Breaking Isolation: Social Work in Solidarity with Migrant Workers through and beyond COVID-19

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In the early months of COVID-19’s proliferation through Canadian communities, the now largely documented uneven impacts and burdens of the illness were emerging. Among the early COVID-19 casualties were workers in Alberta’s meatpacking plants, with infection rates so high that the news quickly gained international attention. The Cargill meatpacking plant, overwhelmingly staffed by temporary foreign workers with no permanent status or citizenship rights, was the site of the largest single coronavirus outbreak in Canada. The need for a community response to this emerging crisis was a focal discussion for a newly formed network of social workers. A multileveled series of actions and systems advocacy were put in place. These actions would foment a vibrant and diverse “community of communities” while also unveiling challenges and obstacles to the work during a period of a shifting health landscape, shutdowns, and changing legislation. This article focuses on the development of a grassroots and transformative community-led response to COVID-19, describing strategies, implementation, and challenges in the “real life” context of the recent pandemic. Key learnings for postpandemic community organizing and social work solidarity actions are highlighted.

KEY WORDS: COVID-19; grassroots; mutual aid; neoliberalism; temporary foreign workers

In the early months of COVID-19’s proliferation through Canadian communities, the now largely documented uneven impacts and burdens of the illness were emerging (Pazzano, 2020). The rapid global shutdown revealed with intensity the violent relationship between the capitalist global economy and the enduring oppression of disadvantaged populations, a power dynamic that social workers and justice advocates in Canada had been working to expose over decades (Alcaraz et al., 2021; Leonard, 2001). The reach of COVID-19 into the harbors of privatized healthcare facilities was swift, with a massive death toll among elderly residents that would cause even some of the most unrelenting advocates of the free market to question their allegiance to prior agendas (Government of Ontario, 2020).

The pandemic exposed deep-seated systems of injustice and racism that had existed since colonization, which had set in motion “a European-dominated global economy” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). COVID-19 brought to full light the otherwise normalized methods employed by global capitalist systems to assure the desperation of certain populations as prerequisites for their exploitation in the labor market. Among those required to fulfill the most menial and dehumanizing tasks in Canadian society are trafficked racialized essential workers, legally categorized as temporary foreign workers (TFWs).

TFWs in Alberta’s meatpacking plants were overrepresented among the early COVID-19 casualties, with infection rates so high that the news quickly gained international attention (Baum et al., 2020). The Cargill meatpacking plant in Southern Alberta, overwhelmingly staffed by TFWs with precarious immigration status, was the site of the largest single coronavirus outbreak in North America (Baum et al., 2020; Dryden & Rieger, 2020). Reports of outbreaks at JBS Food Canada in Brooks, Alberta, and Harmony Beef would soon follow (Alberta Health Services [AHS], 2020). Infamously notable in the Cargill case, the American-owned corporation, with permission from the Alberta government, would keep the plant functioning as the first handfuls of TFWs became ill; fears and requests for workplace safety
were largely disregarded (Baum et al., 2020; Dryden & Rieger, 2020). Within weeks, this dispensable precarious workforce would incur more than 1,560 COVID-19 cases linked to the plant with three confirmed deaths (Baum et al., 2020; Dryden & Rieger, 2020). More outbreaks in smaller numbers continued to occur throughout the pandemic (AHS, 2020; Dryden, 2020), as TFWs and their allies organized to save lives and advocate for safe working conditions and basic rights.

The need for a community response to this emerging crisis was a focal discussion for the newly formed Alberta Assembly of Social Workers (AASW), a network of social workers and social justice–minded individuals who first coalesced in January 2020 in solidarity with the land right claims of the Wet’suwet’en Indigenous Peoples in northern British Columbia. As an anticolonial, antiracist, and feminist group, our work quickly evolved as we recognized the potentially devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic within our communities. AASW formed a partnership with Migrante Alberta, an affiliate of Migrante Canada, with an enduring record of solidarity action with Filipino TFWs and the broader migrant community. With some social workers already involved in both organizations, and Migrante’s outstanding reputation and strong relationships among the TFW community, strategies for a grassroots community response to the crisis would emerge.

By identifying and mobilizing our local and neighborhood networks, faith and ethnocultural groups, as well as pre-existing partnerships, the AASW and Migrante catalyzed several points of entry for COVID-19-related solidarity work. A multileveled series of actions and systems advocacy were put in place, and would continue to build throughout the pandemic. These actions would form a vibrant and diverse “community of communities” while also unveiling challenges and obstacles to the work during a period of a shifting health landscape, shutdowns, and changing legislation.

This article focuses on the development of a grassroots and transformative response to COVID-19 by social workers in solidarity with TFWs impacted by corporate and fiscal conservative political interests. Key learnings for pandemic and postpandemic community organizing and social work solidarity actions are highlighted, underscoring the imperative for social workers to engage with global citizen movements. As women activist scholars and community organizers with AASW and Migrante, both voluntary and nonfunded organizations, we describe the strategies, implementation, and challenges that were confronted in the “real life” context of the recent pandemic. We locate ourselves to authenticate the knowledge shared in this article (Carter & Little, 2007). The first author migrated from the Philippines to Canada through the Live-in-Caregiver Program, a precursor to the current Caregiver Program, which is a subset of the TFW program. Inherent to the TFW program, she experienced workplace abuses and has centered herself in migrant justice activism for more than a decade. The second author is a second-generation Italian settler and activist scholar born in Kanien’keh:á: ka (Mohawk) territory, with over 30 years of organizing experience. The third author is a recent social work graduate, born on Treaty 7 land and Métis Nation Region 3, who works as a community researcher. The fourth author, of Nepali birth, engages in community-based transformative research and community building.

### TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF CANADA’S TFW PROGRAM

In the 1900s, the world witnessed the furtherance of capitalist expansion also known as globalization, which accelerated the opening of the borders of countries in the global South while advancing the concentration of wealth in countries in the global North (McKenzie & Wharf, 2016). The era also gave rise to a neoliberal ideology that encourages a robust economy for the benefit of a few individuals (McKenzie & Wharf, 2016). Deeply entrenched in an economy that is based almost entirely on monetary policies, free trade, the retrenchment of social policies, and the privatization and deregulation of the economic sector, the capital-serving neoliberal ideology has a stronghold in western economies where individualism proliferates and privatization of the public sector (health, education, social services etc.) is made profitable and desired (McKenzie & Wharf, 2016; Strier, 2019).

As a market-driven phenomenon, globalization supports the neoliberal agenda that promotes the reduction of spending on social and preventive services while transferring government responsibilities to the hands of private citizens, including
settlement and integration (Arat-Koc, 1999; Bauder, 2008), which only exacerbates the existing inequities and disparities locally and globally; this serves to further justify tighter border controls among northern nations. The era of globalization is also characterized by the transnational movement of a record number of people from the global South to the North (Foster & Luciano, 2020; Schierup et al., 2015). This mass exodus is emblematic of the dispossession and displacement of people from countries in the global South and the demand for cheap expendable labor in the North (Foster & Luciano, 2020; Wallis & Kwok, 2008).

From the French and British occupation of Indigenous lands in the 17th through the 18th and 19th centuries, Canada’s nation-building project has been solidified through chattel slavery (Cooper, 2006), indentured labor, and immigration (Hari, 2014). Immediately after its “founding,” Canada counted on Indigenous, enslaved, indentured, migrant, and trafficked racialized workers to address its need for cheap labor to perform essential and dangerous work to sustain its economy (Jakubowski, 1997). The first recorded “guest workers” who arrived in Canada in the 1880s were Chinese temporary workers, who were instrumental in building the western end of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Spencer, 2005). In the latter part of the 1900s, the country’s increasing demand for laborers changed the course of history when the settler demography shifted dramatically from a predominantly White population to more diverse populations (Jakubowski, 1997; Preston & Murnaghan, 2005). In 1971, 96 percent of Canada’s population was of European descent; since the mid-1970s, the number of racialized people in Canada has steadily increased (Government of Canada, 2015).

While Canada’s economic sustainability is highly reliant on immigration through migrant labor and investments, immigration status has become a powerful state machinery to control its subjects and create a demarcation between those who belong and those who do not (Thobani, 2007). Increasingly, Canada has shifted its focus to rely on a temporary migrant labor force that is disconnected from the inherent social rights and privileges that come with full immigration status (Jakubowski, 1997). Canada’s reliance on imported labor to sustain its economy was manifested in the 1950s when the Caribbean Domestic Scheme was established to recruit Caribbean women to work as domestic workers in private households (Jakubowski, 1997). However, as opposed to their European counterparts, who came as permanent residents and received higher pay, participants were tied to a single employer, given short-term work permits, and denied labor mobility and the right to become permanent residents (Hari, 2014; Jakubowski, 1997). In 1973, as the need for more domestic workers grew, the Non-immigrant Employment Authorization Program was launched, ushering the birth of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program as we know it today (Foster, 2012; Fudge & MacPhail, 2009; Jakubowski, 1997).

The TFW program “allows Canadian employers to hire foreign workers to fill temporary jobs when qualified Canadians are not available” (Government of Canada, 2020, para. 1). In essence, however, the program effectively creates a pool of workers inherently characterized by precarity and temporalities that restrict their access to social, labor, economic, and civil rights, and bars them from political rights and advocacy (Foster & Luciano, 2020; Schierup et al., 2015). Established with a one-sided goal of boosting Canada’s economy, the TFW program became a superhighway for employers to gain access to an unlimited supply of low-maintenance, low-cost labor from countries in the global South whose citizens were desperate to leave, primarily due to extreme poverty (Schierup et al., 2015; Tungohan, 2020). Divorced from their human rights, TFWs are found in Canada’s vital industries, from railways to garment production, agricultural work, food processing and services, and caregiving or domestic work, often performing jobs that are described as dangerous, laborious, and low-paying (Hari, 2014). The precarity inherent in temporary workers’ lack of full status ensures that Canada maintains an uninterrupted supply of cheap and docile labor to sustain its economy (Foster, 2012; Hari, 2014).

In the past decades, the TFW program has undergone several modifications, always to the benefit of employers whose primary goal is to extract maximum profit out of the workers with the least cost (Foster, 2012). In 2019, there were close to 470,000 work permits issued to foreign nationals; a large concentration of this number was employed in food production, followed by private households,
gasoline stations, accommodation, and food service (Lu, 2020).

**COVID-19 SPOTLIGHTS TFW OPPRESSION IN ALBERTA’S MEATPACKING PLANT**

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the delineation of essential and nonessential work would build community recognition of frontline healthcare workers. A collective acknowledgment of the critical role of instrumental workers in grocery stores, transit, food transport, and other essential services would soon follow (Baum et al., 2020). The deemed essentiality of many working-class people who were previously viewed as “lesser than” exposed—at least in the context of the pandemic—enduring class hierarchies. Even as marginalized workers were viewed in a new light by the middle and elite classes, there was still little recognition of the workers responsible for food cultivation, preparation, and packaging (Baum et al., 2020). Out of sight of the daily exchanges of urban life, the essentiality of much of TFW labor continued to go unnoticed. The historical exploitation of migrant labor would set the context for the political and economic interests that would override the right to safety for TFWs in Alberta meatpacking plants, putting the workers in harm’s way. Their invisibility further enabled the expedient and alarming spread of the virus in the plants.

The first case of COVID-19 in Alberta was diagnosed on March 5, 2020; less than five weeks later, the Cargill meatpacking plant confirmed its first case (Dryden & Rieger, 2020). Immediately following, community members and advocates began informing the media that multiple employees were experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. A growing public outcry likely ignited a government investigation that was launched on April 12, 2020. While COVID-19 proliferated through the plant’s workforce, the government deemed Cargill a safe worksite (Dryden & Rieger, 2020). As the government and the company continued to downplay the cases, both workers and community advocates claimed that the numbers were much higher. This was confirmed by Alberta’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, on April 17, 2020, with 358 cases linked to Cargill. Within two days of this announcement, the first Cargill worker, Hiep Bui, would pass away from COVID-19, and Cargill would announce a two-week closure the following day (Dryden & Rieger, 2020).

Despite legal action and advocacy efforts from the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 401 union to keep the plant closed, Cargill reopened on May 4, while outbreaks spread to a nearby nursing home and Indigenous community. A day after reopening, the father of an employee, Armando Sallegue, succumbed to the virus (Dryden & Rieger, 2020). His death was tragically followed by the loss of Benito Quesada, a veteran Cargill employee who had been battling the virus for weeks in the hospital (Dryden & Rieger, 2020). Throughout the weeks of this mounting crisis, many employees reported to outside sources the lack of social distancing and no consistency with COVID-19 safety protocols (Baum et al., 2020; Dryden & Rieger, 2020).

The reluctance of both Cargill and JBS companies to heed calls to shut down operations had deleterious impacts on workers. Without the necessary pressures and policies from the Alberta government, the company failed to implement proper safety measures to adequately limit the number of workers in workspaces at one given time, their proximity to one another, and their access to personal protective equipment (PPE; Baum et al., 2020; Dryden & Rieger, 2020). Instead, workers who experience dire financial precarity reported various forms of coercion to stay on the job, which included fiscal incentives that exploited their dependence on job security and income (Baum et al., 2020).

**BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTS FOR TFWs**

Years of social justice action by social workers in the province would set the stage for the formation of a social work movement to contest the treatment of TFWs in Alberta’s meatpacking plants and support impacted workers. AASW emerged just prior to the pandemic as a community grounded in social work praxis of personal transformation, relational accountability, peace building, and solidarity action. The group established a nonhierarchical and consensus-based platform for social workers to organize to take action on issues of injustice outside of our paid roles in organizations that often restrict advocacy work. Rooted in our commitment to antiracism and TRC’s 94 calls to action for Indigenous rights (TRC, 2015), the AASW’s initial
solidarity work quickly translated into a community-led response to COVID-19, which expanded to large-scale community engagement and sustainable action.

The AASW began meeting online and at a distance in yards and doorways as the uneven impacts of the pandemic were yet to become topics of mainstream media. Anticipating the vast impacts of the virus on disadvantaged groups, we sought to bring out into public sight a collective presence of social workers in action. Our individual and collective experiences of social justice work and pre-existing relationships laid the foundation for our work from our own spaces of isolation. Navigating social distancing and health recommendations, we worked alongside neighbors and neighborhood associations, faith and ethnocultural groups, other local organizations, and friends. We assessed local community needs and extended our solidarity to social work colleagues abroad who were addressing COVID-19 as it impacted communities with limited infrastructure.

Migrante Alberta’s existing campaigns for migrants’ rights and welfare, and also provision of assistance through referrals, advocacy, and lobbying work for migrants’ issues (Migrante Alberta, n.d.), made the organization a key partner and natural anchor for meat-packing plant workers impacted by the pandemic. The relationships and cross-purposes between the two groups allowed for an expedient and evolving action plan that was cultivated from community care, rooted in the principles of mutual aid and relationships of trust (Whitley, 2020). The AASW and Migrante acted as funnels and connectors that enhanced our ability to reach into the community of COVID-19-impacted meatpacking plant workers and out to a network of care from people seeking a greater purpose and solidarity during a time of uncertainty.

Solidarity networks were at the core of our action strategy, with Migrante organizers, some of whom had lived the precarity of TFW life, having direct contact with workers, worker representatives, and union leaders. Information exchange was immediate, bringing to light the coercion being experienced by the workers and the alarming number of sick and quarantined TFWs who did not have access to food, sanitary supplies, and household items. A multilayered strategic initiative was needed that would get supplies out to the workers while shining a spotlight on the systemic injustices unfolding. Partners were called in to perform specific roles. Calgary social workers with more than a decade of invaluable experience in antipoverty political advocacy were asked to lead our letter-writing campaign and support the collection and delivery of goods.

AASW tapped into our connections with social work activists, scholars, alumni, and students at the University of Calgary using the faculty’s newsletters, mailing lists, and scope of influence with students and colleagues. Graduates and soon-to-be graduates like our third author organized among students who were in lockdown with practicums halted, to redirect their practice and efforts toward this initiative. Some students completed their practicum requirements remotely by contributing to coordination and communications through social media and emails.

Locality engagement was employed to access new sources of support for TFWs, using the power and resources of long-standing neighborhoods. Our members used awareness building and education to inform and motivate neighborhood networks to expand their local COVID-19 support efforts outwards to reach TFWs. Working with key community associations such as the Brentwood community afforded many benefits. Because neighbors knew each other, and had physical proximity, they could easily and quickly gather items and establish a pickup/drop-off system. The second author’s front lawn became a central and visible space for organizing. The doorstep, with physical distancing and masking, became a centerpiece for the exchange of goods, ideas, advocacy strategies, and other planning; included was the packaging of culturally appropriate food hampers, medicines, and PPE. An additional benefit of a local hub was the influence that could be exerted on political representatives, as they sought to contribute to the food distribution and were then petitioned regarding the systemic injustices within their purview. Furthermore, the doorstep drew in seniors who were primarily at home, for fear of contracting the virus. Initial conversation led to drop-offs of home-stitched masks and ear protectors, and after some time, clothing and knitted sweaters for TFWs’ children.

Outreach and relationship building continued with the migrant workers using virtual methods and distanced conversations during food drop-offs, as many were in quarantine or already ill with the
virus. As we extended our support to nondocumented or nonstatus workers, we prioritized strict confidentiality and dignity, and did not ask questions. While the pandemic drew on, word circulated that support was available and requests increased; the potential for supply shortage and organizer fatigue set in. To expand our volunteer base, an AASW member facilitated a connection to his faith network in a call for solidarity. The Islamic Circle of North America was swift in organizing food donations and deliveries, crossing both cultural and faith boundaries. Many organizers recognized the significance of Muslim members supporting Christian migrant workers. An AASW member from the Nepalese community, the fourth author, reached into her community to coordinate a “rice drive.” As both communities shared the same staple, the rice outreach quickly translated into a significantly large donation, and the Nepalese community joined in future projects.

Our social work code of ethics demands that we not only “uphold the right of people to have access to resources to meet basic social needs,” but also to “challenge injustices, especially injustices that affect the vulnerable and disadvantaged” (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005, p. 5). The efforts of AASW and Migrante Alberta demonstrate that solidarity work, a cornerstone of social work practice, requires us to be creative in our approach while also being authentically integrated and closely connected with those that have been systematically disenfranchised. The urgent response to migrant workers impacted by the virus in Alberta’s meatpacking plants was swift and effective in the short term. We exercised our collective force as an intercultural team unbounden to organizational mandates, funding directives, or fear of reprimand from neoliberal NGO structures. We utilized systems advocacy to gain attention from all levels of government and the general population in efforts to generate immediate action. For instance, in the late spring, Migrante launched the Health Care for All campaign, calling on all levels of government to guarantee access to safe and confidential health services for all Alberta residents regardless of immigration status (Migrante Alberta, 2020). AASW responded with strategic letters addressed to policymakers, advocating for them to act with expediency and conscience to assure the rights of TFWs in Alberta and across our country. Most urgent was the need to publicly condemn racism and the increasing climate of discrimination targeting TFWs and migrant workers. Public officials who used the uneven burden of illness experienced by TFWs to expound racist rhetoric were called out. During this time, systemic racism sweeping across North America, most poignantly captured in the police murder of George Floyd in the United States, would broaden our antiracist response. AASW, Migrante, and other partners convened a public virtual forum on racism. We also submitted several public presentations at a municipal inquiry on systemic racism. These actions would set the context for ongoing virtual educational and action forums.

DISCUSSION

“Mutual aid,” a term coined by Peter Kropotkin (1908), is a political vision focused on collective connectedness and reciprocity over charitable, needs-based supports; this approach highlights the power of cooperation over “clientization” as a foundation for sustainable action (Whitley, 2020). Mutual aid directly opposes and challenges traditional charity models installed in most capitalist democracies (Whitley, 2020). Conversely, mutual aid leans on solidarity networks among individuals and communities as catalysts for improved well-being and quality of life (Tolentino, 2020; Whitley, 2020). Spade (2020) argued that mutual aid fosters community care and mobilization among society as “people learn and practice the skills and capacities we need to live, in the world we are trying to create” (p. 138).

Through a process of action, reflection, and learning, we developed a sustainable action framework, beginning with a platform of support that built on preexisting relationships among AASW, Migrante, and the TFW community, and extended to partnerships with faith and cultural groups, neighborhood coalitions that had formed or deepened in response to the pandemic, and local organizations that were long-standing and resourced (see Figure 1). Establishing a “community of communities,” an open space was created for diverse talents, skills, and offerings to sustain the initiative. Key actions included education and awareness, often done through distanced doorstep chats, phone calls, or online through webinars and lunch-and-learns, which led to voluntary mobilization of time and resources. Locality engagement was beneficial as community mobility was reduced

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and residents were often yearning for ways to help. Similarly, the TFW community was interconnected, often housed collectively, and able to communicate and share information swiftly between themselves and with the trusted advocates who grew in number over time. Solidarity networking brought more people who were previously involved in social justice initiatives and leveraged these relationships to support the TFW community. These members facilitated the systems advocacy work, including letter writing, social media posts, and a formalized Health Care for All campaign directed at politicians and decision makers.

Most difficult to grow and sustain was reciprocity, the cornerstone of mutual aid, which was fostered over months of engagement. This was done through creative means such as online supper and group party, where TFWs, advocates, and supporters gathered for karaoke, storytelling, and planning of future activities and events.

The strengthening of relationships was deemed a necessary ingredient for long-term community work. Our roles as global citizens rather than agents of oppressive organizations or predatory colonial systems resonated with the TFWs and set the context for shared accountability. Among ourselves, we
relied on relationships of trust, which allowed us to operate with diffuse and nonhierarchical leadership, including quick public responses to emerging social issues and campaigns as they unfolded. Furthermore, traditional power hierarchies associated with social work and expert knowledge were refuted, and the group relied on the social workers who were part of or most closely aligned with the experiences of the TFW community to lead the way.

FRAMEWORK FOR GRASSROOTS AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

The evolving Framework for Grassroots and Transformative Action was embodied in the efforts of AASW and Migrante, in ways that were impactful and also challenging, as this entailed an extensive amount of volunteer hours dedicated to planning, organizing, resource navigation, and trust and relationship building with TFWs and community members. Although initially reluctant to connect with individuals outside of their own community, TFWs involved in this community response expressed that the connections made through the mobilization of supplies, care, and advocacy made them feel part of the Canadian community; they commented that this decreased their feelings of isolation and despair that tempered the constant worries engendered by the pandemic and their precarious immigration status. Many TFWs continued their connection with Migrante Alberta, which, tapping into the volunteer efforts of AASW, continues to persevere in providing short-term support and advocating for long-term policy changes. The notable lack of interest from government agencies and the general public about the injustices experienced by migrant workers contributes significantly to emotional fatigue felt by social workers and community advocates who have been doing migrant-justice work for many decades.

As exemplified through the grassroots efforts of our social work group, the concept of mutual aid resonates with social work, a discipline rooted in—the pursuit of social justice, the purpose of the profession being the advancement of human rights, and courage to demand justice when rights have been violated (Santiago & Smith, 2020). To establish genuine solidarity networks, social workers must prioritize the practice of engagement, recognizing unequal power relationships, committing to mutual respect, the inclusion of community members, and the quest for allyship (Strier, 2019). In addition, systems advocacy stands alone as the hallmark of good practice in that it involves challenging political power and policies, the use of strategies to amplify marginalized voices, and the promotion of collective goals (Strier, 2019).

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL WORK

The intersectional and compounding impacts of systemic racism, gendered labor exploitation, and multiple forms of community disadvantage (Butts, 2002) coalesced in the pandemic’s differential burden of illness and mortality. As common expressions circulated that the pandemic offered a time of “great reflection” and hopes to “build back better,” these grand ideals were in high contrast with what many referred to as the pandemic of racism (Rodriguez, 2020) and the pandemic of social inequality (Benach, 2021). For thousands of TFWs whose rights and well-being have been unjustly compromised by the profit-driven system, the pandemic only intensified their considerable hardships.

For the social work discipline, the COVID-19 pandemic has reasserted our allegiance to the charity model, which continues to limit the profession’s ability to practice mutual aid. There continues to be a noticeable absence of social workers in advocacy and grassroots community organizing work during the pandemic, and in particular with TFWs and antiracist and decolonial movements. To disassociate ourselves from the paternalistic behaviors associated with a deserving/undeserving charity lens, social workers must resist the role of reframing outrageous injustice with the hopes that it become palatable to those who are oppressed (Lorenzetti, 2013). We are called instead to act as global citizens in defying and overcoming the obstacles and barricades that separate the human from the professional (Tolentino, 2020). Global citizenship requires us to consider the state of our communities and how we are all citizens of one world, and to take collective action based on solidarity and reciprocity.

As COVID–19 brought to light concealed social inequity, it also reinforced the depth and significance of our human connections and our responsibility to reimagine and manifest a new society (Tolentino, 2020; Whitley, 2020). In this time of reckoning in multiple ways, social work as a profession is called to implement a practice of transfor-
mation, rooted in a community of care. The time is now for social work to be a fully emancipated practice, “a profession of resistance” (Leonard, 2001), and a community of mutual aid.

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