

from global
framework to
local realities

reform proposals for
international social work
in a postcolonial
world

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**From Global Frameworks to Local Realities: Reform
Proposals for International Social Work in a Postcolonial
World**

Illustrated by the Example of Postcolonial Social Work in Uganda

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Luzern, im August 2024

Hochschule Luzern, Soziale Arbeit
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Abstract

The present bachelor's thesis examines the phenomenon of international social work in a postcolonial context. International social work has yet to realize its full potential to counteract the adverse effects of globalization, promote human rights, and social justice.

International social work is confronted with the complex relationship to the legacy of colonialism. In countries that were previously under colonial rule, social work has its roots in colonial structures. This has weakened functional indigenous social support systems. The Western-influenced systems are not aligned with the local context and, as a result, are not effectively addressing the needs of the communities. These structures were upheld and further developed through universalization and standardization tendencies in international social work. Colonialism was replaced by *professional imperialism*. This thesis aims to make a contribution to the resolution of this problem through the formulation of international social work reform proposals.

A case study of social work in Uganda revealed that international social work is confronted with another significant challenge: its inherent nation-state bound nature. In this challenge, non-governmental organizations play a pivotal role. In particular, transnational non-governmental organizations have the potential to transcend national boundaries and engage in transnational operations. Therefore, this thesis recommends that transnational NGOs become a future working field for international social work. When decolonized, they have the potential to strengthen the common commitment to advocate for an issue at the global or national political level as a common "global force".

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The entire thesis was a collaborative effort between Lisa Pfaffen and Samuel Zimmermann.

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List of Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DP	Democratic Party
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
ICSW	International Council on Social Welfare
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ISW	International Social Work
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
LDC	Least Developed Country
MNCs	Multinational Corporations
NRA	National Resistance Army
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PLHA	Individuals living with HIV and AIDS
SDA	Social Development Approach
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SW	Social Work
TNSW	Transnational Social Work
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UPC	Uganda People's Congress

1 Introduction

In the contemporary globalized world, rapid global developments cause many interconnected challenges and issues that transcend national boundaries. These global challenges are not limited to specific nation-states; rather, they encompass a wide array of issues. Of which include: the increasingly evident repercussions of climate change, the fallout of the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, humanitarian crises resulting from conflicts, and the ever-widening socio-economic disparity between more affluent and less developed regions of the world (Spitzer, , p. 43). As evidenced by the ongoing impact of the global pandemic, local social issues tend to intensify in the context of global crises (Rehklau & Lutz, 2009, p. 248). In light of these global challenges, it is imperative that the field of social work (SW) engage with international issues and concerns (Spitzer, 2019, p. 42). This call for internationalization within SW has significant and necessary implications, as we are confronted with substantial, transnational¹, and interrelated problems that demand global-level solutions. Since the practice, theory, and research of SW are invariably shaped by their respective national contexts (Gredig & Scherr, 2023, p. 215), it is of paramount importance to maintain a focus on local contexts within this broader international framework.

International social work (ISW) is regarded as a practice that is inherently interconnected on a global scale, with localized actions being of cardinal importance (Lutz & Stauss, 2016, p. 545). This approach to SW should reflect a *Eurocentric* perspective, engage with postcolonial critiques, and consider the professional viewpoints from historically marginalized regions. This thesis aims to examine the contemporary challenges facing ISW while also exploring the potential opportunities and limitations from a critical *Eurocentric* perspective. The aim is to contextualize these considerations within the historical colonial legacy and postcolonial dynamics. The primary focus of our research is to examine how SW in a country oppressed by colonialism is responding to the multiple challenges of the postcolonial era, including advocacy for indigenization in SW. Uganda was chosen as the country in which this issue was examined as an example. As a result of this thesis, reform proposals will be derived for the ISW to better fit and support local realities.

¹ The term “transnational” is used to describe a range of phenomena that transcend national boundaries, including migration, capital flows, technology transfers, and other forms of cross-border interaction. Such phenomena are effecting a transformation in the relationship between the national, the local, and the global, thereby creating new power structures and new relations (University of Oslo, 2010).

1.1 Objectives and Scope

The thesis's principal objective is to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the subject matter and current challenges of ISW practices and organizations. This entails a comprehensive examination of the opportunities and limitations inherent in ISW from a critically *Eurocentric* perspective. In this way, the thesis aims to draw attention to and examine the pervasive influence of *Eurocentric* norms and practices within ISW, offering a critical lens through which these issues can be understood and addressed. In view of the historical interconnection between colonialism and ISW, this thesis seeks to elucidate the manner in which SW in regions formerly colonized by Western powers, particularly in Uganda, responds to the complex challenges presented in the postcolonial era. This necessitates a comprehensive examination of the call for indigenization, investigating the ways in which local SW practices are adapting, and evolving in response to these challenges. The example of Uganda is employed to illustrate these dynamics, providing a concrete case study that clarifies both the challenges and the innovative approaches being employed to decolonize and indigenize SW practices. The foundational book for this thesis, *Indigenous and Innovative Social Work Practice: Evidence from East Africa*, serves as a pivotal reference point and can be regarded as the key work for this thesis. The evidence presented in this study is drawn from the work of East African researchers Janestic Mwendu Twikirize and Helmut Spitzer (2019).

1.2 Relevance to Professional Practice

The implications for professional endeavors in ISW are profound and multifaceted. The objective of this paper is to highlight the importance of several critical areas that are essential for the advancement of SW practice on a global scale, with a particular focus on the context of Uganda.

First and foremost, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge and tackle the postcolonial intricacies intrinsic to Uganda. The legacy of colonialism has resulted in the persistence of significant social, economic, and political challenges. It is imperative that professional social workers possess a keen awareness of these historical and ongoing issues to provide effective and culturally sensitive interventions. An understanding of the nuances of postcolonial contexts allows social workers to identify the sources of systemic inequalities and to develop strategies that promote justice and healing in communities that have been marginalized and oppressed (Tamburro, 2013, pp. 2–3).

Secondly, this paper underscores the significance of indigenization and the implementation of local methodologies in SW practices. The process of indigenization entails the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and values into the framework of SW. This approach respects and honors the cultural heritage of local communities while simultaneously enhancing the relevance

and effectiveness of SW interventions. By adopting local methodologies, social workers can ensure that their practices are firmly rooted in the lived experiences and realities of the communities they serve, thereby fostering trust and collaboration. This approach challenges the dominance of Western-centric models of SW, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable practice that values diverse perspectives and eschews the dominance of a single, Western perspective (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, pp. 1–2).

Thirdly, the paper presents a series of proposed reforms that are designed to effectively address global adversities through the implementation of localized strategies. The interconnectivity of global issues such as poverty, climate change, and migration necessitate a global perspective and a local approach for social workers. By adapting interventions to the particular requirements and circumstances of local communities, social workers can facilitate the development of more sustainable and effective solutions. This entails advocating for policies that address the root causes of social issues, promoting community-led development, and fostering partnerships with local organizations and stakeholders. The objective of these reforms is to empower communities, enhance their resilience, and promote social justice on a broader scale (Dominelli, 2023, pp. 2–4).

Finally, the overarching aim of this paper is to contribute to the ongoing discourse in ISW by providing insights and recommendations that are both theoretically grounded and practically applicable. It seeks to advance the field of SW by promoting culturally sensitive, contextually relevant practices capable of addressing the complex challenges faced by communities in East Africa, especially Uganda.

1.3 Research Questions

This thesis will address the following main research questions, each probing different facets of ISW and its evolving role in addressing global and local challenges. These questions are designed to explore the meaning, challenges, historical development, and future reform needs of ISW, with a particular focus on contexts influenced by colonial histories.

1. *What is the meaning of international social work?*
2. *What are the challenges and dilemmas of international social work?*
3. *How has social work developed in countries where it emerged under colonialism and what challenges does social work still face today? Illustrated by the example of Uganda.*
4. *How does international social work need to reform to address global challenges at the local level?*

1.4 Target Audience

This thesis is intended for academics, practitioners, and policymakers engaged in SW, with a particular focus on those interested in the international dimensions of the profession and its development in postcolonial contexts. The objective is to provide insights that are relevant for both theoretical exploration and practical application. By addressing these questions and focusing on the highlighted areas, this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the necessity for a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive practice in ISW. The objective is to enhance the profession's capacity to effectively address global challenges in a manner that respects and integrates local contexts and knowledge.

1.5 Delimitation

In the process of structuring this thesis, it became evident that the topic of religious denomination, while highly significant in the context of Uganda, could not be addressed within the scope of this work. The impact of religious denominations on SW practices, both historically and in the present era, is indisputably significant. Nevertheless, a comprehensive investigation of this aspect would necessitate a detailed examination that extends beyond the scope of this study. Consequently, while acknowledging its significance, the decision was made to exclude a analysis of denominational influences in order to maintain focus on the core themes of decolonization, indigenization, and the professionalization of ISW. This approach ensures a more manageable and focused analysis, allowing for a deeper exploration of the selected topics within the constraints of this thesis.

2 Methodology

The aforementioned research questions are addressed in this thesis through a review of the primary literature. A substantial corpus of literature in the English language exists on the topic of ISW in the context of postcolonialism. The following authors are identified as key contributors to the field: James Midgely, Mel Gray, Ronald G. Walton, Medhat M. Abo El Nasr, Faisal Ahmed, Cathleen Faruque, Kawaku Osei-Hwedie, Rodreck Mupedziswa, Jan Fook, John Coats, Nigel Hall, Lynne M. Healy, Karen Lyons, Terry Hokenstad, Janestic Mwendu Twikirize, and Helmut Spitzer. Additionally, there is a substantial corpus of German-language literature that has been partially integrated into the thesis. The authors who have written the most about ISW in a postcolonial context in the German language are Ronald Lutz, Christine Rehlau, and Leonie Wagner. The authors of this study were not frequently confronted with ISW and SW in other countries during their coursework. Consequently, the method of primary literature research has been augmented by interviews with experts of African Studies, International Cooperation and Development, and SW in Uganda. These interviews were conducted for knowledge acquisition and joint discussion of the topic, rather than empirical research. The interviews have not been subjected to analysis in the present thesis but serve as background knowledge. The content of these interviews is not directly quoted or referenced in this text. Instead, all information derived from the interviews has been referenced with additional literature sources.

3 International Social Work

ISW represents a specialized field within the broader discipline of SW, characterized by its focus on addressing global challenges through advocacy, policy engagement, and practice that transcends national borders (Frampton, 2019, p. 31). This chapter delves into the multiple dimensions of ISW, providing a comprehensive overview that illuminates its role in shaping SW practices worldwide and tries to answer the question: *What is International Social Work?*

An understanding of ISW necessitates a comprehensive examination of its historical context, the paradigms that have shaped its evolution, the organizations that have influenced its practice, and the connection with the process of professionalization. This chapter provides a structured overview of these essential elements, laying the groundwork to deepen the analysis of its dilemmas and potential in chapter 4.

3.1 Definition of International Social Work

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the field of ISW, it is first necessary to define the term and situate it within its historical context. This historical lens is of great importance, as it reveals the evolution of SW practices across different cultures and eras. By examining the historical trajectory, we gain a clearer understanding of how SW has been shaped by various social, political, and economic forces.

It's crucial to distinguish between two concepts: The *Global Definition of Social Work*² and the *Definition of International Social Work*. The former is a globally agreed-upon definition aiming to encapsulate SW practice universally, from Albania to Zimbabwe, carefully phrased to apply to local practices in any country. The latter describes a specific subset of SW that focuses on activities and perspectives that are international in scope, excluding practices that are entirely local or national (Frampton, 2019, p. 31). In the "Social Work Dictionary" by Barker (2014), ISW is described as "the transfer between countries of methods or knowledge about social work" (p. 194). International SW, as an evolving discipline, defines a singular, definitive description due to its expansive scope and the diverse contexts in which it operates. At its core, it embodies a commitment to address global challenges through advocacy, policy engagement, and practice that transcends national borders. This dedication is rooted in a

² The Global Definition of Social Work was adopted by the IFSW General Assembly and the IASSW General Assembly in July 2014 and is as follows:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels. (University of Oslo, 2010)

foundational framework that prioritizes human rights, social justice, and the dignity of all people (Truell & Jones, n.d., p. 3). The field has emerged in response to the interconnectedness of today's world, recognizing that issues such as poverty, inequality, and oppression are not confined by geographical boundaries (Gray, 2005, p. 233). It calls for social workers to adopt an international perspective, understanding the global context of their work to effectively make a difference. This perspective is not solely for those aiming to work in development aid or international practice but is crucial for all social workers to develop a critical understanding of international development and its implications on the practice of SW (Cox & Pawar, 2013, p. 93).

Key to this field is the challenge of eradicating "professional imperialism", where practices rooted in Western perspectives risk being imposed on diverse cultures without sensitivity or humility. Thus, ISW emphasizes the importance of cultural competence, advocating for methods that are responsive to local needs and resisting the homogenization of practice (Gray et al., 2007, p. 55). The internationalization of SW has been driven by the desire to reduce dependency on national mandates, to define itself, and to become a relevant force for social change at local, national, and international levels. These efforts have gained renewed momentum and significance in recent years due to the challenges posed by globalization and migration, underscoring their relevance and importance in the contemporary context (UNESCO, 2010, p. 169).

Discussing ISW means weaving together diverse elements into a unified concept, necessitating an exploration of varied perspectives and dialogues within the SW sphere as highlighted by scholars like Midgley (1981, 2001), Lyons (1999, 2006), Healy (2008), Hokenstad and Midgley (2004), Cox and Pawar (2005), Lyons et al. (2006), and Dominelli (2007). This includes insights from historically marginalized regions and communities, emphasizing the need for SW practices that are indigenous and authentic (Walton & Abo El Nasr, 1988, p. 148), and advocating for approaches that are anti-imperial, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive (May, 1999, p. 64). Synthesizing these viewpoints reveals four critical dimensions of international SW, underscoring its complex and multifaceted nature (Hugman et al., 2010, p. 632). First, it involves social workers practicing in countries other than their own, historically marking a flow of knowledge from wealthier, industrialized nations to less economically developed (Midgley, 1983, p. 32). Second, it includes work with immigrant communities, focusing on assimilating them into host country cultures (Hugman et al., 2010, p. 632). Third, it is about engaging with international organizations to address global social issues (Hugman et al., 2010, p. 633). Lastly, it entails cross-national collaborations to share SW practices and knowledge (Hugman et al., 2010, p. 633).

The complexity of ISW, comprising numerous interrelated elements, is evidenced by a survey conducted in 2000. This survey, which queried 400 social workers from 40 countries, aimed to assess their comprehension of ISW (Lyons, 2005, p. 208). The findings of this study provide a definition of ISW that is oriented toward practice; therefore demonstrating its importance by not solely focusing on the theoretical but working with the application of its approach. A review of the responses to these surveys reveals the following categories: intercultural SW/migration SW, commitment to human rights and social justice, participation in international events or exchange programs, gaining familiarity with diverse structures, policies, practices, and cultures, as well as the role of international organizations (K. Lyons, 2005, p. 208). This entailed both the exchange of professional expertise for the advancement of theory and practice, as well as the collaborative development of international regulations by organizations with an international presence. ISW opportunities include attending international conferences, participating in excursions and exchange programs, conducting joint research and practice projects, and involvement in international governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Wagner, 2015, p. 85).

3.1.1 The Beginning of International Social Work

The origin of ISW provides the context for understanding its development and transformation over time. This section examines the origins of SW, tracing its roots from early charitable movements to its formalization as a profession. By situating ISW within a historical context, we can gain insight into the foundational principles that continue to influence contemporary practice.

The history of ISW is characterized by significant events and meetings that influenced the development and exchange of social practices and theories on a global level. The beginnings of international social congresses date back to the 19th century. The first significant events were the charity congresses that took place between 1856 and 1863 in cities such as Brussels, Frankfurt, London, and Berlin. These early congresses attracted participants from many countries and laid the foundations for international exchange in SW. An outstanding event was the 1928 International Conference on Welfare and Social Policy in Paris. This conference, which is considered the pinnacle of the cosmopolitanism of SW, attracted around 5000 participants from 42 countries. It illustrated the global reach and commitment to SW and led to the founding of several international organizations such as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), both of which played a central role in promoting international exchange. Many international standards have been established by these organizations, the specifics of which will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters (Lutz & Wagner, 2009, pp. 16–24).

The historical development of ISW reveals a rich tapestry of cross-border exchanges, influence, and evolution, strongly shaped by the Western perspective. From the late 19th century, Western nations, notably from Western Europe and the United States, have been pivotal in exporting their SW models to other parts of the world (Kruse, 2009, p. 16). This exportation often occurred through colonial and post-colonial channels, where Western methods were implemented to structure social services in various regions, sometimes overshadowing indigenous practices (Cox & Pawar, 2013, p. 8). As SW education proliferated, international conferences and exchanges became instrumental in shaping the profession globally. Notably, the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), starting in the early 20th century, facilitated the spread of Western SW ideals and practices across continents, contributing to the professionalization and standardization of SW internationally (Rehklau & Lutz, 2009, p. 42). However, by the mid-20th century, critiques emerged against the dominance of Western SW models, advocating for indigenization (this term is explained in chapter 4.4.1) to align practices with non-Western cultural and socio-economic realities. This shift led to the integration of local knowledge into SW, although Western influence remains significant. This topic will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

As the 21st century progressed, global developments introduced novel challenges that have further shaped the evolution of ISW. The worldwide impact of the 2008 financial crisis, the rapid advancement of digitalization and technology, and the increasingly visible consequences of climate change are illustrative of the issues that transcend national boundaries and demand international cooperation (Spitzer, 2019, p. 43). Furthermore, the widening economic disparity between industrialized capitalist nations and countries and less industrialized has contributed to the intensification of global migration patterns, thereby reinforcing the necessity for ISW in addressing these cross-border challenges. The ascendance of neoliberal³ ideologies, which pervade economic globalization, has progressively eroded the efficacy of political and welfare state actions, thereby reshaping labor markets and social policies on a global scale (Spitzer, 2019, p. 46). In response to these global dynamics, ISW has had to adapt its approach to better address the challenges faced by those who have been marginalized by economic and social inequalities, a group that has been increasingly at the forefront of global dynamics. This has highlighted the necessity of an internationalized and critically reflective SW practice that addresses global challenges through a lens of social justice and human rights. In this way, ISW has evolved into a key player in advocating for global standards and policies, thereby becoming a vital force in addressing the complexities of a globalized world (Spitzer, 2019, p. 48).

The historical journey of ISW is marked by efforts to balance universal professional standards with the need to adapt to diverse cultural contexts. This ongoing dialogue between global standardization and local adaptation continues to shape the field, highlighting the need for a sensitive approach that respects both global interconnectedness and local specificities.

3.1.2 Western Influence and Eurocentrism

A critical examination of ISW must address the influence of Western thoughts and the paradigm of *Eurocentrism*, which have shaped the discipline in significant ways. Historically, SW has been predominantly shaped by Western ideologies, which have often overshadowed local practices and knowledge systems in non-Western contexts (Gobena et al., 2023, p. 2). This section employs a critical analysis to examine the impact of Western dominance on ISW and to highlight the importance of deconstructing these biases in order to foster more inclusive and relevant practices globally (Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2019, p. 799).

Western influence in ISW has been both profound and complex, characterized by the exportation of educational models and professional practices primarily from Europe and North America to other parts

³ Neoliberalism is an ideology and policy model that emphasizes free market competition (Smith, 2024). Neoliberalism is an ideology and policy model that emphasizes free market competition (Smith, 2024)

of the world. This influence began during the colonial era and continued through the efforts of Western-based international organizations and educational institutions. These entities played a crucial role in the initial establishment and subsequent development of SW in various countries, often aligned with Western theories and methodologies (Ibrahima & Mattaini, 2019, p. 801). The dialogue about Western influence is not only about critique but also about understanding the positive contributions and learning from the past mistakes. It involves recognizing the dynamic interplay between global influences and local needs, ensuring that ISW practice is both internationally informed and locally adaptable (Gobena et al., 2023, p. 11).

The Paradigm of Eurocentrism

The concept of *Eurocentrism* has been defined in various ways, but it is essentially a worldview that positions Europe as the primary driving force and architect of global history, the epitome of universal values and reason, and the pinnacle of progress and development (Kitchin & Thrift, 2009, p. 638). *Eurocentric* narratives tend to prioritize European achievements in economic, political, technological, and quality-of-life domains, which are frequently utilized as benchmarks for global development. However, this perspective is not merely an ethnocentric bias; it is deeply rooted in the colonial and imperial encounters that justified the subjugation and exploitation of non-European societies (Araújo & Maeso, 2015, p. 34).

Eurocentrism has facilitated a worldview wherein European and subsequently Euro-American cultures and systems are perceived as the ultimate models to be emulated. This mindset has pervaded numerous domains, including SW, where Western practices and models have frequently been imposed on diverse cultural contexts without sufficient adaptation. This imposition has resulted in the marginalization of indigenous knowledge and practices, which are crucial for addressing local needs effectively (Kitchin & Thrift, 2009, p. 638). In conventional *Eurocentric* accounts, Europe is depicted as the source of significant advancements in agriculture, culture, economy, politics, and science, including capitalism, democracy, and industrial and medical revolutions. The terms “the rise of Europe” and “the European miracle” (Kitchin & Thrift, 2009, p. 638) reflect these *Eurocentric* models of history and development, which attribute Europe’s so-called rise to its social and environmental qualities, such as inventiveness, rationality, and propensity for abstract thought. In consequence to this perceived historical movement, the term “Europe” has evolved into the term “West” and now the term “Global North⁴”,

⁴ In this work, the terms “Global North” and “Global South” are deliberately avoided due to their intrinsic connotations that perpetuate colonial mindsets. Moses Isooba, the Executive Director of the Uganda National NGO Forum, posits that such terminology frequently serves to reinforce a dichotomy that is deeply rooted in historical power imbalances. Such terms not only perpetuate a narrative of superiority versus inferiority but also

which encompasses not only Europe but also white settler societies like the United States, Canada, Australia, and Japan. These fluid geographic imaginaries, though sometimes ambiguous, are consistently used to define global development standards. This repetitive use reinforces the idea that European and Euro-American values and systems are universally applicable and superior (Kitchin & Thrift, 2009, p. 640).

It is of the utmost importance to recognize and challenge *Eurocentrism* to deconstruct these biases and promote more inclusive and culturally relevant SW practices. This involves a commitment to valuing and integrating local knowledge systems and practices, ensuring that SW is responsive to the diverse needs of communities around the world (Adade Williams et al., 2020, p. 331).

3.2 Organizations Related to International Social Work

ISW is not only defined by theoretical frameworks but also by the organizations that promote and regulate its practice. Organizations such as the IFSW, IASSW, and the ICSW facilitate cross-cultural dialogue, build global networks, and collaborate on international policies, aiming to uplift the profession's influence on global stages and contribute to societal transformation. These organizations have achieved a formal consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, as well as other affiliated United Nations (UN) agencies (Truell & Jones, n.d., p. 5). Over their 80-plus years, these three organizations have engaged in various degrees of cooperation. They share ownership of the "International Social Work" journal and have co-hosted numerous regional and global conferences. Together, IASSW and IFSW have issued several key documents, including the Global Standards for Social Work, ethical principles statement, and Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (IFSW, 2020). They recognize the importance of aligning SW with education, practice, and sustainable development, fostering broader partnerships with networks like the Social Work Health Inequalities Network and the Commonwealth Organization for Social Work, and engaging with service user groups (Truell & Jones, n.d., p. 6).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the international dimension of SW, this chapter examines three key international organizations that have a significant influence on the development of ISW policies, standards, and practices.

undermine the agency and knowledge of those from so-called "Global South" regions. In his document "Decolonizing Aid: The Use of Language and Lexicon" (Isooba, n.d.) he emphasizes the importance of language in shaping systems and advocates for the abolition of neo-colonial clichés and the adoption of more inclusive terms.

3.2.1 United Nations

The UN plays a pivotal role in the shaping and support of ISW through the implementation of comprehensive frameworks on human rights and sustainable development. The UN's dedication to promoting social justice, human rights, and sustainable development is in close alignment with the fundamental tenets of SW (IFSW, 2024). The UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) serves as a foundational document, outlining fundamental rights and freedoms to which all individuals are entitled. This declaration has been instrumental in guiding SW practices globally, emphasizing the importance of human dignity, equality, and social justice (UN, 1948). Social workers frequently utilize the principles espoused in the declaration to advance the rights of marginalized and vulnerable populations. In addition to the Universal Declaration, various international covenants and conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1966a) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN, 1966b), provide specific frameworks for the protection of human rights. These documents are of paramount importance in addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination, which are central concerns in SW (UN, 1966b).

Furthermore, the establishment of regional human rights conventions exemplifies a dedication to contextualizing human rights within particular geographical and cultural contexts. These regional frameworks, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1979), the Arab Charter on Human Rights, or the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012), reflect the diverse approaches to human rights across different regions. Such frameworks are designed to address the specific challenges faced in different regions and to ensure the protection of human rights in the context of diverse cultural norms. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, provide a comprehensive agenda for global development, targeting 17 key areas to be achieved by 2030 (UN, 2003, p. 72). These goals encompass a broad range of issues, including poverty eradication, quality education, gender equality, and climate action, all of which are pertinent to SW (UN, 2015).

Social workers are instrumental in advancing these goals through the implementation of community-based programs, advocacy for policy changes, and engagement in international collaborations aimed at promoting sustainable development. The SDGs highlight the interconnectivity of global challenges and the necessity for integrated approaches that consider the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development (IFSW, 2021). The UN engages in collaborative efforts with various specialized agencies and programs to facilitate SW initiatives. Prominent agencies include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Program, and the World Health

Organization, among others. These agencies provide resources, technical assistance, and policy guidance that enhance the capacity of social workers to address global challenges effectively (UN, n.d.).

3.2.2 International Federation of Social Workers

The IFSW, is a worldwide organization dedicated to the promotion of social justice, human rights, and social development. It achieves these aims through enhancing SW practices, establishing the best practices, and fostering global collaboration among social workers and their associations. Its members unite under the organization to purpose the profession's collective objectives and tackle global issues relevant to social workers (Hall, 2012, p. 275). Established in 1956, succeeding an organization dating back to 1932, IFSW operates as a non-profit, comprising national SW organizations (IFSW, 2016, p. 1). It is dedicated to facilitating sustainable social outcomes, emphasizing partnerships, action, policy development, and advocacy (IFSW, 2016, p. 1). Members, adhering to rigorous ethical standards, engage in efforts to enhance professional practices and address global issues (IFSW, 2016, p. 2). Governed by democratic principles, IFSW's structure includes a General Assembly and an Executive Committee, ensuring broad representation and accountability (IFSW, 2016, pp. 3–5). Through collaboration with various stakeholders, including UN bodies, IFSW strives to uphold the dignity of all individuals and communities, making a critical contribution to societal well-being and future generations (IFSW, 2016, pp. 2–3).

3.2.3 International Association of Schools of Social Work

The IASSW unites SW education institutions, tertiary SW programs, and educators globally. It champions SW education development, sets educational standards, and encourages international exchanges and forums for sharing research (Healy, 2012, p. 281). With UN advisory status, IASSW represents SW education internationally, promoting human rights and social development. It is guided by a board under statutes approved in general assemblies, focusing on excellence in SW education and fostering a global community of educators through various initiatives, including conferences, publications, UN representation, and funding cross-national projects (IASSW, 2015a). The IASSW envisions promoting excellence in global SW education, research, and scholarship, aiming for a more just and equitable world. It represents institutions and educators in SW, fostering a community engaged in SW education. The IASSW mission emphasizes representation, community building, mutual exchange of resources, and advocacy for educational strategies supporting social justice. It commits to human rights principles outlined by the UN pushing for social justice and development, while encouraging cooperation and collegiality among members (IASSW, 2015b).

3.2.4 International Council on Social Welfare

The ICSW distinguishes itself from IFSW and IASSW by being interdisciplinary and welcoming both professional and laymembers. It serves as a global NGO, uniting a broad array of member organizations focused on enhancing social welfare, justice, and development (Healy & Hall, 2007, p. 19). The ICSW prioritizes reducing hardship and vulnerability, particularly among disadvantaged communities. It represents numerous organizations aiding those facing poverty and deprivation, enhancing their ability to manage life's challenges. As a modern overarching organization, ICSW empowers members towards active societal participation and collaborates with civil societies, governments, academia, and international bodies to realize its vision. ICSW champions dignity for all, advocating for universal human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment as central to its mission (ICSW, 2020).

The council acts as a bridge, uniting diverse issues and regions while mobilizing partnerships to influence social and economic policies globally. Its core activities encompass information dissemination, research, organizing seminars, drawing from grassroots experiences, strengthening Civil Society Organizations (CSO), developing policy proposals, public advocacy, and collaboration with policymakers. With the highest consultative status at the UN, ICSW amplifies its members' voices in international platforms, actively contributing to commissions on social development and women's status. The Global Cooperation Newsletter and regional publications keep members informed on socio-economic developments and organizational activities (ICSW, 2020).

3.2.5 Professionalization through Organizations of International Social Work

These organizations are instrumental in promoting universal standards for education and practice, aiming to establish SW as a globally recognized profession, through the development and dissemination of global standards and by advancing SW scientifically, practically, and politically (IFSW & IASSW, 2020, p. 18).

However, creating such global standards often entails challenges, especially when aligning them with the diverse socio-cultural contexts of countries with varying levels of economic development and different historical and cultural backgrounds. These standards have historically been influenced by Western perspectives, which can lead to misalignment with practices in non-Western countries. Faraque & Ahmed (2013) emphasize the importance of considering the diverse contexts in different countries (p. 66). Although these standards have evolved and become more representative with the recent 2020 revision, the perspectives of former colonized regions remain underrepresented. In order to ensure that all regions can effectively meet these standards, a dynamic and ongoing process of developing these standards is important; the process appears to be more important to professionalization than

the standards themselves (Faraque & Ahmed, 2013, p. 67). Additionally in the process of professionalization, there remains a critical need to remain cautious of oversimplification through standardization. Such oversimplification can hinder the profession's ability to respond effectively to local needs and may obstruct future development (Faraque & Ahmed, 2013, p. 66).

In summary, while ISW contributes significantly to the professionalization of SW by fostering global standards and striving to shape it as a global profession, it is essential to ensure that these standards are inclusive and adaptable across different cultural contexts to enable SW to operate effectively worldwide and address global challenges through a united, professional force.

3.3 Interim Conclusion

Considering the preceding chapter, an answer to the question of what ISW is, could be provided as follows: ISW encompasses a multifaceted set of activities, including practicing in countries other than one's own, working with immigrant communities, engaging with international organizations, and participating in cross-national collaborations. These activities are driven by the imperatives of global interconnectedness and the universal pursuit of social justice. At the heart of ISW lies the commitment to human rights, social justice, and the inherent dignity of all people. The historical exploration of ISW underscores the complexity of its evolution, marked by a significant Western influence that has both shaped and been reshaped by global dialogues. Currently, ISW seeks to strike a balance between establishing universal professional standards and adapting to the cultural specifics of different regions. The development and influence of ISW are significantly shaped by key organizations such as the IASSW and IFSW. These organizations play crucial roles in promoting education, professional standards, and ethical practices across the global SW community and within nation-states. They facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, thereby contributing to the professionalization of SW and enhancing its effectiveness on a global scale.

One of the critical issues addressed in ISW is the challenge of professional imperialism. This term refers to the tendency to impose Western SW models on non-Western contexts without adequate adaptation. ISW must advocate for methods that respect and integrate local customs and knowledge systems, thereby avoiding the pitfalls of cultural imposition and fostering practices that are genuinely responsive to local needs. This points to a first dilemma in which ISW finds itself. The subsequent chapter will address further dilemmas and potential solutions.

4 Potentiality and Challenges of International Social Work

ISW embodies a unique blend of significant potentials and substantial challenges, situated within the complex dynamics of a globally interconnected world (Gray, 2005, p. 231). This chapter seeks to answer the pivotal question: *What are the potentials and challenges of international social work?* By exploring this query, we aim to uncover the dual nature of ISW, while offering vast opportunities for tackling global issues and enhancing intercultural collaboration. ISW also contends with profound obstacles, deeply influenced by historical and ongoing dynamics such as colonialism (Gray, 2005, p. 232). This chapter will explore these potentials and challenges in detail.

4.1 Potentials of International Social Work

As early as 1930, Alice Salomon identified the necessity of “international welfare work” (Wagner, 2015, p. 83). In an article entitled *Why International Welfare Work is Necessary* (Wagner, 2015, p. 83/own translation) she posits that the advent of modern technologies has resulted in a shrinking world, facilitating the free movement of people and goods across the globe. The globalization of people and nations has had a mixed impact. The potential for conflict and destruction has increased, yet there is also an opportunity for genuine cooperation and collaboration to facilitate mutual assistance and the development of a robust global community (Salomon, 1930; qtd. in Wagner 2015 pp. 83-84). Building on these foundational ideas, the potential of ISW becomes apparent. The following chapter illuminates these potentials in the context of globalization, international engagement and exchange of knowledge, and through the lens of the developmental approach.

4.1.1 Globalization

Alice Salomon considered globalization as a driver for ISW (Salomon, 1930; qtd. in Wagner 2015, pp. 83-84). To derive the potential of ISW, it makes sense to start by looking more closely at the process of globalization.

Since the 1990s, the term *globalization* has gained prominence as a buzzword in various fields. However, it initially did not garner significant attention in SW, as it was not perceived as a relevant concept within the discipline (Lyons, 2006, p. 365). The prevailing view was that local needs required local responses within the context of specific national laws and by individuals who were familiar with the indigenous cultures and regional ethnic groups in question (Lyons, 2006, p. 366). Nevertheless, it is currently asserted that globalization exerts an influence on all societies and their constituent elements, affecting welfare systems and SW practices through a multiplicity of regional and global impacts (Lyons, 2006, p. 366). Globalization has contributed to the exacerbation of social injustice within and

between nation-states, resulting in a widening gap between the wealthy and the impoverished, both at the individual and national levels. This has resulted in a shift in the conceptualization of welfare states, moving away from a foundation of solidarity towards a more neoliberal understanding. This has contributed to the precarity of living conditions. Social workers are now tasked with providing support to individuals facing these precarious circumstances, which were previously addressed by collective networks based on solidarity (Wagner, 2015, pp. 86–87). Additionally, national-level SW issues are frequently the result of international factors (Wagner, 2015, p. 84).

Globalization can be defined as the process of a transnational networking of different actors, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away, and vice versa (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). The definition of globalization is a challenging one, yet it is often linked to economic activities. Some have gone as far as to define economic activity as the “lynchpin” (Khan & Dominelli, 2000, p. 96). The following aspects of globalization are particularly relevant to SW:

- The relocation of production processes: rich, former colonial powers from Western Europe relocate the production to developing poorer countries. This is driven by the pursuit of cheaper labor and fewer regulations, which in turn influence the global economic landscape (Lyons, 2006, p. 366).
- The proliferation of transnational corporations and multinational corporations (MNCs): These entities operate beyond the control of individual states, exerting influence over global economies and policies. Such actions frequently result in environmental concerns and social implications (Podolskaya & Alekseeva, 2021, pp. 19–20).
- The liberalization of financial markets: The actions of institutions such as the IMF and World Bank have resulted in market volatility, increased inequality, and financial crises. This has led to a concentration of power among MNCs and wealthy investors, while undermining vulnerable populations (Ghosh, 2005, pp. 22–29).
- Technological advancements: The reduction of transport and communication costs, facilitation of economic growth, and integration of global economies. State interventions, particularly during wartime, have constituted a significant factor in the advancement of technology (Boiko, 2019, pp. 7–9).
- The increasing diversity of cultures around the globe: The movement of people driven by economic necessity, political conflict, and social inequality has increased intercultural diversity within local and national populations, presenting challenges and opportunities for SW (ILO, 2021, pp. 12–13; Lyons, 2006, p. 366; Wagner, 2015, p. 87).

Globalization exerts a profound influence on a range of social phenomena, including cultural exchanges, power dynamics, and the marginalization of minorities. These processes exacerbate inter-ethnic conflicts and broader social challenges (Lyons, 2006, p. 368). It is incumbent upon social workers to address these transnational issues, which require the development of intercultural competence to ensure the effective support of marginalized minorities (Wagner, 2015, p. 86). Considering the globalization of SW, ISW must address global challenges and work across borders. Social workers must possess knowledge of global issues and the ability to collaborate and provide effective solutions (Wagner, 2015, pp. 84–87).

4.1.2 International Engagement and International Exchange of Knowledge

As described in chapter 3.2.5, ISW is through its organizations a crucial element in the advancement of the professionalization of SW on a global scale. International cooperation allows SW to reinforce its foundational knowledge base, refine its methodological approaches, and enhance its overall efficacy. In the context of emergency and disaster response, as well as peacebuilding efforts, international engagement is of critical importance. Those engaged in SW in these areas may benefit from international training and standards, which could enhance their ability to respond more effectively to complex crises and contribute to global peace initiatives (Wagner, 2015, p. 89–90).

Through an international exchange of knowledge and experience, it becomes possible to reconsider one's own position. This allows for a questioning of the status quo and the acquisition of knowledge regarding new solutions. This enables collaboration to enhance the professional foundations and social and political framework conditions (Wagner, 2015, p. 83). Therefore, International cooperation can advance the science of SW and lead to more informed and legitimate SW (Wagner, 2015, p. 89). It is crucial for SW to assume an active role in international affairs, particularly given the political mandate that ISW has acquired. To achieve this, SW must become involved at the international level. An international exchange of knowledge makes it possible to learn from each other. It especially enables the identification of themes which are relevant for SW in different contexts, different countries or regions, and to promote community activity and support.

Today, the international orientation of social workers usually stems from their own interest and commitment. It is not a product of study or practice and is typically not even exemplified (Wagner, 2015, p. 93). Furthermore, ISW, particularly through international exchange and collaboration, can demonstrate that practitioners are adequately equipped to address contemporary challenges and to adopt a global perspective. The potential of ISW lies in its capacity to foster international cooperation and to enhance the profession's ability to advocate for social justice and human rights on a global scale. By

participating in international forums and engaging with global issues, social workers facilitate the formation of a more interconnected and understanding world. Such engagement is crucial in promoting global well-being and addressing significant social challenges through collective action.

4.1.3 Social Development Approach

The *Social Development Approach* (SDA) in SW places a premium on the profession's role in addressing not only the immediate needs of individuals and communities but also the broader social and economic structures that contribute to these needs. This approach underscores the importance of social workers engaging in both micro-level interventions, such as supporting individuals and families, and macro-level efforts, such as influencing social policies and advocating for systemic change (Petersen & Pretorius, 2022, p. 133). The SDA necessitates that social workers bridge the divide between the micro and macro levels of social organization. This entails expanding their interventions to encompass community and institutional levels, with the objective of influencing societal and political decision-making processes. Social workers frequently confront the adverse effects of globalization, such as insecure employment, poverty, and social disintegration, primarily at the micro-level. Occasionally, they extend their scope to the meso-level, engaging with communities and institutions. However, they currently have limited influence on macro-level political and social processes, which is crucial for achieving broader social change (Spitzer, 2019, p. 54). James Midgley, a prominent advocate of this perspective, characterizes SW as a catalyst for social change, emphasizing the necessity for social workers to actively engage in political processes and critically examine power dynamics in order to advance social justice and human rights (Androff & Caplan, 2018, p. 4).

A crucial element of the SDA is the acknowledgment that global challenges, such as economic inequalities, migration, and environmental issues, necessitate collaborative efforts across various levels and actors. Social workers are uniquely positioned to address these challenges because their work at the local level is directly influenced by and impacts international realities (UN & United Nations, 2008, p. 11). By embracing a SDA, SW can contribute significantly to sustainable global development and the universal respect for human rights, aligning with the profession's commitment to social justice and ethical practice (Spitzer, 2019, p. 55).

The link to ISW can therefore be made as follows: SDA within ISW has the potential to address global challenges in a comprehensive and integrated manner and offers a promising strategy for addressing these issues. This approach addresses not only the immediate needs of individuals and communities, but also the systemic issues that perpetuate social inequalities and injustices on a global scale. By connecting the dots between micro-level SW practice and macro-level policy influence, SDA empowers

social workers to drive broader societal change. The SDA is particularly effective because it aligns with the profession's global mandate to promote social justice and human rights. ISW practitioners are uniquely positioned to understand and address the complex interrelationships between local and global forces. Their work at the grassroots level provides invaluable insights into the tangible effects of international policies, economic systems, and social structures in the real world. Integrating these insights into broader development initiatives is a promising way to increase the effectiveness of ISW in promoting sustainable development and addressing the root causes of social problems.

4.2 Challenges of International Social Work

The following chapter examines the challenges posed by the paradoxical processes inherent to ISW, as well as the intricate interrelationship between ISW and colonialism. Gray (2005) characterizes the position of ISW as “on the horns of a threepronged dilemma” (p. 231). This dilemma, as she describes it, arises from the processes surrounding indigenization, universalism, and ISW in context of Colonialism and Imperialism. These three processes are mutually dependent but simultaneously exhibit a tendency to diverge in other directions. The trajectory toward indigenization can give rise to conflicts with endeavors to establish universal standards in SW. Moreover, these tensions are further compounded by international initiatives that may unwittingly advance a Western-centric approach under the disguise of universal principles (Gray, 2005, p. 231).

4.2.1 International Social Work in Context of Colonialism

Colonialism, a historical process defined by the domination and exploitation of territories and peoples, has left a profound and lasting impact on global social structures and policies (Said, 1979, p. 2). This legacy persists and continues to exert influence on contemporary social dynamics, perpetuating inequalities and injustices that are deeply embedded in many societies (Hugman, 2003, p. 5). It is of the utmost importance for ISW to gain an understanding of the lasting effects of colonialism, as this provides invaluable insights into the root causes of many of today's social problems. By studying colonialism in this context, social workers can develop more effective and culturally sensitive interventions that promote social justice and equitable development worldwide (Sakamoto, 2005, p. 437).

The relationship between ISW and colonialism is a complex one, often described as professional imperialism. With the conclusion of colonial rule, SW systems were established that were modeled on those of the colonial powers. The transplantation of Western models of SW frequently disregarded local customs and knowledge systems, resulting in a form of professional imperialism where Western practices were imposed on non-Western contexts (Midgley, 1983, p. 16). Ethnic divisions were employed as a fundamental strategy by colonial powers to control and manage colonized regions. By establishing and

perpetuating ethnic stratification, colonial administrators sought to preclude unified opposition to colonial authority by fostering divisions among local populations (Mamdani, 2018, p. 13). This was frequently achieved through the implementation of policies of indirect rule in which colonial powers exercised governance through the existing tribal structures, thereby institutionalizing ethnic divisions and creating systems of decentralized despotism (Mamdani, 2018, p. 14). For instance, in Nigeria, the British policies of amalgamation combined disparate ethnic groups into a single political entity, thereby creating deep-seated ethnic tensions that persist to this day (Agbiboa & Okem, 2011, p. 98). The legacy of these colonial policies continues to influence contemporary SW practice in former colonies. Social workers must navigate complex social landscapes shaped by historical injustices and entrenched ethnic inequalities. Addressing these inequalities necessitates a nuanced comprehension of the manner in which colonial histories have shaped contemporary social dynamics. The challenge is to dismantle these legacies while providing culturally sensitive and efficacious interventions. SW in postcolonial contexts frequently entails addressing the residual effects of ethnic stratification and segregation imposed during the colonial period (J. Smith, 2012, p. 679).

Ethnicity and Colonialism

The relationship between ethnicity and colonialism is complex and deeply rooted in historical strategies of domination and control. Colonial powers frequently employed strategies to exacerbate ethnic divisions in order to maintain their authority over colonized regions. An understanding of this interplay is essential for addressing the enduring impact of colonialism on contemporary social dynamics and SW practices (Mamdani, 2018, p. 13). This section examines the historical context of colonial policies, their impact on SW, and their continued relevance in the contemporary era (Agbiboa & Okem, 2011, p. 98). Ethnic divisions were employed as a fundamental strategy by colonial powers to control and manage colonized regions. By establishing and reinforcing ethnic hierarchies, colonial administrators sought to prevent local populations from uniting against colonial rule (Mamdani, 2018, p. 13). This was frequently accomplished through the implementation of policies of “indirect rule”, in which colonial powers exercised governance through the existing tribal structures, thereby institutionalizing ethnic divisions and establishing systems of decentralized despotism (Mamdani, 2018, p. 14).

The issues related to ethnicity and colonialism are not limited to the past; they continue to manifest themselves in various forms in the present. The persistence of ethnic conflicts, pervasive discrimination, and enduring social inequalities can be traced back to the colonial era. It is imperative that social workers be equipped with the requisite skills to address these issues in a culturally sensitive manner. Strategies for addressing these issues include the promotion of inclusive policies, the advocacy of

marginalized communities, and the fostering of intercultural competence among practitioners (Agbiboa & Okem, 2011, p. 104).

Neocolonialism

Neocolonialism is defined as the practice of employing economic, political, and cultural pressures to control or influence formerly colonized countries, even after they have achieved formal independence (Spivak & Young, 1991, p. 220). In contrast to traditional colonialism, neocolonialism does not rely on direct territorial control. Instead, it employs more subtle means, such as economic dependency and cultural dominance, to maintain influence (Spivak & Young, 1991, p. 223). The neocolonial dynamic significantly influences social policies and practices. International organizations and foreign aid may contribute to the perpetuation of neocolonial relationships by imposing Western ideals and practices on developing countries (Fentahun, 2023, p. 3). This can result in a situation of dependency rather than empowerment, and may also have the effect of undermining local practices and knowledge systems. Social workers must engage with these dynamics in a critical manner in order to avoid reinforcing neocolonial power structures and instead promote genuine, locally-led development (Spivak, 2003, p. 43).

To address these issues, social workers can adopt strategies to decolonize SW practice. This encompasses the promotion of indigenous knowledge and practices and the assurance that local voices are heard and respected in the development and implementation of social policies (J. Smith, 2012, p. 697). Furthermore, social workers can advocate for policies that empower local communities and reduce dependence on foreign aid (Spivak & Young, 1991, p. 224). Adoption of a postcolonial framework enables social workers to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of power and resistance in formerly colonized societies. This approach underscores the significance of cultural competence and the necessity to challenge neocolonial influences in SW practice (Fentahun, 2023, p. 5).

4.2.2 Indigenization of Social Work

Perhaps the most discussed challenge in ISW is that of indigenization, focusing on tailoring SW practices to the local context where they are applied. Indigenization insists that SW must be shaped by the specific social, political, economic, historical, and cultural factors of each locality, integrating local perspectives and voices (Gray, 2005, p. 232). The indigenization debate is based on three central premises. First, that SW with the current definition is a Western invention. Second, that SW was exported and imposed on countries that were under colonial rule by Western powers (Gray, 2005, p. 231). And third,

that indigenization is an (postcolonial⁵) approach that challenges the dominance of SW as a Western invention and seeks to bring SW into the local context, to localize SW (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 634).

The origins of what we call today SW can be traced back to Great Britain, North America, and later Western Europe. During the colonial era, the practice was subsequently transported to the Asian, African, and South American continents (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 632). People from less industrialized regions had to travel to more industrialized, western countries to obtain SW education (Rehklau & Lutz, 2009, p. 42). Hence SW educators from regions outside the Western world acquired their knowledge at British or North American universities and then brought it back to their country of origin. Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) describe: “students were trained to apply the aims of SW in the same way as students in western countries; they studied the same textbooks, read the same journals and were taught the same theories and methods” (pp. 149–150). As Said (1978) observed, these SW educators subsequently encountered difficulties in identifying the extent to which Western cultural influences had shaped their thinking and identity (pp. 25–26). Subsequently, when degree programs in SW were established on the African continent, a considerable number of social workers were nevertheless trained by Western educators (Mupedziswa, 1992, p. 21). This phenomenon is also described by Twikirize and Spitzer (2019) who state that even today, the educational context is still so strongly influenced by the colonial legacy that there are dominant voices, including voices from the elite, that promote Western knowledge as superior and do so at the expense of their own cultural heritage (p. 3). The expansion of SW was predicated on the assumption that SW is a social technology with the capacity to address social issues in all societies. It was additionally assumed that SW is an international or universal profession with methods that can be used as technological tools in any context, regardless of cultural differences (Walton & Abo El Nasr, 1988, p. 150). This form of SW was distinguished by its agency-based and individualized casework approach, with an emphasis on the following service areas: disability, family and child welfare, and mental health. Subsequently, following the 1950s, group and community work was increasingly accepted as a method of SW, and participation in social policy became more relevant. However, the focus remained on working with individuals and families, which was regarded as the most important subject (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 632).

As early as 1969, an expert working group of SW educators from the African continent identified the necessity of indigenization of SW, particularly the necessity for indigenous learning materials (UN Economic and Social Council, 1969, p. 15). Consequently, in his book *Professional Imperialism*, James Midgely delineated the concept of indigenization. Midgely (1981) defines indigenization as “appropriateness” (p. 170). This implies that SW must be tailored to the diverse needs of different countries,

⁵ The concept of postcolonialism is explained in chapter 5.1.

and that SW education should equip SW practice with the requisite tools. Later in the 1980s, it was increasingly recognized that SW theory also needed to reflect local socioeconomic and cultural contexts and particular needs. This led to the effort to create SW that was less remedial in individual cases and more socially developed (Midgley, 1983, p. 170). Mupedziswa (1993) criticized the inappropriateness of Western SW for developing countries because of its lack of sensitivity to the local context and living conditions (p. 159). Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) pointed out that it is not possible to just copy the Western model of SW and apply it universally, because their problems, politics, economies and cultures are different and vary from country to country (pp. 148–149).

4.2.3 Universalization of Social Work Values

The term universalization is used to describe the process of establishing a unified profession of SW on a global scale, with shared goals and fundamental values based on commonalities across diverse contexts, nations, and countries (Gray, 2005, p. 231). The pursuit of universal SW is seen in particularly in the endeavors to create an international definition of SW, as exemplified by the IFSW's initiative to create a global definition of SW and global standards for SW education. (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 625). One of the most significant challenges in this field is the divergence of opinion among its practitioners on several crucial issues. These include the nature of international SW, the commitment to internationalizing SW education and practice, and the desirability of internationalism as a normative position in principle. A significant point of contention is the question of the universality of SW values. Some argue for a more remedial, activist, or developmental approach to practice. This gives rise to a debate surrounding the concepts of multiculturalism⁶ and universalism, and the question of whether the values of SW can be considered universal. This idea of a universal value system for SW is in tension with the concept of cultural autonomy. This gives rise to the question of whether a universal value system and cultural autonomy are in contradiction with one another (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 625).

The ongoing debate surrounding the universalization of SW illustrates that the question of universalization is fundamentally a matter of value. This is because, as all authors concur, the framework is context-specific and therefore unsuitable for universalization. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to consider whether there are fundamental values that could be universally applicable. The majority of references pertain to the concepts of empowerment, justice, equity, and human rights (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 626). Nevertheless, it is debatable whether it is even permissible to universalize human rights. The universalization of human rights is one of the most discussed topics in the human rights discourse

⁶ Multiculturalism can be understood both as a response to the diverse cultures present in democratic societies and as a means of reparation for cultural groups that have experienced oppression and discrimination in the past. Multiculturalism asserts that minority groups deserve special recognition of their differences within the dominant culture (IFSW, 2014).

(Constantinides, 2008, p. 51). Those who object to the applicability of human rights in non-Western contexts often cite the Western provenance and significant influence of Western values on the concept of human rights. This, they argue, renders the concept difficult to apply to non-Western cultures, and frequently results in the disregard of these cultures' unique identities. Furthermore, it is argued that the human rights discourse primarily focuses on the protection of individuals from the state, thereby overlooking the positive roles and benefits that the state can provide in the context of human rights. Perhaps the most significant objection to human rights is their misuse for political polemics or, in the most extreme cases, for political betrayal (Vahsen & Mane, 2010, p. 102). Bar-On (1998) describes values based on human rights as values that are: a total ideology of how the social universe should cohere (...) (which), in effect, are like a religious frame of mind to which practitioners are expected to subordinate their entire modus operandi, and expect as much of themselves by virtue of their professional socialisation (p. 153). The fact that the values of SW are becoming universal rules leaves a bitter aftertaste for Bar-On (1998) in the context of multiculturalism, a concept he espouses. He sees a contradiction between the universalization of values and the principles of genuine multiculturalism. He compares this type of multiculturalism to the position of so-called liberals, who only respect people's way of life as long as they adhere to their rules (p. 154). On a very practical level, social workers face an ethical dilemma when they perceive their values as universal. This is because there may be a conflict between their professional values and cultural or religious differences, along with the obligation to uphold these professional values (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 637). An additional challenge emerges from the disparate continental declarations of human rights, including the *African Banjul Charter*, the *Islamic Charter*, and the *Asian Charter*. While these documents recognize the universal and indivisible nature of human rights, they also assert the primacy of their own cultural values. In such instances, the tenets upheld by the state, such as those pertaining to stability and harmony or divine laws, and the familial cultural or religious morals held by its citizens often take precedence over the universal claims set forth in the UN Charter and other human rights documents in cases of conflict (Staub Bernasconi & Wronka, 2012, p. 81). These contextual interpretations of human rights are merely reactions to colonial histories, but they also represent responses to the ongoing economic, military, and cultural hegemony of more powerful and historically advantaged regions. It is imperative that these dominant regions recognize that this dominance is a double morality and a form of neocolonialism. Colchester, (2021) who is Founder and now Senior Policy Advisor of the Forest Peoples Programme, an international human rights organization with consultative status at the UN also emphasizes that it is crucial to be aware that the human rights have "been born out of Western philosophical doctrines of natural law and human beings' freedom to reason" (p. 18). However, he argues for the recognition of universal human rights that take cultural differences into account and avoid cultural imperialism.

He considers it important to seek cross-cultural support and participation of e.g indigenous people in UN working groups (Colchester, 2021, pp. 20–21).

Gray and Fook (2004) adopt a similar stance to that universalization dilemma within SW with their proposal. Instead of pursuing universal definitions and standards, they recommend that attention be directed toward achieving social justice, with the ultimate goal of “making the world a better place for those who suffer as a consequence of pervasive injustice and poverty” (pp. 637–638). They emphasize a need for a collaborative, grassroots process that respects and values cultural differences while seeking to identify commonalities. This approach can help to prevent the negative consequences of cultural imperialism and ensure that that SW practices are both contextually relevant and globally informed.

4.3 Interim Conclusion

The potentials and challenges of ISW represent the dual nature of ISW. On the one hand, ISW has many potentials especially in the context of the current issues that transcend national boundaries and require a coordinated international response to promote social justice and equitable development. One of the main justifications for ISW is its ability to address global challenges, such as social and economic inequalities, migration crises, climate change, and health pandemics. The potential of ISW lies in its ability to transcend national boundaries, with its emphasis on collaboration and knowledge sharing, ISW can contribute to counteracting the negative effects of globalization. International developments have a significant impact on people's lives and on the field of SW. If SW is to truly improve the conditions of society and not just deal with individual cases, it must understand these global connections and be committed to solving problems on an international scale (Wagner, 2015, p. 84). Additionally, Healy (2001) posits that through internationalization, SWs obtain a local and global socio-political mandate to act as global players for better conditions and to exert pressure on nation-states (p. 219). Likewise, the SDA underscores the necessity for collaboration across borders, disciplines, and sectors, rendering it an indispensable framework for ISW. By coordinating with international organizations, governments, and local communities, social workers can utilize their expertise to shape global policies and contribute to the formation of more equitable and just societies. This collaborative endeavor not only enhances the impact of ISW but also reinforces its role as a pivotal actor in the global movement towards social development and the universal respect for human rights.

However, the legacy of colonialism poses a significant challenge to ISW and places it in the aforementioned “horns of a threepronged dilemma” (Gray, 2005, p. 231). Colonial histories have left deep scars, perpetuated inequalities and created complex social dynamics. Modern SW must navigate these dynamics and be aware of the pitfalls of professional imperialism. Furthermore, the endeavors through

indigenization stand in a complex relationship to the endeavors of universalization. Efforts of indigenization have a complex relationship with efforts of universalization. Understanding this relationship is essential for developing effective (especially at the local level) and culturally sensitive interventions, while being interconnected and using the network to act at the global level and work together on common issues. Gray (2005) suggests that culture is extremely important in enabling indigenization while maintaining universal notions and avoiding imperialism (p. 231).

5 Postcolonial Social Work in Uganda

As has been previously observed, Western ideologies, models, and methods of SW have spread globally through internationalization processes based on globalization, with ISW playing a pivotal role in this process. A review of countries formerly under colonial rule reveals that the origin of SW, as it is defined internationally, can be traced back to colonialism (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019a, p. 23). As outlined earlier in this thesis, ISW is currently confronted with the complex challenges of indigenization, universalism and imperialism. In order to derive reform proposals for ISW in the following chapter, the aim is to bring the issues discussed in the previous chapters, which are of a highly theoretical nature, down to a deeper and more practical level, focusing on a country classified by the UN as a Least Developed Country (LDC) (UNDESA, n.d.), with a colonial history. This examination is made with the question: *How has social work developed in countries where it emerged under colonialism and what challenges does social work still face today? Illustrated by the example of Uganda.*

The following graphic offers a preliminary overview of Uganda:

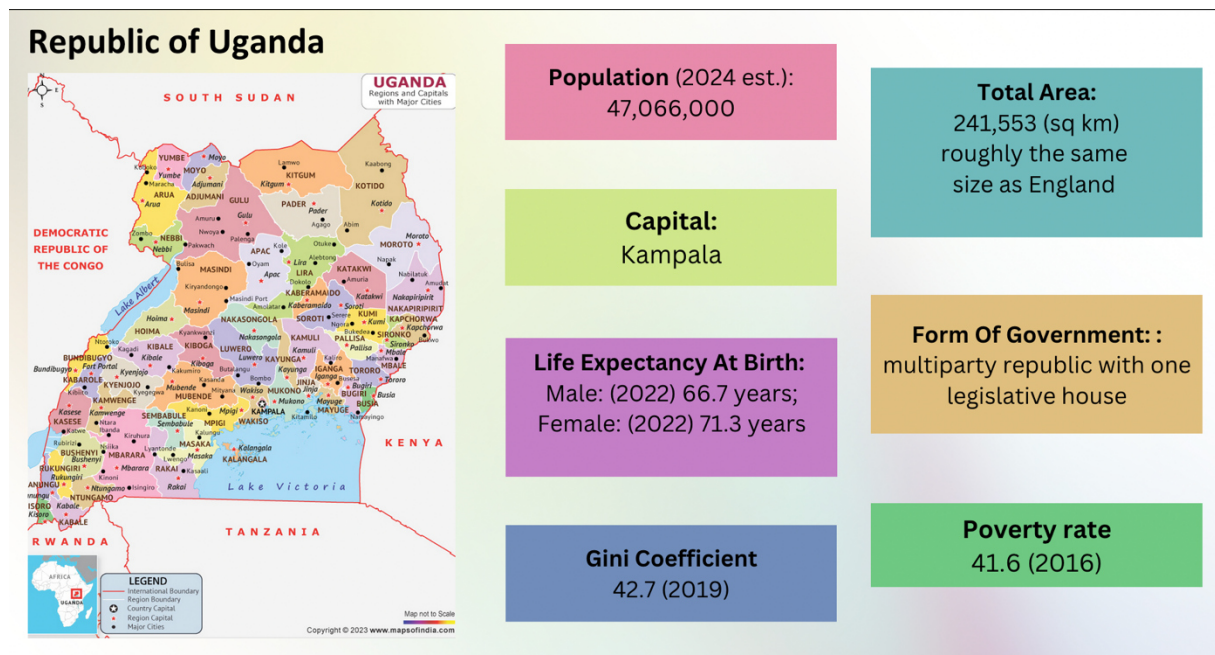


Figure 1: Uganda Overview (Source: Self-created graphic based on Bernstein & Wiesmann, 2019; Gini Coefficient by Country, 2024; T. Information Architects of Encyclopaedia, 2024)

An understanding of a country's historical background is essential for comprehending the current configuration of society and the establishment of state power, civil society and SW. These topics will be discussed in greater detail in the following subchapters. But when attempting to construct a historical narrative for a country, there is a risk of oversimplification, inadvertently sidelining minority voices, and over-reliance on established sources such as Western anthropologists and self-glorifying governments. This issue is particularly pronounced when the narrative about a country is heavily influenced

by the perspective of (British) colonizers. The use of the colonized language, in this case, English, serves to further underscore the imbalance of power. The effort to identify English-language sources that diverge from the colonial narrative was not a straightforward undertaking. A brief detour will therefore be taken before examining the historical development of Uganda in chapter 5.2. This detour will lead to the exploration of alternative narratives that challenge traditional viewpoints and offer a more nuanced understanding of the past. In this thesis framework, only the most prominent paradigm, post-colonialism, can be considered.

5.1 Postcolonial Theories

This chapter will briefly examine the theoretical framework of postcolonialism, its origins, the key theorists who have shaped its development, and the impact it has had on historical understanding. The chapter will analyze the ways in which postcolonialism has shaped our understanding of Uganda's historical development and its continuing influence on contemporary discourses about the country's past and future.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the concept of postcolonialism emerged in cultural, literary, and social studies, giving rise to the first theoretical formulations. These were concerned with the critique of European colonialism, the imperialism theory, and the examination of themes related to diaspora, migration, and racism in affluent Western countries. The two most prominent figures in the field of post-colonialism are likely Edward Said and Gayatri C. Spivak. In their works, they delved into the ways in which physical realities and discourses have shaped and continue to shape the world in the context of the imperial project of Europe. Postcolonialism posits that the overt colonial circumstances, which are viewed from a Western perspective, are often no longer evident and have been perceived as historical and political relics. There is a perceived gap between the political fact-based liberation and the continuous, cultural, psychic, and social colonialization. This gap is marked with the prefix “post”. Postcolonialists addressed a number of key questions, including those pertaining to the nature of perception and the distinction between what is and what is not perceived. They also explored the visibility of the act of speaking and the ability to be heard (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010, pp. 274–275). The field of postcolonial studies is predicated on the assumption that although colonies are politically autonomous, they are nevertheless subject to the hegemony of a *Eurocentric* worldview (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010, pp. 274–275). The following section outlines the two most prevalent approaches to this field of study, with a brief explanation of each. The first is from Edward Said and is entitled *Orientalism*, while the second is from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her book *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

5.1.1 Orientalism

Edward Said was a Palestinian-American professor of literature. His 1987 publication, *Orientalism*, has remained a seminal text in the field of postcolonial studies to this day. In his book, Said (2014) explains how the British and the French, and until the end of the Second World War, the Americans as well, constructed a dominant imagination of the “Orient” and its inhabitants (pp. 28–29). The Orient was understood by the Europeans and Americans to be the howl region of North Africa and the Middle East (Gasser, 2022).

Said described a process of creating a simplified, more uniform representation of the people who live in a very heterogeneous foreign region. These constructed images of the “Orient” are pure fantasy, yet their real-world consequences are significant. Colonized peoples and regions have suffered and continue to suffer due to these distorted perceptions. The suffering stems from the imposition of foreign control, the exploitation of resources, and the suppression of native cultures and identities. Said explained that Orientalism, in portraying Eastern societies as backward, exotic, and inferior, provides a justification for the domination and exploitation inherent in colonialism and serves as a form of legitimization for colonial practices. This legitimizing narrative masks the violence and injustice of colonial rule, framing it instead as a civilizing and exploratory mission (Gasser, 2022). Such a framing is frequently observed in English literature pertaining to the history of a former country under British protectorate, as e.g. in the case of Uganda.(Gasser, 2022). Such a framing is frequently observed in English literature pertaining to the history of a former country under British protectorate, as e.g. inby the case of Uganda.

5.1.2 Can the Subaltern Speak?

In her 1988 essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak examines the ways in which individuals situated at the margins of society can articulate their experiences and perspectives. Spivak employs the term “subaltern” to describe these populations, who are persistently silenced and unable to document their histories. The narratives of these individuals are appropriated by external parties. Spivak concluded that the subalterns are unable to articulate their experiences due to the dominance of other voices, which overshadow and misrepresent their narratives. This exclusion from social participation and voice has proven economically advantageous for Europe (Rohlf, 2008).

This concept finds resonance in Uganda's colonial history, wherein colonial powers imposed their own narratives and systems, effectively silencing local voices and knowledge. The colonial administration and subsequent neo-colonial structures resulted in the marginalization of indigenous practices, which in turn led to a loss of local agency and representation. This loss is of particular relevance to the

practice of SW at the local level. By integrating local knowledge and providing a platform for historically silenced groups, social workers can facilitate the development of more equitable and inclusive practices that address past injustices. The role of ISW will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters, particularly in chapter 6.

5.1.3 Postcolonial Reflections on Narrating Ugandan History

A pervasive narrative about Ugandan history commences with the initial incursion of European colonizers. This prompts the question of whether Uganda has a history prior to the colonial era. From a postcolonial perspective, this question reflects the Western notion that Africans lacked historical consciousness until Europeans established a nation with a defined purpose.

The process of determining Uganda's history is inherently complex. To what extent does Uganda's history encompass the experiences of diverse groups within its population? The present-day territorial boundaries were not established until 1926. President Yoweri Museveni has questioned the legitimacy of the affiliation of some groups, and some groups contest the territorial legitimacy of their own designation due to arbitrary colonial designations. The term Uganda is a phonetic rendering of Buganda, one kingdom within the British protectorate that encompasses numerous distinct groups (Reid, 2017, pp. 1–8). Prominent Ugandan publishers, like the one in 2007, have put forth the proposition that Uganda's inception coincides with the arrival of external actors, thereby creating an externally constructed entity (Reid, 2017, p. 7). From a postcolonial perspective, Uganda has a history that extends beyond the colonial era. A comprehensive understanding of the region requires an examination of the experiences of all diverse groups within and around the region, as well as an investigation of the connections between these groups and neighboring countries. This requires a considerable expansion of the field, but it is crucial to be aware of this area of tension. For this reason, a concise overview of Uganda's early history is presented in the subsequent chapter. Prior to an examination of Uganda's history, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the concept of the “Maafa”, as defined by DuBois (2016). The term “Maafa”, derived from Swahili and translating to “Great Disaster”, encompasses the historical phenomenon of slavery, including the East African and Transatlantic slave trades. This brutal enslavement had long-lasting, devastating impacts on African societies and their descendants. The cultural and psychological effects continue to be significant (DuBois, 2016). The institution of slavery, the subsequent colonial era, and associated ethnicization and violence have left indelible marks on Uganda's self-image and political structure, shaping its identity today. This must always be considered when discussing postcolonial Uganda.

5.2 Historical Context

As previously stated, telling colonial history in a postcolonial context is a challenging endeavor. The subsequent chapter presents a synthesis of various sources with the objective of providing a concise overview that avoids, to the greatest extent possible, the perpetuation of colonial narratives. The historical events are initially described in three parts. This chapter will examine the early history of Uganda, its period under colonial rule, and the subsequent period of independence. Finally, the historical events and their consequences will be classified and contextualized in a manner relevant to this work.

5.2.1 Early History of Uganda

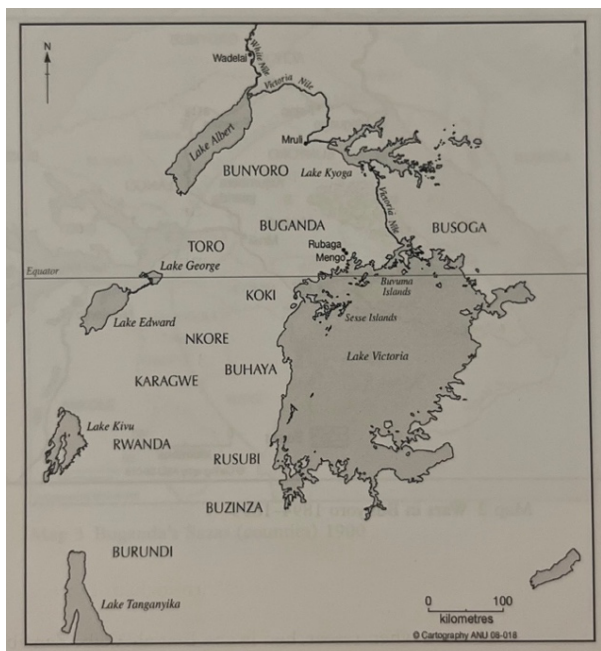


Figure 2: pre-colonial Map of principal interior East African lakes kingdoms, and some clusters (Source: Low, 2009)

The early history of Uganda is characterized by the gradual movements of small groups of cultivators and herders, which differ greatly from one another, over centuries (see figure 2). This continuous migration led to the intermingling and evolution of cultures and languages. By the mid-19th century in the region that would later become the Uganda Protectorate, a diverse array of languages and cultures had already developed. The northern areas were predominantly occupied by peoples speaking Nilotic and Sudanic languages, while the central, western, and southern parts of the territory were mainly inhabited by Bantu-speaking peoples (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024). There were

practically no similarities between the region's northern and southern parts, neither in terms of language (as previously described) nor in political or cultural matters. For instance, the Baganda⁷ and Acholi had minimal contact with each other during the 19th century, as they were situated at the peripheries of different long-distance trading systems (Schubert, 2008, p. 276). So, it is evident that there were significant differences between the political structures of the South and the North (and even within the South and the North there were still important differences). The northern region was often characterized by clan structures, in which a single leader, who served as both a religious figure and a political authority, held considerable power. In contrast, in the southern region the political structure of the northern regions could be described in Western terminology as a centralized kingdom. In the

⁷ The Baganda are the inhabitants of Buganda (Schubert, 2008, p. 276).

late 15th century, the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom emerged in northern Uganda, expanding its influence. By the end of the 18th century, its power waned under leaders Kamrasi and Kabarega. Buganda, an offshoot of Bunyoro-Kitara, grew stronger under effective Kabakas (leaders). In the 1840s, Swahili-speaking traders entered the region, trading ivory and slaves, further weakening Kabarega's authority (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024).

In the 1860s, slave traders from Egypt and Sudan devastated the Acholi region and southeastern Uganda. Kabaka Mutesa I of Buganda sought allies against these threats. When Henry Morton Stanley arrived in 1875, he proposed inviting Christian missionaries to Uganda, which Mutesa I agreed to, hoping for military support. In 1877, the Church Missionary Society arrived in Buganda, but disappointed Mutesa I by not engaging in military matters. In 1879, the Roman Catholic White Fathers Mission arrived and quickly gained influence. The Mahdist Rising⁸ of 1881 halted Egyptian expansion, allowing Mutesa I to control the missionaries. After Mutesa I's death in 1884, his successor Mwanga II opposed the missionaries, prohibiting conversions and executing converts, which led to his dethronement in 1888. Not even a year later in 1889, Mwanga sought British support to reclaim his throne, trading some sovereignty to the British East Africa Company, which exposed him to European imperialism. In 1890, he signed a Treaty of Protection with German Carl Peters, which was annulled by the 1890 Anglo-German agreement, placing all territory north of latitude 1 under British control (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024).

The Imperial British East Africa Company began British colonial administration in Uganda. Frederick Lugard, a colonial officer engaged by the company for military affairs, made treaties with Mwanga II and Rukirabasaija Daudi Kasagama Kyebambe IV the Omukama (which means also King) of Toro, placing Buganda and Toro under the company's protection, which bound them closer to the British empire. In 1892, Buganda faced civil war and threats from Bunyoro's Omakuma (King) Kabalega, who rebelled against British influence and marched into Toro. After a long struggle, Kabalega was defeated and exiled in 1898. In 1894, under pressure from British missionaries, the British declared Buganda a protectorate. By 1896, the protectorate included Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole, and Busoga. Mwanga II, after revolting against British rule in 1897 and being defeated, fled, was arrested, and exiled to the Seychelles. He returned in 1898 with a revolutionary army but was defeated again and died in exile in 1903 (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024).

⁸ The Mahdist Rebellion was an Islamic revolt in the Egyptian Sudan against the British occupation. The revolt had been started in 1881 by Mohammed Ahmed, who proclaimed himself the "Mahdi", which translates as "Guide". By 1885 they had conquered large parts of the Sudan, but in 1889 they were defeated by an Anglo-Egyptian force (National Army Museum, n.d.).

In the 1890s, Uganda faced religious wars among Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic factions, interpreted as political contests influenced by British interests. The British Empire, co-creator of these conflicts, sought to legitimize its control for its own interests like economic gains through cotton export. In 1900, the Buganda Agreement was signed between the Kabaka and Harry Johnston, a representative of the British Crown. In this agreement the Kabaka was recognized as the ruler of Buganda, provided he remained loyal to the British authority (see Figure 3). The lukiko, the council of chiefs of Buganda (a parliament of politicians loyal to the king (Schubert, 2008, p. 285) could remain. The leading chiefs profit

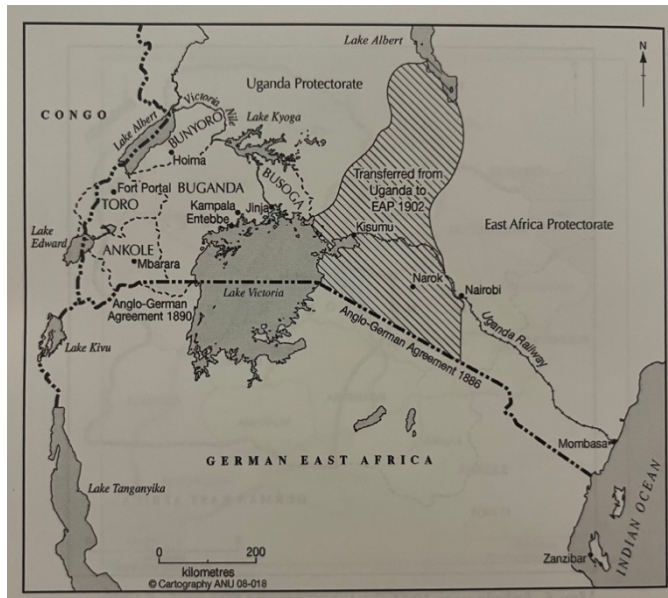


Figure 3: Map of British East Africa 1902 (Source: Low, 2009)

a lot from this agreement, because they obtained a lot of authority and land in freehold to secure their support of the British authority (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024). In 1914 the British administration gradually extended north and east of the Nile. By 1914, British control extended across Uganda, aided by Buganda chiefs who collaborated with the colonial government, solidifying the boundaries of modern Uganda (Schubert, 2008, p. 279).

5.2.2 Uganda under Colonial Rule and Decolonization

The British declared Uganda unattractive for settlers, focusing instead on economic growth and cotton export. Buganda became the colonial economic center, with Teso and Busoga integrated into cotton production by 1910 (Schubert, 2008, p. 280). By 1914, cotton wealth made Uganda financially independent from Britain. During WWI, minor border conflicts with Germans occurred, but Uganda remained safe from invasion. Post-war, coffee cultivation was added, becoming a key export. Most coffee plantation workers were migrant laborers from the West Nile District and Kigezi region (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024; Schubert, 2008, p. 280).

From the 1930s, migrant workers could lease land in Buganda. Despite many migrants residing in various Ugandan districts, they remained excluded from local decision-making and rarely became chiefs (Schubert, 2008, p. 208). The British focused educational efforts initially in Buganda, appointing Western men as teachers to enhance control and policy implementation. This was beneficial for British control and the implementation of government policy. Economic growth was further spurred by a railroad

constructed in Buganda, extending north only in the 1960s (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024). The railroad was only extended to the north in the 1960s (Schubert, 2008, p. 280).

The decolonization process began in the 1950s, marked by tensions between Buganda's leaders, who prioritized regional dominance, and the British colonial administration, which proposed an East African federation that threatened Buganda's supremacy (Schubert, 2008, pp. 284–285). This perceived betrayal led to protests, resulting in the British forcibly exiling Kabaka Mutesa II in 1955 (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024). However, they were unable to implement the new political system in Uganda. The Baganda rejected integration into the rest of the protectorate and the initiation of a democratization process within their own territory. Political activities remained confined to ethnic boundaries, with local protests primarily targeting colonial-appointed chiefs. Consequently, Uganda's political parties were founded on ethnic and religious lines, emphasizing the significant yet unexplored influence of religion during this period (Schubert, 2008, p. 285).

In 1960, Milton Obote, born in 1924 in Lango, became the chairman of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), a party that continues to be influential in Uganda. The Democratic Party (DP), founded in 1954 and predominantly Catholic, was another major political force, especially in Buganda and the northern Catholic regions. Both parties advocated for Uganda's national independence but had different regional and confessional focuses. The UPC was primarily supported in northern Uganda and the eastern regions, while the DP, facing opposition in Protestant-led Buganda, was seen as an opposition party there (Schubert, 2008, pp. 286–287). This led to discussions in London in the early 1960s about Uganda's independence, which were influenced by new political parties based on regional and religious affiliations and Buganda's demand for special status, often complicating the focus on national independence. In 1961, despite Buganda's boycott due to fear of a DP victory, the British held elections for Uganda's Legislative Council. The DP won the majority, despite a low turnout in Buganda, and its leader Kiwanuka became Chief Minister and later Prime Minister in the transitional government of 1962. The Buganda government and the UPC were forced to accept Buganda's integration into an independent Uganda, leading to the formation of the Kabaka Yekka party, which secured all Buganda seats. Uganda achieved independence on October 9th, 1962, with a part-federal structure allowing kingdoms like Buganda some autonomy. Milton Obote of the UPC became prime minister, overseeing a period marked by political instability and challenges such as ethnic and religious conflicts, remnants of colonial rule (Schubert, 2008, pp. 286–287).

5.2.3 Independent Uganda

Just two years after achieving independence, Uganda faced significant turmoil. The conflict over the so-called “lost counties”⁹ (Schubert, 2008, p. 287) was threatening to escalate. The situation in the Kingdom of Buganda became increasingly precarious and volatile in 1966, leading to the emergence of the so-called “Buganda Crisis” This crisis began when the Obote government, supported by the military, imposed a new constitution that effectively removed Kabaka Mutesa II and installed Milton Obote as president. This led to military intervention in Buganda led by Idi Amin, forcing Kabaka Mutesa II into exile and resulting in the capture of the royal palace.

In 1967, following the conflict, the kingdoms were abolished under a new constitution. Despite some resistance from Buganda, the response was unexpectedly weak and unorganized, leading to increased humiliation and reinforcing ethnic stereotypes. Milton Obote's grip on power solidified during this period, culminating in a constitutional change that abolished democratic elections and opposition parties, making Uganda a one-party state. To maintain (and obtain) his power, he used the army as a leading force (Schubert, 2008, p. 288). The level of military activity intensified, and the armed forces became more deeply involved in political disputes. This phenomenon was more pronounced than during the late colonial period. During Idi Amin's tenure as military leader, the political influence of the military grew rapidly, which Idi Amin was keenly aware of. This was a significant concern for Milton Obote, who sought to curtail the influence of the military by establishing additional security organizations and dissolving Amin's authority. Nevertheless, Idi Amin proceeded more expeditiously, seizing power in a military coup in 1971. Subsequently, Uganda was governed by a military dictatorship (Schubert, 2008, p. 287). This period marked a significant shift towards military involvement in political affairs, surpassing even the late colonial period.

Idi Amin's authoritarian rule in Uganda resulted in the deaths of over one hundred thousand people, primarily due to the despotic actions of his soldiers who were granted immunity and encouraged to loot for their sustenance. The regime's downfall began in 1977 when military conflicts emerged within the army regarding the distribution of the spoils of war. In 1978, Idi Amin attempting to distract the army with warfare, invaded Tanzania, which responded with a counteroffensive leading to his overthrow in 1979. Idi Amin fled to Saudi Arabia, where he died in 2003. Following his departure, Uganda struggled with political instability, undergoing several interim governments and facing old political

⁹ The term “lost counties” is used to describe the territory that was initially taken from Bunyoro by the British during the early years of colonialism and subsequently granted to Buganda. This also illustrates the preferential treatment afforded to Buganda. Bunyoro sought to reclaim these territories, but Buganda was uncooperative. In 1964, a referendum was held in the relevant territory, despite the threat of an armed protest by Buganda. The result of the referendum was that the lost counties were returned to Bunyoro (Schubert, 2008, p. 287).

divisions. Despite attempts to establish a multiparty democracy in 1980, the military retained substantial influence, culminating in the manipulated re-election of Milton Obote. Yoweri Museveni utilized the rigged elections to legitimize a guerrilla (civil) war which lasted from 1980 to 1986, with the initially modest National Resistance Army (NRA) in the so-called Luwero Triangle (see Figure 4), situated in



Figure 4: Luwero Triangle (Source: Berrang Ford, 2007, p. 3)

Buganda, to the north of Kampala (Berrang Ford, 2007, p. 3). This resulted in an escalation of the conflict between the NRA and the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), the army of Milton Obote (Schubert, 2008, p. 292). The UNLA was comprised primarily of Acholi soldiers, and Buganda was regarded as enemy territory. Consequently, the UNLA, which was imbued with a sense of superiority due to its feeling of material tribes, initiated a highly violent counter-insurgency campaign. This had the consequence of a wider loss of legitimacy for Milton Obote in Buganda and in other regions in the south and west of Uganda. The UNLA's pri-

mary focus shifted from combating the NRA to securing loot, which ultimately led to their political and military failure. The NRA gained greater acceptance among the civilian population in the Luwero Triangle, which facilitated the recruitment of new soldiers. In 1985, internal conflicts within the UNLA intensified, with Milton Obote and the army leader becoming increasingly estranged (Schubert, 2008, pp. 291–293).

In 1985, Milton Obote was overthrown by his own military leaders, leading to a brief regime under Tito Okello which failed to end conflicts with the NRA. By January 1986, the NRA captured Kampala and seized control over Uganda, installing Museveni as President, a position he holds to this day. The ensuing war in the Luwero Triangle, often misrepresented as an ethnic conflict between the North and South, between the material tribe against the Buganda, was actually a struggle for power among political elites. In 1993, Ronald Mutebi was crowned as the cultural Kabaka of Buganda, reflecting a reduced role from political leadership. The first free presidential and parliamentary elections under Museveni's rule occurred in 1996 and the new constitution that had previously come into force, marking a significant political transition (Schubert, 2008, pp. 293–294).

The economic recovery in the South was relatively swift, whereas in the North, there was no corresponding political or economic restoration (Schubert, 2008, p. 294). Museveni was not particularly

well-received in the North, which resulted in the formation of armed rebel groups since 1986. These groups, collectively known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), are led by Joseph Kony. The LRA is known for its violent tactics against civilians. As reported by UNICEF in 2005, 1.5 million individuals displaced in the northern region resided in refugee camps (Peters, 2006, p. 9). Through the ongoing troubles and violence of the LRA, Museveni must incorporate opposition leaders to create a broad power base. This government promoted grassroots democracy and decentralized the country into four regions and 38 districts in the 1990s. Despite criticisms of its undemocratic nature, elections were held at all levels to enhance citizen participation (Oberberger, 2012, p. 29). By the late 1990s, many Ugandans lost hope in the establishment of a new political system, as Museveni's regime became increasingly militarized and self-serving (Schubert, 2008, p. 294). The introduction of a multi-party democracy in 2005 through a referendum marked another shift in governance, although President Museveni simultaneously amended the constitution to remove term limits for his presidency. Since 1996, direct presidential elections have been held every five years, consistently won by Museveni. The multi-party system strengthened the parliament, though the NRM has remained the dominant party. The opposition, including the Forum for Democratic Change formed from former NRM politicians and new alliances, struggled to counter the entrenched power of the NRM. Historical parties like DP and UPC suffered repeated defeats due to their regional focus and lack of national appeal. This political evolution demonstrates how the NRM solidified its power while significantly shaping Uganda's political landscape (M. Lyons & Ingham, 2024).

Yoweri Museveni continues to serve as the President of Uganda to this day. A review of the period preceding his assumption of the presidency reveals a notable transformation in Uganda. Under his leadership, the country has witnessed a discernible enhancement in security, political stability, and economic conditions, when compared to the preceding administrations. Despite these improvements, Uganda faces ongoing challenges including restrictions on political freedoms, pervasive corruption, and mismanagement (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024) and large socio-economic disparities, widespread poverty, armed conflicts and problems with the healthcare system (Oberberger, 2012, pp. 32–35). Uganda is Africa's leading host nation for refugees and its armed forces actively participate in regional peace-keeping missions. However, the political climate is marred by interference with judicial independence, intimidation of opposition figures, civil rights activists, and journalists, discrimination against sexual minorities, and entrenched patriarchal norms. These issues severely compromise human rights conditions. A major setback occurred in July 2023 when the UN Human Rights Office in Uganda was forced to close after President Museveni refused to renew its mandate (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024). Even today, international newspapers continue to publish headlines about Uganda that illustrate the (partly) precarious political situation and at the same time the very deficient view of the West towards Uganda:

“How the Army Is Swallowing the Ugandan State”(Taylor, 2024), “Uganda and Congo Are at War With the Islamic State” (Candland, 2024) and “Uganda’s Museveni Won’t Go Quietly: Emboldened by his recent reelection and longtime Western support, the entrenched president appears determined to quash his opposition” (Baraka, 2024).

5.2.4 Historical Classification

In light of the historical circumstances reviewed in the preceding chapter, they will now be categorized. In particular, regarding the current socio-cultural context in Uganda. Due to the considerations above, the establishment of ethnicities through colonialism and their hierarchical classification as a foundation for instability and violence will be initially addressed. Subsequently, the so-called ethnofunctionalism will be elucidated.

Ethnic Hierarchization as a Foundation for Political Instability and Violence

The ethnic hierarchization is predicated upon the unique status of Buganda. The British colonizers perceived Buganda to be superior to the other regions and more “civilized”. Buganda was more centralized and had differentiated administrative structures (Schubert, 2008, pp. 277–278). The hierarchical system and monarchy of Buganda was admired by early British colonizers. The British believed that if the Kiganda (kingdom) system could be transplanted and imposed elsewhere, it would ease the process of rule implantation (Kabwegyere, 1972, pp. 304–305). Similarly, Christianity was rapidly disseminated throughout Buganda, and educational institutions were constructed at a similarly rapid pace. The education system, from the village school to Makerere University, was geared to the transmission of metropolitan (western) values, further alienating the indigenous people from their values (Schubert, 2008, p. 279). The historical events described above demonstrate the existence of an extreme ethnic hierarchization. The Buganda Agreement of 1900 represented a significant departure from the typical colonial approach, as it granted the chiefs and especially the Kabaka of Buganda considerable autonomy and ownership of land. This was a highly unusual arrangement for colonial powers (Schubert, 2008, p. 279). Additionally, the role which Baganda played by the colonial conquest due to the installation of Baganda chiefs to collect taxes and recruit forced laborers in other regions of today’s Ugandan territory. In addition, the Baganda played an instrumental role during the colonial era through the installation of Baganda chiefs. Moreover, they utilized Baganda warriors with the objective of conquering new territories for the British Empire (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1972, p. 22). In the newly conquered territories, the British used Baganda as administrators, and judges. The agents were simultaneously the judges and juries (Kabwegyere, 1972, p. 307). This resulted in the Baganda developing a sense of superiority over the inhabitants of other regions. The two following quotes illustrate the extreme

hierarchization observed from both external and internal perspectives. The first is from Winston Churchill (1874-1965) on his African Journey, during which he visited Buganda.

In the place of naked, painted savages, clashing their spears and gibbering in chorus to their tribal chiefs, a complete and elaborate polity is presented. Under a dynastic King, with a Parliament, and a powerful feudal system, an amiable, clothed, polite and intelligent race dwell together in an organized monarchy upon the rich domain between the Victoria and Albert Lakes. More than two hundred thousand natives are able to read and write. More than one hundred thousand have embraced the Christian faith. There is a Court, there are Regents and Ministers and nobles, there is a regular system of native law and tribunals; there is discipline, there is industry, there is culture, there is peace. (Churchil 1908; quoted in. Schubert, 2008, pp. 278–279)

And the second is from Kabaka Daudi Chwa of Buganda, who spoke out against the introduction of Kiswahili¹⁰ as a national language of Uganda:

My ancestors have always kept up the supremacy of Buganda Kingdom among the surrounding native tribes of East Africa. It is therefore not unnatural that I and my people should feel that the compulsory use of another native language is derogatory to the prestige of the natives of Buganda Kingdom. (Daudi Chwa, n.d; quoted. in Mukama, 1989, p. 195)

The Buganda military leaders and chiefs engaged in self-enrichment, aggression, arrogance, and violence during their campaigns and administrative tasks. This has led to a particularly strong negative sentiment towards the Buganda among the people of North and East Uganda, who perceive the Buganda as an external threat (Schubert, 2008, p. 279). Their actions were attributed to the white man by the local natives. This led to a general distrust of the Baganda and contributed to the elite/mass gap in Ugandan society (Kabwegyere, 1972, p. 308). From their perspective, the establishment of a British colonial empire was perceived as “Buganda-Subimperialisms” (Roberts, 1962, p. 435).

Ethnofunctionalism

The colonial system favored Buganda both politically and economically, leading to regional disparities within Uganda. This inequality was e.g evident in the 1960 Agricultural Census, which showed that per capita income in Buganda was almost twice as high as in East Uganda and more than three times as high as in the North and West. This economic disparity was further reflected in the concentration of hospitals and schools in Buganda. The colonial administration's preference for Buganda extended to

¹⁰ Kiswahili (translated Swahili) is a widely used language in East Africa, particularly within the of trade. The usage of Kiswahili/Swahili in East Africa is analogous to the usage of the English language in Western Europe (Chayes, 2022)

the workforce around 1920. The Migrant workers, from the Northwest and Southwest were employed in Buganda's coffee fields. These fields formed the backbone of Uganda's export economy. These migrant workers often lived under degrading conditions, and despite disapproval from the colonial government, no effective measures were taken to improve their situation (Schubert, 2008, p. 280).

During periods of economic growth in the early 20th century, the northern and western regions of Uganda were historically perceived as areas with low productivity, serving as a source of labor for export agriculture in Buganda and the rapidly expanding cities of Kampala and Jinja. While the Buganda were primarily given qualified roles in the colonial administration. Moreover, the Acholi people in North Uganda were perceived to possess a particular aptitude for military service, which led to their designation as a “martial tribe” (Schubert, 2008, p. 282). The concept of martial tribes was a colonial construct employed to justify certain recruitment strategies within colonial armies. These strategies were based on unfounded attributions and assumptions about specific ethnic groups. For instance, the Acholi, for example, have no military tradition. They lived in clan structures without a standing army. In contrast, in monarchical societies like Buganda or Bunyoro, a military tradition could be found. These societies had a standing army to protect and expand their kingdom. However, the colonial administration deemed it too risky to recruit in Buganda or Bunyoro. Buganda was perceived as having significant internal autonomy, which could potentially destabilize the colonial empire. Additionally, Bunyoro was regarded as rebellious and should be politically isolated. So, the least risky option for the colonial administration was to recruit in the less structured North. The income prospects in the northern regions were poor, which made it relatively simple for the colonial army to recruit new members. Moreover, military service was also associated with prestige (Schubert, 2008, pp. 282–283). So a system of classification that is not based on natural or inherent characteristics but rather on the arbitrary imposition of a hierarchy through attributions was created by the colonial administration. These attributions and the linked hierarchy became inherent in the self-identifying of the people. In conclusion, the so called concept of ethnofunctionalism, as it was employed in Uganda and in many other African colonies (but Uganda is a particularly outstanding case), constituted a fundamental pillar of the colonial order. It reflected the ethnicization of politics and society that was a hallmark of colonialism. This system of regional unequal treatment and ethnic hierarchization has had a lasting impact on Uganda's socio-economic and political structures, which continue to be influenced by these factors to this day (Schubert, 2008, pp. 280–281).

5.3 Uganda Social Policy

The social policy system is profoundly shaped by the ethnic hierarchization that is deeply rooted in the country's colonial history. For instance, the poverty reduction initiative, which achieved notable

success and is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, rarely resulted in a decline in poverty levels in the northern region of Uganda (Oberberger, 2012, p. 31). Uganda is currently classified as a LDC, which indicates that it is one of the 45 countries globally that are categorized as low-income countries with structural impediments to sustainable development. These countries have access to certain international support, particularly in the areas of development assistance and trade (UNDESA, n.d.) Furthermore Uganda has a rapidly growing population. The population reached 43 million in 2017 and is currently growing at a rate of 3.3 percent annually. This growth is expected to continue until the population surpasses the 100 million mark by 2050. Meanwhile, Uganda's poverty rate was 41.6 percent in 2016 (Bernstein & Wiesmann, 2019) and 42.19 percent in 2019 (Statista Market Insights, World Bank, 2024). Although this has improved considerably compared to the figure of more than 60 percent in the 1990s, with certain fluctuations in recent years, it is still worryingly high (Bernstein & Wiesmann, 2019). According to the Chronic Poverty Advisory Network in 2013 estimated that more than 7 millions Ugandans or 26% of the total population live in chronic poverty¹¹ (CPAN, 2013).

Uganda continues to rely on external financial assistance from donor countries, with 26% of the state budget in 2011 comprising donor funding (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2011, p. 47). This dependency can be attributed to the malfunctioning taxing system. The country's narrow tax base is a consequence of the significant informal economy. The only taxpayers of direct taxes are employees in the formal sector and the self-employed, who collectively represent a small proportion of the population (Twimukye, 2011, pp. 49–51). The Ugandan Economist Twimukye (2011) estimated “that the top 35 highest taxpayers in the country alone account for about 50 percent of all the tax revenue” (p. 51). As a consequence of the relatively low revenue generated by direct taxes, indirect taxes constitute a larger proportion of total tax revenue, accounting for approximately 25%. These indirect taxes are consumer taxes and have a significant impact on the welfare of the population, particularly the poor, as they impose a similar burden on both the wealthy and the less affluent. Notably, taxes on nutrition have been identified as a significant contributor to negative effects (Twimukye, 2011, pp. 50–53). Moreover, the more affluent segments of the population tend to derive greater benefits than those who are less well-off, who are in need of assistance. Consequently, only the more affluent population benefits from investments in social services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, including roads. Such investments, which are also designed as an investment in poverty reduction, tend to benefit the wealthier population to a greater extent than those who are less well-off (Kappel et al., 2005, p. 43).

¹¹ Chronic poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon, yet it is often observed that individuals born into impoverished families rarely have the opportunity to escape poverty (CPAN, 2013, pp. 9–10).

In low-income countries, poverty represents the primary social and economic challenge. Consequently, the primary focus of governments in the realm of social affairs is the reduction of poverty. The so-called poverty strategies were devised in response to and in collaboration with the donor countries. The following chapter will provide a concise overview of the poverty strategies implemented by the Ugandan government over the past few years.

5.3.1 Poverty Strategies

In response to rural discontent during the 1996 presidential election, President Yoweri Museveni initiated the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), which involved significant donor involvement, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The goal of the PEAP was to reduce absolute poverty to less than 10% by 2017 (Isooba & Ssewakiryanga, 2005). Despite periodic revisions involving various stakeholders, questions remain regarding the origin of the conceptual framework of PEAP, whether it is of a domestic or external nature. Some officials posit that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, as developed by the World Bank, were inspired by the PEAP (Mette Kjaer & Muhumuza, 2009, p. 10). The PEAP aimed to facilitate structural transformation rather than provide short-term relief, and thus excluded those deemed unable to participate in economic growth programs, including the “poorest of the poor” (Mette Kjaer & Muhumuza, 2009, p. 12). This exclusion and the prioritization of private sector growth over aid programs illustrate a strategic dilemma between economic productivity and social services.

The shift in focus from social services to economic growth that occurred under Museveni's “Prosperity for All” campaign led to the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2010. The stated goal of the NDP was to transform Uganda into a modern, prosperous nation within 30 years. However, implementation issues and unequal resource distribution have constituted significant obstacles to the realization of the NDP's objectives (Kasoma, 2013). Notwithstanding these challenges, poverty reduction strategies have demonstrably reduced national poverty; however, they face sustainability issues due to political shifts towards economic growth over social services (Mette Kjaer & Muhumuza, 2009, p. 24).

5.3.2 System of Social Security

Uganda's formal social security system is inadequate, particularly in regard to the needs of informal sector workers and the unemployed. Civil servants and public sector employees are eligible for a pension system that is financed through taxation, though it is subject to institutional challenges and inadequate payouts (Oberberger, 2012, pp. 36–37). The National Social Security Fund, which was established in 1967, provides retirement, disability, and death benefits for formal sector employees.

However, its urban focus and individual account system have the effect of disadvantaging non-permanent workers (Oberberger, 2012, p. 38).

This weak formal social security network leads to the great importance of semi-formal and informal social security systems. Semi-formal security systems can be attributed to their foundation on an association of individuals who collectively establish rules and regulations. These groups often comprise low-income individuals, such as taxi drivers. They are organized in a self-defined form, with an elected representation in a council that coordinates income and expenditure. Often local authorities, assume an active role in these systems, mostly in the capacity of a representative on these councils. These systems are based on the principle of reciprocity. The services provided include traditional financial support for funerals and weddings, as well as contributions towards school fees (Oberberger, 2012, p. 41). Informal social security, based on extended family systems, community solidarity and reciprocity, strengthens social cohesion and collective responsibility. A large proportion of the population relies on informal support networks to provide services such as care, financial assistance and food (Oberberger, 2012, p. 41). An example of this is when parents die of AIDS, leaving behind children who, without close family support, must be taken in by other relatives or moved to another village. Grandparents often become primary caregivers, compounding the challenge as the death of working-age adults leaves households without income, disproportionately affecting children and the elderly. In addition, these traditional security networks face erosion from Western influences, such as the individualistic values promoted by Western education systems, which can undermine community-based support (Kasente et al., 2002, p. 179).

5.4 Social Work Practice in Uganda

The field of SW in Uganda has undergone significant developments over time, shaped by a complex interplay of historical, political, and social forces. This evolution, while marked by progress, is also fraught with numerous challenges that continue to shape the field today. The roots of SW in Uganda can be traced back to the colonial era, when missionaries and the colonial administration were the primary providers of social services. These initial endeavors established the foundation for the contemporary practice of SW, which has since expanded to address a multitude of social issues, including poverty, health, education, and human rights. Nevertheless, despite these advances, the sector continues to confront significant challenges, particularly in regard to funding, professional training, and the integration of SW practices within local cultural contexts (Ssempebwa, 2015, p. 73).

5.4.1 Origin of Social Work in Uganda

The genesis of SW in Uganda can be traced back to the colonial era, when the provision of social services by missionaries and colonial authorities marked the beginning of organized welfare efforts. While these initial endeavors laid the groundwork for the modernization of SW, they also resulted in a reliance on external models and resources. This dependency has persisted into the post-independence period, during which the establishment of formal SW education and the professionalization of the field were critical milestones (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 23). Institutions such as Makerere University have played a pivotal role in this development, yet they continue to face challenges related to underfunding and inadequate resources, which limit their capacity to expand and modernize SW education to meet contemporary needs (Ssempebwa, 2015, p. 4).

Furthermore, while the establishment of SW programs has been instrumental in the professionalization of the field, ongoing challenges persist regarding the relevance and quality of education. The curriculum frequently lacks sufficient integration of indigenous knowledge and practices, which are vital for addressing the distinctive social issues confronted by Ugandans. Furthermore, the training programs are constrained by resource limitations that impede the efficacy of practical training components, which are vital for equipping students to address intricate social issues (Spitzer et al., 2014, p. 120).

5.4.2 Organizations Related to Social Work in Uganda

The growth and maintenance of SW in Uganda has been significantly influenced by the role of NGOs and government-led development cooperation. NGOs, frequently financed by international donors, have served to reinforce governmental initiatives by furnishing indispensable services, promoting alterations to existing policies, and addressing deficiencies where governmental resources are constrained (Wamara et al., 2023, p. 1403). However, these organizations encounter considerable obstacles, most notably in the area of securing consistent and adequate funding. A considerable number of NGOs are dependent on donor funding, which can be erratic and frequently contingent on specific projects rather than meeting the organization's core operational needs. This financial instability impairs their capacity to deliver services in an effective and sustainable manner (Wamara et al., 2023, p. 1405).

Furthermore, government funding for SW is often insufficient, which constrains the scope and impact of state-led social programs. For instance, although the government has made progress in incorporating SW into national development agendas, these endeavors are frequently constrained by financial limitations and deficiencies in policy implementation. Moreover, NGOs frequently encounter

operational obstacles due to rigorous regulatory frameworks, which can impede their operations and diminish their efficacy (Ali & Gull, 2019, p. 53).

The legal environment for (CSOs) in Uganda is shaped by a complex and stringent regulatory framework, which presents additional challenges to the effective delivery of SW services. This environment, which is governed by the Non-Governmental Organizations Act of 2016, imposes strict requirements for registration, financial transparency, and public activities. These requirements often create bureaucratic hurdles that hinder the operations of CSOs. Such regulations may result in frequent audits, operational restrictions, and, in some instances, the closure of organizations, particularly those engaged in human rights advocacy (UNNGOF, 2021, pp. 5–8).

5.4.3 Challenges of Social Work in Uganda

The SW sector in Uganda is confronted with a multitude of challenges that impede its efficacy and viability. One of the most significant challenges is the lack of adequate funding and resources. NGOs and government agencies encounter difficulties in obtaining consistent funding, which impairs their capacity to deliver services in an efficacious manner. This challenge is further compounded by the high degree of dependence on donor funding, which is often project-specific and does not cover the costs of core operational activities, resulting in financial instability within organizations (Wamara et al., 2023, p. 1404). Furthermore, the sector encounters obstacles pertaining to the training and retention of qualified social workers. The dearth of trained professionals is further compounded by the substandard quality of SW education, which frequently fails to adequately prepare students for the intricate realities of practice in Uganda. A significant number of social workers choose to leave the profession due to the combination of low salaries, heavy workloads, and limited opportunities for professional development. This further weakens the sector (Wamara et al., 2023, p. 1409). The differences in the country's regions, as explained in chapter 5.2.3, also pose a mayor challenge. Furthermore, social and cultural barriers present a significant challenge. The stigma associated with receiving social services, along with the conflict between traditional beliefs and modern SW practices, can impede the efficacy of interventions. It is imperative that efforts to promote social acceptance and integrate culturally relevant practices are sustained and adequately supported in order for them to be effective (Service, 2009, p. 615).

In conclusion, while the SW sector in Uganda has made notable advancements, it is imperative that ongoing efforts be made to address the aforementioned challenges in order to build a more effective and sustainable practice. By integrating local knowledge, improving training, and securing more stable

funding sources, social workers in Uganda can better meet the needs of their diverse and dynamic population.

5.5 Different Approaches of Decolonization and Indigenization

The concepts of Indigenization and decolonization are crucial in the context of SW, especially in post-colonial societies such as Uganda (Tusasiirwe et al., 2023, p. 3). As described in chapter 4.2.2 indigenization in SW refers to the process of adapting and integrating local cultural values, practices and knowledge systems into SW practice and education (Gray et al., 2010, p. 4). Decolonization, on the other hand, is a more profound process that involves questioning, challenging, and dismantling the dominance of Western epistemologies, ideologies, and practices in SW. Decolonization aims to restore, revalue, and recenter indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices that were marginalized or suppressed during and after colonial rule (Tusasiirwe et al., 2023, p. 3). While both processes are interrelated and aim to address the effects of colonialism, they convey different ideas and are distinct in their approaches and goals (Tusasiirwe et al., 2023, p. 4). The importance of distinguishing between these two approaches lies in their application. Indigenization may involve the integration of indigenous elements into existing Western frameworks, sometimes perpetuating subtle forms of colonialism. In contrast, decolonization seeks to completely overhaul these frameworks and replace them with indigenous ones, ensuring that local knowledge systems are central. This distinction is critical to creating culturally appropriate and locally relevant SW practices (Tusasiirwe et al., 2023, p. 5). In Uganda, as in many other postcolonial societies, both indigenization and decolonization are essential for addressing the unique SW needs of the country's diverse regions and are culturally appropriate and sustainable. Equally important is the consideration of modernization, which involves the integration of modern techniques and technologies without undermining indigenous practices. This balance ensures that SW practices remain relevant and effective in a rapidly changing world (Jaswal & Kshetrimayum, 2023, p. 1369).

The purpose of this section is to look at decolonization and indigenization approaches in Uganda. By exploring specific examples, this section aims to highlight how indigenized SW practices can address local needs while considering the impact of modernization and ongoing colonial legacies (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 25).

5.5.1 Indigenous Knowledge in Social Work

According to Gray and Allegritti (2022), culture plays a central role in indigenization, serving as a powerful tool for addressing local challenges and understanding the African context. This perspective underscores the importance of adapting SW roles to the cultural specificities of each society in which they are implemented. This approach advocates tailoring SW practices to be context-specific,

recognizing the different cultural backgrounds, worldviews, and orientations that exist in different countries. This discourse is particularly prominent in discussions of indigenized SW practice on the African continent, where it resonates with the principles of *Ubuntu*.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu, rooted in African philosophy, emphasizes that community strength comes from mutual support and that human dignity and social well-being are achieved through values such as reciprocity, empathy, reconciliation, care, wholeness, and harmony. Originating in sub-Saharan Africa, *Ubuntu* is embraced in various African countries under different names (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019, p. 28). It embodies indigenous knowledge and wisdom about communal living that transcends historical, linguistic, and cultural differences. *Ubuntu* aims to foster unity and promote interconnectedness among all people, spanning different levels of society. In the context of indigenizing SW practice, *Ubuntu's* collectivist values are increasingly being applied to develop programs that promote equitable resource distribution, inclusive governance, and effective peacebuilding and poverty alleviation measures (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019, pp. 29-30).

Developmental Social Work

As described in chapter 4.1.3 developmental SW is a conceptual framework used to describe indigenized SW practice, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Androff & Caplan, 2018, p. 4). The SDA takes a multi-sectoral approach, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of poverty. Gray et al. (2018) emphasize that it harnesses the collective capacities of communities to formulate appropriate solutions, often involving collaboration with professionals in fields such as agriculture, infrastructure development, education, and primary health care. In this way, social workers act as intermediaries between service providers and recipients. Key characteristics of developmental SW include rights-based approaches, democracy, participation, and initiatives that promote income generation and micro-enterprise. This approach is considered an indigenized SW practice that contrasts with remedial SW models by mobilizing, empowering, and organizing local communities to influence local development outcomes (Herselman et al., 2023, p. 3).

Political Action as an Element of Indigenized Social Work Practice

Political action within Indigenized SW practice is often highlighted in the literature (Gray et al., 2008), emphasizing the goal of empowering indigenous communities and addressing governance deficits that contribute to poverty, social exclusion, and inadequate service delivery. Hughes (2003) provides insights into the political dimensions of Indigenized SW, arguing that it involves indigenous people asserting their rights, autonomy, and self-expression. Similarly, Briskman (2014) posits that indigenized

SW is inherently political, grounded in principles of human rights and social justice, as indigenous communities seek self-determination in the face of historical domination and colonialism. On the African continent, indigenized SW is seen as an intentional political process aimed at advocating for the economic, social, and cultural rights of local populations marginalized by state policies (Spitzer, 2017). This advocacy is supported by Civil Society Organizations (CSO) in various African countries, including efforts to secure political representation for marginalized groups (Akwetey & Mutangi, 2022, p. 13).

5.5.2 Modernization Aspects of Social Work Practice in Uganda

The process of modernization in SW entails the incorporation of contemporary methodologies, technologies, and frameworks into traditional and indigenous practices with the objective of enhancing the efficacy and reach of SW interventions. In Uganda, this integration presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in balancing the benefits of modern techniques with the preservation and respect for indigenous knowledge systems (Agents of Change, 2024). One of the primary benefits of modernization is the introduction of advanced methodologies that can improve the efficiency and impact of SW practices. For example, the utilization of digital technologies in data collection and case management has facilitated the streamlining of service delivery, thereby enhancing the ability to track progress and outcomes (Wamara et al., 2023, p. 1417). Furthermore, contemporary training programs and continuous professional development opportunities have furnished social workers with the most recent abilities and information, thereby enhancing their capacity to address intricate social issues (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 50). Nevertheless, the process of modernization also presents significant challenges. One major concern is the potential erosion of traditional practices and the risk of cultural homogenization. Modern SW methods, frequently based on Western models, may not always align with local cultural contexts and values. This misalignment can give rise to resistance from communities and may compromise the efficacy of social interventions (Gray et al., 2016, p. 12). Moreover, the imposition of external frameworks without adequate adaption to local realities can perpetuate forms of neo-colonialism, where local knowledge systems are marginalized in favor of imported practices (Tusasiirwe et al., 2023, p. 5).

The successful integration of modernization in SW in Uganda necessitates a meticulous, culturally informed approach. This entails comprehensive community consultation and participation to ensure that modern methods complement rather than supplant indigenous practices. Programs that prioritize the complementarity of modern and traditional approaches tend to be more efficacious and sustainable. For instance, the integration of traditional healing practices with modern health services has been demonstrated to enhance both acceptance and outcomes in mental health care (Wamara et al., 2023, p. 1419). Another crucial aspect of modernization is the role of capacity building. It is imperative to

strengthen the capacities of local SW organizations through training, resource provision, and institutional support in order to ensure that modernization efforts are grounded in local contexts and responsive to local needs (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 53).

5.5.3 Best Practices

The following section presents several high-impact models currently in use in Uganda. The objective is to demonstrate the efficacy of these models in providing comprehensive and culturally appropriate assistance to a range of communities. The following sections examine specific examples of these approaches and their contribution to the overarching goal of transforming SW practice in Uganda.

Professional Social Work in East Africa

The Professional Social Work in East Africa (PROSOWO) project represented a substantial initiative aimed at decolonizing and indigenizing SW education and practice in East Africa. The project was initiated as a joint venture between higher education institutions from Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and an Austrian partner. Its primary objective was to enhance the professionalization of SW in the region, thereby facilitating more effective contributions to social development and poverty reduction. This collaborative initiative aimed to address the distinctive socio-cultural contexts of East African communities, moving away from the historical dominance of Western models and theories that shaped SW education in the region (Spitzer et al., 2014, p. 2).

The overarching objective of PROSOWO was to advance the field of professional SW education and practice in a manner that is more closely aligned with the socio-cultural realities of East African communities. These activities were conducted in accordance with the following key objectives:

- Empirical Research: The project undertook comprehensive research to elucidate the role of SW in poverty alleviation and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. This research entailed the administration of surveys, the conducting of interviews, and the facilitation of focus group discussions with approximately 2,000 respondents representing a diverse range of backgrounds. The empirical data yielded insights into the local needs and practices, thereby identifying the areas where SW interventions could be most effective (Spitzer et al., 2014, p. 3).
- Curriculum Development: In light of the research findings, the project undertook revisions to SW curricula at the undergraduate level and the development of new programs at the master's level. The curricula were designed with the objective of enhancing their relevance to local contexts and of equipping social workers with the skills necessary to address regional challenges in an effective manner. A principal objective was the incorporation of indigenous knowledge

and practices, thereby ensuring that the education provided was both culturally sensitive and practically applicable (Spitzer et al., 2014, p. 3).

- Capacity Building: PROSOWO enhanced the capabilities of SW educational institutions through joint publications, academic collaborations, and networks, both within the African continent and internationally. This encompassed training workshops, conferences, and symposia, which were designed to enhance the scientific writing and research skills of SW educators. The project sought to establish a collaborative academic environment with the objective of developing a robust foundation for ongoing professional development (Spitzer et al., 2014, p. 4).

One of the pivotal outcomes of the PROSOWO project was the discernment of a substantial deficit in the incorporation of local knowledge and practices into SW education. The research revealed a pronounced tendency to rely on Western literature and models, which frequently proved inapplicable to the local socio-cultural context. To address this issue, the PROSOWO project underscored the necessity for a bottom-up approach to theory and model-building, supported by empirical research that documents indigenous and innovative practices from the regions (Spitzer et al., 2014, p. 5). Furthermore, the project underscored the necessity of integrating the African philosophical concept of *Ubuntu* into SW practice and education. The concept of *Ubuntu*, which emphasises the interdependence of human beings, promotes culturally relevant interventions and supports the indigenization of SW in East Africa. This approach was consistent with the project's overarching objective of promoting social cohesion and community development through culturally appropriate methodologies (Spitzer et al., 2014, p. 6).

PROSOWO has made considerable progress in the professionalization of SW in East Africa, promoting a more culturally relevant and context-specific approach. The project yielded several notable outcomes, including revised curricula, an increase in research output, and enhanced institutional capacities. Moreover, the project's emphasis on policy advocacy has established a foundation for the potential regulation of the SW profession in the region. The project's impact was evidenced by the publication of four national books based on PROSOWO's research findings, the development of a fieldwork manual, and numerous conference presentations and journal articles. These contributions enhanced the academic discourse on SW in East Africa and furnished valuable resources for educators and practitioners (Spitzer et al., 2014, pp. 7-10).

By integrating indigenous knowledge and practices into SW education, PROSOWO established a precedent for future initiatives aimed at decolonizing and indigenizing the profession. The project's success highlighted the necessity of context-specific approaches to SW, which are vital for addressing the distinctive challenges encountered by communities in East Africa.

Nkwatiraako practice model

The Nkwatiraako practice model, deriving from the Luganda term signifying “give me a helping hand”, epitomizes a self-help group approach devised to address the multifaceted needs of individuals living with HIV and AIDS (PLHA) in the Byakabanda Sub-County of Rakai District, Uganda. This model incorporates community organizing elements to collectively address the multifaceted challenges faced by PLHA, including health, psycho-social, and socio-economic concerns. The Rakai Counsellors' Association plays a pivotal role in providing HIV treatment, care, and support, while the groups themselves address a range of broader daily challenges, including school fees, hunger, drought, poor housing, and poverty (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 134).(Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 134).

In the initial stages of the HIV epidemic, which occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, organizations such as RACA provided comprehensive care packages that encompassed medical care, food assistance, livelihood support, and, on occasion, educational assistance for the children of PLHA. However, a reduction in donor support gradually limited these interventions to mainly medical treatment and psycho-social counseling, thereby creating a gap that prompted PLHA to adopt self-help approaches to address their needs. As a result, a multitude of such groups have emerged throughout Uganda, becoming a substantial component of the country's response to HIV and AIDS. Initiated by RACA's HIV and AIDS counselors in 2005 with seven members, the Nkwatiraako group approach saw significant growth by 2016, with a total of 31 members (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 134)(Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 134). These groups engage in community-based HIV awareness and mobilization for HIV testing, as well as fostering HIV status disclosure, with the objective of combating stigma and aligning with the goals set forth in Uganda's National HIV and AIDS Priority Action Plan (Uganda AIDS Commission, 2015). Furthermore, they advocate for improved household sanitation, collective economic production, and support for housing construction for vulnerable members, in alignment with national strategic objectives to reduce vulnerability and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 135)(Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 135). In addition to its health-related activities, the group has initiated income-generating projects, including the rental of household utensils for social events. In 2011, it also established a Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), which enables members to save money, contribute to an emergency fund, and borrow for socio-economic improvement projects, thus fostering financial stability and self-sufficiency (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 135).(Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 135).

Integration of Traditional Healing Practices with Modern Health Services

In the Western region of Uganda, traditional healing practices are integrated with modern health services with the objective of improving mental health outcomes. This integration is particularly pertinent

given the region's cultural reliance on traditional healers and the constrained availability of formal mental health services.

Social workers collaborate with traditional healers to provide culturally appropriate mental health care services. This collaboration entails the concurrent utilization of traditional healing techniques and contemporary therapeutic modalities. In Uganda, traditional healers frequently address mental health issues through spiritual and physical treatments, which are culturally significant and widely accepted by the local population. For example, traditional healers utilize herbal remedies and rituals to address what they perceive as spiritual causes of mental illness, such as unhappy ancestral spirits or witchcraft (Akol et al., 2018, p. 2). The collaboration process includes mutual referrals between traditional healers and biomedical practitioners, training sessions to enhance understanding of mental health from both perspectives, and joint community outreach programs to raise awareness about mental health issues and available treatments. Despite their willingness to collaborate with biomedical providers, traditional healers express significant mistrust on both sides (Akol et al., 2018, p. 5). The integration of traditional healing practices with modern health services has resulted in increased acceptance and efficacy of mental health interventions. Traditional healers frequently serve as the initial point of contact for individuals with mental health concerns due to their accessibility and the cultural relevance of their practices. By collaborating with traditional healers, social workers can utilize this initial trust to introduce modern therapeutic practices, thereby enhancing the overall acceptability of the treatment within the community (Akol et al., 2018, p. 6).

The outcome of this integrated approach has been improved mental health outcomes and greater community acceptance of mental health services. This collaboration has demonstrated the importance of mental health services. This collaboration has demonstrated the importance of integrating traditional and modern practices to provide holistic and culturally sensitive care. For example, patients who initially seek help from traditional healers are more likely to continue their treatment with modern health services when referred by someone they trust. Furthermore, traditional healers who integrate biomedical practices, such as the use of modern medications in conjunction with herbal treatments, report superior outcomes in their patients (Akol et al., 2018, p. 7). The efficacy of this integrated model in the Western region of Uganda underscores the potential benefits of such collaborations in other regions with similar cultural contexts. Furthermore, it underscores the necessity for sustained efforts to cultivate mutual trust and respect between traditional healers and biomedical practitioners, ensuring that both approaches are duly respected and effectively integrated into the mental health care system (Akol et al., 2018, p. 8).

Culturally Responsive Child Protection Practices Traditional Reception and Rehabilitation by Twesitule Women's Group in Rakai District

In traditional Ugandan society, the family has long been a primary institution for the care of children. Relatives, such as uncles and aunts, frequently assume responsibility for orphaned children. In response to the HIV epidemic, which resulted in numerous children becoming orphaned (which is a significant challenge as described in chapter 5.3.2), the Twesitule Women's Group in Kyotera, Rakai, District, established a facility for the traditional reception and rehabilitation of affected children. The group provided children and youth, including orphans, lost and missing children, and those with difficult behavior, with a place to live and supported them through basic primary and secondary education as well as vocational training in crafts and traditional dances. These initiatives not only fortified the children's social connections and cultural identity but also constituted a foundation for awareness-raising campaigns on HIV prevention and overcoming discrimination and stigma (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 136). The practice is aligned with the developmental approach of SW, which aims to empower clients. Social workers provide guidance and support to facilitate the clients' growth and development. The model promotes manual skills and culturally accepted tasks, thereby contributing to the children's economic independence and protecting them from dangers such as child labor and street life (Kaawa-Mafigiri & Walakira, 2017, p. 313). The work of the Twesitule Women's Group provides a compelling illustration of the potential for local communities to utilize culturally sensitive approaches to address challenges at individual, family, and community levels. This practice represents a crucial aspect of the broader effort to decolonize and indigenize SW in Uganda. It offers locally rooted solutions to complex social problems, thereby contributing to the broader objective of transforming SW in Uganda (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019b, p. 137).

5.6 Interim Conclusion

The example of Uganda shows that colonial history has also influenced the society of a country and its self-understanding. In Uganda e.g. colonialism has created different "ethnicities" that have led to conflicts, that are still relevant today, it has contributed to major regional disparities that are linked to major differences in economic status and a large gap between rich and poor, inequalities in terms of land ownership and economic opportunities, a military that is used by the president to maintain his power, and violence. And these are just some of the scars left by colonialism. All these scars influence the today's society and with it the social issues, i.e. the field of action of SW. SW needs skills, models, and knowledge of its social workers to respond to such processes and structures. It seems obvious that concepts from western societies, which are only vaguely familiar with such problems, are not effective. But this has often been the case, because SW in Uganda has its origins in the colonial structure, then during colonialism the colonial administration and missionaries took over all forms of social support,

which led to the disappearance of the existing indigenous structures. And after colonialism, the SW of Uganda tried to catch up with western development and tried to fit into the global standards defined (under western dominance). Western models were taught as role models and were seen as superior by Western SW practitioners and educators, but also by parts of the Ugandan elite.

Uganda is confronted with the challenge of a relatively underdeveloped welfare state, characterized by the almost absence of formal social security systems and significant constraints in financing social security and social development due to a limited national budget, which remains heavily reliant on external donor countries. In the absence of a welfare state, it is not possible to work with individuals on a case-by-case basis. This renders many of the models and methods of SW inapplicable. SW must be tailored to the specific local or even regional context, which requires a comprehensive understanding of the local/regional context.

Uganda lacks a welfare state with a strong national foundation, a phenomenon that can be attributed to the country's colonial history. Consequently, informal structures and community support are the most prevalent and effective means of providing assistance, as evidenced by the pest practices in chapter 5.5.3. What these cases have in common is that none were conducted solely by the government or a government institution. These initiatives are structured as NGOs, which rely on external funding sources. In some cases, the government of Uganda provides financial support, and NGOs may also secure funding through networks. Additionally, NGOs in Uganda frequently collaborate through networks. In this SW network there is potential to practice indigenous approaches or to combine them with existing western approaches. It is important that indigenous approaches are researched and then taught in Uganda's universities, because these approaches are needs-based and culturally sensitive, which makes them more effective. For ISW it is important to take these into account, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

6 Reform Proposals for International Social Work

The practice of ISW is currently facing a critical juncture, necessitating a comprehensive and reflective evaluation, as well as meaningful reform, to effectively address the contemporary global challenges it is confronted with. This chapter examines pivotal domains for reform, synthesizing prior theoretical discourse to delineate strategies for enhancing the relevance, efficacy, and equity of ISW. The necessity for reform arises from the recognition that conventional models, shaped by Western ideologies, frequently prove inadequate in addressing the multifaceted needs of global communities. Such models have the potential to marginalize local knowledge systems and cultural practices, underscoring the urgent need to decolonize ISW by incorporating more inclusive and contextually relevant approaches. This chapter attempts to do this by answering the question: *How does international social work need to reform to address global challenges at the local level?*

To ensure the continued relevance of ISW, it is essential to incorporate the evolving nature of global social issues, including climate change, migration, and increasing inequality, into its framework. These interrelated challenges necessitate a comprehensive approach that transcends conventional boundaries. This chapter will examine the ways in which ISW can be adapted to address these complex issues in a more effective manner through the implementation of an integrated framework. Furthermore, it is imperative that ISW plays a pivotal role in advocating for social justice on a global scale. Social workers are uniquely positioned to challenge systemic inequalities and promote human rights. By aligning with global movements for justice and equality, ISW can utilize its global networks to influence policy and drive social change, thereby contributing to the creation of a more just and equitable world.

In this section, we, the authors of this thesis, will present reform suggestions based on the content of the preceding chapters. The objective is to derive actionable insights and recommendations for the future of international SW.

6.1 Decolonization

The process of decolonization represents a pivotal aspect of the ongoing reform of ISW. Its objective is to confront the enduring consequences of colonialism and to advance the implementation of more equitable and culturally responsive practices. This chapter examines the essential steps required to decolonize ISW, with a particular focus on three pivotal domains: education, NGOs, and SW organizations. The objective is to dismantle the pervasive influence of Western-centric models and integrate indigenous knowledge systems, thereby ensuring that SW practices are inclusive and reflective of the diverse cultural contexts in which they operate.

The process of decolonizing ISW necessitates a comprehensive rethinking and restructuring of the manner in which SW is taught, practiced, and organized. Such a process requires a commitment to challenging the dominance of Western paradigms and to the prioritization of the voices and experiences of those from previously colonized regions. Consequently, ISW has the potential to become a highly effective instrument for advancing social justice, human rights, and sustainable development on a global scale.

The following sections will present specific strategies for decolonizing education, NGOs, and SW organizations. The strategies are designed to foster a more inclusive and just practice of SW, with the ultimate goal of empowering and improving the well-being of diverse communities worldwide.

6.1.1 Education

The process of decolonizing SW education is a complex undertaking that seeks to transform the curriculum to incorporate non-Western perspectives and indigenous knowledge systems. This comprehensive reform is essential for the creation of a more inclusive and contextually relevant educational environment for future social workers. The preliminary phase of this process entails the revision of textbooks and course materials to reflect the heterogeneous cultural contexts and historical narratives pertinent to the subject matter. The dominant approach to SW education has been largely shaped by Western perspectives, which can result in the marginalization or overlooking of the experiences and practices of non-Western societies. To this aim, educational institutions, such as the IASSW, must integrate indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews into their curricula. This entails an understanding of traditional practices, community structures, and cultural rituals that play a substantial role in the social fabric of non-Western societies. It is similarly crucial to diversify reading lists, ensuring the inclusion of works by scholars from a range of cultural backgrounds. The inclusion of contributions from African, Asian, Latin American, and other non-Western authors provides invaluable insights into the nuances of local SW practices. Furthermore, it is imperative that historical events and social developments be presented from a multiplicity of perspectives, with particular attention to those of marginalized communities. This approach facilitates students' comprehension of the impact of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization on diverse societies and their SW practices.

Training programs must extend beyond the mere transmission of theoretical knowledge to encompass the lived experiences and practices of marginalized communities. Field placements and internships in indigenous communities and underserved areas facilitate students' acquisition of a firsthand understanding of the distinctive challenges and strengths of different communities. Guest lectures and

workshops with community leaders and indigenous practitioners provide a unique opportunity to gain insights into alternative SW practices and methodologies. Moreover, encouraging students to engage in community-based projects that address local issues ensures that these projects are designed in collaboration with community members, thereby guaranteeing their relevance and respect for local customs and needs.

It is of the utmost importance to establish robust collaborative relationships with local communities and indigenous leaders in order to ensure the effective decolonization of SW education. It is imperative that course materials and training modules be collaboratively developed with community members and indigenous leaders to guarantee that the content is firmly grounded in local realities and respects indigenous knowledge systems. The establishment of advisory boards comprising representatives from diverse communities provides guidance on curriculum development and educational strategies, ensuring cultural sensitivity and appropriateness. The undertaking of joint research projects with local communities enables the exploration of social issues from a culturally informed perspective, thereby facilitating the development of new theories and practices that are pertinent to the local context.

Another essential element of decolonizing SW education is to equip students with the abilities to engage with diverse populations in an effective manner. Cultural competence training is a vital component in this process, as it enables students to comprehend, communicate with, and interact with individuals from a multitude of cultural backgrounds. This encompasses an understanding of cultural norms, values, and communication styles. Additionally, fostering critical thinking and reflexivity in students is of paramount importance, as it allows them to critically examine their own cultural biases and assumptions, and to engage with diverse communities in a more effective and empathetic manner.

6.1.2 Non-Governmental Organizations

NGOs occupy a pivotal role in the field of SW, particularly in regions where government resources are limited or absent. The decolonization of NGOs requires a comprehensive approach to integrating local knowledge and leadership, ensuring that interventions are culturally relevant and sustainable. This necessitates a paradigm shift from traditional Western-centric models to practices that respect and incorporate indigenous perspectives and expertise.

The process of decolonizing NGOs must begin with the prioritization of local individuals for employment and leadership roles. It is of the utmost importance to implement policies that prioritize the recruitment of local personnel at all levels of the organization, from field workers to senior management. This approach serves to empower local communities and enhance the organization's cultural

competence and relevance. Moreover, investment in leadership development programs for local staff, including training, mentorship, and opportunities for professional growth, ensures that local leaders are adequately prepared to assume significant roles within the organization. Furthermore, succession planning strategies are vital for preparing local staff for leadership roles. This ensures the continuity and sustainability of the organization's efforts and fosters long-term community empowerment.

Inclusive decision-making processes within NGOs are a fundamental aspect of the decolonization process. The establishment of community advisory boards, comprising local leaders, elders, and representatives from various community groups, can facilitate the provision of invaluable insights and feedback on the organization's strategies and interventions. The implementation of participatory planning approaches ensures the active involvement of community members in the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects, thereby guaranteeing that the interventions align with the actual needs and priorities of the community. The dissemination of information to community members on a regular basis and the solicitation of their input serve to foster transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. This approach fosters trust and ensures that the organization's actions are subject to local scrutiny and approval.

It is imperative to maintain a continuous dialogue with local communities in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of their needs and perspectives, and to prevent the imposition of solutions that are Western-centric in nature. It is recommended that regular community consultations be held for the purpose of gathering views and feedback on both ongoing and planned projects. It is imperative that these consultations be inclusive, accessible, and culturally appropriate. The implementation of feedback mechanisms, such as suggestion boxes, community meetings, and digital platforms, enables community members to express their concerns, suggestions, and grievances. The deployment of cultural liaisons or community facilitators, who possess a comprehensive understanding of local customs and languages, can facilitate effective communication and foster mutual understanding between the organization and the community.

Furthermore, the integration of local knowledge and practices represents a crucial aspect of the decolonization process within the context of NGOs. Cultural competence training for all staff members underscores the significance of comprehending and upholding local traditions, beliefs, and practices. The involvement of local experts and practitioners in the design of collaborative projects ensures that the resulting interventions are based on a comprehensive understanding of the local context, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and sustainability. The documentation and dissemination of successful

local practices and innovations can serve as a source of inspiration for other organizations, facilitating the wider adoption of culturally relevant approaches.

To circumvent the potential for Western-centric solutions to be imposed, NGOs should prioritize contextual adaptation, modifying international best practices to align with the local context and promoting empowerment over dependency. The empowerment of local communities to develop their own solutions, rather than fostering dependency on external aid, can be achieved through the implementation of capacity-building programs and the provision of support for local entrepreneurship. It is similarly crucial to engage in critical reflection on organizational practices and their impact on local communities. This necessitates the periodic evaluation of interventions to ascertain whether they are respectful, equitable, and genuinely beneficial to the community.

It is also important for NGOs to establish robust alliances with indigenous organizations and community groups in order to facilitate the decolonization process. Such partnerships facilitate the exchange of knowledge, resources, and expertise, thereby ensuring that interventions are culturally grounded and locally driven. It is imperative that a culture of mutual learning be cultivated, whereby both the NGO and indigenous organizations benefit from one another's knowledge and experience. The development of joint initiatives that leverage the strengths of both the NGO and indigenous organizations serves to enhance the impact and sustainability of SW interventions. It is of the utmost importance to acknowledge and uphold the autonomy and expertise of indigenous organizations, guaranteeing that they are afforded an equal voice in decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the decolonization of NGOs in the field of SW requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that prioritizes local knowledge, leadership, and decision-making. By fostering continuous dialogue, integrating local practices, and eschewing Western-centric solutions, NGOs can develop more sustainable and culturally appropriate SW practices. This transformation has the additional benefit of enhancing the effectiveness of SW interventions while also promoting social justice and empowerment within local communities.

6.1.3 Organizations

The process of decolonizing SW organizations is a multifaceted one, involving structural and cultural changes designed to promote inclusivity, equity, and respect for diverse perspectives. It is imperative that these changes be implemented in order to establish an environment in which the principles of decolonization are not only acknowledged but also actively integrated into the day-to-day operations and decision-making processes. To facilitate decolonization, SW organizations must undertake a

critical examination of their existing policies and procedures with a view to eliminating any inherent biases and promoting inclusivity. This process entails the establishment of policy review committees comprising a diverse membership, which are charged with the regular review and updating of organizational policies. The objective is to identify and eliminate biases that marginalize non-Western perspectives and practices. Furthermore, the development and implementation of inclusive policy frameworks that prioritize anti-discrimination, affirmative action, and culturally sensitive service delivery are essential. It is recommended that regular audits be conducted to assess the organization's adherence to decolonization principles. Such audits would help to identify areas for improvement and track progress over time.

The implementation of comprehensive training programs is of paramount importance for the establishment of a decolonized organizational culture. It is recommended that organizations allocate resources to mandatory cultural competence training, which should encompass the historical development, values, and practices of diverse cultural groups, with an emphasis on the importance of respecting and integrating indigenous knowledge systems. It is similarly recommended that workshops and seminars be organized with a specific focus on decolonization in SW. These should address the impact of colonialism, strategies for decolonizing practice, and the role of social workers in promoting social justice. It is imperative that decolonization training be regarded as an ongoing process, providing continuous professional development opportunities to ensure that staff remain informed about the latest research and best practices in decolonization.

The establishment of an inclusive organizational culture that upholds and honors diverse perspectives is a crucial element in the process. Such an objective can be attained by conducting periodic reflection and feedback sessions, wherein personnel can candidly discourse upon their experiences, obstacles, and recommendations pertaining to decolonization. In order to ensure the efficacy of the aforementioned processes, it is essential to implement inclusive decision-making procedures that guarantee the inclusion of all voices and perspectives. Furthermore, it is vital to facilitate the involvement of staff from diverse backgrounds in leadership roles and to establish platforms that serve to amplify the voices of marginalized individuals. It is similarly vital to acknowledge and appreciate diversity through events, workshops, and recognition programs that honour the contributions of staff from different cultural backgrounds and to create spaces for sharing and learning from diverse cultural traditions.

The effective decolonization of SW organizations requires collaboration with local communities and indigenous leaders. It is imperative to establish collaborative relationships with local communities and indigenous organizations with the objective of jointly developing programs and services based on

principles of mutual respect, trust, and a shared dedication to common objectives. It is similarly recommended that community advisory boards be constituted to provide guidance and feedback on the organization's programs and policies, including representatives from various cultural and community groups. The involvement of community members in the design, implementation, and evaluation of research initiatives, as part of a participatory research approach, ensures that the findings of such research are relevant and beneficial to the community.

To guarantee the efficacy and sustainability of decolonization initiatives, it is of the utmost importance to implement comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The development of metrics and indicators to assess the impact of decolonization initiatives, as well as the evaluation of changes in organizational culture, policy implementation, and service delivery outcomes, is of paramount importance. The production of regular reports on the progress of decolonization efforts is of great importance. Such reports should offer transparent and accessible insights into successes, challenges, and areas for improvement. Furthermore, they should establish feedback loops for continuous input from staff and community members. This is crucial for the refinement of strategies and the implementation of necessary adjustments. The implementation of these strategies enables SW organizations to establish an environment that is more inclusive, equitable, and culturally relevant, thereby supporting the principles of decolonization. This, in turn, enhances the effectiveness of SW practice and promotes social justice and empowerment for all communities.

6.2 (International) Social Work Practice

The previous chapter discussed the element of decolonization as the basis of any reformation of ISW towards a more relevant, effective and equitable international SW. The following chapter tries to go to a very practical level. What exactly should ISW do? What should the international social worker do at the micro level? What should organizations do at the meso level? Which reforms should be considered in the practice of ISW? The answers to these questions are highly specific and vary considerably from one case to another. It is therefore not feasible to provide comprehensive responses to them in this context. We try to provide approaches and food for thought that can then be worked out in detail for each organization, each course, and each international social worker. Even though we have discussed SW in Uganda in detail in chapter 5, we will not suggest how SW should be reformed in Uganda or other regions currently labeled as “developing” - this would be a form of professional imperialism. The reform proposals are based on the four main areas of ISW defined in chapter 3.1, as follows:

1. social workers practicing in countries other than their own
2. work with immigrant communities

3. engaging with international organizations to address global social issues
4. entails cross-national collaborations to share SW practices and knowledge

And the last point that will be discussed in this chapter is a proposal to expand the fields of ISW, namely to the field of international/transnational NGOs.

6.2.1 Social Workers Practicing aboard

When social workers practice abroad, they often work for an International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) or for a projects based on the development cooperation (DC) construct of their home country. Especially in countries where the professionalization of SW is not so far that SW is a direct governmental institution, most of the SW is provided by INGOs and NGOs. Here it is crucial that the conception of such development or aid projects is a co-production with the local population, i.e. that the work is completely needs-oriented and builds upon existing modernization efforts. One of the most crucial elements of this process is to identify and assess the needs of the local community in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Presently, a NGO will often devise a concept for a project that is largely aligned with a SDG or a pre-defined issue, then make minor adjustments to accommodate the local context, engage local personnel, and that is the extent of its involvement. This approach inevitably results in SW that is incongruent with the local context, which in turn leads to inefficiencies and unsustainability. It bears repeating: It is imperative that SW be tailored to the specific context of the local community. It is only feasible for foreign social workers to achieve this if they possess a comprehensive understanding of the local context and have the competencies¹² to work “nonhegemonic and anti-imperialistic” (Baig, 2019) with partners abroad. Furthermore, it is essential to gain an understanding of the local community and its informal support structures. Such structures often possess deep roots and are vulnerable in the face of contemporary crises as described in chapter 5.3.2. However, they also have potential for development. The SDA should be more prominently applied in the practice of ISW, as it focuses on capacity building and empowerment, enabling individuals to actively participate and make effective contributions within their communities, as explained in chapter 4.1.3.

6.2.2 Work with Immigrant Communities

As a consequence of the aforementioned globalization process, the diversity within local and national populations is steadily increasing. A quick review of the data illustrates the magnitude of this phenomenon. In 2021, there were 169 million documented migrant workers, representing nearly 5% of the global workforce (Reutlinger, 2008, p. 236). And in the year 2023, there were 117.3 million individuals

¹² Razack (2012) posited that social workers could develop these competencies by engaging with theoretical frameworks pertaining to “race”, racism, colonialism, postcolonialism, and the concept of white privilege, along with their associated critical insights (p. 718).

who were displaced from their habitual residences. Of the displaced population, 68.3 million were internally displaced persons, while 36.4 million were refugees (UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, 2024). These mass movements of people are transforming regions and nation states. This transformation presents a multitude of challenges that ISW and local SW practice are well-positioned to address. Fundamentally, it is important to see migration as a transnational phenomenon (Kniffik, 2010, p. 110). As will be discussed later, SW is unable to respond in an efficacious manner when it operates exclusively within the national context and does not consider the broader implications beyond the confines of the nation-state. SW occurs within a field of tension between the bonds of the nation-state and the orientation towards the clients' lifeworld, which is not constrained by the nation-state (Leiprecht & Vogel, 2008, p. 36). This is a challenging approach because SW, with all its knowledge, methods and theories, is still very often framed by nation-states (Homfeldt et al., 2006, p. 68). The following four ideas may prove beneficial in addressing this challenging task. Firstly, it is recommended that informal support structures and community SDAs within the migrant community or diaspora be sought out, supported, and interwoven with existing support structures in the host country. The second idea is to promote community-oriented development and to work with individuals as members of a community rather than in isolation. It is also crucial to work with the community and not within the structure of individual case assistance. In working with the community, it is also essential to adopt a needs-based approach, which entails a process of continual inquiry and analysis of the community's needs, with the objective of adapting the practice in a manner that aligns with those needs. Furthermore, the objective was to establish contact with the community of the country of origin, which resulted in the formulation of a third idea. Such networking could be facilitated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in both countries (and, on occasion, in specific regions). These organizations possess expertise regarding migration and the concomitant challenges confronting both nations. It would therefore be advantageous to combine the community work of these two countries. The implementation of such approaches necessitates the possession of highly developed intercultural competencies by social workers. This observation leads to the fourth idea, which advocates the enhancement of intercultural competence through SW education and training. This is extremely important because Western white individuals, despite their unearned privileges, are socialized within a racist structure that discourages the acknowledgment of racial differences and encourages the perception of self as colorless. This phenomenon, among other consequences, has the potential to perpetuate imperialism and the maintenance of Western dominance (Razack, 2012, pp. 716–717).

6.2.3 Addressing Global Social Issues through Engagement of International Organizations

In order to reform the working field of engagement in international organizations, the main part is the de-colonization of these organizations, as described above. The IFSW occupies a dominant position

within committees of the UN (Razack, 2012, pp. 716–717), and is able to draw attention to the importance of representation of social workers in NGO committees and activities (Hall & Healy, 2009, p. 258). As illustrated in chapter 4, SW has a global socio-political mandate, which lends legitimacy to its mission of advocating for enhanced conditions for individuals and exerting pressure on states. In essence, it serves as a political advocate for their concerns. This endeavor can be most effectively carried out through these international organizations, particularly the IFSW.

Further such organizations could enhance their capacity to address global social issues through more expansive campaigns and collaboration with other organizations that share similar interests. Moreover, these organizations could facilitate the involvement of social workers in political activities by providing them with support, analogous to that of a global union. This may require the creation of a new organization, which could be a topic for further investigation. Furthermore, these organizations could engage in negotiations with governmental entities to secure investment in social services, citizen participation, and a governance structure that fosters accountability on the part of rulers with regard to human rights (Baig, 2019).

6.2.4 Sharing Knowledges and Practicies through Cross-National Collaborations

It is not uncommon for cross-national collaborations to result in the creation of a document that defines certain standards. This endeavor is not entirely inaccurate. However, it should be noted that these standards must undergo further adaptation. For example, the *Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training* were adapted and, with a view to indigenization, improved. It is necessary to adapt the aforementioned standards in order to align them with the aforementioned principles. One example of this approach is the PROSOWO Project, which has done this work in East Africa. The empirical research is of great importance because if approaches are not based on empirical evidence, they are regarded as less promising for success. This perspective is aligned with the prevailing conceptualization of a profession.

As evidenced in chapter 3, the global sharing of knowledge and practice in cross-national collaborations frequently entails the joint definition of global standards and the advancement of the process of professionalization. In order to exert influence, it is essential for SW to possess robust professional-specific structures and a high level of organization, such as professional associations. Particularly in order to achieve the features that necessitate external validation and regulation from the government. In countries with low levels of economic and social development, such as Uganda, the prevailing socio-cultural context is unable to respond effectively to the inherent structures of professional practice. Consequently, external forces, such as government policies and regulations, are unable to drive

professionalization from outside the profession. To take this into account, it is crucial to consider these specific socio-cultural contexts when defining global standards for SW practice or education, so the process of developing global standards had to be circular, interactive, and discursive (Faraque & Ahmed, 2013, pp. 66–67) and include the perspective of all regions of the world as equals (Baig, 2019). Addressing the discrepancies within SW around the globe is critical to improving the global coherence of the profession, ensuring ethical practice, and effectively promoting social justice worldwide. This understanding paves the way for discussing reforms in ISW that focus on harmonizing professional standards while respecting local contexts and needs. Thus, these global professionalization efforts need to be reformed in the following ways:

- Balancing respect for diverse practice and the need for a unified professional identity in SW education and training. As SW practice is standardized globally, it's important to develop and implement education and training standards that not only promote global best practices, but above all respect and integrate the diversity of local practice. This approach ensures that the profession maintains its integrity and effectiveness, promotes a unified identity that celebrates diversity, and encourages international collaboration, thereby enhancing the profession's responsiveness to both global and local needs. Future reforms should emphasize strategies that facilitate this balance and promote a global profession that is both universally competent and locally adaptable.
- This includes fostering a global SW identity that embraces diversity, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and advocates for global social justice.

6.2.5 International/Transnational Non-governmental Organizations

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that SW is situated in a challenging position in countries with a fragile welfare state. SW, as currently conceptualized, entails the provision of social services within a nation-state framework. This framework is constituted by elements such as laws, accreditation, and regulated education, which are established and maintained by the nation-state. Consequently, when the welfare state is weak, the framework is also weakened, placing SW in a difficult position. SW, with its intricate structure and guidelines for action, is inherently dependent on the nation-state (Köngeter, 2009, p. 343). In light of these considerations, it seems that ISW, when considered in conjunction with Transnational Social Work (TNSW), may offer a promising avenue for future exploration. The TNSW is used to describe SW practices that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, whereas the term ISW is employed to encompass SW activities that occur between two or more countries or within the global “world system”, which encompasses a multitude of nations (Wallimann, 2014, p. 17). For TNSW is no national commissioning required (Kniffik, 2010, p. 108). This permits TNSW to rely principally on its own conceptual and ethical foundations while the significance of the nation-state framework

diminishes (Kniffik, 2010, p. 108). It is important to note that TNSW does not seek to undermine nation-states; rather, it is about understanding the significance of the role that nation-states play (Kniffik, 2010, pp. 108–109). It is also crucial to emphasize that the particulars of a local context should not be overlooked; rather, they should be integrated with a transnational perspective (Schröer & Schweppe, 2010, p. 91). TNSW, presupposes an attitude of openness to results, because it basically tries a discursive negotiation of social development with all the participants (Kniffik, 2010, p. 111).

In this context, NGOs have a great potential because, like TNSW, NGOs are not bound to a nation-state and operate (mostly) independently of any government. Using the example of SW practice in Uganda, it becomes clear that most of the SW in Uganda is already being done by NGOs and INGOs. The foundation of SW and NGOs is the protection and advancement of human rights. It can be reasonably proposed that human rights represent an optimal foundation for a unified strategy (Healy, 2001, p. 75). Additionally, transnational operating NGOs exhibit similarities in their practice with ISW. Both entities endeavor to facilitate social learning processes to foster social development through the implementation of strategies that prioritize participation and empowerment. It is also noteworthy that both entities target collective development rather than individual growth (Cox & Pawar, 2013). NGOs operate at both the operational and political levels, engaging with civil society and influencing economic and political processes. Their involvement can facilitate the integration of civil society perspectives (Schuppert, 2006, p. 212). NGOs that operate transnationally possess the capacity to establish networks that traverse borders, facilitating the interconnection of experiences at the local, national, and international levels (Klein et al., 2005, p. 63). They address issues that transcend geographical boundaries, such as environmental concerns or refugee crises (Klein et al., 2005, p. 64). NGOs are becoming increasingly influential in drawing attention to global problems and deficiencies, initiating public debates and expanding participation in international politics (Klein et al., 2005, p. 66). Nevertheless, they also encounter limitations, particularly in the international domains of finance and economic policy (Groterath, 2011, p. 153). Moreover, the domain of NGOs is largely unregulated, with a considerable number of NGOs operating independently, without any form of coordination. This can result in the emergence of dual tracks and failures (Groterath, 2011, p. 153). It is therefore crucial for NGOs to maintain transparency and to publicly declare their objectives (Groterath, 2011, p. 146). The challenges inherent to nation-state contexts are well recognized by NGOs. NGOs must align themselves with the parameters set forth by the government in order to gain acceptance and operate within the confines of the framework. Should an NGO deviate from the government's stated objectives or even adopt a position in opposition to them, the likelihood of continued government tolerance is diminished. This often results in a limitation of their scope to providing immediate, short-term relief, rather than fostering sustainable social development. A particularly significant issue is that of funding constraints.

Financial backers tend to allocate resources primarily for immediate humanitarian assistance, leaving little for long-term, sustainable initiatives. This cyclical process constrains the potential impact of NGOs, as they are constrained in their ability to implement long-lasting solutions that could lead to significant improvements in social conditions (Groterath, 2011, pp. 153–158)..

Notwithstanding, NGOs with expertise and insight into transnational challenges and processes, with the objective of furnishing sustainable assistance and solutions through the implementation of methodological strategies such as empowerment and participation, represent a promising domain of work with substantial potential for international social workers. Nevertheless, as evidenced by a study conducted by Claibrone (2004), the number of social workers employed by NGOs is minimal (p. 213). It is therefore pertinent to inquire why transnational NGOs do not engage in more collaborative endeavours with SW institutions, particularly given their shared objective of mitigating the adverse effects of globalization through organized forms of support. The current underrepresentation of social workers in NGOs is due to educational and structural barriers. A major reason for the shortage of social workers in INGOs is that their education and training often does not adequately prepare them for the specific demands of international roles (Groterath, 2011, p. 164). SW programs need to be more internationally oriented, integrating subjects such as economics, law, and political science and providing interdisciplinary knowledge. There should also be a greater focus on international and agency-based approaches, community-based methods, and participatory techniques with groups and communities (Homfeldt & Schneider, 2008, pp. 147–149). Although the Bologna reform theoretically allows mobility in higher education to gain international experience and understand the structures of transnational NGOs. However, the limitations imposed by SW education, which is strongly oriented towards the framework provided by the nation state, severely restrict the opportunities for such exchanges and work abroad, particularly for those pursuing an international career (Groterath, 2011, p. 28). Furthermore, the majority of NGOs, particularly those engaged with the UN, aspire to possess a Master's degree. In the domain of SW, however, such qualifications are relatively novel and not yet widely prevalent (Groterath, 2011, p. 165). Conversely, NGOs must demonstrate a greater willingness to engage with social workers, acknowledging the distinctive competencies and perspectives they contribute, which appear to align well with their field of work (Homfeldt & Schneider, 2008, p. 151). The objective can be achieved through the implementation of targeted recruitment strategies and the development of positions that are specifically designed to align with the skills and competencies of social workers. In order to enhance their visibility and facilitate a more fruitful integration of social workers into INGOs, it is imperative that SW education programs become more globally oriented and that NGOs acknowledge and leverage the contributions that social workers can make to international collaboration efforts.

7 Conclusion and Future Directions

The landscape of ISW is at a pivotal juncture, necessitating a comprehensive reevaluation and reform to address contemporary global challenges effectively. The dynamics of global interconnectedness, cultural diversity, and socio-political complexities require a transformation in how SW is conceptualized and practiced. It is of great relevance to the authors of this thesis to ensure that they do not analyse a former colonized country from their very privileged office chairs in a nice middle-class apartment in Switzerland, which also played an active role in colonialism. It was therefore decided to present the final conclusion in the form of reform proposals for the Western position.

ISW has unexploited potentials to address the adverse effects of globalization and play a role in the international cooperation. But SW especially here in Switzerland takes too little interest in the topic and is still thinking only in the frame of the own nation state or even worse in the own canton (in Switzerland like a district) but the problems do not stay within these borders and this is what exactly has to change in the mind of social workers, it is crucial to change the view of social issues to a transnational. This view of the problem is necessary in order to change actions. Such activities are based on international connection and engagement, mostly in organizations which urgently need to decolonize further to

Another pivotal element for ISW reform is the decolonization of practices and ideologies within SW. It is imperative that social workers become more actively engaged with transnational NGOs, thereby opening up new and specialized working fields. Transformation in SW education is essential to produce qualified professionals who are prepared to address the complexities of global social issues. This necessitates the integration of curricula that prioritize global perspectives, cultural competencies, and the capacity to function effectively within diverse, international contexts.

The ISW must facilitate the development of a globally applicable framework that is sensitive to the specific nuances of local contexts. This necessitates the establishment of structures and policies that are malleable to disparate cultural contexts while upholding an unwavering dedication to the tenets of universal human rights and social justice. By employing transdisciplinary methodologies, SW can integrate insights from other disciplines and the affected persons themselves, thereby enhancing its capacity to address global challenges in a comprehensive manner. Transdisciplinary approaches represent not only a conclusion but also a future direction for ISW. As a profession dedicated to the advancement of human rights, SW must leverage international law to exert pressure on nation-states and promote global social justice. This necessitates advocacy at various levels, from grassroots

movements to international policy forums, thereby ensuring that SW remains a formidable advocate for the marginalized and oppressed on a global scale.

In conclusion, it is imperative that ISW undergo a process of evolution in order to meet the demands of an increasingly interconnected world. Adopting a transnational perspective, decolonizing practices, engaging with transnational NGOs, and building adaptable global frameworks will enable SW to significantly enhance its impact on global social issues. This transformation will not only enhance the effectiveness of SW practice but also promote social justice and empowerment for all communities and create an influential **global framework** which fits **to local realities**.

8 References

The authors of this thesis are non-native English speakers. All texts in this thesis were linguistically revised with the help of AI-supported programs, including [DeepL Write](#) and [ChatGPT](#).

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