).

There are certain key changes in the everyday practices of refugee management that demonstrate this move towards greater authoritarianism. *Firstly*, the illegal pushbacks, involving not only the Coast Guards of several different states (mainly Greek, Turkish and Italian), but also the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX). Reports from NGOs and media networks suggest that thousands of refugees have been illegally sent back in the past couple of years, and often in a manner that is clearly and unashamedly placing migrants' lives in extreme danger (Fallon, 2020; McKernan, 2021). This has led to a problematic relationship between EU and FRONTEX officials (Nielsen, 2020), as active engagement in pushbacks severely undermines the humanitarian narrative promulgated by the official institutions of the European Union.

Secondly, there has been a clear move towards constructing 'closed' refugee camps along European borders, which replace previously more 'open' living arrangements. The outbreak of COVID-19 gave rise to a public health narrative which legitimizes such detention, even though the latter has actually been the most critical aspect of migration policy since 2015. An aspect of this situation and attendant narrative which is particularly reprehensible is that, while there are references to the need for social distancing in order to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus, this relates not to living conditions inside the camps, but to minimizing the contacts refugees have with the local population. Meanwhile, within the camps, people live in cramped conditions, with absolutely no safety protocols in place. These new closed camps are being built on various Greek islands, including Lesbos and Samos. Unlike the situations in previous camps, these are officially set up and run by European authorities. This represents a critical point of departure from the previous European strategy, which attributed the "dysfunctions" of refugee management to institutional decisions and actions taken by member states (Xypolytas, 2019).

However, at the same time, this new situation makes it impossible for the EU to dissociate itself from its deterrent migration policy.

Having said the above, the role of member states should not be entirely discounted in this new situation, as internal developments within states also have impacts on approaches to refugee management. For example, the election of a right-wing government in Greece in 2019 contributed to the deterioration of an already very bad situation, as it further pursued a deterrent migration policy, making specific changes to strengthen and enforce it. In the past two years, there has been a reduction in asylum-granting decisions. Concerns have been raised about the changed criteria for establishing vulnerability and about the way in which asylum-seeking interviews are conducted (Psaropoulos, 2020). Furthermore, punitive and far-reaching court rulings are often handed down to refugees without evidence of wrongdoing having been established (Smith, 2021).

5. The role of social work in migration management

It is evident from the outline of the migration management system we have presented here that the role of social workers within it is a complex one and that any analysis and evaluation must reflect that complexity. From the outset, in the field one can immediately be confronted with the non-harmonious coexistence of different approaches to social work by different actors (Munteanu & Barron, 2021). Variations in approach are informed by both institutional and personal characteristics and are profoundly influenced by the historical development of social work described above. Essentially, social work operates on a continuum between two extremes. At one end of the continuum there is a more or less uncritical adoption of European migration policy and enthusiastic adherence to it. A little further along is passive acceptance of the policy, combined with efforts to maximize the benefits for the refugees within its confines. At the other end is a conscious effort to support refugees by effectively monitoring, questioning, and undermining European migration policy. It is also the case that positioning on the continuum is not necessarily static, as developments affect individual and organizational decisions. Furthermore, as migration policy moves closer to an extreme form of official de-prioritization of human rights and authoritarian disciplining, it becomes increasingly difficult for actors to situate themselves in the more sought-after mid-positions along the continuum. The result is an increasingly divided outlook on the role of social work in the 'refugee crisis', as well as on the ethical aspects of this involvement.

The two opposed positions, as outlined above, clearly result in very different approaches to social work and in the field, such as at hotspots on the Greek border, that manifest themselves in a variety of ways. On the one hand, we see a considerable rise in the active engagement of NGOs whose goal is the monitoring of human rights violations in the context of refugee management, thus effectively questioning and undermining official migration policy. Social workers within these organizations are on the front line, as they actively engage in scrutinizing and publicizing illegal pushbacks perpetrated by the Greek Coast Guard and FRONTEX, or provide legal defense for refugees who are at the mercy of frequently punitive court decisions. On the other hand, many NGOs, as well as public sector social workers, operate inside and outside the new 'closed' camps, trying to maximize benefits for their 'clients', within the European migration framework. However, it is not just in social work organizational decisions or individual actions of social workers that one sees the difference. The polarization is increasingly evident in consumption choices, socialization practices and the overall lifestyles of people who spend their working days in what is called refugee management (Tsartas et al., 2020).

The fact of this radically divided approach to social work within the migration field leads us to two questions, which this article has set out to address. Firstly, what are the factors that have led to this division? Secondly, taking our bearings from the works of Gramsci, Freire and Fanon, what do we see as the role and function of social workers in this field for the near future? In other words, where does the profession need to position itself, based on its human rights orientation?

In attempting to answer the first question, we focus on one feature that seems to define all others, which is the conscious effort to depoliticize the refugee experience and co-opt social workers into an EU values-based and regulating migration management system. Since 2015, as it became increasingly apparent that hundreds of thousands of people would need permanent resettlement, the management of migration has become profoundly political. This is due to the conscious exercise of power over the refugee population, which takes place in zones of exception, where the 'common sense' of European human dignity seems to be switched off. Refugee management consists of a range of disciplining mechanisms that are there to inform migrants of their social position in European societies. But the reality is that each of these mechanisms is concealed by a veil of bureaucracy, or the utilization of science, making it difficult for the migrant to gain access. These hurdles are represented as inevitable in the context of significant levels of migration. For example, the long waiting periods, which are an essential disciplinary and pacification tool, are portrayed as a bureaucratic complication (Auyero, 2011; Jacobsen et al., 2021).

We now turn to the use of scientific discourse and practice to victimize and depoliticize both the migrant subject and the refugee experience. It is in this process that social work is heavily involved (alongside other disciplines, e.g., psychology), and it is the main influencing factor in the division of approaches of professionals in the field.

The portrayal of the refugee as a passive victim, especially on the basis of what has occurred in the country of origin, is based on an ideologically loaded set of assumptions. In order to exemplify this, we will briefly look at Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is a condition diagnosed in many refugees in camps located on European borders. While PTSD is an acknowledged condition recognized by the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) of the American Psychiatric Association, the assumptions behind its use have been heavily criticized (Becker, 1995; Hernandez, 2002). One of the main problems identified relates to the use of the prefix 'post-', as it implies that the trauma was inflicted previously and that the disorder simply involves the inability to cope with the consequences. In the context of the refugee experience this is problematic for three important reasons: a) the traumatization of individuals is not something that ends upon entering Europe, but can and does continue in refugee camps, b) the refugees' experience of trauma may only begin when they encounter the migration management system and the obstacles and uncertainties built into it, c) neo-colonial narratives are reiterated, as refugees, upon stepping onto European soil, are supposedly treated for the damage (physical and emotional) inflicted upon them in countries of origin in the Global South.

The attribution of PTSD diagnoses in evaluating the refugee experience relates to the essential political process of victimization. Treating refugees as passive victims in need of assistance depoliticizes their subjectivity, defining them as unable to control their future. Furthermore, their dependence upon Western humanitarian 'experts', such as social workers or psychologists, reinforces their lack of control and solidifies the seemingly – albeit deceptively – benevolent character of refugee management. In other words, what appears as benign social protection represents a crucial form of control that pacifies refugees and prevents them from questioning and actively undermining European migration policy. This construction of the *apolitical* and *vulnerable* migrant subject has been a central feature of this policy and of the overall management of the 'refugee crisis'. The granting of asylum itself depends on these two essential aspects, and many professionals in the field work to create such migrant personality profiles in a sincere effort to help them gain asylum. Yet, questions remain. Should social scientists and social work practitioners be actively engaged in policies and practices that actually harm the people they are supposed to help? And what form should their help take?

Moving away from 'social protection' to providing protection from refugee management has been a conscious decision for many social workers who have refused to play an active role in the continuation of this process of marginalization. They regard a duty to promote and defend human rights and social justice holistically as an inherent aspect of the definition of social work, and impossible to safeguard in the existing refugee management context. On the contrary, it is in questioning and undermining policy that they feel closer to the principles and guidelines of their profession. How then should they best aid refugees in this context?

The approach proposed here is based on defending the interests of refugees in the light of the goals of those who work against them. What the previous analysis suggests is that migrants are confronted with a policy that aims to pacify, victimize, and deny them the ability to alter their environment, which is absolutely central to notions of human freedom and sovereignty. Following Gramscian theory, this would imply that 'traditional' social scientists not only analyze, but also precisely recognize their inherent social function, which consists in taking part in monitoring human rights abuses and supporting the building of progressive social alliances. Through this process, they initiate the absorption of the body of intellectuals by exercising conscious resistance against the goals of European migration policy. In order for this to be grounded in subaltern realities, organic intellectuals and ideological leaders within refugee communities will need to be supported, and 'new' principles and values, based on the dignity and human rights of all, will need to be defined and demanded. This absorption can only happen within civil society, where the development of a new 'common sense' can take place.

We contend that the further development of policy and action for the emancipation of refugees is not the role of those of us who are not migrants ourselves. It is up to refugees themselves to define such plans. What we can offer is to provide access to knowledge and experience gained from other emancipatory projects throughout the world, and to open a new 'thinking space' in which freedom can be practiced. Refugees need opportunities to critically engage with their reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of migration policies. This would be an entirely democratic exercise, linked to the seeds of freedom planted in other areas of the world in the struggle against colonial and imperialist oppression. It is a struggle that begins with understanding one's social position in relation – and in opposition – to oppressive political power (Freire, 1970). This form of intervention is, above all, educational in character, giving refugees the tools with which they themselves can claim what is rightfully theirs, their freedom and sovereignty.

6. Social Work as Liberation

Inter-ethnic solidarity necessitates work of an educational nature to contribute towards improving the situation. Providing effective anti-racist education, predicated on an understanding of colonialism and neo-colonialism, and grounded in both cultural understanding and political economy, is one of the greatest challenges facing those committed to a socialist, anti-neo-liberal politics in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. This work is broadly educational as was the work which Gramsci was engaged in when

attempting to generate revolutionary working-class consciousness in this country [Italy] (Mayo, 2016: 144).

The above quote describes quite well what educational programs should focus on to help refugees affected by the post-colonial 'refugee crisis' in Greece and other European countries. We, as academics, must look to the work of significant political educators, such as Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire and Ignacio Martín-Baró, as pathways to a new consciousness. They point out to us the needs and opportunities to engage with refugees in overcoming the structures of oppression which produce and reproduce social, political and economic exclusion. While writing in different periods of the 20th century, all three theorists were highly critical of how Western intellectuals contributed to this oppression by aligning themselves with the hegemonic capitalist system. Furthermore, all three made substantial contributions to a new understanding of the 'philosophy of praxis' that takes the worldviews of the subaltern as the starting point for transformative action by various oppressed social groups which were at the center of their pedagogical interests.

In particular, a work of Freire (1970), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, serves as a foundation of ideas for strategic political action in Social Work (Mayo, 2020). As part of his pedagogy of liberation, people are essentially regarded as experts on, and protagonists of, their own lives; hence, the alienating technical clinical-case oriented role of the social worker is seen as redundant. A crucial take-away from the work of Gramsci is that exploration and progressive modification of 'common sense' contributes to peoples' understanding of their own life worlds and opportunities, alongside their historical and geographical conditions.

More recently, Martín-Baró, working in the field of liberation psychology, which he more or less defined, emphasized the role of the psychologist in assisting people suffering from trauma. Moving away from clinical and individualistic approaches, he introduced the concept of 'psycho-social trauma' (Martín-Baró, 1989) to underscore the causes of, as well as the solutions to, problems faced by those who have experienced the destructive effects of political and military power. For Martín-Baró, trauma is not an individual dysfunction, but rather a normal response to an absolutely abnormal situation. The solution does not lie in detached medical diagnoses and prescriptions of medication that focus on the individual and his suffering. It lies instead in identifying the social causes of the problem (thus destigmatizing the individual), in restoring stable and trusting social relations and, above all, in strengthening a community's capacity for collective action (Aron & Corne, 1994).

7. Conclusions and way forward

We conclude that in today's dominant model, social workers in praxis, education and research broadly support a function of technical service provision, justifying their interventions with knowledge from disciplines such as psychology, educational science, law and social administration. Admiration for these disciplines and the allocation of research and teaching chairs in Social Work departments facilitated the profession's inclusion in the 'higher' academic world of 'traditional intellectuals'. This positioning has contributed to their co-option by existing hegemonic systems, in order to implement Western governments' dominant social development and migration policies. This, in turn, has alienated many social workers from the people they are supposed to serve (Yuill, 2018). This alienation is particularly severe in the case of refugees and migrants who continue to suffer the consequences of colonialism and unequal global development. This is a situation that has existed in Europe for some time and, more recently, has been extended to the countries of the Global South, primarily through Western social work curriculum imports and INGOs interventions into local civil societies and their struggles for post-colonial justice.

Freire's pedagogical views demand a rejection of the colonial and rather technical and instrumental Social Work of the Global North that is currently being applied in migration management. He posits the necessary abandonment of the liberal character of value-free science. In line with his theory, this would require social workers to adopt more radical and liberating positions, in particular in today's global migration regime. In order to do this, they need to first liberate themselves from institutions, migration policies and work regulations controlled by national and European politics, which, as our analysis has shown, have contributed to most of the social problems they are expected to solve. Social Work must develop its own agency, return to its inherently social function, and engage with migration management as a political actor, in order to increase political participation on the part of refugees. Social work, as a liberating practice, requires refocusing beyond its current Western focus on the individual. It needs to broaden that focus to reflect its positionality, hence disrupting exploitation, oppression, racial and religious profiling, victimization and categorization within the migration management system, and its underlying social structures that minimize people's opportunities and capabilities (cf. Lavalette & Ioakimidis, 2011). This model of Social Work would challenge the political sphere and would adopt alternative and opposing views on migration politics and the institutional regimes associated with them. The struggle between the poor and the rich, between the powerful and the subaltern, migrants and non-migrants is not a problem to be resolved by state and humanitarian agencies, but rather is itself political action (Rancière, 2006).

As the marginalized and voiceless become more aware of their position and stand up for their rights, social structures are reconstructed. For Social Work, this means withdrawing from the societal consensus around the subaltern position of refugees and the political contracts of institutionalized migration politics between the European Union and so-called Third States. The work of Fanon, Rancière, Freire and Martín-Baró, may aid critical reflection on social work and lead to a re-ordering of the political within the profession. This approach would draw on theories of resistance, movement building, liberation and utopia in order to support more radical forms of Social Work. As evidenced and discussed, the Social Work of the Global North is currently committed to providing services in an existing dehumanizing system, such as in migration management at the EU external border and in detention centers. We believe it can develop a new radicalism, inspired by the Social Work of the South, particularly in Latin America, which is oriented towards social movements. The ethical substance of a society must be measured in terms of the extent to which all its members enjoy substantial freedoms or, to quote Hannah Arendt (1951), whose words are more attuned to refugees' trajectories, 'the right to have rights, which provides access to a political community'.

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