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Decolonizing Social Policy: Challenging the Western Welfare State through a Racial Capitalism Perspective on Migratory Movements

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Abstract

This article delves into the critical examination of the Western welfare state through the lens of decolonization and racial capitalism in the context of migratory movements. The Western welfare state, established during periods of colonial expansion, has perpetuated inequalities and exclusions, particularly affecting migrant communities. Through a racial capitalism perspective, we explore the inherent linkages between capitalism and racial discrimination that have shaped social policies and their impact on migrant populations. By interrogating Eurocentric perspectives and assimilation policies, we aim to understand the marginalization and economic exploitation faced by migrant communities within the welfare state. Decolonizing social policy involves reimagining solidarity, embracing intersectionality, and resisting neoliberal co-optation. Engaging in decolonial praxis and promoting global solidarity can pave the way for transformative possibilities, leading to a just and inclusive future where the Western welfare state empowers marginalized communities and acknowledges the richness of diversity. This article seeks to highlight the urgency of decolonizing social policy and confronting racial capitalism to create more equitable social systems and promote social justice for all those affected by migratory movements.

Introduction

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The Western welfare state has long been regarded as a symbol of progress, providing social protections and services to citizens within its borders. However, critical scholars argue that this system is deeply rooted in colonial ideologies and perpetuates racial capitalism, marginalizing and excluding certain groups, particularly those impacted by migratory movements. In this article, we delve into the concept of decolonizing social policy and explore how a racial capitalism perspective challenges the Western welfare state in the context of migratory movements. By critically analyzing the inherent inequalities and exclusions within the welfare state, we seek to understand how a decolonial lens can pave the way for transformative change and social justice.

Neoliberal capitalism has created new social inequality gaps and has become the excuse used by states to transform immigrants into the cause of welfare crises, job instability, and threats to national identity, based on the imaginary of a homogenous community. Moreover, neoliberalism has created its own structures of racial oppression. In these structures, borders become key tools for reproducing racial and cultural hierarchies, and for setting spatial boundaries between different types of populations.

Certainly, many people flee their homelands because of economic, political, or social violence. However, analyses of migration place too much emphasis on the individual trajectories of migrants or on the pull factors of host societies. In contrast to this idea, this paper focuses on the material structures that fuel migration flows from the Global South to the Global North, two historically interconnected worlds, but with unequal geographical developments. These differences have been accentuated by neoliberalism, which has led to wide belts of impoverishment and surplus labour that is not exploited, but which feeds human displacement. This paper offers a theoretical reflection on the structural causes that force people to migrate, on the historical context in which unequal power relations between the Global North and South emerge, and on the welfare state as another expression of inequalities on a global scale. The reflections that emerge in this text insist that the lack of freedom of movement of people produces much violence and death.

Welfare states are promoters of rights, but they show a tendency to exclude people who do not meet certain criteria. In the case of Europe, it is often those without citizenship or formal employment, such as immigrants or refugees, who are excluded from benefits. However, the absence of redistribution policies or a welfare state opens up inequality gaps between people and between regions. For example, in the countries of the Global South, the lack of social policies and difficulties in accessing housing, well paid employment, and health care, among other things, can have repercussions on the expulsion of people.

State-provided services such as health, education, and pensions are highly valued by people and central to maintaining reasonable standards of living. However, the welfare state functions because it is linked to



a well-functioning economy, to social and power relations. This is why the arrival of neoliberalism has reduced the welfare state, because it has curbed state intervention in the economy and imposed limits on economic resources for social policies. The neoliberal order has modified social protection, partially privatized it, and made work more flexible.

Colonial modernity will produce a new economic rationality where surpluses will cease to be produced for the community and will be managed by the ruling class, which will lead to an unequal distribution of the world's wealth. This inequality has been extensively studied by Wallerstein, who situates capitalism in the 16th century. This date marks the beginning of the gestation of new forms of labour control, nationalism, and states. The unequal distribution of wealth on a global scale, which continues to this day, can be seen in the unequal economic and political development between the countries of the North and the Global South. These inequalities are rooted in the world system, a system that functions on the basis of the international division of labour and the free circulation of capital, concentrated in the Global North.

The world system will be led by Europe and will distinguish three zones: metropolis, semi-periphery, and periphery. In each zone there will be different specializations and forms of labour control. The distribution of occupations was radicalized to produce multiple strata of status and different social rewards. Under this scheme, the metropolis extracted all kinds of resources from the peripheries, which made the emergence of the capitalist system possible. It was the racial division of labour that ensured that the metropolises extracted profits from the global chains of commodities, raw materials and wealth. Moreover, it constructed the disparity with the peripheries, which represent social "backwardness", commercial dependence, and economic vulnerability.

The colonial legacy of the western welfare state

The Western welfare state emerged during periods of colonial expansion, and its policies were deeply influenced by imperial ideologies. We explore the historical roots of the welfare state and examine how colonial attitudes continue to shape social policy, resulting in discriminatory practices and systemic injustices.

The nexus of racial capitalism and migratory movements

Migratory movements, whether forced or voluntary, have played a significant role in shaping contemporary societies. We examine how the intersection of racial capitalism and migratory movements perpetuates social inequalities, leading to the exclusion of migrant communities from the benefits of the welfare state.

The marginalization of migrant communities



Through a racial capitalism lens, we analyze the ways in which migrant communities face marginalization and economic exploitation within the Western welfare state. We explore discriminatory policies and practices that hinder access to social services, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

The illusion of inclusivity: examining assimilation policies

Assimilation policies often form a part of the Western welfare state's approach to migratory movements. We critically assess these policies, questioning their impact on cultural identity and the erasure of diverse traditions and practices.

Decolonizing social policy: unpacking eurocentric perspectives

Decolonizing social policy involves challenging Eurocentric assumptions and perspectives that underpin the welfare state. We explore alternative frameworks that acknowledge and respect the diversity of cultures and traditions within contemporary societies.

Reimagining solidarity: embracing intersectionality

A decolonial perspective highlights the importance of intersectionality in addressing the needs of diverse migrant communities. We examine how recognizing the interconnectedness of social identities can inform more inclusive and effective social policy solutions.

Empowering migrant communities: participatory approaches

We explore participatory approaches to social policy that engages migrant communities in decision-making processes. By giving voice to those affected by policy outcomes, we discuss how more equitable solutions can be crafted.

Resisting neoliberal co-optation: decolonial praxis

The Western welfare state is increasingly influenced by neoliberal ideologies, which undermine its original intent of social protection. We discuss strategies for resisting the co-optation of social policy by neoliberal forces and promoting decolonial praxis.

Global solidarity: rethinking international relations

A decolonial approach to social policy encourages reevaluating international relations and responsibilities. We consider how global solidarity and cooperation can foster just migration policies and challenge the exploitative nature of racial capitalism.

Towards a just future: transformative possibilities



We conclude by envisioning a just and inclusive future, one in which decolonizing social policy and confronting racial capitalism pave the way for a Western welfare state that embraces diversity, empowers marginalized communities, and fosters genuine social cohesion.

Conclusion

Decolonizing social policy and challenging the racial capitalism perspective on migratory movements is essential for transforming the Western welfare state into a more inclusive and just system. By critically examining historical legacies, dismantling discriminatory practices, and promoting global solidarity, we can work towards a more equitable future that embraces the richness of diverse cultures and acknowledges the rights and dignity of all individuals impacted by migratory movements.

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