Editorial:
Pandemic Social Work:
Practice, Education, and Activism in the Time of COVID

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It is now the middle of November of 2021, and as we sit to write the introduction to this special issue on the impact of COVID-19 on social work practice, education, and activism, we cannot help but think about the over five million people who have died of COVID, and the over 260 million people worldwide who have contracted COVID since the disease first came to the world's attention almost two years ago. Despite ongoing efforts to vaccinate the population, over 300,000 persons still contract COVID worldwide, and over 8,000 die on a daily basis. In Canada, 1.7 million people have contracted COVID and almost 30,000 have died since the pandemic was first declared in March 2020 (Center for Systems Science & Medicine, n.d.). While it would be fair to say that the pandemic has touched everyone, some of us have felt its impacts more deeply as a result of losing family and community members, loved ones, and close friends to this disease.

As the second anniversary of the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of the global pandemic approaches, the uneven effects of COVID-19 and the ways in which race, gender, class, age, ability, geographical location, and other axes of inequality intersect with the disease have become ever more evident. COVID has more gravely impacted populations that were already rendered vulnerable as a result of persistent colonial and global imperial relations and a neo-liberal world order that, as SZTAINBOK suggests in this issue, continue to rely on biopolitical and necropolitical practices of social abandonment (see also MALSOM & TRIPURA; KHAN, DIAS, & THOMPSON.). In the Global North, these communities include the elderly living in long-term care facilities that for decades have suffered from the effects of reduced funding and aggressive privatization, migrant workers whose labour continues to be demanded but whose lives remain expendable, Indigenous communities living in precarious conditions of poverty and colonial dispossession, and racialized and immigrant communities living in poverty and working in jobs deemed essential to the survival of capitalism and global neo-liberalism. COVID-19 may be indiscriminate in its targeting, but its effects are not. Communities that suffer more strongly the effects of state policies of abandonment have been more seriously impacted by the global pandemic, demonstrating that COVID is not only a biomedical or epidemiological phenomenon but also, and perhaps most importantly, a political and social issue.

COVID has revealed the underbelly of political systems and the way in which global neo-liberalism, ongoing colonialism, and white supremacy shape state policies and strategies aimed at addressing the health, social, and economic effects of the pandemic. In the United

States, Donald Trump's responses to COVID were harmful, negligent, and, at times, clownish.[1] Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro's official policy of COVID denial, his failure to implement public-health measures, and his unapologetically homophobic responses to public demands for action[2] have also been troubling. These examples are egregious, but they are by no means exceptional. In Canada, though the Trudeau administration implemented emergency public-health and economic measures soon after WHO's declaration of the pandemic, such measures have remained, as AVISSA argues in her contribution to this special issue, entrenched within a neo-liberal political rationality. Thus, emergency economic measures have not only left intact but also aggravated existing social disparities and their connection to racism, patriarchy, anti-immigration sentiments, and colonial legacies. As the pandemic has progressed and provincial and territorial responses have evolved, government strategies continue to correlate strongly with neo-liberal, political, and economic common sense.

State responses to the pandemic have preserved and relied on colonial genocidal practices already in place, and these responses continue to affect Indigenous and racialized peoples and communities in tangible and devastating ways. As MALSOM AND TRIPURA write, the impact of COVID on Indigenous Peoples of Tripura, Northeastern India, are palpable. Similarly, through personal narratives, KHAN ET AL. poignantly describe the effects of COVID on queer, Indigenous, and racialized communities in Canada.

The effects of COVID on all our personal lives is undeniable. The pandemic has transformed our conceptions of work, home, school, the public and private, and so much more. These effects reveal, and continue to cement, social inequalities. Working and learning from home has become a new normal for many, and perhaps people have not always stopped to consider the structural class, race, and gender impacts of lockdowns nor have they seen the injustice of how their capacity to isolate is predicated on the labour of others, mostly racialized, migrant, and low-income workers who continue to labour in services deemed "essential," and in industries such as e-commerce (e.g. Amazon) and meat-packing that have been ongoing sources of outbreaks (Grant, 2021; Neustaeter, 2020; Wilson, 2021). Furthermore, state-instituted lockdowns have resulted in the further downloading of child- and elder-care responsibilities onto families and individuals in ways that perpetuate the neo-liberal and patriarchal condition of care work. Lockdowns have also, as GREIG AND HILLIER argue, aggravated conditions such as gender violence while securing hegemonic masculinity across private and public realms. ZHANG suggests that the impacts of the pandemic at the micro level are perhaps more insidious than we imagine. The pandemic has had concrete ontological effects on us, transforming our own conceptions of ourselves as subjects, citizens, students, teachers, workers, and so on (see also DIEBOLD, GRAND, BERROUARD, & PEARSON).

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[1]As of November 2021, an estimated 767,000 people have died of COVID in the United States, with the majority of the deaths taking place during the Trump administration (Allen et. al., 2020). The United States continues to be one of the hardest-hit nations.

[2] Over 22 million people in Brazil have contracted COVID and over 600,000 have died. In a speech to the nation on November 10, 2020, Bolsonaro stated, "I regret the deaths. I really do. But we're all going to die someday. There's no use fleeing reality" (Kenny, 2020). He then proceeded to use an outrageous homophobic slur to categorize those demanding action in the face of the public-health crisis. In November 2021, a panel instituted by the Brazilian Senate recommended bringing charges of crimes against humanity against Bolsonaro (Dunn & Laterzo, 2021).

While many of the articles in this volume focus on the deleterious impacts of the pandemic on our personal and public lives, the ontological effects of COVID are by no means without possibilities for transformation toward justice. As DAGENAIS-LESPÉRANCE AND CARON describe, COVID has created opportunities for disrupting domestic-public dichotomies and for developing transnational pluralist alliances. Similarly, MANTEI shows how COVID has transformed her research with children: though it posed significant barriers to pursuing her doctoral research as she had originally conceptualized it, it also created opportunities for transformative research that challenges adultist conceptions of childhood and that recognize children's capacities to assert political and social agency. As ARROW AND GRANT suggest, the pandemic has also shifted our understanding of ableist notions of social work labour and created opportunities for the radicalization, queering, and flexibilization of social work practice and field education. Arrow and Grant argue that the pandemic has opened up possibilities for queering white and colonial notions of time in social work field education (possibilities that were unavailable previous to the pandemic), leading to more inclusive, disability-justice, and learning-centred professional relationships.

COVID has had unprecedented effects on social work practice and activism. Social workers have found themselves at the forefront of pandemic practice, working with many vulnerablized communities while themselves dealing with increased demands related to balancing working from home and caregiving work with their own families and communities (e.g., JABER & CORDEIRO; KHAN ET AL.). The effects of the pandemic on social workers can also be tracked, as ALLEN, GEBHARD, & PINO argue, along race and gender lines in ways that not only reveal the way in which "clients" are impacted but also how social workers' capacity to offer effective support is determined by institutionalized racism and by social work's historical roots in carceral practices (see also PRESTON). Furthermore, working from home or remotely, with its technologically mediated character, has opened up social workers to further managerial and surveillance practices while they themselves rely on those same technologies to surveil clients and their families. As DIEBOLD ET AL. suggest, social work during the pandemic has resulted in circumstances in which social workers are required to negotiate state and agency demands and social discourses of heroism while attempting to develop opportunities for transformative solidarity and resistance.

Finally, the effects of COVID on social work education are yet to be fully grasped. Remote and online teaching and learning have reconceptualized education despite widespread arguments that platforms such as Zoom can make possible undisrupted learning despite the pandemic. Distance and remote education, as ZHANG argues, has allowed post-secondary educational institutions to impose and maintain a "business as usual" normativity that not only neatly fits within an ongoing neo-liberal reorganizing of the university but also relies heavily on disciplinary discourses of optimism (see also SIMANOVIC, CIOARȚĂ, JARDINE, & PAUL). Discourses of resilience and optimism, ZHANG continues, do not only ignore the living, working, and learning conditions affecting students during this pandemic. They also constitute self-regulating technologies that ultimately shape student and teacher's subjectivity. In the context of social work, the pressure to remain optimistic in view of ongoing struggles related to the pandemic and to remote education result in the sacrifice of social-justice educational agendas. While remote and technologically mediated practice and teaching are commonly presented as emergency measures, their long-term effects on social work seem unavoidable.

The Pandemic Social Work Special Issue

It is within the context of these multiple complexities that we invited interdisciplinary scholars, educators, students, and practitioners to reflect and theorize the effects of COVID-19 on social work practice, education, activism and community organizing, and on social and economic policy. Consistent with the aims and format of *Intersectionalities*, we explicitly invited contributions from social work practitioners and graduate and undergraduate students to be included in a Voices from the Trenches section of the issue. As you will see in the articles in the special issue, we accurately reasoned that social work practitioners, educators, and scholars were compelled to come to terms with the impact of this historical moment and the indelible effects it is having, not only in our/their personal and professional lives but also in the social, economic, and political systems within which we/they live, play, and work. Massive unemployment, economic crisis, the restructuring of work and school, and the reconfiguring of social, familiar, and intimate relationships suggest that COVID has not been simply a health crisis but that it has had far-reaching potentialities of transformation of social relations and systems that until recently seemed to be immutable. Furthermore, the pandemic has coincided with an upsurge of white supremacy and neo-conservatism, evidenced in acts of racial violence and white hate leading to the state-sanctioned death of Black, Indigenous, racialized, and migrant peoples. The pandemic simultaneously has seen a surge of anticolonial and anti-racist activisms, which have been articulated in new and creative ways. Social work was, and is, at a critical moment in which we asked authors to consider the impacts of the COVID pandemic on political activism, anti-racism work, and the very terrain in which pandemic social work takes place.

We sought contributions that unpacked the impacts of the pandemic and what the experience of practising and living in the pandemic has taught us about the future of social work. Several of the submissions focus on unpacking the effects of the pandemic on our understanding of interlocking relations of power, particularly how the crisis of COVID has impacted groups of people historically subalternized, marginalized, colonized, and oppressed by relations of racism, sexism, classism, ageism/adultism, sanism, ableism, colonization, casteism, heteronormativity (see ALLEN ET AL.; AVISSA; DAGENAIS-LESPÉRANCE & CARON; GREIG & HILLIER; JABER & CORDEIRA; KHAN, ET AL.; MALSOM & TRIPURA; MANTEI; PRESTON; SZTAINBOK). Several authors write about COVID and social and economic policies, and in particular reflect on austerity and other neo-liberal institutional policy responses that emerged as a result of the pandemic (see AVISSA; ALLEN ET AL.; GREIG & HILLIER; MALSOM & TRIPURA; SZTAINBOK; ZHANG). Some authors explore the biopolitical and necropolitical effects of the pandemic, and the ways in which responses to the COVID pandemic have (re)defined, (re)calculated, and (re)organized bodies and populations (see MALSOM & TRIPURA; SZTAINBOK; ZHANG). Several of the articles describe the impacts of COVID on the politics of care and the material reconfiguring of the labour of caring across different sites of practices (see ALLEN ET AL; DIEBOLD ET AL.; JABER & CORDEIRA; KHAN ET AL.; PRESTON). Similarly, authors interrogate how the crisis has reshaped critical and social justice–centred social work teaching, learning, research, and other forms of academic work (see ALLEN ET AL.; ARROW & GRANT; MANTEI; SIMANOVIC ET AL.; ZHANG). Finally, some authors offer insights into the relationships among COVID-19, activism, protest, and community organizing and their impacts on social work practice, education, and analysis (see ALLEN, ET AL.; ARROW & GRANT; AVISSA; DAGENAIS-LESPÉRANCE & CARON; GREIG & HILLIER; KHAN ET AL.; PRESTON; SIMANOVIC ET AL.).

We were fortunate to receive an impressive number of submissions originating from a variety of theoretical, methodological, and conceptual frameworks. We encourage readers to read and counter-read the articles, paying attention not only to their analyses of the pandemic as a historical conjuncture but also to their methodological and theoretical diversity and the way in which at times they blur traditional methodological divides in order to articulate a multiplicity of grounded and theoretical analyses. Authors in this volume, such as SZTAINBOK, ZHANG, AVISSA, and ARROW AND GRANT, bring post-structural lenses into the analysis of the political, economic, social, and professional context of the pandemic. They unpick the specificity of neo-liberal governmental rationalities, their reliance on racial necropolitical and biopolitical arrangements, their regulation of labour and time, and the processes of subjectification they uphold. These articles can be read along and in conversation with PRESTON's reflection on the possibilities of transformative and abolitionist social work practice, MANTEI's discussion of children's agency as forms of subject making, MALSOM AND TRIPURA's arguments about the connections between state responses to COVID and colonial practices, and SIMANOVIC ET AL.'s reflection on how the pandemic has impacted and transformed education in ways that are likely to be felt during the transition to a post-COVID period.

GREIG AND HILLIER and ALLEN ET AL. provide much-needed critical theory and materialist analyses of the pandemic, offering insightful analysis of its gender and race effects and making timely and necessary connections between the pandemic, patriarchy, and white supremacy. These papers can be read alongside empirical and reflexive contributions such as PRESTON's politically relevant discussion of carcerality and social work abolition, KHAN's discussion of the impact of COVID on queer, Indigenous, and racialized communities, and JABER AND CORDEIRO's interrogation of the possibilities and limitations of clinical practices as micro-practices taking place at a moment of macro proportions. Contributions such as that of DAGENAIS-LESPÉRANCE AND CARON further advance this structural and materialist analysis of the pandemic by bringing forward a decolonial and feminist analysis that calls attention to global politics of solidarity and encourages readers to look at the local in connection to the global.

It has been a true privilege to work with the authors as their work transitioned from idea to proposed abstract to final article. We have also been fortunate to count on the assistance of a group of dedicated and gracious anonymous reviewers without whose contribution this special issue would not have been possible. The breadth of topics included in this issue, the theories and the richness of the reflections and connections to practice and theory, illuminate the struggles and challenges that the COVID pandemic has posed for social work practice, education, and activism. They also elucidate the long-lasting effects of this unexpected and at times unpredictable pandemic moment on the future of social work.

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