Nature-based therapy in Botswana and Scotland: Re-imagining social work for the climate crisis

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Abstract
This article discusses nature-based therapeutic interventions for young people and their families in Scotland and Botswana, to explore how green social work practice might tackle deepening inequalities in the context of the climate crisis. Both countries struggle with long-standing inequalities, and both face similar threats as the climate crisis advances –complicated by the legacies of other shared crises, from pandemics to poverty. With similar modes of governance and a shared entanglement in the British colonial project, social work practice encounters similar challenges in addressing the intersecting crises both countries face. Co-written by two social workers and a social anthropologist with personal, professional and research experience in these countries, the article draws on autoethnography to make comparisons that enable imagining new possibilities for social work practice in a time of accumulating crisis.

Keywords
climate crisis, nature-based therapy, green social work, inequalities, auto-ethnography

Introduction
A firmly established and growing area of social work sits at the intersection between social work and the environment, and its potential for therapeutic intervention and social justice. Described as green, eco, or environmental social work, it recognises the pivotal role social work can play in combating the entwined crises of climate change and biodiversity loss (Boetto, 2017; Dominelli, 2012; Engstrom & Powers, 2021). Looking at the impacts of climate change on mental health (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018), re-establishing connectedness with nature, prioritising climate justice, and supporting individual and community resilience and recovery after climate disasters are areas in which social work is finding an important foothold (Boetto, 2017; Dominelli, 2012; Engstrom & Powers, 2021). Significant

work remains in researching the interdependent relationship between people and nature and the ways in which climate change signifies both a social and natural crisis. In this article, we take a step in this direction by exploring nature-based therapeutic interventions in two countries – Botswana and Scotland – and situating them in our own experiences with the natural environment and the climate crisis, in Botswana, Scotland, and Canada.

The climate crisis is a revelatory crisis (Sahlins, 1972: 124); it starkly reveals contradictions in existing socio-economic and political orders, and the inequalities those orders produce. Climate change is experienced in different ways and degrees around the world, presenting different types of threat to people's livelihoods and health. These differences are shaped by political and historically situated inequalities, which gain new focus in the light of the crisis (Schipper, 2020). At the same time, the discourse of crisis camouflages these inequalities, blaming them or reducing them to matters of the changing climate, and distracting from their root causes (Solway, 1994). Responses to crisis that do not address fundamental inequalities at best delay or postpone further crisis – and at worst, magnify and reproduce it. We suggest nature-based and eco-therapeutic approaches offer one means of attending to the root causes of the complex issues emerging from compounding experiences of crisis, while providing an alternative approach to the crisis that envelops all others: the climate crisis.

Drawing on the example of two non-governmental nature-based therapy programmes, contextualised in collaborative auto-ethnographic accounts, we argue that the climate crisis is usefully seen as cumulative: a crisis that is produced, driven by, and embedded in multiple other crises – from pandemics to war, financial crisis to crises of care – while simultaneously encompassing and enfolding them. We also draw inspiration from intersectionality scholarship (Crenshaw, 1989) which focusses on understanding and addressing multiple inequalities caused by layered privileges and oppressions. The effects of the climate crisis are universal, but its impacts differ and differentiate, along lines of class, race, generation and gender, between rural and urban, both tracing and reproducing long-standing inequalities (Mikulewicz et al., 2023). The ways in which people engage, or are able to engage, with the environment in response to crisis are deeply ambivalent and may be harmful or destructive as much as healing or restorative (Albrecht, 2019; Cunsolo & Landman, 2017). Nature-based therapy, utilising the environment as a partner in the therapeutic process (Berger & McLeod, 2006), works with this ambivalence and intersectional lens in an intentional attempt to turn it towards healing, and cultivating relations with the natural environment.

Over our initial discussions around this article, a question began to develop. How might our own personal and professional experiences – with nature-based therapy and the climate crisis – help to imagine and generate a "green shift" in social work, which might address environmental justice?

Context: Botswana and Scotland, in comparison

Botswana and Scotland may seem to offer an odd comparison, but they share surprising similarities. Both are welfare states, with significant government involvement and leadership in development and the provision of public goods and services. Both also struggle with long-standing and worsening inequalities, which disproportionately affect young people and their families – especially those in rural and highly remote areas. The economies and politics of both countries rely to a significant extent on the management of finite natural resources: Botswana on diamonds, Scotland on oil. Those resources have

played critical roles in each country's entanglements with the British colonial project, and critical roles in shaping possibilities for and claims on independence as well. Scottish missionaries were key figures in not only the missionisation of Botswana, but also in the development of its first formal health and education interventions, as well as the occupation and development of land on which later colonial ventures built (Sillery, 2023). Both have inherited British models of governance, parliamentary systems, and legal traditions. Scotland remains partly devolved from Westminster, and while Botswana is fully independent, several of its laws have not changed since those promulgated in the colonial era – and it remains tied to British educational standards and assessments (Seidler, 2011). Social work practice in both countries is informed by comparable curricula and training, modelled on British social work norms and histories (Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2016), and underpinning assumptions about what constitutes healthy individuals, families, and societies. And in both countries, as in many other parts of the world, social work occupies a tense position between sometimes contradictory state and community priorities.

Scotland

Social work in Scotland remains slow to recognise the "green shift" needed to benefit the country socially and environmentally. Historically, Scottish social work was an undifferentiated arm of British social work; but since Scotland's devolution, and in the context of a strong political focus on gaining independence from the UK, Scotland has been differentiating itself politically, socially and culturally from the rest of Britain (Cree & Smith, 2018). Social work in Scotland is seen primarily as a statutory profession; Criminal Justice, Children and Families, and Adult Services mark the main areas of practice, with options for working within a different focus within each (Cree & Smith, 2018). Scottish social workers have their own legislation to consider (separate to the other three countries of the UK) and are often seen as an arm of the local government, as opposed to being more focussed on social justice, challenging neoliberal agendas (Wilson et al., 2023), or tackling the climate crisis.

Botswana

Like Scotland, Botswana is modelled on the principles of the welfare state. Welfare states often look different in the developing world than in western countries that pursue the same governance model (Botlhale & Molokwane, 2019). In Botswana's case, the state is a key player in development initiatives, but also depends heavily on the contribution of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to undertake major social interventions. This reliance has become especially marked in the face of four overlapping crises – sometimes all classed as "pandemics" (Mpabanga, 2017; Stone et al., 2021) – that have hit Botswana hard since 1997: HIV/ AIDS, drought, periodic financial crisis, and latterly COVID-19. NGOs have taken leading roles in the provision of psychosocial support, and more recently the pursuit of the environmental agenda towards a "green shift". There are hundreds of NGOs addressing psychosocial issues and environmental disasters in the country (Stone et al., 2021), though many focus more on the needs of adults or children than those of youth (Thamuku & Daniel, 2012). Social work has had a critical role to play in both governmental and NGO interventions, and has had to develop rapidly to emerging crises (Thamuku & Daniel, 2013).

Both Botswana and Scotland face surprisingly similar threats as the climate crisis advances despite their very different climates and ecosystems. In recent years, both have been subject to increased drought and threats to water supply, and alternately to

devastating flooding (Amusan & Odimegwu, 2015). Both countries have faced the global crises that have characterised recent history, if in different measures and degrees: from pandemics (both AIDS and COVID-19) to the financial crisis (Taylor, 2017; Ulriksen, 2011). It is partly due to this comparable combination of tensions that nature-based therapy programmes have also come to feature as evolving social work responses in both Botswana and Scotland.

Methodology

As academics from different cultural backgrounds (two from Canada, one from Botswana) and academic disciplines (two in Social Work, one in Social Anthropology), we have come together to look at how our social, geographic, and disciplinary intersections help us imagine possibilities to address deepening inequalities, collective trauma, and environmental injustices. In fact, our differences, and the differences in the cases we compare, have highlighted that no matter where in the world you find yourself, innovative good practice is emerging to support humans, nature, and the ecosystems they co-constitute. We have had similar reflections and experiences as we see and feel the climate crisis unfold around us, and have a shared sense of the imperative to come at these complex issues from all angles.

Utilising a "case study of collaborative autoethnography" (Haeffner et al., 2022) for this article seemed like the logical starting point. We knew we could combine our shared experience and knowledge into a piece relevant to our disciplines. We have noticed the resonances and tensions in our shared roles as academics and individuals with acute experiences of climate related change, and as women who enjoy spending time outdoors to support our own wellbeing. Our conversations often contain a reflective and analytic component as we wrestle with our impactful environmental behaviours, and as we bear witness to each other's climate related emotions, including eco-anxiety and frustration at the social inertia around making sustainable change. As in Engstrom and Powers (2021), writing and sharing our stories and experiences has become a part of our own self-care and support of each other.

Autoethnography takes the approach of systematically analysing personal experiences in order to understand broader social and cultural experiences – in this case, the climate crisis (Ellis et al., 2001). We aim to display, in writing, multiple layers of consciousness and recognition of the complexity of being academics who research the natural environment whilst simultaneously being climate change survivors and active witnesses. All of us place significant importance on the role of storytelling as a form of sense making, and a mode of navigating crisis that produces and strengthens relationships (Reece, 2022; Reece, 2021). As Ellis et al. (2001) note, "autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does, how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others, as writers, participants, audiences and humans" (p. 282). We took notes during our conversations, journaled or undertook free-writing; and in conversation, we sought to ask each other poignant questions to support a deeper level of self-analysis, reflexivity and gentle critical inquiry. These practices are essential to supporting a collective autoethnography, as we returned to our notes and writing while putting together the manuscript to support a fuller critical analysis (Hamilton et al., 2008). In our discussions we referred to theories we often utilise, including intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), crisis (Roitman, 2013), ecological systems - how an individual's membership in different systems interact with each other at multiple levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) – and decolonialism (Choate

& Engstrom, 2023). These dialogues supported us to sense-make and interrogate our individual eco-social world views (Engstrom & Powers, 2021).

Critically, we believe in the role of autoethnography, and storytelling broadly, in challenging traditional colonial and patriarchal research practices (Oswald et al., 2020). We subscribe to the position that current research and academic processes need to evolve and allow for other ways of knowing and being. We believe we must continue to challenge and push methodological boundaries when it comes to complex global issues such as the climate crisis, which calls for societal reckoning and drastic shifts in understanding. And we suggest that the "green shift" underway in social work practice both requires and enables this decolonial shift, in the practice and theory of our disciplines.

In addition to placing an analytical lens on our own experiences, stories, and perceptions, we recognised the need to focus on the countries we know, live and work in. The social work academic from Botswana focussed on one case study, the social work academic who lives in Scotland on another, while the social anthropologist with extensive experience of both places draws the comparisons together and situates them in their own experiences in order to extend the comparison into imagining alternative futures. As such, there is not only a case study element to this work, but a comparative project (Candea, 2019). In our conversations and editing work, we surprised even ourselves with the striking similarities and while reading and reconfiguring one another's sections we jointly formulated the comparisons Botswana and Scotland share that informed the final discussion. While comparison may be 'an impossible method' (Candea, 2019, p. 52), drawing these interdisciplinary and different stylistic strengths, approaches, and examples together not only subverts colonial assumptions about which countries can provide models or learning to which others, but draws our attention to the climate crisis as a globally shared predicament, and to the potential of collective learning and response.

Our stories

Botswana: People and nature interact in simple but deep ways

Masego Katisi (social work academic, practitioner, Botswana)

In the early 2000s, years of drought made wastelands of Botswana's farms and wild spaces (Solway, 1994), compounding the losses of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, which had been raging for over a decade. When I was starting my social work career, rural communities – particularly in the remote Kalahari Desert areas – were hit hard by drought and disease alike, crises which widened long-standing inequalities around food supply (Taylor, 2017). Coping strategies in these rural areas tended to rely on natural resources, which are vulnerable to environmental stressors, and were also disproportionately affected compared to cities and towns due to a relative lack of resources and limited support from government (Lottering et al., 2021). These crises, and responses launched to address them, both contributed to rapidly growing inequalities across the nation.

Young people bore the brunt of these intersecting crises. By 2001, Botswana had registered a shocking 67,000 orphaned children in a population of only 1.7 million people. Young people started experimenting with high-risk behaviours. Young people's mental health deteriorated even more when the global financial crisis hit Botswana in 2008 (Sigurdsen et al., 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these impacts as it overlapped with the consequences of earlier crises (Hambira et al., 2022). Additionally, Beer Depots turned wild fruits, herbs and plants into "strong alcohol" to entertain stressed young people. These strong brews were given local names like *laela mmago* (*say goodbye*

to your mother), and *motse o teng godimo* (*there is a home in heaven above*). These names communicate the high levels of alcohol and high chances of deaths due to overdose and addictions associated with these wild drinks. Young people were, and still are struggling to deal with the accumulating crises in which they are coming of age (Sebeelo, 2021).

Early on in this trajectory, I realised something new was needed to address young people's mental health challenges. I thought: "I do not need to read a book or refer to a theory"; I drew my childhood experiences of exploring and living with the land, my social work practice, and ecological commitments together. Together, they made clear that nature-based therapeutic interventions were what was required.

The Balekane EARTH wilderness-based programme

The Balekane EARTH programme adapts a long-standing and widespread – though now largely lapsed – Setswana tradition of initiation practice to strengthen young people facing psychosocial challenges through wilderness retreats (Katisi et al., 2019). It targets children orphaned by AIDS and young people with alcohol addiction. The wilderness camp is organised as a rite of passage, and comprises three phases: *separation* from the community, a transition and *transformation* period at camp, and incorporation or *reaggregation* back into the community (Thamuku & Daniel, 2012). Like Botswana's traditional initiation schools, the programme uses encounters with nature in four ways: 1. nature is used as a space in which to be with one's thoughts and ventilate debilitating mental pressures to fellow group members and therapists; 2. natural metaphors and symbols are used to mark and crystalise phases of transformation throughout the three weeks of camping; 3. nature is used as a platform for character building, including through long and short expeditions (Thamuku & Daniel, 2012); and 4. young people learn about the importance of protecting and growing natural forests.

The programme, which has now been running for over twenty years, has a strong focus on being adventurous in exploring the emotional, mental world with and through the natural world. Participants tap into what is going inside them, expose it and address it through natural metaphors and constructive resolutions (Ark & Mark Trust, 2011). Nature-based challenge courses at the custom-built Balekane camp are intended to give participants the opportunity to recognise self-imposed limitations, and realise that the only person responsible for breaking through those limitations is oneself, alone and in kinship with others (Thamuku & Daniel, 2012). In nature-based therapies, nature is used to teach perseverance – a life skill that requires different skill sets and reflections for everyone, but that produces unique possibilities for changing their own world as well as the world around them (Divya & Naachimuthu, 2020). Young people are given opportunity to push themselves and learn skills and strategies for survivial through different terrains, over rivers and rocks, through woods and mountains.

My observation is that this experience offers participants compassion, fierceness, and resilience. They learn that they are not going through these experiences only for themselves, but can be there for others too. By being in their cohorts, and within their growing kinship, they identify their own autonomy, identify who they are and learn to contribute in their own unique way. An emphasis on autonomy helps them to be authentic and to contribute for the benefit of all (Blaine & Akhurst, 2022). Balekane EARTH uses rites of affirmation as well: symbols from nature like pieces of heartwood, seeds with hard shells, or light from the fire, which mark the phases of transformation as they go through their intense, cumulative ecotherapy. During wilderness therapy, cohorts of these young people develop into kinship groups that continue supporting each other back in

their communities and undertake hands on activities together including tree-planting and starting backyard gardens to feed their families (Thamuku & Daniel, 2012; Thamuku & Daniel, 2013).

If nature therapy is taken as a rite of passage, sealed with rites of affirmation, it "can provide a powerful tool to help children commit to therapeutic transformation, and build the supportive group" (Thamuku & Daniel, 2012, p. 215). In our investigation of the efficacy of the Balekane EARTH programme (Katisi et al., 2019), we have determined that young people who scored most poorly on measures of resilience reported the biggest gains on these measures following the intervention. The programme is currently being replicated nationwide by the Botswana government, but in a limited form. It is not yet available to millions of other young people who could gain from such a focused programme, while also enhancing biodiversity.

Scotland: Relationships with nature, others, the self, and the world: Barnardo's B-Wild

Sandra Engstrom (social work academic, practitioner, Scotland)

In Scotland, the charity Barnardo's runs a nature-based therapy intervention called B-Wild, which combines connectedness with nature and supporting children and families. Barnardo's is a UK-wide charity that seeks to achieve better outcomes for children; they run a variety of evidence-based programming, including the B-Wild programme. The key aims of the B-Wild service are to increase wellbeing in children, young people and their families by strengthening their engagement with nature; for the participants to have an increased understanding of natural heritage and how to access, engage with and protect it; for participants to gain confidence in accessing natural spaces and different ways to engage with it; and to increase the skill base of staff in nature-based therapy based programming. The B-Wild programme utilises the full range of Scotland's natural environment to support children, young people and families. Although I haven't delivered this particular programme myself, I am experienced working at outdoor centres delivering similar programming, and am currently evaluating B-Wild's training and impact. I have seen the positive impact of spending extended time in the outdoors on people's mental health and overall engagement with the world.

What stands out is the centrality of relationships in these programmes. I have seen this in my own life, among my friends and family, and among the B-Wild staff members I have spoken with. Nature-based interactions and therapy inspire a complete shift in your inter- and intra-relationships. This change happens gradually as one pays more attention to senses of connection and relationality as a living practice.

Nature

Often, the first shift is how one relates to the natural world, an increased recognition of the interdependence of all living things. While people can, and often do, read or watch videos about the natural world, tangible experience of interacting with the non-human environment makes us far more likely to understand, protect and respect it. The B-Wild programme, and training, includes an emphasis on learning to identify some of the Scottish flora, fauna, bugs and animals. Staff are not expected to be qualified ecologists, but there is vocal appreciation of being able to name what they see and understand the wider ecosystem. This skill set allows them to be able to link aspects of, for example, how a particular plant adapts and changes through the seasons, with potential directions of

growth for a young person or family. Confidence here also increases people's understanding of the true scale of the climate crisis, and their ability to respond.

Others

When I think about what else I have learned through studying and participating, or facilitating nature-based therapy, I have been surprised at the extent it has affected my relationships. Primarily, this shift has been achieved through spending concentrated time with others and experiencing and supporting each other through the highs and lows of being human, which natural environments often evoke. I have seen outstanding displays of vulnerability and connection through shared experiences of joy, supporting each other with difficult tasks and risk management and assessment. Having to problem-solve together, sometimes in potentially life-threatening or risk-of-injury situations, develops advanced communication skills and empathy, building mutual resilience that classrooms or 'sterile' environments cannot support as effectively. With an epidemic of loneliness (Goodfellow et al., 2023), I can't think of a better way to help people connect with others than getting them outside and exploring with a group.

The B-Wild facilitators have also spoken of how they have seen family relationships change as a result of the programme. Whether it is building shelters, bug-hunting, nature-based scavenger hunts, or increasing the capacity for mindfulness, they witness individuals and families developing emotional intelligence and new ways of interacting with each other. Nature-based interactions can also support mindset shifts in how we understand our role within our systems through opportutunies to challenge and develop our self-esteem (Chavaly & Naachimuthu, 2020).

Self

One aspect of these programmes I certainly did not credit enough until working with the B-Wild programme and focussed self-reflecting, are the benefits to facilitators as well as participants. My capacity to problem-solve, sit with uncertainty and risk, and support others through challenging times, as well as be sure of my own resilience, were all nurtured and developed by working with others in an outdoor setting. Supporting a group of young people through a lightning storm, or explicit debrief sessions with a group, have influenced my ability to stay present and grateful. I relate my own wellbeing and beliefs about the world to my knowledge of how interconnected we all are; I am unable to separate myself from the trees, rivers and mountains where I grew up and spend time in. My overall sense and trust in myself, and how I show up for others, have been highly influenced by these experiences, and the B-Wild facilitators echoed similar feelings. In short, I am fully on board with, and see daily evidence of, the biophilia hypothesis, which states that we have an innate biological need and attraction to natural environments, and spending time in these environments are key to our survival (Wilson, 1993).

Therapists, psychologists, neuroscientists and social workers are increasingly aware of the benefits of spending time outdoors on mental health, anxiety, blood pressure and overall wellbeing (Cooley et al., 2020). However, there is considerable work to be done to support other leaders and practitioners to gain confidence in this way of working. Not only does B-Wild want to see the change in young people and their families, but practitioners have also stated they are inspired to change their wider social work practice as the training has influenced them to be more holistic and ecologically sensitive.

The World

This ripple effect is what those of us who research, practice and live with an eco-social world view (Engstrom & Powers, 2021) hope to achieve. We like to believe that if enough of us start consciously living from a place that de-centres the human experience and places it alongside other non-human entities, the world may start to achieve some sort of new balance. It is increasingly obvious that a lack of balance is changing all our lives, and not in a way many of us would choose. Large-scale forest fires, long standing droughts and 'once in a century' floods, happening yearly, are in our news feeds with alarming regularity. Personally and professionally, I have been witness to how overwhelmed people (including myself) get when thinking about their role in the climate crisis and whether they have any power at all to stop it. This is especially true when listening to people of the global majority and small island states, when the added lens of environmental justice is applied. The true intersectionality of climate change experiences is only starting to get more attention as we see how global supply chains can be affected by climate related disasters, COVID-19 and conflict.

These overlapping and entangled crises are resulting in a globally heightened awareness of just how prevalent and deep rooted our inequalities are. B-Wild, and other programmes, takes a trauma-informed lens for practitioners to identify and work with participants through the layers of injustice they have experienced. Bringing participants out into the 'wild' and allowing them choice, freedom, acceptance, and opportunities to be brave and recognise their own growth and development, in a programme that also emphasises safety and appropriate risk taking, are all central tenets of trauma-informed practice. What we are hoping to get across in this article, is that more nature-based therapeutic interventions and innovations are needed globally, to start the deep healing that is needed for the natural environment and for our own survival.

Integrated stories: Wildfires and the generative danger of natural encounters

Koreen Reece (social anthropologist of Botswana, Canada)

In October 2023, we met online to discuss ideas for this article. I was at home, in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, Canada. A wildfire was raging only six kilometres from where I sat, musing over nature-based therapeutic interventions on different continents via Zoom (Reece, 2023). There was very little between me and the fire but hills of dense forest, parched from a summer without rain – an ecosystem that relies on regular fire to thrive, but burning more fiercely and uncontrollably than ever. Helicopters and planes ran a constant loop from the lake below to the fire above, trying to hold a fireguard. We were on evacuation alert; the few valuables I had with me were packed in the car and ready to go.

The fire season came home to us twenty years less a day from the last catastrophic fire to visit the Okanagan, in 2003. The Okanagan Mountain Park fire forced tens of thousands to evacuate, reducing hundreds of homes to ash, while leaving plastic tents or woodpiles or other homes untouched. After days of watching helplessly from across Okanagan Lake as the fire consumed the horizons of my childhood, I boarded a plane for Botswana – a place I had never visited, but which would come to occupy my professional and personal life for the next two decades. Five years in Botswana working as a development worker – first in NGOs responding to the AIDS pandemic, and then in the Department of Social Services coordinating community-based orphan care projects – took me, in its unexpected turn, to graduate school in Scotland, where I would conduct doctoral research on the ways that families were impacted by AIDS and the governmental and NGO responses launched

in its wake. I concluded that, far from being destroyed, family is made, reproduced and reoriented in navigating crisis, including major socio-political crises like the AIDS pandemic (Reece, 2022). I wondered, now, as we discussed all the places I have called home over Zoom, whether the climate crisis, too, was the sort of crisis through which we generate kinship – and through our kin-making, the possibilities of broader social change, to our fraught histories and collective futures alike.

Wildfire has bracketed and punctuated my personal and professional journeys. In British Columbia, whole towns have been consumed by fire, and in some places the forests have burned so hot that the soil is rendered hydrophobic, unable to take in water. The last time I visited Botswana, in 2022, I saw my first veld fire – uncharacteristically, it had come right to the edge of the border town of Lobatse, where it flared uncontrollably among the high grasses and lapped against walls built around local school and churchyards. And then 2023 brought the strange news of drought and forest fire in Scotland, a place almost altogether deforested over hundreds of years, only recently subject to systematic reforestation programmes. Notwithstanding the oceans and continents that stand between these three far-flung locales, it was somehow hard not to feel this was all somehow the same fire, a continuous conflagration that stretched around the world.

This vision of a world on fire, we suggest, is one thing the global climate crisis invites us to take seriously: the fact that places, peoples, histories and futures that seem quite remote from one another are in fact deeply entangled, and must be held and thought of together. It's a task that comparisons like the one we have undertaken above seek to achieve, and that we suggest is a necessary pre-requisite to generating a "green shift" that recognises and attends to the complex inequalities we have described, and to environmental justice. It is in comparison that what we have identified as the cumulative and intersectional dimensions of the climate crisis become most apparent, as well as its sheer global scale and scope. We see how pandemics, from AIDS to COVID-19, financial crises, wars, and histories of colonial exploitation have accumulated into an unsustainable burden on our environment, on our interpersonal and global relations, and on ourselves. Comparison brings out the radical inequalities that mark our capacities to respond to and live with climate crisis as well: while helicopters and planes flew over my head all day to fight our encroaching fire, there were no resources, infrastructure or fire-fighting strategies whatever to meet the veld fire I encountered in Botswana. And we see the ways in which attempts to shift burdens of crisis and responsibility, since the colonial era, on to the global south, while resources and wealth flow in the opposite direction, simply render us all more vulnerable. In Setswana, we say *matlo go sha mabapi*: neighbouring houses burn together. Fire, and the climate crisis broadly, insists we recognise our personal and political entanglements, and the responsibilities we have to one another, inspiring our capacities for creative, collective response.

As both the looming fires and the reflections above suggest, a "green shift" in social work at a time of climate crisis also needs to attend to the environment as a source of danger and trauma, *and therefore* a source of potential healing. The presence of mortal danger in wild spaces is a defining feature, and a key source of therapeutic intervention and resilience. In the Canadian forests, danger was (and is) omnipresent: in the risk of encounters with bears, cougars, or rattlesnakes, as much as with exposure to unpredictable weather, dangerous terrain, floods or wildfire. In Botswana, "the bush" is shorthand for all that is existentially threatening, unknown, unknowable, or untrustworthy; it is seldom seen as a place for leisured pursuits. And for good reason: the Balekane EARTH programme is situated where it is common to hear the roaring of lions all night. In

Scotland, there is little to worry about in terms of wildlife, but rugged terrain and highly unpredictable weather mean those who spent time in the outdoors regularly risk life and limb. It is a landscape of unforgiving histories, in which famine and want played prominent roles in the violent mass displacement of people during the Clearances. Danger, or threat, is precisely what makes wild places wild. Facing and managing the risk and danger of wild places reminds us of our capacity for negotiating uncertainty and change, and of our agency and resilience, in ways that can prove unexpectedly equalising.

If the presence of mortal danger is not new in wild spaces, and indeed defines them, what *is* new is the unpredictability of that danger, the level of devastation it can wreak – and the inadequacy of our usual means of response. What makes the climate crisis a crisis is its radical volatility; it is change run amok, without discernible patterns we can compensate for or rely on in recovery. And linked to this volatility are new sources of trauma, as people lose livelihoods, living spaces, homes (sometimes repeatedly), and even loved ones – and come up against the limits of their strategies and abilities to cope. The multi-layered and complex experiences of individual and collective grief often sit beyond our capacity to fully understand how to recover from it (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Engstrom, 2019). Our identity and place in the world is being questioned in ways we haven't been faced with before, and we are still learning how to articulate and develop the language needed to meaningfully move forward.

These disasters trace and reinforce existing inequalities and injustices, which an effective "green shift" ought to anticipate and ameliorate. If we conceive of therapy, in broad terms, as a practice that restores and strengthens our ability to manage, respond to, and thrive in contexts of change, the changeability of our environment may make it even *more* well-suited to healing practice – though it may require a creative expansion of focus. Thus, for example, we suggest nature-based social work interventions might do well to find ways to accommodate the unpredictabilities of the climate crisis into therapeutic practice. One way of doing so, following anthropological work the acknowledges the personhood of rivers and forests (Kohn, 2013), might be to conceptualise the environment as an actor in its own right – not simply a context, or an object, but an equal player with its own agency and relational generativity. Indeed, some anthropologists have encouraged a rethinking of our more-than-human relations in terms of kinship (Haraway, 2016; Strang, 2023) – itself a fraught social practice that may be simultaneously a source of trauma and of healing. Kinship may provide a model for shifting the relations we can build to, and through, the natural world – and one easily adapted to social work practice, which has for so long taken the family as a major space of intervention. Our comparison above attests to the potential therapeutic advantages of this approach, as much as its conceptual utility: just as the Balekane EARTH model imagines healing as simultaneously individual and collective, as something that produces and enables kinship, the B-Wild programme's impact is above all relational, focused on one's relations with the self, with others, with the natural environment, and with the world as a socio-political space as well.

Conclusion

Our original overarching question asked: how might our own personal and professional experiences – with nature-based therapy and the climate crisis – help to imagine and generate a "green shift" in social work, which might address environmental justice? We conclude that above all, deep relational work is needed, not only with those seeking therapy or intervention, their kin and communities, but also with those who are delivering

programmes, and, we would argue, with those researching the climate crisis as well. Experiential initiatives like the programmes described above will result in challenging values, practices and ways of being in the world that often go unquestioned. However, it is clear how much a reckoning with and questioning of these established ways of being is needed, and what creative kin-making potential arises from those reckonings. We have all been witness to the destruction of the climate crisis, and of all the crises with which it is entangled, in contexts of increasing inequality and injustice. But we have also been witness to the hope and opportunity these crises bring. Wildfire, after all, is regenerative: it nourishes the soil, cracks open the seeds of key species, and makes space for new growth. We hope that our initial reflections on the above innovations and possibilities inspire further experimentation with and research into these questions – knowing that our need, and our capacity, to address the accumulating and intersectional crises with which we are faced has its roots deeply in our relations with our changing environment.

Acknowledgements

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