Black Lives Matter: Developments in de-colonising social work

De-Colonising Writing in Post-Anthropocentric Social Work

De-colonizing Trafficking Responses: Reflections on Social Work Practice and Training

The courage to see and be seen: the emotional labour of decolonising social work curricula for Black educators in the UK

Weaving rights: Educational equality from Critical Social Work

Decolonising Fieldwork Practice in Guyana: A Systemic Approach to Student Engagement

Beyond Breaking the Chains: Decolonisation as transformation
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Editorial:

The proposal for this special edition of Social Dialogue came from members of SWEARN (Social Work Education Anti-Racist Network), an established network of academics and leaders from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland committed to the development of global understandings of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice framed within a post-colonial set of standards based on global conventions and ideas.

Under the guest editorship of Dr Kish Bhatti-Sinclair (UChichester, UK) and Professor Brian Littlechild (UHertfordshire, UK) we have gathered 16 articles from Ecuador, Guyana, Uruguay, Papua New Guinea, Italy, UK, Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, exploring the title “Black lives matter: Developments in decolonising social work”.

Articles in the edition (#26) explore the way a post-colonial lens privileges post-colonial knowledge, skills, and values in all aspect of the curriculum and aspects of practice, encouraging social work to continue to create an awareness of the impact of colonialism and create less oppressive ways of delivering education and social services. A key aspect of decolonial work is to help with cultural recovery and self-determination efforts.

Thank you to all the contributors

Enjoy!
Prof. Annamaria Campanini  
President, International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)

President's report

Dear Friends, I would like to update you all on the various crucial activities and development of International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in the last few months.

IASSW General Assembly

IASSW is looking forward to the 2022 General Meeting which will be held via an online platform on the Wednesday, July 13, 2022 at 12:00pm Wed, Jul 13 2022 (CEST). Results of IASSW election 2022 for the positions- Treasurer and Member at large will be announced in this general assembly.

IASSW Board of Directors look forward to your active participation in the activities of our association. For more details, visit https://www.iassw-aiets.org/news/9911-iassw-general-assembly/

The People's Global Summit: Co-building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind, which will be held during 29th June to 2nd July 2022 – Online. International Association of Schools of Social Work(IASSW) is one of the active partners of this summit. IASSW Board Member and interim president of the Association of Caribbean Social Work Educators (ACSWE). Dr. Karene-Anne Nathaniel will be a Key Note Speaker at the People’s Global Summit on 30th June, 12:00hrs UTC. She will speak on the topic - “Leave no one Behind – Confronting Caribbean Realities”. This keynote will highlight the realities for the small island developing states of the Eastern Caribbean, on the premise that, in order to meaningfully strategies for ‘leaving no one behind, the global social work community has to recognize and acknowledge who has been severely impacted, how they have been affected, and who is highest at risk of being forgotten, therefore ‘left behind’.

Joint World Conference SWESD 2022 “Redefining social policy and social work practice in a post-pandemic society: Social welfare programs and social work education at a crossroads.”

IASSW and IACSW along with other partners will be organizing this world Conference. Both International Association of Schools of Social Work(IASSW) and International Council on Social Welfare(ICSW), have played a vital role in promoting social welfare over the past 93 years as international organization in the field of social welfare and social work. The priority areas of IASSW are social work education, research and scholarship, and various activities have been carried out at the regional, national and international levels to strengthen social work education, promote skills and strategies, strengthen exchanges and cooperation among social work educators, as well as to create a just society. ICSW mainly focuses on social
development, social welfare and social justice advocacy, knowledge-building and empowerment to help vulnerable groups cope with risks and challenges, and to advocate for policies and programs to balance social and economic goals. Current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic leaves us the responsibility as international organisations to address and advocate emerging social problems.

The conference will be held in Seoul, South Korea during October 26 to 28, 2022. It will be a hybrid conference. The call for abstracts is open. More details are available at: http://www.swesd2022.com/ You can visit website and send your abstracts.

IASSW webinar series

IASSW have started to organise webinar on specific topics linked to the UN days. These webinar have been organised in each month or alternate month as per availability of resource person. IASSW is thankful to all resource person who have contributed in the past and it will be continue in the future as well. You can have a look of all webinar on IASSW Facebook pages: http://www.facebook.com/IASSW.AIETS

The updated Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training was adopted by IASSW and IFSW General Assembly in 2020 and after that several workshop, seminar, conference was held to make it available for social workers across the world. Now, it is almost two years and we would like to do assessment whether it has been implemented or in use? Keeping this in view IASSW Board of directors would like to propose to create a task force with representatives of all the regions that will develop a strategic plan to implement Global standards for education and training in different part of the world. The task force will be formed during next board meeting which going to be in “Hybrid” mode. As soon as task force has been formed it will be informed to IASSW members and posted on IASSW website, so that anyone interested can join and support it.
Kish Bhatti-Sinclair, 
Professor of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Chichester, UK.

De-colonising social work: Changing perspectives (SWEARN)

This paper is a brief analysis of the discussions on de-colonising social work, held by a UK based network committed to anti-racist social work practice: the Social Work Education Anti-Racist Network (SWEARN). The debates took place during 2020-2022, a period when a global pandemic took grip of the UK and profession suffered losses, learned new ways of working and felt isolated from service users and students. Dependence on technology and social media intensified, brought new challenges but also eased communication across the world.

The developments below were partly triggered by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement which itself reignited interest in racism arguably because of the traumatising effect of Covid-19. The work of SWEARN, however, is on-going as members hold responsibilities as academic and professional leaders based in universities, policy making bodies and provider organisations across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The thread which holds the group is a shared commitment to global understandings of anti-racist practice framed within professional standards and principles of social justice along with the idea that social work can be improved by the inclusion of decolonising principles, practices, policies and procedures.

Background

SWEARN is an established but unregulated network of people holding strategic positions, who meet regularly at action-based meetings with the ultimate aim to improve the experiences of service users, carers and experts by experience, principally through a critique of policy and procedure.

The national debate created by BLM during 2020-2022 led to an appreciation that the time was right for intensive change, particularly in areas where influence was limited. Initiatives took place across the four countries of the UK which, at many levels, work unilaterally as regional governments but lack the critical mass and population numbers to sustain anti-racist practice. Coalitions and collaborations gathered to enable capacity and strength across geographic boundaries, informed by colleagues working across the globe.
In the interests of efficiency there was agreement that the short-term focus would be on barriers and equality gaps in relation to under-represented voices underpinned by relevant theories, models and research methods.

SWEARN enabled the sharing of good practice and a log of activity which included, for example, the employment of equality, diversity and inclusion leads in local government and race equality student advocates in higher education. Members contributed to cross organisational developments such as the zero-tolerance statement on anti-racism led by the British Association of Social Workers and the Workforce Race Equality Standard in Social Care (WRES - SC). Colleagues in Scotland joined ranks to influence developments and planned events such as an international conference on anti-racist practice.

This paper is a tribute to social work academics and practitioners committed to gaining and building connections to maintain a focus anti-racism particularly during times of crisis and challenge.

**Black Lives Matter**

With BLM in the background SWEARN sought to influence the strategic aims of employer organisations underpinned by theories relating to anti-racism, black perspectives, intersectionality, whiteness and white privilege.

Anti-racist practice is rooted in universal principles of racial equality and social justice (Bhatti-Sinclair, 2011). Black perspectives in social work stem from the shared experience of racism and powerlessness both past and present (Naik, 1995).

BLM offered an opportunity to revisit and re-define anti-racist social work in a legitimate manner and, more widely, re-energise the public sector into recruiting equality officers and collecting data on racism. However, closer scrutiny highlighted a continuing tendency for local and national government to promote moral positioning rather than whole systems change. Moral positioning can be linked to gesture politics, defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as ‘any action by a person or organisation done for political reasons and intended to attract public attention rather than having little real effect’. Although the energy and enthusiasm of the BLM movement continues (Samuels and Olorunnipa, The Guardian Newspaper, 25 May 2022) overt campaigning has diminished along with the threat of the pandemic.

The work on de-colonising social work practice has impacted on educational partnerships between universities and local authorities. There is a demonstratable commitment to the learning journey of the social work student from the point of entry to a well organised and delivered newly qualified year in supervised and assessed practice. Social work graduates see the newly qualified year as gateway to status and income and many, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, believe that their experience of poverty will end at this point. However, the experience of black and overseas students suggests that the bar to enter the profession is higher for them than for other graduates.
Entry into the profession does guarantee long term success as early career social workers face a cliff edge when management support falls away and the realities of practice become real. The retention of experienced professionals remains a significant concern for all employers leading to an increasing number recruiting social workers from overseas countries. This is ethically dubious as such opportunities are, in the main, taken up by professionals from poorer areas of the world with the ultimate result that the countries of origin lose them and their skills.

A sustainable workforce strategy should focus on recruiting British workers from black and minority ethnic groups but this would require institutional commitment on meeting equality gaps and hearing under-represented voices. In a post pandemic era strategic attention is diverted to the crisis facing the public sector and the poorest in society. Students are rarely seen as poor but in social work they are amongst the poorest groups, particularly if they are not in receipt of higher education subsidies, Government bursaries and/or are from overseas backgrounds.

**De-colonisation**

The UK is hierarchical in that the four governments control the development of public sector policy although Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland hold some powers through their regional assemblies. In historical terms the awareness of the part played by the English in the suppression of the Scottish identity and the Welsh language is embedded in British culture. Differential access to resources and overwhelming differences in population numbers means that the power is held in London, the national capital.

Modern day colonialism is also evidenced by Northern Ireland which, due to disagreement amongst political parties, continues to be governed by Downing Street. The Northern Irish experience remains centre stage in the post-Brexit negotiations with a real possibility of a merger with the Republic of Ireland. The loss of Northern Ireland may lead to the dismantling of the British Isles if taken further by a vote for an independent Scotland (Savage, 15 May 2022). Public opinion is critical to such developments and has roots in historical differences between the four countries.

SWEARN members discussed colonialism with a heightened awareness that as citizens of the UK we have part to play in the history and modern-day impact of colonial power and, therefore, the notion of de-colonisation requires a complex and nuanced response to the past and the present.

Second or third generation citizenship, particularly of England, requires personal scrutiny of possible complicity in oppressive histories bearing in mind that colonisation is a process based on exchange, trade, sexual relationships, inter-marriage, power and privilege. Divide and rule and strategic alliances continue to be considered critical to success and the colonised can also be the colonisers benefitting from colonisation.
In common with all human experience colonising discourses are rooted in the distortion of the reality of the experience of the colonised, reinforced by knowledge, power and privilege. Discussions on colonial experiences must be beyond colour, ethnicity or other racial identification and, in the context of the UK, parallel with cultural heritage from across the globe. Intersectionality means that individuals can identify as different at a number of levels including working class, older, disabled and/or LGBTQI+. Racial hierarchies can include established immigrants who are seen as better educated, wealthier, embedded in society and valued by employers.

Social work’s employment practices require ethnic monitoring but, within such organisations, discrimination can be greater and deeper for newly arrived immigrants or refugees suggesting a hierarchy of acceptability based on citizenship and the capacity to relate in a culturally appropriate manner. Within higher education international students are tested more than home students in admissions processes whilst receiving little in the way of public funding. The poverty-based qualifying experience can end with some employers blocking access to newly qualified social worker routes because of visa restrictions.

The debate on gathering evidence of racism remains live amongst those who question meanings and seek concrete answers to complex questions. Others suggest that research is held by the majority elite and tends to re-formulate knowledge rooted in white privilege. Action-based practice develops cross sector change, however, learning about sensitive and highly charged areas of practice is essential for social workers who fear accusations of racism and, as a result, demonstrate a general lack of professional curiosity about cultural diversity.

**Change and development**

Strategic approaches to addressing discriminatory barriers gaps led to many examples of good practice by social work organisations, including the recruitment of equality officers. Academic leaders also examined curricula content for bias and prejudice alongside applicability and relevance to the socio-economic profile of increasingly diverse and global student body.

An important aim of social work education is to ensure that the profession is valued in the same way as medicine or law in the UK. This is a key driver for members of SWEARN who are acutely aware of the lack of investment in public sector services and the increasingly competitive resource base of higher education. Although organisations such as the National Institute of Health Research is targeting social work, there is continuing focus on an elite group of universities who dominate the sector. Social work rarely attracts the same funding as other subjects and the top universities tend not to educate social workers or employ social work academics. Although the staffing figures are difficult to verify the number of Black professors in English universities number fewer than 10 in 79 universities delivering social work programmes in England.

More positively, most social work students benefit from an overwhelming commitment to high educational standards and availability of good resources, libraries and study materials.
with a focus on student led assessments and, for one university, digital skills and environmental issues. The learning journey is perceived as an empowering process which includes close collaboration between academics, service users and professionals on teaching, assessment, research and development.

**Conclusions**

The pandemic curtailed significant developments but also offered greater opportunities to react to triggers such as BLM. The 2020-2022 period will not be seen as progressive or transformative, partly because it is tinged with sadness at the disproportionate loss of social workers who steadfastly pursued their daily duties to the end. The Covid-19 student generation, some of whom are about to graduate in 2022, are likely to remember their studies as distanced and isolated from their peers and educators. However, within such a crisis-based environment the profession continued to function, using all available openings to pursue anti-racist practice, whilst retaining its strategic commitment to staffing, academic curriculum, data gathering and workforce needs within the overarching aim of remaining current and relevant.

SWEARN members demonstrated the value of networking and collaboration in the pursuance of principles at a time of heightened emotional distress. The group has raised awareness of colonisation, challenged organisational practices and demonstrated the importance of reflecting on what the concept means for individual, institutional and societal change.

**References**

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Samuels, R. and Olorunnipa, T., (25 May 2022), The Guardian Newspaper, What would George Floyd’s life have looked like without the crushing weight of racism? theguardian.com
Decolonising Social Work Education: Yarning our Way Home

In this article we will provide some early considerations of a larger research project exploring our approach in facilitating Aboriginal Social Work in a Qualifying Masters Social Work Degree. We will provide some historical context to social work and social work education with First Nations Peoples in Australia, and reflect on some of our learnings.

As academics, educators and social workers in our efforts to decolonise education and practice, we will be using the term First Nations people to define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. At the time of the lie/myth of the declaration of Terra Nullius the term Aboriginal was used to define and identify all First Nations people in Australia. This generic term does not acknowledge, appreciate or honour that Australia consisted of many nations and not a homogenous group as the definition of Aboriginal implied. Each nation had their own worldview which is defined by their epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Acknowledging and honouring these facts are key to decolonising education and practice (Terare 2020).

Firstly, we will introduce ourselves, and provide information about our cultural location and connections. Connections and relatedness to country is the foundation as it relates worldviews and epistemologies - our ways of knowing, axiologies - significant component of First Nations protocol when introducing self, this then links with First Nations ontology - ways of being.

Dr Mareese Terare:

I teach, write and research as a Re-empowered Bundjalung, Goenpul (descendent of two slaves – from Tanna) to critique the powerful and insidious nature of colonisation, whilst reflecting and reclaiming my tribal epistemes and applying actions to relational responsibilities, that is to care, nurture and protect our Mother. The academic role broadens my scope to collaborate and develop meaningful and purposeful alliances to action social justice for Mother Earth, as expected by Ancestors.
Professionally I define myself as a human services/welfare worker. I have worked in the women's services sector congruency of personal and professional responsibilities regarding advocacy, social justice and empowerment became a reality. I was a frontline worker for 25 years, responding to women and children in crisis, as a counsellor, group worker and community development worker. The past 16 years I have worked in the education sector starting out in RTO and currently in higher education of academia. The bane of my professional existence directed me to explore Aboriginal worldviews and how to apply these, to social work and human services theory and practice – which ultimately led to my PhD.

Dr Meaghan Katrak Harris:

Home for me is Tati Tati, Mutti Mutti and Latji Latji Country, where I have strong family and community ties, while I live and work on unceded Durrarmarragul Country. My life as a family and community member, ally and social worker has always been informed by my commitment to working alongside communities: listening, learning and the responsibility of making what contribution I can. I have worked in community and social work for almost 35 years and lectured and researched for more than 15. It has been my great privilege to have spent a much of that time working and learning alongside First Nations Peoples.

Background

Australian social work dates back to the 1930's when workers started to organise themselves professionally. The first Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) was founded in 1946 and continues today (Lawrence 2016). Inarguably, since then social work has been an oppressive force in its engagement with First Nations Peoples in Australia, working within and often enforcing policies of oppression and assimilation (Bennett 2015; Katrak 2015). Social work was founded and has since operated in Australia from the centred position and intrinsic norm of 'whiteness'. Morten-Robinson (2004) defines whiteness as ‘the invisible norm against which other races are judged in the construction of identity, representation, subjectivity, nationalism and the law’ (p.7). Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011), discuss the invisibility white privilege gives to enable those to live unchallenged within societal formations. Given how First Nations Peoples are highly policed in this country, by both law enforcement and government departments (Incarceration Nation 2021), this has significant implications for social work and the continuing role we play in these systems.

As an extension of social work, it is unsurprising that social work education has developed from this centred world view of whiteness. Over recent decades social work in Australia has reached a reckoning; whereby the profession has had to acknowledge its past role as an oppressive tool of the State, and attempt to forge a new way forward working alongside First Nations Peoples (Katrak 2015). In 2004 the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) published a statement of acknowledgment to the Stolen Generations, those First Nations children and young people forcibly removed from their families and communities under policies of assimilation. In this apology the AASW acknowledged the role played by social workers in implementing these horrific policies (AASW 2022). Since this time the
AASW has issued a range of policy positions aimed at strengthening this way forward. However, it could still be argued that many non-Indigenous social workers and mainstream systems are yet to find a meaningful will or way towards a decolonised future.

In considering social work education, we note that it wasn't until 2012 that the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditations Standards (ASWEAS) required that all qualifying degree programs include Indigenous content within the curricula (Fernando & Bennet 2019). These ASWEAS guidelines list the graduate attribute of knowledge “…of the history and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples” (AASW, 2021, p. 8). Significant work has been undertaken in embedding First Nations World views in the curricula, such as the Getting it Right project which aimed to centre social work education and align it with Indigenous values, principles, and knowledge (Young et al., 2013). Despite this, there is still limited understanding of how that may ‘look’ across social work degree programs nationwide.

The way forward requires a multidimensional approach. We know that there must be greater opportunity and real representation of First Nations Peoples within the academy. This huge structural inequity requires more than glib assertions such as this, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to do an analysis justice. We are reminded by Mukandi & Bond (2019) in their paper ‘Good in the Hood’ or ‘Burn It Down’? Reconciling Black Presence in the Academy, that the academy, like the colony, are not safe spaces for Black scholars, and we encourage readers to explore this important work further.

We also espouse, as noted by Duthie (2018) that it is every social work educator’s responsibility to embed core Indigenous curriculum. This takes commitment and the cultural humility for non-Indigenous educators to authentically attempt to de-centre and step outside a westernised world view and be guided and informed by First Nations Worldviews.

How do we do this?

Transforming Classrooms- Socio Political and Historical Contexts

“to educate as a practice of freedom is a way teaching that anyone can learn” bell hooks

In developing cultural safety, we must consider and honour the profound difference in realities created by politics of race and class in the learning environment. This is essential in both First nations and non-Indigenous students (Terare 2019, citing hooks 1994)

In examining how we, as social work educators, undertake this, we can begin by reflecting on our own motivations. What are we hoping to achieve? For meaningful outcomes, we must look beyond merely ‘ticking the box’ or reaching minimum standards.
We begin by considering the very foundation of how we come together. Honouring Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing as foundational to the curriculum but also, equally importantly, as the pedagogical approach. This cannot be an add on, a token to the usual westernised approach that has been the foundation of social work education.

Students are emersed in the reality that First Nations Worldviews encompass a unique set of values and beliefs system, creating a theoretical location of First Nations people and culture that highlight that Creation stories were well established in Australian First Nations lives before 1788 (Terare 2020).

The practice of working from worldviews is the way the students are reconnecting, reclaiming and maintaining an ongoing process of decolonising western ways. Inclusive to this is a process of teaching and learning together for social justice. We are here for a shared purpose. We are working together to decolonise this social work unit. Participants, (in this case students) are part of the process, driven by social justice and community development philosophies, where by participation is aimed as an empowering experience (Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011). Given this opportunity many students embrace the responsibility we all share to make this a safe and secure learning space.

**Not a deficit Approach**

Protection polices grounded in deficit discourse, structural racism and lack of truth telling of past injustices all continue to shape policy and impact on the health and well-being of First Nations Peoples (Dudgeon et al 2022). When Aboriginal social work is ‘taught’ from a western standpoint, this will continue to be the outcome, shape the world view of graduate social workers, impact on the wellbeing of First Nations students and scholars, and inform the social work practice. Rather, the approach taken is one of recognising resistance, resilience and strength despite the ongoing impacts of colonisation, as articulated in the powerful quote by Dr (Aunty) Rosalie Kunoth-Monks (Q&A 2014).

"I am not an Aboriginal, or indeed indigenous, I am ... (a) First Nation's person. A sovereign person from this country. I speak my language, and I practise my cultural essence of me. Don't try and suppress me, and don't call me a problem, I am not the problem."

**Yarning Circles, Reciprocity and Responsibility**

Our tutorials are Yarning Circles. The philosophy of Yarning informs our engagement and our learnings. Atkinson, Baird, and Adams (2021) describe Yarning as essentially the sharing of stories which is grounded as an Aboriginal culturally specified process. They describe the creating of a collaborative space where both voices in the yarn are important. Yarning is the practice of deep listening, reciprocal sharing and retelling, allowing for the new
understandings to emerge (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Rigney 2001; Smith, 2021).

Geia, Hayes and Usher (2013) espouse the importance of Indigenous research and Indigenous method(ology), inclusive of the process of knowledge creation within collaborative respectful partnerships with non-Indigenous researchers. Similarly, we can apply this to the relationship between First Nations and non-Indigenous educators and students.

Terare and Rawsthorne (2021) advocate that for genuine Yarning social workers and educators to relinquish expert status, to take a position of deep listening and quiet stillness-Dadirri- where your heart speaks to you (citing Fernando and Bennet 2019). Dadirri is a term from Aunty Miriam Rose Ungunmerr from Ngan’gikurunggurr and Ngen’giwumirri language of the First Nations peoples of the Daly River region Northern Territory. Deep listening is demonstrating ongoing cultural humility commitment to practice the principle of lifelong learning and professional development.

Yarning allows social work educators and students alike to sit with discomfort, to learn and share, to value and learn from our lived experience. Historical and contemporary experience of First Nations Peoples are considered, not as lineal or unrelated events, but rather within the context of ongoing colonialism. It is these processes that may enable genuine collaboration, address power imbalances and (re)connect ways of knowing to Country (Lowitja Institute, 2018; Fernando and Bennett, 2019).

What works in the Room or on the Zoom?

Many of the structures and systems we are bound by within in the academy work against First Nations Worldviews. Timetabling, attendance and assessment requirements, despite our best creative responses, can be limiting. One thing we have found that has made a significant impact on the experience students have in our Unit of study is time. By conducting our Yarning Circles in intensive or semi-block mode (3-4 hours consecutively per week or fortnight) allows for Yarning to develop deep connections.

Students form smaller Yarning Circles (or working groups) and are encouraged to approach this from a First Nations Worldview. We invite students to consider their responsibly to the group, what they can contribute and how they can support and encourage their fellow group members. Again, time is a factor. Students are given time to participate in these smaller Yarning circles and then encouraged to bring back to the bigger group their learnings, questions and challenges (as in many social work group activities). What we have found however, is a shift in dynamics. Students show they seriously consider and value their place in the group from a First Nations perspective. They take shared responsibility and reciprocity seriously. Non-Indigenous students have shown they welcome the opportunity and ‘permission’ to step outside a westernised world view and First Nations students have reported feeling validated and valued, without pressure to ‘perform’ or have ‘all the answers’.
We look forward to undertaking a broader research analysis to really explore, learn from and share the learnings from these experiences.

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De-Colonising Writing in Post-Anthropocentric Social Work

A brick wall, corridors, rooms, and offices; rows of books in neatly arranged bookshelves; and the computerised space of words where I write and write again, struggling with the sound of academic dry prose and social problems. When I look out of the window from the third floor of this early twentieth century building, I see the water; I begin to imaginatively listen to the sound of the sea; the ice-break of clashing ice blocks and ice-slush; the sound of waves. Some of the feminist-, indigenous-, and post-colonial writers that attended to this dilemma claimed that how they wrote, when transforming writing into embodied genre-transgressive creative prose, writing memories, stories, poems, paved way for social justice at the same time as it marginalised their texts (Anzaldúa 1987; hooks 1989; Parmar & Min-ha 1990; Richardson 2000; Livholts 2019). This paper turns to the question of how writing and textual shaping matters for the creating of critical and creative knowledge and learning in social work research and education. I propose that to de-colonise social work, there is a need to de-discipline practices of writing with human and multiple embodiment that transcends the relationship with objects and things, all forms of life, and the natural environment. The paper draws on my work with situated life writing inspired by feminist-, postcolonial and indigenous scholarship that used creative life writing genres such as diaries, letters, poetry, and photography to engage in critical thinking and textual re-shaping for social justice. I contextualise the writing in the context of the post-anthropocentric condition of more-than-human entanglements, to write
with human, architectural, spheric, and earthly embodiments. How can writing with walls or writing with water contribute to decolonising practices in social work research and education?

**Research paper**

I view the brick wall opposite to my window, with all its multi-layered colored reddish bricks; the tree in the yard, stretching its sunbathing bare spring branches towards the sky; the tall house beyond it with a black tin roof partly covered with snow; the sharp contours of the chimneys that stands out towards the blue sky, clouds passing by, and the sunlight creating distinct yellowish whitish shadowlight [Swedish: skuggljus, Finnish: varjonvalo] areas on the roof. It is very quiet. I hear a vague sound from the ventilation in the flat, and the clicking sound from the keyboard of the computer as I write. A wall can be ‘a life description’ writes Ahmed (2017, p. 143), referring to how institutional walls in academia as well as other walls, of houses, along borders of nations and regions, can include or exclude; how they are both immaterial and material, created by the way they are perceived and talked about and at the same time physical. When are walls visible and when are they invisible, and for whom? Who pass through and who does not pass through? What blocks movement? Ahmed (2017, p. 142) suggests that ‘to think about materiality through institutional brick walls is to offer a different way of thinking the connection between bodies and worlds.’ This illustration of thinking with walls, the extension of embodiment to the materiality of a brick wall illustrates both architectural power and the sound of writing within the walls and geopolitical contexts of writing social work. In this article I draw on my work on situated writing to propose that the often overlooked aspect of textual and visual shaping of social work is important to decolonise writing social work research and education (e.g., Livholt 2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2019). Such departure also challenges epistemologies and ontologies in social work as a human-centered westernised discipline shaped by mainstream forms of writing knowledge. What does it mean for social work researchers and educators in the academic world to decolonise practices of writing? In this article I propose that post-anthropocentric social work opens for practices of decolonizing writing that critically engages in writing with architecture, things, objects, and water from diverse and entangled more-than-human perspectives.
Walls are how some bodies are not encountered in the first place.

Walls are how other bodies are stopped by an encounter.

A wall becomes necessary because the wrong bodies could pass through.

(Ahmed 2017, p. 145)
Who can be the creators of knowledge? Bell (2021, p. 65) writes about how post-anthropocentric social work:

[...] moves social work closer to its professed holistic perspective, as it situates humans as interdependent and interconnected with all other living things and the material world. The nature of knowledge within a transformative philosophy of social work is likewise relational, embodied, dynamic and dialogic, and humans are not necessarily the only creators of knowledge.

Such re-framing acknowledges responses and agencies of people and social workers in the contemporary condition of interconnectivities of peoples’ lives, and all other life forms. It is a way of stretching social work philosophy, thinking, and writing in a post-anthropocentric condition that intertwines the spheric and planetary with the becoming of bodies and structures in social work. Textual shaping is part of the structural conditions of power in academia that requires submitting to specific norms. As Min-ha (1989, p. 8) writes, “to be a writer” is not merely about the act of writing, but also contextualized in relations of power that demands writing to fit into a strict academic prose. To decolonize social work there is a need to re-write the textualities and re-invent the wor(l)dlyness of social work, including the language of social problems (Livholts 2021). The immaterial and material force of being seen as a problem, its emotional, organic and affective power of aged, classed, gendered, and racialized bodies, and how embodiment is entangled with architectures and landscapes. ‘How does it feel to be a problem?’ as Du Bois (1903, p. 3) wrote, can be understood as the unasked question, that even though not being said aloud, is always present in the ‘double consciousness’ of someone who is imposed to see themselves through the eyes of others. Indigenous scholarship has contributed to reshaping writing and storytelling in academia. As Guttorm et al (2021: 114) write about de-colonising research storying there is a need to change ways of seeing what an academic text is: ‘to hear the Earth, to feel the Moon, to think like the forest, and to write with these ontologically different epistemologies, where do the non-words get translated into words in our writing process.’ Working with memories as fragments of lived experiences is a powerful methodological tool (Livholts 2019; Haug 1987) and Baikie (2020, p. 42) writes about decolonisation through Indigenous memory work ‘need to routinely navigate in-between the worldviews of the colonizer and the colonized in both research and practice.’ Shifting between diary notes, letters, poetry, and photography, I invented a novella form for academia, where the re-worldling of social work transgressed personal, political, organic, and academic movements. A fragment of a memory, emotional engagement, seeing, listening, and sculpting academic life on paper. ‘Writing Water’ I express this movement through poetry (Livholts 2013, 2019, p. 76):
Had it not been too late, I would have claimed I am writing water,
In the age of untimeliness.
The letter is sent too soon, too late.
The recipient has moved.
Written in the layers of ice, cracks, breaking the line,
Had it not been too late,
I would have claimed I am writing water.
Through all the years of metaphoric captivity
I was always writing water;
but it was just now when you were leaving with the train and the lake threw rain on our faces,
that I was astonished to know this.

Novotny (2008, p. 1) writes about how knowledge cannot be contained and provides insight into the ability to transform knowledge by the way it ‘seeps through institutions and to and from academia to the outside world’. Thinking with water in the season when this chapter is initially written is thinking with the ice break; thinking with the Baltic Sea, the clashing of ice blocks, ice-slush and water; thinking with the architecture, immaterial and material walls, of
urbanized spaces in Helsinki, Finland and Stockholm, Sweden, both of landscapes of belonging; thinking with entangled languages and sounds.

Am I floating, in the sun beams, of the spring sea, the surface of ice and open water; Am I floating, towards open sea, ice-blocks clashing, slow water movements, asking me to listen; Am I floating, in this moment, of intense sunlight, with the water of the Gulf of Botnia, connecting and separating Finland and Sweden.

Figure 2 ThinkingWithIceBreak. Author’s photo Helsinki, Finland, 2021.

Bozalek and Pease (2021) write that post-anthropocentric and post-human thought challenges dichotomies such as 'nature/culture, material/discursive, subject/object, human/animal, man/woman and North/South'. Such departure is central for decolonizing social work through post-anthropocentric transformations in relation to the work of women of color, indigenous-, post/academic and post- qualitative writing (Anzaldúa 1981, 1987; Cisneros 2018; Livholts 2012, St. Pierre 2018). Anzaldúa (1981, p. xxviii) writes:

Every person, animal, plant, stone is interconnected in a life-and-death-symbiosis. We are each responsible for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea.

Anzaldúa’s writing could be conceptualized as a body of writing about language and writing, figurations of how writing matters, skrivande har betydelse, kirjoittaminen on merktystä for how it is possible at all to learn about this life-and-death-symbiosis. St. Pierre (2018, p. 604) describes post-qualitative inquiry as a slow process of reading and re-reading, writing and ‘creating different worlds for living.’ In the context of feminist- and postcolonial studies, I (Livholts 2012, p. 7) described post/academic writing as movements of interdisciplinary and genre-transgressive writing, creating verbal, visual and written versions of the world, ‘disturbing and interrupting the un-named hegemonic style.’

The critique from post-human and new materialism scholarship towards diversity and intersectionality is that it risks producing difference as positions in—mostly binary—structures of categories are problematic because they tend to ‘capture and reduce’ the vibrancy and instability of bodies and subject formations (Puar, 2012, p. 50). As Tiainen et al
(2020) discuss, intersectionality studies tended to categorise human embodiment and suggests that from the perspective of new materialism and more than human agency makes the middle challenge structures of oppression by producing 'open-ended relationalities happening across social, material, discursive, human and more-than-human areas of activity.' Gordon (2017) demonstrates the usefulness of creative life writing as a decolonising pedagogy for social work. As a facilitator of creative life writing workshops with people with migratory background in a saloon, Gordon (2017) initiates conducting creative life writing workshop as a third area of experience. The architectural space was the basement of an urban hair saloon/barbershop in England which served customers of African, Caribbean, Asian and European heritage. A participant described the radical change of spatial setting in the following way (Gordon 2017, p. 141):

Before I enter that space [a university creative writing class], metaphorically, here's my blackness, I put it in there [the participant mimes putting something in a bag]. I have a bad hair day, I put that in the suitcase; I feel depressed, I put that in the suitcase and lock it tight and I leave it outside, and then go into that space supposedly to be creative and I have to write my poetry... I am the only black person in the group. I feel they could not come with it, could not understand and that is why I leave a part of myself outside.

As the writer express the act of creating space, it shows how ‘entering’ the academic space means to leave part of oneself outside. Although there is a door to enter, the academic 'space dictates' (2017, p. 141) and excludes 'black selves.' Gordon (2017) argues that we are always engaged in creating the spaces we inhabit, and her agency as a facilitator is to create a 'holding environment' that is perceived by participants as a safe enough space to allow for critical and creative processes to occur.

**During the December holidays of the late eighties, my older sisters whom I adored and had recently returned from Durban on a summer break - recounted a story of their visit to the Durban beachfront. The day that they chose to go to the beach was a stinging hot day and their light skins still bore the sunburn**
marks. The beach front had been crowded. As they prepared to wade into the waves, a group of policemen approached wielding batons. As they drew nearer my sisters made out the hand written words on the policemen’s hats: “Whites only beach!” Soon people were scattering in all directions running away from the police. My sisters joined the running when they saw how expertly the police handled their batons on unsuspecting or tardy ‘non – whites.’ Afterwards, they watched from the distance and saw how the white women reclaimed the sand as they lay on cotton towels under large colourful umbrellas. They went home feeling hot, burned, and bruised. I do not recall the exact words used but I recall my eldest sister felt empty while the second eldest was seething in anger. These were my older sisters whom I
held in awe for living in the big world away from our dusty village. In that moment I felt small and insignificant.

(Apartheid Archives Research Project, N1) (Schefer 2021, p. 87-88)

This story is collected from Schefer’s (2021) writing on embodied and affective scholarship and critical place studies, situating a fragment of historical memory, of a black person going to the sea, to a crowded beach on a hot summer day to the Durban beach front in South Africa in the late eighties. The attention is directed towards how bodies, objects and places are entangled and how traces of the past affectively is alive in the present and shapes the future. Schefer (2021, p. 80) describes how hauntology ‘disrupts neat temporal divides in multiple ways and acknowledges also the poltergeists of the future.’ As a hauntology of the sea, swimming calls for listening, seeing, and feeling with all our senses to trace hauntings of past, present, and future in the strive for environmental justice. The complexity of the sea as a space for colonialism and invasion and at the same time healing and spiritual engagement; nevertheless, it is always a matter of entanglements between bodies, excluding black and brown bodies and privileging white bodies. This has been taken up by decolonial feminist South African poet Kholeka Putuma, and I wish to conclude this paper by sharing the video of Putuma reading the poem ‘Water’ to demonstrate this complex process of writing, voicing, listening, transforming as a pathway to decolonising writing in post-anthropocentric social work research and education.

References


Decolonizing Social Work by Advancing Racial Justice

In 2004, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) made a joint statement urging social workers to remain true to the profession’s commitment to social justice. Despite this call for action, Black, Indigenous and racialized social workers and social work educators continue to work in constrained environments where they experience marginalization and oppression (Duhaney & El-Lahib, 2021). The legacy of colonialism, decolonization and the effects of globalization and universalization of social work remain rampant. These processes create institutions and structures of power that sustain exploitation, domination, and repression across generations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Social work continues to be a site of Eurocentric values, heavily laden with Western ways of knowing and worldviews that are often far removed from the realities of the populations and settings that it serves. Universities globally support academic freedom in theory, yet academic spaces can be discriminatory, alienating, and risky to challenge power dynamics (Rassol & Harms-Smith, 2021). Eurocentric theories, approaches and practices dominate social work programs. Social work educators and social workers continue to be used as instruments of oppression by both colonial and postcolonial governments in different contexts.

We acknowledge that we are products of colonization and the structures of power and oppression that we yearn to transform. As three Black women social work academics, with differing upbringing, both geographically and culturally, we are uniquely positioned in a Faculty of Social Work located in the Global North. We do not take the space we occupy for granted, as it is uncommon to have this gendered and racialized representation in a Canadian
faculty. Our position comes with challenges as we un-learn dominant ways of knowing. However, we work as a team, invested in anti-colonial work while intentionally engaging in acts of resistance to decolonize our curriculum, our pedagogies, and the policies and practices that govern our workplace and our profession. We also emphasize racial justice and equity in our teaching, research and service to the university and our communities.

In this paper, we highlight the importance of decentring Eurocentric ways of knowledge, learning and teaching and the centring of decolonizing pedagogical approaches and practices in social work. Decolonizing Social Work

Over the last two years, we grappled with the relevance of decolonization both locally and globally following the publicly televised murder of Mr. George Floyd and asked questions about the intersections between global injustices and the COVID-19 pandemic. We also are exceedingly aware of the emotional labour and burden for us as Black women fighting and working within an oppressive system (Duhaney, 2020) that may contribute to anger, demotivation, and frustration. These become everyday lived experiences of those who have made the decision to cease being unwitting instruments of oppression and social control in post-colonial regimes. These events coupled with our lived experiences created a window through which we advocate for change and decolonizing approaches in our own circles of influence, including our Faculty of Social Work. Decolonizing social work involves “a process of discerning, unpacking, analyzing, unlearning, and resisting dominant colonial/colonizing influences and worldviews. This process is both internal (healing oneself and unlearning internalized oppression) and external in relation to colonial systems (political, academic, social, economic, and most medical systems” (Gray, n.d., as cited in Lee & Carranza, 2022, p. 29). Promoting decolonizing knowledge, education, and practices void of colonial influences is riddled with complexities, contradictions, and ambivalences. This internal struggle calls us to unlearn dominant ways of knowing.

Within our institution and broader communities, we challenge and push boundaries to create spaces for productive dialogue rather than those based on the politics of polarity. Achieving the intended productive space for dialogue requires a system-wide interrogation of power relationships in practice. Razak (2009) states that in the context of the classroom, “critical attention is needed to understand how we teach global issues, how we introduce content on particular topics, how students interpret and integrate the knowledge, whose voices are silenced and, more importantly, what gets discussed and what is erased” (p. 1). This includes critical reflection, analysis and acknowledgement of power differences enacted at individual, professional, disciplinary and system levels – with inequalities being perpetuated by those with power, advantages, and privilege. We have pushed to obtain space to center Black perspectives and ways of knowing. In our faculty, we created an Anti-Black Racism Task Force (University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work, n.d.) through which we have informed and influenced the faculty’s strategic plan and redesign of our Bachelor of Social Work program. We partner with like-minded educators to co-develop courses that advance decolonial teaching. As part of its mandate, members of the Anti-Black Racism Task Force developed three critical courses, Africentric perspectives in social work, anti-colonial
and antiracist praxis and critical race theory and praxis. For instance, two of us co-developed and co-taught a new course focusing on Africentric perspectives in social work. The Africentric perspectives course exposes students to Africentric ways of knowing, strategies and interventions that are grounded in Africentric principles and values. It draws on historical and contemporary contexts to underscore the ways in which slavery, colonization, racism, and other inequities shape the histories, traditions and lived experiences of peoples of African descent. The course is experiential, relational, and critical of socio-political and economic histories of Black people in Canada and globally. The course encourages students to develop an understanding of the significance of this historical background and its relevance in decolonizing social work.

Our approaches are much more than teaching isolated courses. We effect change in admission, curriculum design, and course content for existing and new courses. In our quest for critical dialogue, we strive to ensure that our students feel included, valued, and heard – thus giving rise to new ideas, and ways of decolonized and transformative engagement. We recognize that colonialism is an impediment to transformative social work. However, it is possible to envision a transformative social work practice. Rassol and Harms-Smith (2021) argue that societal transformation calls for social workers to collectively focus on decolonization more intentionally and to engage with praxis that enables critical consciousness so that they themselves are liberated from these colonial dynamics, with the complex changes required beyond curriculum review, design, and transformation. We share a case study (See Warria & Chikadzi, 2020) of a hybrid model, Isolabantwana (eye of the child) that incorporates social work interventions and honours different ways of knowing.

In African settings, several underlying principles guide practice approaches with people of all ages; these include cooperation, social support networks of trust and agreed norms of obligation and reciprocity. African cultural values motivate the individual’s participation in informal practices to fulfil their cultural responsibilities. These arrangements are not merely an expression of African cultural values but are firmly embedded in customary law and social institutions. For instance, the protection of children is viewed as a community responsibility, augmented with the notion that “all of us” are accountable. However, processes of colonization and post-colonization disrupted and weakened these principles and practices; leaving people vulnerable, not cared for and dependent on government-driven formal social protection measures. Communal care and support processes became individualized and Westernized. To counter these global universalized forces of one size-fit-all models, Isolabantwana was developed in South Africa. It is a community-based child protection program based on the principle of Ubuntu (I am because you are). This model combines both Eurocentric and Africentric approaches. The social worker works with Eurocentric aspects of record-keeping and monitoring while integrating principles of Ubuntu such as humanness, personhood, sharing, dignity and solidarity. This program has different entry points and is linked to other initiatives, networks, and services in the community such as schools who can negotiate access for the social workers. It acknowledges the positive role of traditional African systems that are rarely measured or considered as knowledges. While this approach is implemented in South Africa, it clearly demonstrates that integration of different
knowledges is possible. This example calls for social work educators to be intentional in decolonizing practices that govern current institutions.

Conclusion

The dynamics of coloniality are evident and ongoing in many academic and social work contexts. Social workers find themselves practising in heavily colonial-influenced contexts that are politically charged with dictated policies, procedures, and programs and activities. However, there is still much work to be done to (re-)awaken critical consciousness among social workers and remain committed to the social justice mission. Social workers must not assume positions of neutrality where they may inadvertently support or defend the status quo, as this is a betrayal of the social work’s plight for social justice (Chikadzi & Warria, 2022). Decolonization is an ongoing process, geared toward achieving independence, removing all remnants of colonialism, with ongoing questioning, reflective praxis, and analysis of power relationships in practice and policy and towards understanding the role played by the social work profession in colonization. When social workers remain silent and continue to be absent at the periphery of social change and social justice, the decolonization project stalls. In addition, to enact transformational change, we must acknowledge the rich insights gained from engaging with other ways of knowing and being and the ways in which these knowledges and practices can be incorporated into social work curriculum, practice advocacy and policies.

References

Decolonizing Trafficking Responses: Reflections on Social Work Practice and Training

...as we commit our work to social and structural justice, we bear the responsibility to disrupt the singularity, (mis)representativeness, and othering in the dominant construction of knowledge. This task is neither easy nor comfortable but worthwhile (Hu, 2019, p. 435)

Trafficking evolved from slavery to take its current form in the present modern society. The violence the victims of trafficking endure points to the need to support, protect and uphold their rights and dignity effectively and timeously. The response also requires a critical practice framework that is holistic and social justice-centred (Botha & Warria, 2020). This is because race remains a troubling legacy of slavery and colonialism which continues to impact the lives of Black people globally. It also offers a compelling lens for viewing trafficking experiences (Constance-Huggins et al., 2022).

This paper highlights the complex intersection of trafficking and exploitation with systemic and layered colonial violence - recognized aspects which remains invisible within social work interventions. I then use this to suggest how select trafficking interventions in social work practice and education can be framed. This approach ensures that the greater economic and political motivations and implications as aligned with the individual, historical and socio-cultural factors lead to relevant knowledges and effective interventions. It supports Nonomura (2020) arguments that no single framework can address trafficking complexities, but critical awareness of the intersections is crucial to social workers as they reflect on the roles they play i.e., neutrality, concealing, revealing, or disrupting injustices.

I write this paper from the position of a Black African female-identifying survivor, though with current geographic and academic privilege. I did not live through the actual reality of colonization, in my home country, and my positionality does not make claim to that i.e., absolute understanding of colonization and trafficking. Like in the US and Canadian contexts, my social work training and trafficking practice experiences in South Africa often occurred in
white, heteronormative social contexts or with colleagues who were taught under Apartheid. However, I hope that this piece may serve as a useful contribution to the ongoing task of identifying best practices when engaging with trafficked persons especially in the countries that were previously colonized. This does not promise to have exhausted potential decolonized interventions, rather I hope it will stir conversations into complexities aligned to trafficking, decoloniality and intersectionality nexus.

**Reflections for social work practice and training**

Social service providers are not faultless in the perpetuation of power imbalances between systems and victims, and in the dominant construction of the passive trafficking “victim” (Chikadzi & Warria, 2022; Constance-Huggins et al., 2022; Hu, 2019; Nonomura, 2020). Social workers as gatekeepers on how voices of victims are framed, supported, or distorted can be oppressive, foregrounders of -isms and leave discriminatory systems intact. In the politics of rescue, victims are spoken for and represented but not positioned as authorities on exploitation and trafficking, or that of their own lives. However, drawing from Crampton’s (2015) value of impermanence, taking the lead from victim’s voices, permits the social work engagement to be responsive, not to reinforce dominant victim stereotypes, and it highlights victim’s agency and healing efforts.

Eurocentric social work views, as routinely taught in many African social work schools, direct and impact the trafficking discourse and excludes the voices and perspectives of majority of the trafficked and exploited population. When the latter is respected, and invited to participate in the discourse without representation, then real changes happen. In 2021, the theme of World Day against Trafficking in Persons was “Victim’s voices lead the way”. The theme highlighted the significance of victims’ voices and the influence of survivor engagement. Victims’ lived experiences offer authentic understanding and familiarity of trafficking. They are the experts of their life stories to be told in their own way – a way that also reminds White social work practitioners and educators of the racism that persists in daily social processes (Constance-Huggins et al., 2022). Thus, social work post-trafficking success, depends on the active engagement by the victims/survivors (Botha & Warria, 2020; Crampton, 2015; Hu, 2019). Indeed,

Victim’s voices matter. Victims are a vital part of understanding the impact and best responses ... Victims’ voices represent courage, fear, agency, frustration, scepticism, strength, and survival. Their varied experiences are meaningful towards informing, shaping, and designing responses and services, raising awareness, and shaping policy (Warria et al., 2021)

When victims access care programmes, they have knowledge that is premised on their lived experiences. However, the meanings derived from services provided is dependent on how the knowledge of their lived experiences are given recognition, respected, and included in the healing and recovery processes. Failure to acknowledge these experiences, by focusing on short term work, can lead to further shame, disconnection, isolation, and pre-mature exit from the trafficking programmes (Warria, 2020). Long-term trafficking interventions with
strategic focus such as those intended to address structural changes and race relations and lead to economic freedom, gender equity, access to education and training, and address violence are more effective but few. The integration of races and genders on workspaces has not prevented racism or gender-based violence or inequalities from continuing. Like in many countries, the development of new legislation and amendments to older legislations targeting trafficking crimes and victim protection does not instantly contribute to shifts in behaviour (Warria, 2019; 2020). Meaningful and sustainable change happens with the adoption of a holistic multi-level approach, rooted in socio-cultural and historical contexts. The changes cannot be understood through frames that support the neutrality of the law but by those which draw attention to the race-influenced lived experiences (Constance-Huggins et al., 2022).

Shifts in professional orientation are also required in recognizing that although anyone can be a victim of trafficking, and experience different forms of exploitation, the most affected groups are Black, indigenous and women of colour at the intersection(s) of racialized, gendered, and colonial oppression(s), marginalization, and discrimination(s). A social work curriculum that exposes students to the varying exploitation experiences of trafficked individuals encourages improved understanding of diversity, need identification and service provision. For example, trafficking security and/or risk assessments and therapeutic intervention ought to stress a person-centred approach which is aligned to the victim-survivor’s intersectional identities.

A recently concluded study on trafficking in South Africa, which the author was part of, found that many of the Black victims of trafficking identified had experienced violence, maltreatment and/or neglect prior to being trafficked. The findings indicated that such back life narratives made them (victims) pre-disposed to the trafficking perpetrators who take advantage and exploit systemic-generated gaps. To be progressive and transformative in social work theoretical and practical orientations when working with victims, means being critically aware and grounded in the intersectionalities. Thus, this calls for interventions that not only address structural factors but also those that intersect to increase trafficking risks. See example below from Gerassi and Nichols (2021) that bridges research to practice and uses an anti-oppressive, intersectional framework to address trauma:

... a social worker facilitating a support group of mixed-race, cisgender, heterosexual women survivors of trafficking must acknowledge the trauma of racism that has impacted the women of colour in the room. Group participants will have likely experienced sexism that is inherent in gender-based violence and state responses to it but acknowledging the intersectional role of racism is critical (pp. 31-32)

Extensive sex exploitation and trafficking literature focuses on women and often excludes other genders and race discussions. Social work training should also include teaching about criticism of the applicable theoretical frameworks especially liberal and radical feminism which tend to ignore notions of race, ethnicity, nationality, and certain gender identities in trafficking narratives.
Literature and imagery impact identification and risk assessments in social work, they are not reflective of what happens in communities, and they often do not assist in victim’s self-identification. Years ago, when working for a counter-trafficking organization, it was and still is common to see prevention and awareness raising trafficking campaign material depicting Black men as trafficking perpetrators and victims as white and female. Some trafficking indicators also depict classism and racism e.g., originating from foreign countries, not speaking a local language, appears weak and malnourished etc. These are stigmatizing assumptions which lead to exclusion of Black victims from the mainstream narratives, campaigns and service provision. Furthermore, use of visuals such as chains and shackles may distort and exclude the existence of race, power, violence, and oppression in trafficking. From a colonial hierarchical power structure into post-colonial societies, Black and Other females who are trafficked are stripped of their humanity, objectified, and perceived as incompetent and worthless.

This aligns to Steve Biko’s words that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” As noted by Gerrasi and Nichols (2021), the colour-evasive racism as a persistent categorical and discriminatory discourse does not consider these women and other populations (such as LGBTQ2S, disabled persons) who are trafficked, and the authors calls for trafficking advocacy addressing oppression through omission and pervasiveness of race and its sustained impact.

Conclusion

This reflective paper highlighted colonial legacies as contributing to trafficking risks, with the hope that it will inspire critical interventions. Indeed, an intersectional analysis of trafficking service provision within social work points to both challenges and opportunities whilst drawing critical attention to the underlying complex systems of violence.

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Post-Humanism, Ethics, and International Social Work


International Social Work (ISW) has become the focus of an intense critique that probes the degree to which (a) the Western liberal worldview that permeates its core assumptions and values is compatible with the values of communities in the Global South and, more radically still, (b) whether the concept of a ‘human’ at the core of universal human rights and her way of knowing ought to form the basis of ISW (see, for example, Bell, 2011; Healy, 2007; Hölscher et al., 2020; Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019; Tascon, 2020). The critique highlights how Western modernity not only exploits the Global South economically, it also justifies this exploitation by assigning people of the Global South a lower stage of human development thus entrapping them in an ontological web (and its political implications) whose rules are made by and that exculpate the Global North. It posits that the Global North consciously or semi-consciously imposes multilayered and complex relations of power onto the Global South colonising its way of knowing, culture, life worlds, and life itself.

Epistemological strands of this critique have been taken on board by numerous social work academics alerting us that the imposition of universal standards in ISW education is unlikely to empower the people it is supposed to serve if it replicates an epistemological hierarchy that places a Western-centric body of knowledge at the top of a developmental hierarchy (Bormann, 2021; Gray & Webb, 2008). Indeed, commentators have argued that ISW exponents run the risk of perpetuating “cultural and intellectual imperialism” and

This raises the question whether and how international social workers of the Global North can be taught to feel, think, and act beyond their cultural and experiential horizon. And while critical whiteness, privilege, racism, and epistemic violence are increasingly being discussed in social work programs of the Global North in an attempt to sensitise social work students to potential asymmetries of power in social work and to change their perspectives on the people they will be working with (Heilmann & Rosskopf, 2021), a number of authors have highlighted gaps in the translation of decolonising scholarship into practice (Hölscher et al., 2020; Melter, 2018; Schmelz, 2021).

ISW has also become the focus of a critique from within. For some social workers, the framework contained within the Global Statement of Ethical Principles (disseminated with slightly different content both by the International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] and the International Association of Social Workers [IASSW]), with its ethical grounding in universal human rights, social justice, and democracy (see, for example, Staub-Bernasconi, 2014) can ring hollow in conflict zones they find themselves in. Indeed, some have questioned the philosophical and ethical premises that underpin the deployment of international social workers querying whether an ethics grounded in Western values should be imposed on the Global South (Hugman, 2008). Others have extended this critique to the role and purpose of ISW (see, for example, Hölscher et al., 2020; Mupedziswa & Sinkamba, 2014). Such criticism from within has amplified questions whether ISW is suffering from an ethnocentric ‘blind spot’ and whether a de-colonial or post-human deconstruction of human rights could assist social workers to make better sense of people and the processes that shape their life worlds (Hölscher et al., 2020).

Human rights were a fairly radical and ambitious proposition that has challenged the core values of communities in the Global North and South since their inception. They are still controversial today precisely for the fact that they enabled persons or groups ostracised or regarded as inferior or worthless by other more powerful groups to claim full humanity. It should not come as a surprise that human rights are not particularly popular among conservative elites. Human rights form the bedrock of the claims of many minorities and disadvantaged majorities for recognition and equal opportunity.

Progressive Western humanism with all its faults, has been used by Indigenous communities to mount a defence against the murderous encroachment of the latifundium and consolidating agribusiness. Human rights enable activists to showcase the inhumane treatment Indigenous people are subjected to. And while communal values may diverge from the Western liberal ethics packaged in the charters of the United Nations (UN), universal human rights are nevertheless strategically deployed to voice grievances and demands at a national and international level. Furthermore, observers have pointed out that human rights are being creatively adapted and re-elaborated to fit local contexts in much the same way as the Global Statement of Ethical Principles asks us to (see, for example, Ife, 2001; Tascon,
2016). More importantly still, in conflict zones where the rule of law is suspended, universal human rights supported by a massive humanitarian infrastructure are often the only hope to find some relief and protection from lawless brutality. Clearly, that hope is all too often disappointed highlighting an increasing gap between normative human rights claims and their ability to impact on social realities experienced in crisis situations (see, for example, Eberlei 2018). Still, the concept of human rights allows communities to bring to light this gap and to transform it into an entitlement.

Within the operational context of international social work, universal human rights are not something that ought to be dispensed with lightly. With all their shortcomings, human rights promote a powerful social imaginary that permeates most aspects of ISW (Hugman, 2008). In crisis situations, human rights provide an aspirational goal, benchmark, source of empowerment, organisational vision, and a practice framework (Staub-Bernasconi, 2014). In conjunction with the wider fabric of international conventions, they form an important legal and political reference point. Humanitarian ideals have spawned a sizeable network of organisations that collaborate across geographical, religious and political divides. These networks still manage to attract considerable resources that are often used to strengthen local civil society. More importantly still, human rights inspire hope.

Post-colonial scholars have unmasked important deficiencies of a human rights-based ISW and have contributed to the emergence of a more reflexive approach that increasingly informs the vision, mission, and mandate of ISW (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). They have contributed to an emergent profession that is perhaps less dogmatic and more able to valorise local socio-economic and cultural contexts (Bormann, 2021). This new reflexive ISW is increasingly able to recognise that the Global North might be, in all sorts of ways, the aggressor – not the good guy as the human rights discourse it promotes would suggest. However, this value pluralistic approach offers little in the way of a viable alternative to an ethico-legal fabric that informs conventions and legislation (see also Ife, 2001).

Furthermore, while a post-humanist approach can help to make analytical sense of certain conflict situations by urging us to reflect on our subject location and to peel back some of the metaphysical assumptions and cultural layers that underpin universal claims of Euro-centric enlightenment, it gives less rise to a positive, nourishing vision. Furthermore, several commentators have argued that post-humanist deconstruction has a tendency toward a negative ontology, which leads to a very dark place indeed (Deranty, 2007; Negri, 2011; Prozorov, 2014; Ziarek, 2008). For example, the only escape from repressive structures Agamben (Agamben, 1998) or Braidotti (Braidotti, 2013, 2016) are able to offer is their suspension, the rendering inoperative of the apparatus of power, to step out of the logics of law and sovereignty (Agamben, 1998 [1995]). In other words, the power to lead out of injustice is vested in nomadic life operating outside the confines of stratified society and the state. Many commentators doubt that this theoretical approach can be fruitfully translated into practice and argue that it results in political paralysis (Deranty, 2007; Deutscher, 2008; Prozorov, 2014; Ziarek, 2008).
In his more recent work, Achille Mbembe argues that we are witnessing the end of democracy as democracies are turned into fortresses fighting a continued war on terror due to the spectacular escalation of destruction driven by market forces and war (Mbembe, 2017 [2016]). Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado is a case in point. It highlights that these forces unleash a raw and deadly brutality associated with the political turmoil that is often the hallmark of ‘failed states’. In Mozambique’s case, the failure of the state to protect its citizens is associated with a great number of factors, key amongst which is a case of corrupt, predatory global capitalism that depleted state resources to a point where it affected all state-run services – particularly those outside the capital.

Mozambique’s fiscal melt-down was the result of a US$2.2 billion secret deal to develop a fishery industry signed by the Mozambiquean government in 2013. Financial improprieties, the alleged misallocation of funds to buy arms, and the alleged payment of massive ‘kickbacks’ of at least $136m to influential individuals (i.e. members of the Guebuza and Nyusi governments and Credit Suisse employees) caused the International Monetary Fund to cancel loans, which contributed to the collapse of Mozambique’s currency (Almeida dos Santos, 2020; Holmey, 2021). Other factors included an alliance between illicit business and Islamic militants, the influence of ISIS stirring a Muslim uprising against the political domination of clans located in the south, the attempt of local ‘big men’ to gain control over the resource-rich north, political wrangling between the two main power-brokers, and the Nyusi government’s attempt to use of Russian and South African mercenaries to fight insurgents (Almeida dos Santos, 2020), not to mention the economic displacement of low-income communities due to global warming.

The result was the emergence of a ‘new war’ of extraordinary brutality. Mbembe’s more recent work argues that they are the product of an inversion of colonial violence where the identification of a common enemy has replaced other social bonds resulting in a relentless and obsessive search for the enemy that is right in our midst (Mbembe, 2017 [2016]). While this interpretation is thought provoking, it tends to gloss over complexities that social workers deployed in these contexts may find better explained in the work of Kalyvas (2006) or Staniland (2014).

The work of critical post-humanists does not provide a ready-made platform for emancipatory collective action that is organised along the lines of a clearly demarked ethics, praxis, and identity (Deutscher, 2008; Ziarek, 2008). There is no easily identifiable agent in their work that could take control of historicity. To be sure, Braidotti offers an escape route from the negative ontology that plagues the work of Agamben but also the more recent work of Mbembe. Her philosophical turn to neo-Spinozan monadic ontology and her embrace of a Deleuzeian ‘ethics of becoming’ grounded in an all-inclusive, relationally normatively neutral community of ‘self-constituting matter’ embarked on a journey of discovery of what it might mean to be ‘the best we can possibly be’ opens new possibilities - and risks (i.e. what do we do if a well-organised illiberal minority hijacks the process to supplant inclusive collective with authoritarian structures?). More perplexing still, because in Braidotti’s work the basic unit is
'self-constituting matter', we would first need to make sure we understand what is meant by 'we'.

ISW education tries to balance universal and local claims of human dignity, worth, and justice. On the one hand its vision and mandate states that every human being has the same inalienable rights. Cultural distinctions can be acknowledged but ultimately will not alter the relevance and authority of these rights (Healy, 2007). On the other – a post-enlightenment critique argues that ethnic, socio-cultural and other distinctions are of crucial importance and that universal norms of morality are only possible if some groups are excluded. However, there is an alternative to this dichotomous reading. It is possible to view the break of critical post-humanists with Western modernity as merely a critical distancing that ultimately affirms the values of progressive humanism. This is the perspective we took in this article. To be sure, this is not an easy, immediate solution to an extremely divisive intellectual conflict that has lasted far too long. Rather it is one of openness and constant negotiation that traverses the kind of intellectual territory outlined in this article.

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Social Work education has been criticized for utilizing a Western and Eurocentric framework to guide the curriculum that is a direct outcome of colonialization, or the centralizing of European standards, norms, and values within settings. Globally, schools of social work are expected to prepare new professionals in promoting anti-oppressive practice and be responsive to regional needs (Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training - International Federation of Social Workers, 2020). In the United States, the disproportionate number of Black/African Americans receiving services calls for an immediate need to decolonize the
education provided to emerging professionals that will work with diverse client systems at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. African Centered practice methods are a theoretical approach that decenters Eurocentric frameworks and centers African values, perspectives, and worldviews as the guiding principles for engaging with individuals, families, organizations, and communities (Harvey, 2018; Shiele, 2000).

This pedagogy includes application to classroom instruction and course content using the seven core principles of Kwanzaa, an annual seven-day celebration focused on recognizing and affirming African culture (Harvey, 2018). Afrocentric principles are aligned with inclusive and equity teaching practices; critical engagement of difference, academic belonging, transparency, structured interactions, and flexibility although credit is not typically attributed to African culture. Through the adaptation of a previous course, Afrocentric principles were incorporated into classroom structure and content delivery in intentional and strategic ways to decolonize the typical structure of course implementation.

**Background**

Colonialization has had profound impacts on society as we know it (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). Taking away land from individuals, capitalizing on the misuse of individual bodies, and forcing acculturation are all outcomes of colonialism. Public education at all levels has the footprints of colonialization that perpetuate white supremacy culture and exclude identities (Jones & Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks), n.d.). Educational institutions have expressed a desire to create plans to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion to address the historical oppression that interferes with learning and development (Molbaek, 2017).

Higher education courses that center and/or focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion offer content knowledge, however, the pedagogical methods may mirror traditional academic structures that are entrenched with the values and beliefs that have resulted from the long-term effects of colonialization. Rigid expectations, single methods of evaluation, lack of collaborative learning, and focus on quantity are often present in courses that are designed to educate on the dynamics of privilege, oppression, diversity, and social justice. This course disrupts traditional methods of teaching and learning that many institutions, instructors, and students are accustomed to and offers an opportunity to disrupt and dismantle racism at an institutional and interpersonal level while decolonizing the academic setting.

Similar to the Center for Research on Teaching and Learning (CRLT) inclusive teaching principles, an Afrocentric model offers an ability for educators to incorporate core principles within their teaching and applied practice methods within their discipline. This model, however, provides the historical context of the origination of the theoretical framework and attributes African culture and ideology. By engaging the contributions of African Americans within specific disciplines, and utilizing unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith, educators are able to
create a cohesive classroom that prepares future leaders to engage in work that supports the pursuit of social justice.

Dr. Maulana Karenga is noted as the originator of incorporating the holiday, Kwanzaa into the US after racial discontent with civilians and law enforcement led to public protests. Dr. Karenga shares that Kwanzaa is a time to unite African Americans and center African cultural traditions and principles (Karenga, 1998). The seven principles of Kwanzaa, also known as Nguzo Saba are unity (academic belonging), self-determination (critical engagement of difference), collective work and responsibility (academic belonging), cooperative economics (structured interactions), purpose (academic belonging), creativity (flexibility), and faith (transparency).

Each principle of Nguzo Saba can be incorporated into the development and implementation of a course to decolonize teaching and learning. Having students include expectations of each other in the course syllabus, highlighting previous and current African American contributors weekly, and offering multiple methods of assignments and rubrics for completion through written, oral, and artistic expression support students in seeing Afrocentrism modeled in their academic spaces and observe that it benefits students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

**Overview**

African Centered Practice with Individuals, Communities, and Organizations is designed to provide advanced intervention practice skills to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity, or the ability to recognize and affirm the differences and strengths within cultures other than your own. Using the Nguzo Saba principles in teaching and learning leads to a unique experience with each section as the norms and values are developed and implemented. Students in the current section have created a space that offers a hybrid learning environment allowing students that are not able to return to campus to participate in lectures with students who are physically in the classroom. Students from other disciplines, education, public health, law, environmental science, and business have engaged in the course along with social work students and offered interprofessional education opportunities. This course design provides educators with a chance to decentralize Western European standards within the academic and professional settings by introducing and developing alternatives to teaching, learning, and practice.

The beginning of class is accompanied by music by a Black or African American artist that aligns with the theme of the day for free writing or reflection on a prompt. Rituals of honoring a Black/African American pioneer in human services/social work occur prior to pouring libations at the beginning of each class. After acknowledging those that came before us, we repeat an affirmation in unison to recognize the work that we are doing and will continue to do. Although beginning classes with music and an opportunity to bring current topics, issues, or concerns is a typical pedagogical practice, the review of the matter using an African centered worldview and evaluating for characteristics of white supremacy is a
significant difference that challenges students to consider ways that policies, procedures, and practices perpetuate racism and anti-Blackness.

Lecture content is developed and presented to align with the course objectives and students are encouraged to add thoughts, ideas, and comments throughout the lecture. The focus is on the course objectives and not arbitrary ideas of what a graduate course should include. Resources are provided by everyone in the learning community. As we continue to intentionally de-center whiteness, working together in unity is being demonstrated by this written submission and on our final project.

**Evidence of impact on student learning**

African Centered education has been named as one method of dismantling the oppressive methods of education with specific attention to African American students (Marks & Tonso, 2006). Reports of feeling marginalized in predominantly white institutions and lack of cultural responsiveness have been shared by students. “Looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” within educational settings that uphold values and ideas of the dominant culture has a negative impact on students of color and white students due to ideas of superiority and inferiority (Du Bois, 1989). Using African-centered education is not specific for African-American students. It is recommended as a method to support the advancement of a true democratic and just society.

Initial evaluation of the course offers support that African-centered pedagogy can positively impact the ability of students to learn and integrate theoretical knowledge within their practice as professionals. A commitment to delivering quality services to people of African descent to reduce the disparities present has consistently been an outcome from course completion (Hollingsworth & Phillips, 2016). In course evaluations, the median score for the responses on a five-point scale; class content was connected to real-world practice examples and content on diversity prepared me to better engage and intervene with diverse populations, was 5.0.

Participants in the course are encouraged to decenter colonial ideas in their roles. One student shared,

“[this course] has positively influenced my social work philosophy. I have obtained a much greater understanding of the potential for a largely negative impact of eurocentric social work practice on the Black Community, especially when such practices are being defined as “best practice”. I have shaped my values and practice to align better with the 7 Principles and have committed myself to ongoing reflection and analysis of my work in light of these principles. I have learned to ask more questions and more deeply analyze the tools that we have been handed and will continue to modify the tools to align with Afrocentric principles whenever possible and/or to simply toss them out and replace them with Afrocentric tools and methods.”
Students report the course as being transformative.

As one student shared,

“This class was the best class I took this semester. The content covered was so helpful because it was linked to my life, my real-world experiences, and helped make some fundamental shifts in the way I think about the world. Professor Price exemplifies everything that an amazing teacher should – the ability to push students beyond what we are "supposed" to think, discussion based learning where we are able to come to our own conclusions rather than her lecturing at us, and connection to the real world. Professor Price is one of the few professors who gets to the root of things – digging deeply into oppression, social justice and liberation. Her practice is always client centered as she operates from the base of seeing social work as an act of justice and liberation rather than simply a profession. I will forever be grateful for her teachings, they have pushed me to be a better social worker and person in general.”

Another student shared,

“Within political social work one might assume that there is no way to integrate African centered practice. However this course, alongside Dr. Price’s eagerness for students to think outside the box, has pushed me to be the change I wish to see.”

As an opportunity for interprofessional education, this course has been open to students of all disciplines. The impact on professional practice in other disciplines is described by a former student who shared,

“This has been one of the best classes I’ve taken at Michigan. I am not a social work student but this class gave me both a deep insight into afrocentric approaches and showed me the shortfall of Eurocentric approaches, as well as helped me to cultivate curiosity and learn the right questions to ask and where to find the answers. I cannot say enough positive things about this course!”

Using an Afrocentric approach to teaching offered a unique learning experience by intentionally creating an environment that fostered learning, growth, and development as a collective group. In addition to teaching Afrocentric principles, the course was designed to incorporate Afrocentric practices. Students were able to describe their experiences and provided the feedback that

“This course embodied the approach that it taught. Also great to have opportunities to build relationships with one another by going outside of the classroom, sharing meals, and libations.”

Students consistently recommend that the approach be integrated within the larger school. One student wrote,
“This course has had a big impact on my learning and should be a much bigger part of SSW approach.”

Challenges, Considerations, Implications, and Recommendations

A challenge for international replication is the various experiences of colonization on different groups. Depending on the geographical area, the group(s) that have been disproportionately impacted by colonization should be identified and incorporated into the engagement, assessment, and development of educational experiences. Engaging the leadership of marginalized groups to consider the cultural values that were disrupted through colonization can support the affirming of those who have previously contributed to the world.

Being able to ensure that students recognize that these principles can be used by all social identities is critical. Theorists contend that using this framework increases equity for disproportionately marginalized individuals as well as creates a more inclusive environment for all.

Language is a consideration that should be noted. In the United States, a major outcome of colonization was the creation of racial classes based on skin tone/complexion and assumed ethnicity. Black, as a racial category typically refers to individuals that have origins from the African diaspora. Individuals that have migrated to the US post colonialization may not identify as Black although they have the same skin complexion that was used to define the categories of Black and White. Understanding the needs of the region and adapting language frequently would be necessary and an essential component of decolonizing educational settings. By being transparent and maintaining collaborative learning and teaching environments, the evolution of language can be respected.

A common criticism from students and faculty includes the exclusion of other ethnic identities and centering those practices. In the US, the recommendation to focus on African Centered practices is deeply grounded in the history of the forced transition to a new space and enslavement and recognizing the contributions of those individuals. The unique experience of descendants of enslaved Africans is acknowledged through this practice. Also, centering another culture when attempting to deconstruct typical norms that are oppressive must be done with great care to ensure that new cultural norms and values don’t perpetuate oppression within education.

This model requires reflexivity, the ability to consider the internal and external thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of self by everyone. One of the agreements is that everyone is a teacher and a learner. Unfamiliarity can lead to feelings of anxiousness and fear. Again, by modeling anti-racism and being transparent about what can be expected, the outcomes can be transformative to the individual and the people they will work with.
Conclusion

We are combating the impacts of colonialism! An environment that supports challenging our current social norms and feeling confident in our abilities to enhance the future of our society has been co-created in our section. This is the way to dismantle racial oppression within the profession. In order to develop social work professionals that are aware of the dangers of perpetuating oppression, there must be a space for us to imagine a world that counteracts the global impact of colonialization.

Schools of Social Work across the globe can utilize Afrocentric principles to reorganize the structures of courses with special regard to courses that are designed to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity. The social work profession has shared a desire to engage in teaching and scholarship focused on dismantling systemic oppression. Offering frequent and ongoing courses that explicitly name their purpose and intent at decolonizing practices can nurture students that aspire to change society as we have known it.

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Middlesex University is an international university with a clear vision for its teaching and research to change lives locally, nationally and globally. Promoting diversity and social mobility are at the core of the university's activities in accordance with the Widening Participation agenda: a key strand of the UK government’s Higher Education (HE) policy, which aims to increase the participation of groups that are under-represented in HE.

The University’s survey data from 2019/20 suggests that 9% of its students have a disability, 47% are over the age of 21 years on starting their course, 58% are female and 69% describe themselves as being from a BAME (the term used in the survey), background. For staff, 4% declared a disability, with 29% from a BAME background.

The writers of this paper acknowledge the debates around the term ‘BAME’ (Banton, 1987 & Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 2021). The term will only be used in this paper when necessary i.e. because it was used in a third party document; otherwise the term ‘People [or students] of colour’ (POC/SOC), will be used.

The social work team at Middlesex is proud of the diversity of its students, and see it as something which enhances students’ learning. However, the light that the darkness of George Floyd’s murder has ironically shed on all areas of life, has meant that the staff - as have all individuals in society, have had to re-examine their attitudes about, and behaviour towards, POC, and to critically reflect on how and how much, POC are reflected in the curriculum.
The team considered how far the curriculum promoted anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice, two of the pillars of social work (Keating, 2000 and BASW Code of Ethics 2021). This paper will share some examples of adaptations made to the curriculum that have created more opportunities for SOC to be able to share their experiences with staff and peers. It was a key strategic aim for the team that the changes to the curriculum were not tokenistic, but rather were changes based on genuine reflection on how far students could see themselves and the wider world, in the curriculum.

Two colleagues, set up a curriculum review working group open to all students on one of the MA Social Work programmes. Student engagement in this was limited however, perhaps due to the accelerated nature of the programme and the competing demands on student time. Interestingly, several students also reported that as they did not identify as being a POC nor did they self-identify with diversity or difference, hence they felt it was inappropriate to have a voice on such issues.

**Developing a Difference and Diversity Repository**

The lack of engagement with the process of review raised questions around how some students saw themselves and their personal and professional relationship to diversity and difference and how this might impact on anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practice. The team felt strongly that the responsibility and ownership of diversity and difference should not fall to SOC or to those who identified as belonging to a minoritised group. It was felt that the programme and students generally would benefit from more overtly addressing content that addressed power, privilege and from engaging with ideas of allyship (Reason et al, 2005).

We began by developing additional asynchronous teaching that specifically addressed:

- Power and privilege during the initial ‘readiness for direct practice’ teaching period of four weeks
- Tasks including reflective posts, where students were required to reflect on the teaching content and engage in social analysis through the response to two other posts from their peers. This level of reflection and analysis are central to critical social work education (Gates et al, 2021).
- The history of colonialism in the context of mental health services and a subsequent lecture on anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice.
- A shifted focus to further support allegiance with oppressed and disadvantaged communities and strengthened the concept of allyship to social justice and social work practice (Gibson, 2014).

Another new feature brought into the curriculum has been a ‘Diversity and Difference Repository’. The strategy was to offer students the opportunity to engage in dialogue on how content related to ideas of social justice, systemic oppression and economic disadvantage
and consequently underpinned the development of anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices. The context was structured to offer reflection on key themes such as:

- Power and Privilege
- Race and Ethnicity
- Disabilities
- Gender
- Sexuality

The repository included:

- Research articles
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Opinion pieces by international authors

The resource has been well-received by students and staff alike and has brought about richer conversations with students about systemic discrimination and oppression, and about the role of the social work profession in addressing inequality in a stratified way. The team intends to evaluate students’ awareness of these concepts, particularly of allyship, considering many of the white students initially thought that as they were not SOC, they had little to contribute.

The team is aware that for social justice to truly be experienced, it requires everyone from all backgrounds to recognise and accept they have a part to play in implementing it. The Ally Model ‘...provides an approach to social justice built on social identity’ (Gibson, 2014, p.199), and will be key in addressing how the team works with its students. Soon, short videos featuring the teaching team will be created which will offer perspectives on what identity, privilege and allyship mean to them. The videos are intended to help students reflect on their own position on these topics and how that position relates to diversity and difference. It is hoped this will contribute to students developing an understanding of being, and perhaps seeing themselves as, an ally – members of a dominant social group working to break down systems that oppress minoritized groups (Reason et al, 2005).
Interprofessional Learning- Black Lives Matters teaching and discussion forums

Two live virtual sessions entitled ‘Black Lives Matter’ (BLM) were also added to the curriculum. The sessions were included as part of the Faculty’s Interprofessional Learning sessions, which see students from across the Faculty participate in virtual sessions on different topics that intersect with the subject areas of the Faculty (nursing, midwifery, social work and education). The insertion of the BLM sessions was due to the felt need for students to have a forum to speak as they wished about their own experiences of day to day and professional life as part of a racialized group/community. Cane (2021) in his study with social work students on ‘racially disruptive teaching pedagogies’, wrote that there was “...need for additional and brave reflective spaces that disrupt racial segregation and foster a better understanding about race...” (p.1) It was hoped the IPL sessions would do just that. They were a powerful opportunity for SOC, giving them the opportunity to speak on their terms about their experiences of being visibly different in predominantly white spaces.

There was appetite from students for the sessions, with attendance significantly higher at over one hundred, than would usually be expected. There were likely many different reasons for the increased interest – the rare opportunity for SOC to share their experiences was probably a factor. The Middlesex context was also important - specifically the fact that many of the students could identify with the concerns that had been expressed about the unusually high number of Covid-19 deaths of people within the British Black and minority ethnic population (Platt and Warwick, 2020). With many of the attendees being student nurses, this was a phenomenon very close to their practice concerns, especially as one Black nursing student in his first year of mental health nursing sadly passed away with Covid-19.

The BLM sessions presented an opportunity to share some startling statistics on the racial disparities between ‘BAME’ and White people in education, health and social work. For example, BAME families are more likely to live in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (Barnard and Turner, 2011 and Bernard, 2019) and BAME staff are disproportionately represented in NHS disciplinary proceedings (Archibong et al, 2019).

Employers are an important source of placements for the Faculty’s students – many of whom once they have completed their studies, go on to work with these employers in qualified roles. In fact, some of the guests who attended the IPL sessions were Middlesex alumni, having studied the very same courses as some of the attendees. This made the sessions even more impactful with the discussions encompassing qualified staff from across England, and with some of those staff being Middlesex graduates. This is also an example of the University’s strategy as mentioned at the start of this paper, in action – creating communities of practice intended to bring together staff, students and employers/practitioners to collaborate and drawing on different perspectives and skills to generate improvements in social justice and cultural competence.
Although Middlesex has a diverse study body, the racialised nature of higher education in the UK and the disparities that arise are still present. One such disparity is the ‘degree awarding gap’ - the difference in the number of white and BAME students awarded a good degree (a first or upper-second), which was 9.9% in 2019/20 according to Advance HE, a British charity working with institutions across the world to improve higher education. This UK-wide gap is present even after controlling for individual, course-specific and institutional characteristics. The figure for Middlesex is 9% (Office for Students, 2021).

In the UK, SOC have reported experiences of being ‘othered’ by White people as noted in the ‘I too am Oxford’ project, inspired by the 2014 ‘I, too, am Harvard’ initiative, a platform for Black and Asian students to share their feelings of being ‘othered’ by the majority White students. While Middlesex is ethnically diverse, the same cannot always be said for the organisations and wider communities in which students work and/or live. The students’ experiences shared during the sessions of being ‘othered’ by White people, feeling ‘less than’ and wondering if they were capable, were sad, shocking (to some) and sadly, plentiful. To continue to give those students a voice, below are some extracts of what they said:

“I feel like at workplaces black people are given complex cases with minimum support only to prove a point/exposing them to failure”.

“Fear has covered many of us”.

“I am student on placement and because I am African woman with an accent, I was told that I don’t know how to communicate by a white person. It has shocked me as I am in my final year. If I was not communicating well, how did I pass all previous placements?”

It became apparent, that the SOC not only valued, but needed a space where they could safely talk about their experiences. Initially, students were reluctant to talk, but as one student started, it appeared to empower others which led to more and more being shared. Students seemed to find some comfort and security in knowing that they were not alone in what they were going through and what they felt. This reflects the findings of Arday et al (2021), who found that classroom discussions on race are a method to support minority ethnic students with their day-to-day struggles with institutional racism.

Some of the feedback at the end of the sessions also confirmed the usefulness of the space to talk:

“This was a fantastic session today and it feels like people were just waiting for an opportunity to speak out. It’s like the elephant in the room...”

“We should have more of this session because it’s an ongoing issue with minority groups”
Conclusion

The curriculum planning and delivery changes above demonstrate how some of the action that has been taken by social work academics at Middlesex University, stimulated debate about the everyday experiences of racism experienced by students and service users, leading to new approaches to practice. The concept of allyship (Reason, 2005) has been a key concept in the work undertaken and ongoing in the curriculum. Relevant upcoming work to be undertaken by colleagues within the team includes, research with Black and mixed-race boys and diversion from youth custody approaches, plus a mentorship programme where Black and Asian students are connected to social work practitioners and managers from among the team’s stakeholder group.

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The courage to see and be seen: the emotional labour of decolonising social work curricula for Black educators in the UK

The Black Lives Matter movement has acted as a catalyst on many levels. This includes renewed pressure on academics to review, deconstruct and decolonise social work curricula in the United Kingdom (UK). This paper examines some of the complexities involved for Black educators, focusing specifically on the emotional labour involved in leading on decolonising social work curricula.

There is not currently a single, agreed term that can be used to describe the diverse range of experiences of people of colour. The term BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) has been rejected by many for implying an assumption of similarity without recognition of diversity (Dacosta et al, 2021; Ali, 2020). Black, with a capital B, can be used as a collective and political term to include those in the UK who have ‘suffered colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today’s society’ (Unison, 2013). Not everyone’s experience is the same, but there is a need to acknowledge the value of a collective voice.

My experiences as an educator has led me to highlight specific terms and concepts. This is a tricky terrain, placing me at risk of making broad stereotypical assumptions. This is a risk in any discussion around decolonising the curriculum but one that needs to be taken to enable difficult discussions to begin and for the work to be done meaningfully.

De-colonising refers to ‘deconstructing and challenging the ideology of colonisation’ (Mathebane, et al, 2018), the process in which colonisers’ culture and values have been internalised. How this is done will vary according to the locality, the content of the curricula, the intersectionality of educators and the meaning the current curricula holds for them. Educators and students may have a rich history of parents and grandparents with
origins in the British Commonwealth, and complex narratives imbibed with layers of meaning around this.

This paper focuses on the emotional labour of decolonising social work curricula for Black educators. Readers specifically interested in the experience of Black students are directed to Richardson, (2015) and Bunce et al, (2019) for a helpful discussion. The term ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983) refers to the process whereby emotions have to be suppressed, instead of being expressed naturally and authentically. Hochschild referred to the commodification of emotions, in the marketized world of flight attendants, learning to suppress their own emotions to meet the needs of their customers. The same concept is used here to refer to the challenges that Black educators face in working alongside colleagues, to deconstruct and challenge a colonised social work curriculum within the structures of a colonised higher education framework. Emotional labour can lead to a sense of having to disassociate from an essential part of one’s being. As Hochschild (1983) noted, it can be experienced as the loss of something vital and sacred.

**Background**

Statistics show that Black educators currently make up only nine percent of professors in UK higher education (Advance HE, 2021) but are often likely to be placed in positions of leading work around decolonising curricula. This presents them with additional marginalization and possible isolation (Gunaratnam and Lewis, 2001, Doherty et al, 2021, Doku, 2019 and Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020).

At the heart of the work around decolonising the curriculum are concepts of ‘sameness and difference’ (Akhtar, 2013). This refers to the process whereby assumptions are made on the basis of assumed similarities or differences in social characteristics between people.

Observing physical differences can be a direct and obvious way doing this. It is easy for students to see the race, gender and age of lecturers and perhaps make assumptions about them, and their approachability. For example, white students arriving at a London university who may have lived in more rural environments, may not be used to mixing with a diverse range of people, and can take some time to relate to students and educators perceived as Black or holding minority status.

If people share social characteristics, there can be a tendency for assumptions to be made on the basis of those commonalities. For example, Black students warm towards Black academics and sometimes discuss very personal issues, family situations and circumstances of extreme poverty. This may be a connection of perceived similarity or commonality based on the colour of skin.

The search for assumed commonality may be rooted in the assumption that two people of colour have shared knowledge, values and understandings. The desire to connect may also be part of a process of working out if somebody is in or outside of one’s group. Those who are
seen as outside of one's group can be in danger of being 'othered', falling prey to unconscious stereotypes, biases and assumptions.

All educators learn how they can make themselves more or less approachable to students, and may also have a sense of the impact they have on those with different characteristics to their own. For academics self-awareness is key to acknowledging sameness and difference in the early stages of relationship building with students. The demonstration of being seen provides a language to articulate hard to name feelings. I usually do this by focusing on social work values and relationship-based practice as part of students’ induction. The message is clear: everyone is welcome.

Discussion

The welcome begins the work and as it gets underway, educators need to be mindful of how intersectionality, and the concepts of sameness and difference (Akhtar, 2016) can show up in classroom discussions and written assignments. Diverse case materials in teaching and assessment are long overdue but essential to the understanding of complexities and emotional loads. Black educators cannot assume that Black students are incapable of racist assumptions as stereotypical and racist assumptions, rooted in religion, culture and ethnicity, can appear in assignments and exam answers.

Black academics may have to manage emotions which feel like a double betrayal because they have assumed that class discussions on the complexity of intersectionality has meant that students are anti-racist. Fook’s work (2000) on the development of social work identity is helpful here. She points out that students can be ‘self-centric’ and focussed on technical proficiency (getting the maximum marks possible from an assignment) rather than focused on having an attitude of open and curious inquiry.

As a profession focussed on social justice academics struggle with the readiness of some Black students to make racist assumptions to achieve technical proficiency. Teachers and assessors wonder at how much of themselves students feel they need to discard to do well academically. The question is what are the long-term consequences of compromise. (Dall’Alba and Barnacle’s (2015) explore this theme further in their discussion around ‘discordant professional practice’.

There is the constant question of how more space can be created within the curriculum to explore assumptions that underpin our judgements. Taylor and White (2000) refer to this as epistemic reflexivity. The concern for the ideal curricula which is decolonised should be part of a magic formula that gives Black students ‘permission’ to fully acknowledge and be themselves, and white students’ permission to name and ‘own’ experiences of ‘white fragility’ (Di Angelo, 2011).

The complexity of recognising, naming and transforming the ‘hidden curriculum’ and ‘hidden cultures’ (Fook, 2017) involves having the courage to have difficult discussions with
colleagues. However well-intentioned others are, this work can feel intensely isolating for Black educators (Doku, 2019 and Doharty et al, 2021).

The key point is that the emotional impact of decolonising the curriculum is different for Black and white educators. At times, it may be that Black educators feel they have to bypass the part of them that feels desecrated or dishonoured to present a more rational self (Gunaratnam and Lewis, 2001). The emotional labour involved in doing this may lead to them feeling that there is no space for their authentic selves in the academy.

Conclusion

Having named the challenges, I remain quietly optimistic in the strong value base of social work as a profession and our global commitment towards equality. We continue our journey, cutting through further layers, ever nearer to the core of the issue.

I am grateful to the hard-won spaces in the academy where my colleagues and I have been able to express ourselves and been able to move to a place where such difficulties can begin to be seen and acknowledged. It is a place of vulnerability for all, but one in which I begin to see the glimmer of real change.

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Community Cultural Wealth in the Context of Social Work Education

The aim of this paper is to introduce a powerful tool, community cultural wealth, which can be used to address race inequality in social work education and practice. As an academic leading social work in an English university, I support minority ethnic social work students to nurture their community cultural wealth in order that they can develop high self-concept, clear focus and understanding of inequalities. The hope is to enable a successful course progression and entry into the professional workplace.

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso (2005) coined and defined ‘community cultural wealth’ as a range of strengths, knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and used by minority ethnic people to empower them to maximise life opportunities and resist oppression. Community cultural wealth is rooted in critical race theory and Bourdieu’s theory of capital acquisition (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu’s notion of ‘cultural capital’ acquisition has been used to argue that some communities are culturally wealthy whilst others are culturally poor (Yosso, 2005). This presupposes that students of colour should aspire to and obtain white, middle class norms and values in place of their existing cultures (Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez and Cooper, 2009). Yosso (2005) critiqued Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory and introduced ‘community cultural wealth’ which challenges the assumption that minority ethnic students arrive in educational establishments with cultural deficits. This rejects the notion that black students aspire to obtaining white norms and values (Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez and Cooper, 2009).

The original version of community cultural wealth has been adapted to align with innovative and workable strategies used to identify, draw upon, consolidate and enhance an array of cultural wealth.
Social Capital

This is understood as formal and informal networks of family, friends and other social contacts which provide personal and professional emotional support, advice and assistance to enable people to be lifted to improved positions in society.

Cultural Capital

The cultural knowledge nurtured among family can carry a sense of community history, language, religion, faith, belief, shared memory, cultural practices, customs, dress and behaviours. Cultural capital is nurtured by family and ensures a proud connection to a community and its present and ancestral resources. This includes linguistic understandings, intellectual and social skills attained through communication in more than one language or style. Cultural capital for the students provides social education in developing community well-being, coping and pride.

Aspirational Capital

The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of perceived and real barriers, suggests ambition and aspiration. Inherent to this is the capacity for resilience and the embracing potential and infinite future possibilities available through education, occupation, economic status, emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Resistant Capital

The knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour tend to challenge racial inequality on a personal or structural level. This is grounded in the struggle of resistance to subordination and may include oppositional behaviour, direct challenges to formal or informal routes and utilising education to resist.

Navigational Capital

Strategies and abilities can be used by students to successfully manoeuvre through social institutions and organisations created for self-perceived monocultural societies. The assumption is that students can navigate successfully through university campuses and placements. Navigational capital acknowledges individual agency as well as utilising networks to steer through spaces and places.

Self-Concept Capital

This refers to what individuals know and believe about themselves. Self-concept is the sum of an individual's beliefs and attributes, rooted in self-evaluation and self-perception (Upamannya, Mathur and Bhakar, 2014). Self-concept is multi-dimensional and incorporates cognitive processes, knowledge, feelings, behaviours, values and attitudes. Individuals with high self-esteem are clearer about their self-image (Baumeister, 2009). Those with self-
concept clarity are able to define self-attributes with greater certainty and confidence. This makes them more consistent and conceptually stable (Baumeister, 2009; Noguti and Bokeyar, 2014).

**Social Work Education**

In the context of a UK university curricula content tends to be dominated by white, male and Eurocentric authors and represent the (predominantly white) demographic profile of academic staff (Bird and Pitman, 2019). Singh and Kwhali (2015) suggest that diversity is not reflected in higher education and minority ethnic students feel more detached when racial inequalities are significant and prevalent (Equality Challenge Unit, 2019).

Students have a lifespan in any educational process and connecting with people is a key part of the learning journey. For example, during induction time must be made to allow them to make friendships. The importance of maintaining and building existing family ties must be emphasised as this may have a positive impact on minority ethnic students’ participation (Connor, et al., 2004).

Opportunities for students to explore the range of social and community networks may enable discussions on how familial knowledge can be nurtured and expanded. Emotional and practical support is critical when they are balancing conflicting demands, professional challenges and personal hardships. Social capital can support students to seek support and care in order that they are better able to cope in a manner which is culturally nourished (Yosso, 2005; Yosso, et al., 2009). Lecturers have a responsibility to initiate discourses on students’ upbringings and culture so these strengths can be recognised and developed. Students need space to showcase their cultural heritage and be encouraged to express the different ways that people experience and view the social world. Diversity can bring varied viewpoints and different approaches to social work practice (Sangha, 2020). Global cultural perspectives enhance lectures. The positive value of multiple languages, varied communication and storytelling skills should be accentuated in the process of decolonising the social work curriculum (Sangha, 2020).

Universities need to ensure their assessment processes, marking criteria and academic writing strategies are objective, fair and accepting enough to embrace different perspectives. In lectures, when assessing and in providing feedback, students need to be encouraged to constantly aim higher and realise their full potential. Students can be encouraged to think about excellent grades and successful progression with the ultimate aim of gaining the job of their dreams. During teaching, learning and assessment, aspirational capital is an essential notion to instil because it enables students to maintain hopes and dreams for the future and develop resilience (Yosso, 2005).

Social work students can be subject to racial discrimination throughout their educational journey and may need to be supported to draw on their resistant capital, knowledge and skills to deal with oppositional behaviour (Yosso. 2005). Students need theoretical and
practical understanding of key concepts such as race and racism, anti-racism, white privilege, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice.

Dillon (2011) and Thomas, Howe and Keen (2011) found that minority ethnic students balance a multiplicity of factors including academic demands and placement complexities. Navigational Capital may be essential during the learning journey so that the resources available to them in university and placements (including study skills, library services, pastoral support, financial aid, tutorials and counselling) are fully utilised.

Universities have an obligation to review and restructure institutional processes which impact adversely on student engagement and progression. For example, in England the academic year is structured into rigid semesters which take little account of caring responsibilities or part time employment – demands which many students have to meet. Modules are traditionally taught face to face as opposed to more flexible on-line learning. Assignments have to be submitted strictly on time. Such outdated structures can work against minority ethnic communities who are often from lower socio-economic backgrounds and place higher value on family contact. Restructuring of the courses would allow students to balance their time and energy evenly between personal and academic life, develop friendships, meet financial responsibilities and seek support.

Minority ethnic students do not always successfully progress and find themselves subject to stress and poor confidence (Sangha, 2020). Emotional intelligence is an essential prerequisite for any social work academic as it allows connection and sensitive interpersonal relationships implicit in the duty of care. Self-concept clarity is critical for student social workers who are on the path to newly qualified status. Self-concept activities such as lifeline exercises offer students an opportunity to explore multiple roles that they hold (such as being a father, a student, a care worker).

Strengths-based exercises can enhance knowledge and skills. Self-affirming exercises can help build their self-esteem and confidence. These activities will enable students to better understand and attain high self-concept clarity.

**Conclusion**

Community cultural wealth shifts the lens away from a deficit view of minority ethnic communities as places of cultural poverty. It recognises the resources individuals, families and groups have to adapt, thrive and resist within racist institutions and social structures (Huber, 2009). The idea is rooted in building strength and the recognition and value of the cultural capital that minority ethnic groups bring to the social work profession (Huber, 2009; Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez and Cooper, 2009).

Finally, universities should be encouraged to fundamentally revise educational processes and embark on ambitious plans to decolonise teaching, learning and assessment. Identifying and nurturing community cultural wealth is one way to transform education and empower minority ethnic students to utilise resources abundant in their communities (Yosso, 2005).
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Weaving rights: Educational equality from Critical Social Work

Social work educational institutions are faced with reproducing parameters of educational exclusion dictated by the colonial structures and influences entrenched in current models which arguably respond to global economic-productive matrices. Decolonial theories have the power to annul indigenous knowledge through the imposition of a colonial matrix of power.

This paper is based on action research which came about as a result of experience, from critical social work perspective, of a group of indigenous university students seeking to ensure their right to an inclusive, quality education. They expressed concern about a number of issues including the visibility of educational inequality due to the poor recognition of their mother tongue. Also, a teaching body that does not always keep cultural diversity in mind in the classroom. In addition, the students felt discriminated against when joining academic work groups. The findings suggest that social work academics should guarantee validation and integration of "own" knowledge of ethnic minorities and ensure its integration into existing interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

Access barriers to higher education for indigenous youth: a critical social work perspective

Analyzing educational equality from critical social work (CSW) perspectives is a challenge. The barriers imposed by hegemonic models reproduce inequalities at all levels of the process but young people who are historically excluded are particularly disadvantaged at the point of access. This has the effect, among other things, of keeping indigenous knowledge in a place of inferiority and indigenous people in constant subordination. Respecting values, dignity, diversity, the defense of human rights and social justice constitute the fundamental
principles of social work. The right to a reasonable education is a fundamental position (IFSW, 2014) along with civil and political freedoms, such as free expression and conscience.

There are variables that limit inclusive education, such as gender, self-identification, disability, language, geographic location, and poverty. The lack of equal access to a university education is a violation of human rights if it breaches protected characteristics aligned to indigenous needs. Although some young people do find ways to access higher education those who manage to do so face not only academic difficulties, but also emotional, social, economic, and cultural barriers. This can lead to negative consequences and not all of them manage to generate adequate personal resources to remain in the system. This can lead to demotivational states, possible desertion and abandonment of studies. Our research suggests that deepening understanding of educational equality from the perspective of the Critical Social Work would lead to improved value placed on those belonging to a different social stratum. Critical Social Work approaches can lead to social denunciation and better expression of counter-hegemonic struggles (Viscarret, 2014; Vivero, 2017).

The aims of this paper are to share the reflective experiences of indigenous Ecuadorian university students from their different perspectives. This knowledge is based on their expectations of their studies in a medium of continuous disagreement with the formal education system.

“Other” knowledge and critical social work

Educational policies and processes are part of the problem of the system. However, the "order of knowledge" broadens the debate because the hegemonic models used are an elementary device of power, concentrating all forms of control with subjectivity, culture, and the production of knowledge.

Talking about the order of knowledge allows us to think how education contributes to the colonization of minds, to the notion that science and epistemology are singular, objective and neutral, and that certain people are more apt to think than others. (Walsh, 2021, p. 18)

The intellectual colonization that exists in the universities legitimizes academic production as a science under the parameters of the global north, relegating the thinking of the south to the status of "localized knowledge". In fact, in Latin America, knowledge is crossed by its geographical location, history since colonization, the present cultures "have value, color and place of origin" (Walsh, 2021, p. 14), strengthening what Anibal Quijano (2000) called "matrix colony of power. One of the fundamental axes of the power matrix is the idea of race, a mental construction that classifies the world population socially. For Quijano (2000), in Latin America the idea of race was a way of granting legitimacy to the relations of domination imposed by the conquest. Race as an axis sustains the matrix of power and conditions people's subjectivities, leads to inferiorizing, infantilizing and delegitimizing what is not considered "white". As Zapata mentions (2020), the creation of a racial structure of social identities in whites, mestizos, Indians, and blacks annulled cultural differences, creating common and negative identities known as Indians and blacks. The coloniality of
power strategically favored the organization of world capitalism as a homogenizing model of culture, especially of knowledge and the production of knowledge.

In this framework, decolonization is proposed as a project of modernity based on the development of an objective science, which permeates reason and allows the development of sensitivities. Also, cognitively open to other possibilities of understanding and living life, as mentioned by Rain and Muñoz, “as human beings in permanent construction, incomplete, and therefore require “other” knowledge to complete themselves” (2017, p. 332). It must be recognized that the Critical Social Work is also made up of “other” knowledge that responds to local realities (Alvarez & Gutiérrez, 2001; Montaño, 2019; Muchiri & Nzisabira, 2020). This implies promoting social justice and human rights as general principles of the profession (IFSW, 2014). Could this be maintaining a critical horizon within the classroom resulting in the problematization of education and generation of liberating processes? In order words a search for a radical transformation of the hegemonic forms of power, being and knowing (Iglesias et al., 2020; Kohli, 2012; Paraskeva, 2020; Veugelers, 2017).

**Making visible educational inequality**

The ownership of Critical Social Work by indigenous students has meant that the main factors that they point out are exposed, making it difficult for them to incorporate into university life, experiencing educational inequality promoted by the colonial matrix of power.

For students from indigenous peoples, the official language is not always their mother tongue and academic activity is carried out in a second language. This is not usually considered meritorious, so there is no different accompaniment in the preparation of tasks, presentations and other activities proposed by the teacher. The non-existence of official language leveling systems for the admission of indigenous students has an impact on the successful completion of their university studies. Teachers do not always keep cultural diversity in the classroom in mind, the statistical bases of student enrolment are not considered, where ethnic self-determination can be identified. When the technical-scientific language used by the teacher does not consider the linguistic diversity present in the classroom, academic gaps accumulate that hinder a correct understanding in learning. For an indigenous student, in many cases, it becomes difficult to request an explanation from the teacher on a subject not understood, whether due to embarrassment, lack of interest, lack of motivation or verticality in the teaching exercise.

The difficulty in joining work groups proposed by teachers generates, in some cases, exclusion and discrimination on the part of the peer group. This can add to linguistic disadvantages, both written and verbal and a feeling that students hold basic attitudes and will not contribute effectively to obtain a good grade. Such students are unlikely to actively integrate in face to face classes and, because of the distanced nature of on-line teaching, this disadvantage is accentuated in virtual classes. This type of exclusion and perceived discrimination leads to a detriment in their academic performance which in many cases is not
verbalized or channelled. This can lead to the loss of interest in the academic purpose and on occasion refuge in the excessive use of technological devices and alcohol consumption.

One of the most frequent problems in contemporary society is the uncontrolled use of social networks, mainly by young people, with the aggravating factor of falling into procrastination i.e. a deliberate postponing of tasks. When indigenous students find themselves with unlimited internet access, away from their family, in a different context from the one they were used to before entering university, they find themselves in a situation of emotional vulnerability and guardianship. Therefore, they are exposed to the distractions that are offered on social networks, such as the indiscriminate use of video games, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook and so on.

Excessive alcohol consumption is common and socially accepted on university campuses and in some cases of indigenous students it is made worse loneliness and distance from families. The lack of self-control and access to low-cost alcohol can add to the neglect of studies and aggressive behaviour.

Towards the decolonization of inclusive curricula

The formal education system is made up of tangible and intangible elements (curricula). The latter respond to a global structure of colonization of minds and bodies since the political purpose is to mold individuals and thus obtain a desired type of society.

In the study plans is where the knowledge that ensures the teaching-learning process is selected, organized, and ordered. Where a structured scheme materializes that determines who is suitable for obtaining academic titles and that enables the insertion of individuals in the productive-capitalist system. Decolonization consists of challenging these plans based on homogenizing texts, which delimit the actions of teachers, and which are part of the production of subjectivities. In other words, it is necessary to carry out an epistemological decolonization that recognizes that each territory has its own knowledge and its forms of transmission. Therefore, the inclusive curriculum will value the diversity of cultures and sciences, which must be placed in a horizontal dialogue that responds to local realities. The decolonization of education includes the equal consideration of contemporary knowledge and community education.

Conclusion: Weaving rights

Higher education is a right but it must be relevant and appropriate to the characteristics and training needs of indigenous people right from the beginning i.e. application and admission systems right to the end but also during their stay at the university. It would be a strength for the university community to have a diversity of knowledge from indigenous students since it would contextualize the national reality and contribute to reducing the gaps in intercultural educational inclusion.
The challenge of deconstructing imported knowledge involves weaving critical awareness in academic spheres. Maintaining the relationship between territory and students enables the application of decolonial pedagogies and strengthens intercultural dialogue.

Finally, inverting practices, identifying pedagogies that have already been walked and started, requires involvement in an interactive and reciprocal process between those who are considered professionals in social work and those who access and use services.

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Beyond Breaking the Chains: Decolonisation as transformation

The eruption of anger that came about after the brutal murder of the African-American, George Floyd in 2021, was translated into a worldwide Black Lives Matter movement which has had long lasting repercussions in the UK. There is a new and generalised feeling of urgency for radical action and a growing knowledge and awareness of historical racial injustice has emerged into the mainstream and within higher education. This is exemplified by the new research centre, the Global Race Centre for Equality (GRACE) at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan).

The aim of this paper is to focus on efforts in transforming decolonisation in the School of Social Work, Care and Community at UCLan. Awareness of the need for decolonisation is an important first step to inclusivity in the curriculum. However, inclusivity is not an end in itself as, in the context of the UK, minority groups might be paradoxically included and excluded at the same time.

The complexity of attempts to truly decolonise the curriculum should begin with simple measures, such as reviewing reading lists for students. However, the successful interpretation of inclusivity requires a whole system approach to change, which is nothing less than a radical transformation of structures, norms, routines and habits which many ethnic ‘Anglo-Saxon’ teaching staff at university carry with them, often unconsciously. We
say ‘Anglo-Saxon’ in inverted commas and in the knowledge, as described a long time ago by Fanon (1967), that people of different ethnicities are also capable of colonised behaviour, among themselves and towards different ethnicities, as part of the struggle to speak the language of Fanon’s ‘white world’ (p. 15). At the same time, it is also true that all people of colour are objects of difference compared to white people in the Western world. This is the point made by Robinson (1995, pp. 1-2) who chooses to include different ethnicities under the term ‘black’.

This article discusses the development of an innovative strategy for change being developed at UCLan.

**Context**

The authors are committed to transforming the curriculum to ensure equity of experience, increasing student satisfaction and directly addressing student attainment gaps. Evidence. both internal and external. suggests that Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students do not achieve as well as their white counterparts (Universities UK/ NUS 2019). The internal strategy is to develop cross Faculty collaboration and initiate a Decolonisation Working Group (DWG) in full awareness that this is not a quick fix which will upend oppression and discrimination. The new curriculum development framework and equality, diversity and inclusion strategy seeks to instil a sense of belonging in all students, and the work of the DWG is directly aligned to this and the University’s wider strategic mission. The DWG has several workstreams, covering reading and study materials, communications, research, good practice case studies and a symposium with staff and external facilitators which link together and include staff and students.

**Case Study and Discussion**

The workstreams of the DWG reflect the complexity of the decolonisation agenda. We acknowledge the immediate need to critically re-assess reading and study materials and the requirement to proactively include ethnic minority positions and experience in programme and course design. We work with the knowledge that easy fixes are not enough, since the institutional and social racism that may lie beneath issues of colonisation may run deeper than we know or are able to acknowledge without breaking the mould that created such situations and circumstances.

Breaking the mould is never easy. The need for sustained re-education for our institution as a whole, is reflected in the literature on decolonisation that challenges even the ‘good’ strategies that might be adopted by those with white privilege. For example, Tuck and Young (2012) call the pursuit of social justice ‘a “move to settler innocence” or something akin to “settler harm reduction” (quoted in Dumontet et al 2019, p. 199).

According to ‘dR Works’, an organization of trainers, educators and organisers who work to ‘build strong progressive anti-racist organisations and institutions’, white supremacist cultural systems include qualities such as perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness,
quantity over quality, worship of the written word, only one right way, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, progress is bigger and more, objectivity and the right to comfort, (Okun, accessed 13.03.22). Many such qualities are perceived as positive by many cultures and ethnicities.

We propose that a reasonable existence and a healthy institution are pre-requisites to different ways of approaching work and life, acknowledging that the ‘white way’ is not necessarily the best way. The system as it stands, the ‘white’ system, is not necessarily reasonable or just. Nobles (quoted in Robinson 1995) called this the essential differences in worldview between American European frameworks and the African perspectives. The suggestion is that African philosophy is opposed to the American European in the following ways: groupness v. individuality; sameness v. uniqueness; commonality v. difference; cooperation v. competition; collective responsibility v. independence.

The DWG at UCLan has taken an innovative approach utilising the ideas above in reassessing our processes, systems and procedures. The idea is to re-educate for change through the vehicle of the symposium model to examine in-depth cultural transformation.

**Decolonisation: A Symposium**

The symposium will be facilitated by two external experts in the field to ensure a degree of independence from the potential defensiveness of the institution. Mia Liyanage, from Goldsmiths, University of London, and Dr Neo Pule, a South African academic use pioneering research methods to encourage decolonisation among young black student leaders in Africa. Utilising local and global knowledge, a pro-active interest in the field and a range of learning possibilities will ensure an in-depth appreciation of the facts at our disposal and a learning process centred on experiential learning. This range of knowledge and experience can significantly challenge institutional frameworks and thinking patterns. The five key policy recommendations will form the basis of our learning (Liyanage 2020) include:

1. Get educated about decolonisation and end its conflation with equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives.
2. Reprioritise: decolonisation is both pedagogically necessary and academically rigorous.
3. Fund BAME research.
4. Tackle discrimination, hostility and unconscious bias
5. Institutionalise decolonisation: create departmental roles and engage students. (Source: Liyanage, M. (2020))

Our journey begins by concentrating in the first instance on two strands. First, by becoming informed, as in recommendation number one; and second, by beginning a process of tackling unconscious cultural tropes, recommendation number four. The former will be presented in a
Learning through experience

Social dreaming is used by Pule to work with black student leaders (Pule and May 2021), allows for the expression of difficult ideas from the shared social unconscious, so that unconscious racism and prejudice might find a forum for the expression of feelings and thoughts that can be revealed and aired for debate. This is a technique that has also been used by Karolia and Manley (2018; 2020) in investigations of British Muslim identities. They will assist Pule in the hosting of the social dreaming events which align expert local and international experience. Pule will then conduct a ‘Listening Post’ which provides an opportunity for revealing the social unconscious, but without the use of dreams. A Listening Post group meeting takes a ‘snapshot’ of society at a particular moment in time which has recently been linked methodologically with the idea of a social dreaming matrix (Cummins 2018, pp. 134-138). It seems especially appropriate, therefore, for our symposium to align the two methods. Through learning from experience in using these methods and reinforcing this with empirical knowledge as presented by Liyanage, our symposium hopes to go beyond the mere tracking of good intentions to a path of deeper commitment to cultural transformation.

Conclusion

The Black Lives Matter movement has triggered change in the form of various initiatives include the Global Race Centre for Equality (GRACE). Meanwhile, the new Decolonisation Working Group is introducing meaningful change into the social work curriculum. The aim is to take on the challenge of root change as opposed to superficial quick fixes. We believe that although there will be struggles along the way, however, in the words of Frederick Douglass, ‘If there is no struggle, there is no progress’ (Douglass 1857, web page).

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Decolonising Fieldwork Practice in Guyana: A Systemic Approach to Student Engagement

Guyana’s emergence from British colonial rule in 1966 was a historical landmark as Guyana attained its independence and was finally “free” of colonial rule. While freedom proved to be a significant milestone, the impact of a colonial past is still evident in Guyana. The colonial experience has shaped and influenced the physical, spiritual, economic, social, and psychological well-being of Guyanese. Akinwale (2014) perceived those countries with similar colonial histories found the transfer from colonial to indigenous service had both positive and negative effects; for others, a transition process allowing for democratisation was perceived as analogous to decolonisation (Thum, 2019).

Amidst the transition challenges, social work emerged as one of the responses to influence policies and practices to bring about social change as the country adjusted to becoming an independent nation-state. Guyana is still challenged by the ethnic contentiousness inherited from its colonial history as freed Africans, and indentured East Indians who worked under colonial rule remained polarised. Bartels (1977) captured the essence of Guyana’s ethnic contentiousness, a residue of colonial rule, by highlighting how the colonisers applied a policy of disproportionate allocation of economic benefits and burdens to different subordinated ethnic groups, which resulted in social and economic disparities between these groups. Colonialism flourished because of meritocracy, and it fostered an individualised approach to human functioning, which is still evident in Guyana's society.
The Historical Context of Social Work

Social work is still an emerging profession in Guyana even after introducing the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 to guide the distribution of Colonial and Welfare Fund to alleviate additional suffering wroth to the freed Africans due to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Guyana primarily uses the institutional and residual welfare models to deliver social services, which are residues of the Victorian Poor Law legislation that guided social welfare provision (Rock and Buchanan 2014). All these legislative approaches point to the influence of the colonial era on the delivery of social welfare in Guyana. Even the training of early academics in social world education was from the United Kingdom or the developed countries (Frank, 2019). The methodologies and literature used, which may have been generic, would not have understood the social welfare landscape in Guyana. Social welfare in post-colonial Guyana saw the emergence of self-help groups, communal activities and other entrepreneurial initiatives to negate poverty as policy directives of the then government. The approach to social work education had to account for local practices. Community organization and practice in many areas may arguably contradict western models but proved useful within the Guyana context. Social service delivery and social work education had to be conscious of this policy directive, which was one of the first steps in decolonizing social welfare in Guyana. As Danis (1990) concluded, a significant paradigm shift occurred as the government sought to coordinate and integrate social welfare services.

Decolonizing Social Work Practice in Guyana.
with context-relevant pedagogy that still meets best practices for social work education. A pragmatic approach caters to diversity and versatility in Guyana due to the historical differences that exist. Decolonising social work practice is conceptualised as a two-pronged approach. It included the formalised social work practice within the traditional agency settings and an indigenous approach where students actively participate in determining indigenous field placements.

Indigenized practice, therefore, emerged as a response to contextualisation, resource limitations, diverse service user groups, and the inability of social service agencies to accommodate the growing student population who are on placement and must complete varying hours of field practice. There are no external field practicum supervisors, so educators were tasked with becoming innovative in their pedagogy to support student learning. Student inclusion became imperative since they brought an understanding of the contextual environment based on the diversity of their lived experiences.

Social work education and practice are designed to foster strengths and empowerment of the society through a participatory approach (Rock and Buchanan 2014). This approach offers a three-dimensional advantage. It addresses power differentials between educators and students, students and service users, and educators, students, and servicers user. Participation promotes democracy, an effective tool for decolonisation and dismantling oppressive power structures. It moves away from a rudimentary approach and allows everyone's voice to be heard. In fieldwork practice, the voices of both students and service users are critical to impact change in all levels of service delivery. Chambers (2007) suggests that Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approaches help to understand behaviours, establish relationships, and find local contexts relevant to vulnerable groups. Chambers’ (2007) arguments essentially frame the context in which fieldwork practicum is decolonised in Guyana.

The social work framework universally takes a two-dimensional approach: theory and practice elements. The undergraduate and postgraduate programmes consist of courses that ensure students are afforded enough practical engagement to foster growth and empowerment in the transfer of theory to practice. Field practicums allow social workers to engage with service user groups and professionals within the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of society. Even though placements within local agencies are helpful, limitations exist because of neoliberalism and marketisation, which present barriers to the level of engagement social workers will have with clients. Also, social workers' caseload has always been an area of concern and often impacts how Social Work students bridge the gap between theory and practice. Moreover, the current approach exposes students to the realities of living in Guyana. So, if employed within state agencies after training, experience gained in practicum environments help social workers to become more conscientious and empathetic when working with service users.

Unconventional field placements are advantageous since the bureaucracy is less influential, and students get to engage directly with service user groups. However, despite this
indigenous approach, students are still bound by social work’s professional ethics and values. Every effort has been made to safeguard practice according to international best practices and contextual needs. Hence field practice manuals have been developed to guide students and field teachers in all settings.

Progress Thus Far

Admittedly social work teaching in Guyana still uses western literature, but this is not applied indiscriminately. The negative influence of cultural misappropriation on service user groups is best understood when linked to our context, so educators must ensure the practice is relevant. Hence, the curriculum is periodically retooled to ensure that students make contextual distinctions by critically analysing and applying collaborative and contextual interventions.
Indigenized field practicum is primarily conducted with vulnerable groups, schools, grassroots organisations or communities where a particular need exists. These include persons with disabilities, children affected by domestic violence and poverty, hard to reach communities or rural communities that cannot access services efficiently, and communities with high suicide rates. The selection of practicum groups is often made with engagement from the students, noting that the student’s voice is critical in promoting a positive learning environment. Further, it allows students to engage in micro-level and mezzo practices where they explore communities and conduct needs assessments to determine the type of services needed and the possible intervention programmes that can be implemented. Likewise, this approach has enabled service users to be viewed as experts in their own lives. It also promotes the empowerment of service users since it encompasses a strengths-based approach. Significantly, student feedback during class reflective sessions has indicated that grassroots service users engage better with professionals when they feel accepted. The Guyana reality is that resource limitation and political interference influence how social work is conducted. Therefore, the pragmatic approach has helped social work students to intervene in ways that cut across organisational barriers.

Conclusively, the adaptation of a participatory approach promotes a pedagogy that suppresses oppressive practices but provides opportunities for students to actively engage in determining their learning needs (Bozalek and Biersteker 2010). This experience allowed students to improve self-awareness, explore possible biases and engage in continuous critical reflection during the planning and implementation stages of field practicums. Practices of colonialism advance dehumanising practices where subjugation and division perpetuated human interactions. As such, re-education plays a critical role in what social workers aspire to do in Guyana.

Field practicums also have, over the years, been successful in penetrating racial ideologies. Students on fieldwork placement have strategically been placed in practice settings which helped to bridge this ethnic divide. Students have also enabled better practice with other marginalised groups. Notably, both students and service users gained practical skills and tools that have helped them become more self-sufficient after many of these experiences. It also allowed for the visibility of social work and enabled vulnerable groups to develop help-seeking behaviours.

Conjointly, empowerment using a bottom-up approach has also proven to be valuable as clients or community groups have mobilised themselves with support from students to meet specific needs. Students have engaged with rural communities and people who may not readily access help in mainstream offices or internal agencies. The inability to access support is linked to many factors such as fear of stigma, infrastructure and transportation barriers, misinformation, or lack of awareness that such services exist.
Moving Forward

Social Work Education in Guyana continues to make strides amidst the challenges to reframe our practice and create an identity unique to our context. The work is ongoing, even though a long journey is ahead. Social work practice in Guyana is not at the place where it has started. Social work educators in Guyana commit to reimagining and reconstructing the curriculum to integrate scholarly work done by local academics and regional partners to account for the lived experiences of Guyanese. This does not negate the importance of international social work and global best practices but rather emphasises the importance of understanding context and creating theories and models of practice that fit our context as we contribute to the broader global experiences. Students in fieldwork practice have been impacting the lives of diverse service user groups. Formally documenting the methodologies will foster evidence-based practice. Social work educators should also engage in dialogues to examine colonialism's impact on existing vulnerabilities and formulate a plan to move forward. Students' reflections indicate the limitations of structural barriers. This provides an opportunity for social work educators to seek ways of incorporating the voice of the students in practice and diversifying their experiences in pursuit of a more socially just society.

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Latin American Social Work: Decolonization and critical perspectives in Uruguay’s curriculum

The analysis of decolonization, of the Social Sciences in general and the Social Work in particular, is very recent in Uruguay. However, we understand that, beyond the specific discussion on the subject, there is an impetus to build a discipline that takes into account the characteristics of Latin America.

Thus, in this paper the educational formation of Social Work in Uruguay is analyzed, taking as the axis of analysis the bibliography of the curriculum of the Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work of the University of the Republic. It is concluded that it is an academic formation that has an emphasis on Latin American intellectuals and thinkers, as a result of the perspective of the education that is focused on critical and Latin American thoughts. This example is socialized to show a case based on Latin American theories that dialogues with other knowledge, which is the result of the discussions that started with the Reconceptualization Movement of Latin American Social Work, and the deepening discussions in the period of democratic consolidation at the end of the twentieth century. This process, developed between the 60s and 80s of the last century, was heterogeneous with respect to positions where the perspectives of critical theory are debated along with the technology flows of Social Work, but it is homogeneous with respect to the questioning of the traditional forms of intervention (inherited from the positions of the United States of America) and the need to build a Social Work that responds to the needs of Latin America.

Introduction

Latin American universities throughout their history have been subject to important modifications and transformations, from the University Reform of Córdoba in 1918 to the present day. The Latin American university has been the protagonist of successive changes and transformations in which the university community has tried to put itself at the service
of the society of which it belongs. Although these universities have tried, from a political-institutional perspective, to think and think themselves from the territories of which they are part, epistemologically the "Eurocentric" (Dussel, 2003) and "mono-cultural" formation has prevailed (de Sousa Santos, 2006); the Eurocentric position that invades the entire conceptual system of the social sciences, and the ways in which this is taught, learned and disseminated.

The Latin American "scientific field" (Bourdieu, 2008) is hegemonised by the European thought; at the same time, the liberal legal-political philosophy and economic liberalism occupy a preponderant place within it; from where a type of society has been naturalized: the liberal capitalist one (Argumedo, 1993; 2000).

Why is it important to try to think the Eurocentrism? The constitutions of the social sciences are consolidated in the second half of the nineteenth century; they are impregnated by the European imaginary of a "universal meta-narrative" (Lander, 2003) whose culmination is the European society, based on evolutionary thought rooted in such perspectives, which considers all other forms of thought as "backward" or "inferior", which must be westernized and incorporated into "civilization". The deeply globalized and connected 21st century finds us challenged to try to think beyond Europe and Eurocentrism; taking a set of theories that imply a break with this way of thinking that range from post-colonial thinking, through complex thinking, to cultural, feminist and decolonial studies.

In Latin America, and precisely in the Southern Cone, there already exists a tradition of breaking with the traditional intervention models in Social Work, initiated with the Reconceptualization, with an important aspect of critical Marxist approach, which seeks to deepen and modify the link with the social sciences. However, we understand that this rupture is only a step forward since, following de Sousa Santos (2006), Marxist approaches, even critics, focused on emancipation, but the idea was always an Eurocentric and, therefore, colonialist vision.

The objective of this paper is to present some aspects of how the education of Social Work professionals in the University of the Republic, Uruguay, is given. This analysis is only one possible example to walk a reflective path and build a different profession that includes the Latin American tradition and is also linked to the current debates of the social sciences and world Social Work.

**Academic formation in Uruguay**

In summary, we can affirm that the formation of Social Work in Uruguay goes back to two traditions: one related to the medical profession and the other related to the legal profession (Ortega and Beltran, 2014). According to Acosta (1998) the formation of Female Hygiene Promoters passed into the hands of the Ministry of Public Health in 1936, where the School of Public Health and Social Service was created for such purposes. This shows the beginning of a process of institutionalization of social work characterized in its constitution as a female profession, with a hierarchical registration and technically subordinated to other professions.
in the medical health field. By resolution of the Central Board of Directors, in 1954 the professional education was institutionalized at the university level: the University School of Social Service (EUSS, in Spanish) was created, where the Bachelor’s Degree on Social Work is offered.

Currently, in Uruguay, there are two institutions that train professionals: the University of the Republic and the Catholic University; the first is a state institution and the second is private and has a religious formation. The University of the Republic has the largest number of teachers, students and graduates. Since 1992, the EUSS was transformed into a Department of Social Work, which is part of the School of Social Sciences (Rivero, 2018). In 2009, the Curriculum was modified, generating an important debate about which subjects are basic for the profession and which can be elective for students to build their own profile.

The curriculum of 2009 is divided into initial cycle and advanced cycle. The advanced cycle is organized in eight modules where there are compulsory and optional subjects:

2. Public Policies, Planning and Management: 30 credits
3. Psycho-Social Components of Professional Intervention: 14 credits
4. Social Theories: 30 credits
5. Investigation Methodology: 27 credits
6. Introduction to Philosophical Thought: 16 credits
7. Analysis of Historical Processes: 12 credits
8. Final Work: 30 credits

The curricular approach accounts for the importance of educational formation in social theory and research methodology. Given the length of this work, it is not possible to deepen the qualitative analysis of the curriculum; we are only going to present an analysis of the obligatory bibliography of the subjects of the module Theoretical Methodological Foundations of the Social Work, as a beginning of a process of reflection on the characteristics of the formation. This first approach allows us to get close to the scenario of specific education of Social Work from the perspective of the authors worked on in the mandatory bibliography.

The following table shows the origin of the authors (according to residence); all chapter, book or article authors are taken into account, without making a distinction on their profession.
Table 1: Origin on the authors

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<th>Country/Region</th>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
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This table clearly shows the use of bibliography from the Southern Cone of Latin America, which together with that of other Latin American countries represents a total of 75% of the texts worked, far from the 25% of the texts from Europe and the United States. It is important to note that residence does not necessarily define if the visions of the authors are more or less Eurocentric and decolonizing. However, it shows an advance in the production of Social Work that marks a path of Latin American thought.

**Conclusions**

The 21st century is a deeply unequal world (CICS/IED/UNESCO, 2016) that is transiting and trying to overcome and build a hegemonic "new normal" after the pandemic caused by Covid-19. In this context, social problems and the ways in which they are addressed need to be looked at in order to take account of particular realities and resources.

In this sense, from our place we are walking towards different ways of teaching and training professionals, which includes to reconsider both the social sciences, as well as the professions that intervene in the political and social area, and, in particular, the social work. We are walking through a path in order to make progress in formation processes that break with the colonial and Eurocentric logic. A relevant problem to work is the technological legacy of the Reconceptualization Movement; it is necessary to overcome the technological logics of the profession that emphasize the instrumental of intervention to advance into ethical-political approaches that take into account Latin American logics.

This work is just an outline that allows us to think about an advance in Latin American production. We do not go deeper into the authors' approach here, which requires more in-
depth analysis. We have a long way to go to build a Latin American Social Work that can enter into dialogue with the Social Sciences.

References


Documents

Indigenous Lives Matter in Aotearoa New Zealand

While the Black Lives Matter movement began in the USA, it has resonated with the indigenous rights and decolonising movements within Aotearoa/New Zealand (Aotearoa is the preferred indigenous name). This article will outline the context of social work education decolonisation in Aotearoa and will give an example of indigenous and non-indigenous partnership among social work educators.

Aotearoa context

Māori are the first people of Aotearoa and signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) in 1840 with the British. Māori were promised sovereignty over themselves and their lands but instead were subject to colonisation by the British who also became a numerically dominant group with many negative impacts for Māori.

Social work was imported from Britain and the USA and became the major influence on its development within Aotearoa. However, the resistance by Māori has gained further momentum in recent decades so that within Aotearoa society Western dominance has been challenged and the voice of Māori increasingly privileged. Often this is expressed as honouring the original Treaty, affirming the rights of Māori, and engaging in more of a partnership relationship between Māori and non-Māori (McNabb, 2019).

Over time the social work profession has strengthened its commitment to honouring the Treaty and explored ways in which Māori self-determination can be better expressed within the profession. This has included structural partnership arrangements within the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and more recently the establishing of a separate group for Māori social workers, Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association (TWSWA). These two groups formed a partnership arrangement and together now formally represent Aotearoa within the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW).
Across Aotearoa, social work programmes have become established in a range of institutions. This includes the traditional university context, but also polytechnics, a private training provider and most significantly two wananga institutions, Māori led education institutions. One of them, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, offers a recognised social work degree across several sites around the country. This institution was established to champion Māori interests and so the establishment of a social work programme signalled a shift from other programmes situated in ‘mainstream’ institutions. The wananga institutions have curriculum and pedagogy which are strongly influenced by traditional Māori ways of knowing, being and doing.

While there are many Māori lecturers within Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, non-Māori lecturers are welcomed provided they align with a Māori centred approach to education. Typically, non-Māori lecturers have a steep learning curve on entering this context because, alongside their existing social work knowledge, they need to both know fundamental aspects of Māori culture, and to be able to partner with Māori leaders and colleagues.

These social work programmes that sit within wananga institutions are a statement that indigenous lives matter and are an expression of decolonising social work education in Aotearoa.

The experience of being a non-Māori lecturer in a Māori focused programme

One of the authors (LA) is a lecturer within the social work programme of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Their experience of being a non-Māori lecturer within a Māori focused social work programme is situated within a decolonising commitment and is discussed below.

The principle of Āhurutanga (quality space) from Te Ao Māori (Māori worldview)

In te ao Māori (Māori worldview), āhurutanga embodies the concepts of āhuru, which means warmth, comfort, or calm. It exemplifies the āhuru mōwai i.e a calm place or sheltered haven for anyone (Moorfield, 2013). Āhurutanga is one of the tikanga (Māori customary practices) values that comprise the notion of being that is needed in any relationship in the context of wā (time) and wāhi (location) (Pohatu, 2003). Ngā takepū framework - the principles of Kaupapa Wānanga defines āhurutanga as creating and maintaining quality space to ensure and promote striving for best practice within any kaupapa (Pohatu, 2003). The concept of āhurutanga encompasses a holistic realm to experience a nurturing environment for tāngata (person or people) that allows us to achieve the maximum pursuit of excellence. As tāngata we are naturally creative and wise. However, creating or establishing safe space for engagement with others as āhurutanga, help us to build deep wisdom, creativity, and positive well-being.

The principle of Āhurutanga (quality space) and education practice through self-reflection (aro)
As a manuhiri (guest) in Aotearoa, it is important for me to actively engage in respectful relationships with Māori as part of my obligation and responsibilities to Te Tiriti O Waitangi. Being a kaiako for Bicultural Social Work programme at Te Wananga, has reinforced my tiriti based emancipatory ako experiences. The core philosophy of the social work programme underpins ngā takepū and it grounded my bi-cultural positioning as tāngata tauiwī (the Treaty partner to Māori). The ako experience revitalised my own cultural values as Indian – Malayalee (one who speaks the Malayalam language from the state of Kerala, India) who was raised in a Christian Catholic family. Āhurutanga inspires one to deepen their cultural identity that allows a sense of belonging which results a safe space positioned within their worldview (Chand, 2020). In reflection on my own values, the concepts of wairua and spirituality is identified as the core foundation of my personal and professional life. To create āhurutanga, it is important for me to experience internal peace and oneness with atua (God), hence it is essential for me to do personal prayer. Karakia helps me to ensure the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual safety of the people I interact with. In the context of teaching, it aided me to acknowledge tauira’s spiritual beliefs and values. It creates safe platform for learners to express and practice their own values and beliefs therefore creating reciprocity and āhurutanga.

As a kaiako (lecturer) for a social work programme in Aotearoa, it is important to follow the ethical, professional, cultural and legal requires of Social Work Registration Board (SWRB). Āhurutanga from a social work professional perspective, encompasses the mandatory registration requirement implemented on 27th of February 2021. The mandatory legal requirement of social work registration ensures the safety of the public and enhances the professionalism and accountability. It will also reassure the tāngata that social workers have the professional obligation to adhere to code of conduct and code of ethics therefore reinforcing trust and āhurutanga in the profession. To curtail risks and improve the wellbeing of the vulnerable children, all registered social workers must undergo regular safety checks and police vetting as part of the Children’s Act (Oranga Tamariki, 2014). On top of these professional safety requirements, as a Kaiako, I have to follow Te Wananga o Aotearoa’s tauira induction check list and health and safety policy to ensure utmost safety that results āhurutanga for learners and kaimahi (staff).

An inclusive and inviting environment for diverse Tauira

Social Work profession recognises ten core competence minimum standards of practice for social workers in Aotearoa (SWRB,2021).The first three competencies are: (1) Competence to practice social work with Māori; (2) Competence to practise social work with ethnic and cultural groups in Aotearoa; and (3) Competence to work respectfully and inclusively with diversity and difference in practice. The ultimate professional values of social work are equity, equality, and justice to ensure inclusion, diversity and participation. Hence, as a kaiako of the programme it reiterates the need for creating safe space and āhurutanga for tauira and enable them to practice those values in their profession. This requires a synchronisation of my words and deeds as a kaiako for the social work programme.
A set of diverse and inclusive akomanga (class) values recognises the contributions of all tauira, their whānau and communities regardless of who they are, feel equally involved in and supported in all areas of the learning (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2022). To ensure āhurutanga through inclusive learning environment, it is important for me to build whanaungatanga with my tauira and gain their trust. This is achieved through creating āhurutanga space for tauira to express their mātauranga during class teaching and learning. I also follow the principle of kanohi kitea - meeting the tauira face to face. One of the sessions helped me to get know a tauira who was diagnosed with dyslexia and anxiety. She disclosed me that she has writing and comprehension issues for which she receives assistance for notes taking. She added that she uses assistive technology of read-aloud and voice recognition software. I thanked her for sharing the concerns and acknowledged her proactive response. I also appreciated for reaching out for help that allowed me to accommodate the learning needs of that tauira. Through one-on-one session, we jointly created an individual learning plan depicting the points of reference including safety plans for any severe panic attack she may experience during the learning hours. This has helped her to reduce her major concerns and created āhurutanga and empowering ako experience.

**Addressing social, cultural, and educational needs of diverse tauira (students)**

The COVID 19 pandemic has caused enormous challenges to humanity including the forced global shutdown of several activities, including educational activities and travel restrictions which has resulted tremendous socio, economic, cultural, and educational implications to diverse tauira. The pandemic instigated a crisis response migration of online learning for all the educational institutions (Adedoyin and Soykan, 2020). It has created a severe challenge to the principle of kanohi kitea - the face-to-face teaching learning experience. A recent study carried out by Rangiwai, Chand, and Mataroa (2020) explored the impact of Covid-19 on tauira of Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge programme at Te Wānanga O Aotearoa in New Zealand. The key findings of the research highlighted some of the socio-cultural needs and the challenges experienced through pandemic lock downs (Rangiwai, Chand, & Mataroa, 2020). Hiltz and Turoff (2005) highlighted that digital transformation is considered a revolutionary modification in the context of higher education. Although digital transformation opens plethora of opportunities, it also presents with ample of challenges in the context of social and cultural needs of tauira. The digital learning platform replaced kanohi kitea - face to face interaction into online digital interaction which restricted the human physical presence and interaction. The research findings showed tauira’s experiences of anxiety, depression, stress and loneliness and emphasised the frustration experienced due to lack of wānanga, kanohi-kitea and noho learning environment (Rangiwai, Chand, & Mataroa, 2020). The digital platform supported a hybrid learning method applying digital technologies to enhance constructivist, learner-centred, cooperative pedagogy for worldwide universities (Hiltz & Turoff, 2005). However, it caused huge gaps among tauira in terms of socio-economic factors. The tauira from a low socio-economic background had trouble migrating into the
digital platform. Financial constraints and poverty restricted the accessibility of broadband internet connections and so they fell behind in their educational progress which amplified the challenges of tauira (Fishbane & Tomer, 2020). The application of innovative approaches in technology and student support services can resolve the socio-cultural, socio-economic, and technical challenges experienced by tauira. During the Covid pandemic, as a kaikō I have assisted tauira to receive financial assistance, food vouchers and parcels, loan devices, and assistance for broadband-internet connection. I have also trialled innovative ways of online teaching methods packed with fun to enhance āhurutanga. Although it was not easy to quickly adapt to digital online teaching and learning, the two-year period of the pandemic enabled me to navigate through the digital transformative ako experience for tauira by nurturing āhurutanga.

Conclusion

Decolonising social work education in Aotearoa involves social work lecturers honouring the Treaty of Waitangi within their institutional context and in their teaching practice. The traditional Māori based wananga educational institution provides an environment where Māori rights can be upheld, and Western dominance challenged. While Māori lecturers will typically find a strong alignment between personal and professional identity within the wananga, non-Māori lecturers also have an opportunity to be partners in this decolonisation movement.

References

A historical narrative: The Lifeline service in Papua New Guinea

There is little information about counselling practices in Papua New Guinea that provide insight into the emotional and social issues that have confronted their people. The major churches in PNG supported the opening of Lifeline in the early seventies, at a time when problems were surfacing or were evident in the lives of people brought about by urbanisation and the introduction of modern living. As an independent service, Lifeline is Papua New Guinea’s oldest counselling service and is unique in providing services to Papua New Guineans from all over the country.

Lifeline can make a significant contribution to relieving these concerns and supporting PNG communities to confront these challenges. That demand is difficult to respond to because of the lack of funding and increase of fear and trepidation in the community. This paper contributes as a historical report of Lifeline as a key social work service and as a call to action to position the struggles of social work in PNG and across the Pacific.

History

Since 1973, a range of support services have been provided for people including crisis intervention, and support for the immediate needs of women escaping violence. Different counselling practices in Papua New Guinea have evolved from different sources in the community, including early traditional practices where churches were the main sources of counselling. Churches have been central in providing education and health support services including radio broadcast (PNGCC statement on the role of churches undated).

Education provided by the churches also played a role in the advancement of women, around the same time as the establishment of the Lifeline organisation. A collective voice for equality in the name of women reached Provincial governments as an Act of Parliament (R. Gware & R. Matane, personal conversation, 2018). The National Council for Women (NCW) of the 1970’s and 1980’s purpose was to empower women at all levels of PNG society. At the time of its inception the NCW was lobbying government about paying women for the work...
they do in agriculture and supported the notion of difference understood as the early traditions of emotional support by women for women.

Lifeline has one centre and is located next to the largest established settlement area in the city which has a population of around 50,000 people. Lifeline is staffed by a combination of paid staff, expatriate volunteers, and volunteer members of the patron churches. In 2012 external stakeholders partnered to addressed gender based violence for immediate support services. The Building Safer Communities research program leader Hukula (2021) reported that it was expected that during times of hardship, violence will occur as families adjust to restriction of movement and economic hardship, loss of income for people. The organisation’s services have included face-to-face counselling, letter writing counselling, family planning, a health clinic and Port Moresby’s first women’s refuge (seif haus).

**Lifeline’s practice and services**

Lifeline is the primary based community based service for women experiencing violence but does not receive funding. Practical support and strategies are given to people to address issues of social well-being and poverty. Lifeline operated a telephone confidential counselling service [defunded] some years ago. In terms of financial viability Lifeline relies on community donations, fundraising initiatives, and income from the hiring of hall facilities. Currently Lifeline does not receive external funding from donors to respond to Violence Against Women (VAW) – a ‘referral pathways’ inter-agency case management response. What lies behind response is a certain pattern that leaves women isolated in making decisions they think is best for them, against the struggle workers have responding to and connecting with community to address social and emotional issues.

Agencies like Lifeline grapple with issues such as agency and autonomy. Documents prepared by workers are checked then sent to authorities including a third-party donor who checks inventory against a service agreement (via a consortium) for supply and delivery of provisions such as groceries, garden vegetables. Administration and funding mechanisms are caught in an endless process of fixing or re-fixing process, governed by mainstream organisations. In the context of GBV response, specifying “difference” as a research term is to recognise traditional processes used within-community, such as services delivered by the Village Court. [What women] experience illustrates the notion of the effects of difference which enable or constrain actions in various ways – as the local vernaculars of difference. As referenced by (Hall, 2000) in (Singh, 2020).

Watego & Klimm (2021) in Kunjan (2021) confront conversations around origins of power to reflect the operational ways it works. They argue that having to navigate and strategise; trying to explain and understand; take a toll on the choices people make because situating background of where you are, and where you come from, is not recorded in reporting (Kunjan, 2021).
Workers’ experiences

Drawing on the way workers talk about their experiences is crucial to know what resources or services are available, but this is generally not known or utilised as knowledge. Lifeline has had major challenges providing proposal submissions. On the one hand when international funding bodies talk of partnership or things like ‘bridging knowledge gap[s]’ in service response - on the other - civil society’s local agencies don’t get to explain how it’s done.

Women apply for warrants of breach of violence protection orders is one reason for doing community responsive work including bearing witness to services building relationships. That fear often translates into actual harm for many women connecting to how workers respond and has been observed as “more needs to be done” to address different ethnic groups and ‘street leaders’. Critical to know is what are the observations and essential information to build on what services not being seen ‘in the referral system’. Lifeline is impeded by financial constraints against the struggle workers have responding.

A person centred approach criticality

The silence of response as an outcome of a person’s experience (not in economics) is the ability of educating a knowing of it to affect change. The United Nations forum on ‘Indigenous issues’ (2002, 2003) recognised via national and international bodies, a lack of data on Indigenous peoples (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) explains that power relations in construction of the coloniser and colonised relationship is the difficulties of ‘processes and choice’ as being inextricably linked. “This right: necessarily includes; the right to have data and information collected, by them – jointly with them, that reflect their past and present realities” (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016; p.xxii). For example: Categories such as family, community, and state may carry different meanings and relationships than what is implied in standard research or in mainstream approaches that don’t centre strengths of [answers to] connections with community (Kukkanen, 2012).

If funding is meant for new services, it must listen to grass-roots service workers on what they plan to do for safety and shelter. Lifeline has applied for funding from the United Nations "Building Back Better", a capacity building program for the Pacific – however, was unsuccessful. Anecdotally it appears the large funding grants are given to the international non-government organisations and agencies. Lifeline’s recent funding submissions were submitted with the best intentions using a critical lens to observe issues and disruptions since the pandemic outbreak. Calls for proposals work within in a framework whose objectives operate with a different understanding that is imposed from without, not within.

Differences to big organisations

Community based organisations like Lifeline are better equipped to deliver authentic support because of its community connections and the lived experience of staff. Lifeline’s historical services for women, whose knowledge connect to the lives of the people they
know in their community is different to the international women’s movement on gender discrimination which focuses on individual equity rather than the structural impacts on women’s lives (Xanthaki, 2019).

Singh (2020) writes on sovereign divergence, explained as an act and a process of diverging actions and the struggles following as costs to physical and mental well-being. The GBV response framework is used by workers to assist survivors experiencing violence. A way of thinking that uses processes in what lies behind a certain response. A different service response, is a strengths-based approach that informs a historical background of a person’s experience as a life experience (Lowitja.org.au, 2021). Thinking about the constraints and challenges of the work for a grass-roots agency, opens up perspectives that think differently to mainstream understanding. We still see capacity building workshops being hosted and presented by the big NGOs who decide, and who are not confident in recognising capabilities and capacities embedded in the work. There is nothing that replaces the expertise of these people in their communities – their cultural perspectives and their lived experiences of GBV there. Historical background to the different aspects of a person’s experience, link between the personal experience and the processes of sovereign divergence emphasises what Singh (2020), says about Race locally needing to inform Race internationally.

In paper by a white Race scholar, on ‘white Innocence’, Macoun (2016), makes a connection to confronting the colonial perspective about issues that are learned in colonising people. She says, “is it possible there could be many paths for people who live and work in their communities to grapple with the conflict they are engaged, through which better futures and relationships could be formed.” Where we locate awareness of [our complicity] in ongoing racism and colonialism involves appreciating locations and limits (Macoun, 2016). Perhaps it is the power of, not power over, workers voices in this moment, that paints a positive picture, no notion of perfectness, and is the difference between the deficit of GBV response and of Lifeline’s value in the community that people have trusted.

A new research project aims to document the written counselling history of Lifeline, identifying the issues and concerns of those seeking help. An important Indigenous style of counselling that, while not recognised, has played a part in the development of social services and welfare agencies. In Papua New Guinea the struggles are made difficult because of the assumptions interpreted for people of their connection to information and support. This needs to be acknowledged and shared in writing.

**Conclusion**

Knowledge taken place in society can shed light on years of service to establish a story, sharing the struggle of what this really meant for people. This conceptual paper meets the struggle of giving voice to what you don’t hear a lot about, – as the gap in analysis. Critiquing ‘white ways’ as learned, historical in relationship, provides a story raising questions of how things work. Sharing a unique situation of the Lifeline service in PNG meets the struggle of
forging new definitions for social work and the distractions to inform social work transformation, specifically globally.

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My life as a teenager soldier girl struggling in Europe

The article is a story from our experience with victims of trafficking.

London, March 19, 2036: first day of spring. My name is Hope and I am 34 years old. I came to Europe for the first time in 2016. When I arrived in Italy I was 20, or at least I said I am this age...

The first time I arrived Italy, in Sicily. I was really unprepared when more than a hundred people, at night, piled us on the balloon dinghy, the lapalapa... After having survived the desert and been in the prisons of Libya for months, living like an animal, I was really impatient to cross the river, that separates Africa from Europe, to achieve that longed-for freedom. In a few hours I would finally have fulfilled my dream of a better life: studying and working, to help my poor family, as my father and aunt had promised me, entrusting myself to the people who organized my trip. A few years earlier, when he separated from his mother, my father made me interrupt school and sent me to live as her sister, to help her do house work and taking care of her children. When I got pregnant, my aunt sent me back to my father. He was very angry, he make me to abort the pregnancy and then took me to some people, they took me to Europe. But first they took me to a native doctor, for the oath, which I'd rather not remember.

I hadn't studied much in Nigeria and I was only 14 when I left, but before I hadn't been to school for two years. If I had studied more, I might have known that there are no rivers with salt water and therefore I would have immediately understood that we would have had to cross a sea, the Mediterranean, which has become a cemetery for many people who have tried to cross it.

Despite this, it took only a short time, after the start, to understand that was extremely difficult to get to the other side of the river. Only when a volunteer ship rescued us did we think that our future would be saved.

"I'm twenty, I'm twenty"... I kept repeating it to the policemen when I got off the ship. I repeated to them what the madame had taught me. Maybe they didn't believe me, or maybe yes, I never understood it... I just know that they sent me to a camp with other young women in Sicily. When I managed to call the madame, she sent a man to pick me up and he took me to
her. But first she raped me, in her house. It was the first time this has happened to me after I had been in Libya, and it was terrible. The madame was also not kind to me and told me that to pay my 25,000 euro debt, I would have to work for her on the street. I didn’t want to, but I couldn’t rebel against the oath I had taken.

So I went to the street, at night and also during the day. I was scared and sick, but if I didn’t bring the money she would get angry, she wouldn’t feed me and beat me. She then sent me to do the documents. She explained what I had to say. But when that social worker took me to the police station, they took me to the hospital and then to a community. They took my phone away and I didn’t know how to call the madame. And maybe I didn’t even feel like it. I was confused.

Then the social worker returned, along with a very kind Nigerian woman. They said she was a cultural linguistic mediator, but I didn’t understand why she helped those whites. They tried to treat me well, even though I didn’t know what to do and tried to tell the story the madame had taught me.

It took me some time to trust them; and they, however, knew things about my life without my ever telling them. I didn’t know how they knew me so well, but they never asked me for money and instead made me go to the doctor and to school.

They told me that I was not 20 years old, but that I was an "underage" and therefore I could not prostitute myself and had to stay in a protected place. They said that it was the Italian law that provided for it and that a judge would choose an adult, Serena, to replace my mom and dad in Italy, even if I wouldn’t go to live with her. And all this because I could not choose by myself... I don’t understand these whites very much: in Nigeria I was a mother to my aunt’s children, I crossed the night and the sea alone, I traveled alone around Europe or faced customers more assholes... and according to them to choose my life I need a stranger? But I must say that I was pleased when Serena, the tutor, came to visit me in the community and we went out together.

They even sent people to Nigeria in my house at Orhionmwon to meet my family. Then wrote a report to the social worker, who also showed me the photos. Even though I could already hear them on the phone, it was strange to see pictures of my house and family.

I understood that everyone wanted to help me, but it was really tiring to stay in the community and respect all those stupid rules that nobody followed... they told me that there was privacy, but if I tell them something, the next day everyone knew it. And they often treated me differently from white girls. In one of these communities, if I messed up or didn’t come back to sleep, they told me that I could go back to the madame to work on the street... when I hear this word it makes me feel very bad.

And then I had a lot of dreams at night and the weight and pain were really hard to bear. Sometimes it was better, other times I had thoughts or spirits that were difficult to send away, so much so that I would have preferred never to sleep.
After I ran away from my madame, for many years I had many health problems, especially when I was on my period: I suffered so much that I couldn't even go to work and many did not understand me... I myself was confused and I asked where this evil that haunted me came from: perhaps from the violence suffered in Libya? Was it because I suffered too much violence? Was it because I couldn't have more children? Perhaps because I had not finished paying all my debt and the edict, the juju, which launched the Oba, the King of Benin City, to free and protect all the girls and condemn the madames and native doctors, did not work with me?

Inside me I had these and many other questions that made me suffer, but I didn't have the courage to share them with anyone. And every time my family in Nigeria asked me for money to help them survive, I was getting worse and worse...

I think that many friends I met in those years also felt bad like me, but I didn't like talking to them about these things. If someone got pregnant, the madame gave her a hard alcohol and lots of pills to have an abortion. But it was very dangerous and she risked dying. We called each other "friends", but there were few real friends, because I never knew who I could really trust. But it was clear that they too weren't happy.

Some girls died during the journey: in the crossing or in the desert. Some were sent back to Nigeria, many went to other cities, but also to Germany, France, Spain... then they returned, perhaps after having children who did not always stay with them... others ran away from the camps to return to their mothers, to live with a Nigerian boyfriend or with some young or old Italian... also because there were always many men on the street willing to buy a Nigerian girl... then there were the lesbians, who no longer wanted men, or who used them only for have money, but they preferred to have a partner...

In short, each of us was looking for a way for her to get the documents and get better, but even those who could not obtain a residence permit were almost never expelled and sent back to Nigeria.

Like the boys, also some girls were drug dealers and ended up in jail, some were so quick to pay their debt and were so able that she became a little madame. I have never seen many of these "friends" I met over the years, and I really don't know what happened to them.

I would never have been able, but I don't feel like judging any of my sisters. I myself did not have the courage to denounce my madame, despite the harm she has done to me and that for years she has tried to make me pay all the debt.

We were all trying to fill the gaps we carried inside. The "traumas", as the psychologist and social worker said who, once, together with the linguistic-cultural mediator, gave me a book about a little girl who had a hole in her belly and was looking for many ways to fill it, eventually discovering that that hole, inside her, would remain forever, even if it could become a little smaller and hide positive surprises...
Many years later I thought that maybe it was just to help us live with that hole, that they proposed to meet all together and talk to each other... they called it the "Ubuntu, I am because we are" group, and it was perhaps a way to overcome that loneliness that each of us instead tried to overcome in our own way: with drugs or alcohol, accumulating shoes and clothes, with food, with prayer, singing, sports, studying... but above all in the smartphone, which often led to other forms of gratification, with relationships, virtual or physical, with boys or girls, or to create a parallel world in social networks, so as not to think about our real life...

The social worker cared for us and we called him "the father of Nigerians". The mediator was like a mother: she sometimes seemed strict but it’s a way to show how much she cares about me, and she was also always very sweet and caring. He even went on television once and said that we were like girl child soldiers who fight and kill for a bowl of rice in Africa... Girl child soldiers because we had passed terrible trials and were still alive; because without fear we could harm other people and ourselves; because our experiences gave us the strength to survive a "war" that others have forced us to fight...

What saved me? I think it was the ability to really listen to them to then take the choice of trusting then even though I didn’t know them before, a lot of patience and effort to achieve fundamental goals to build a better life. It was not easy, but today I am aware that it is my merit that I am well: I have a good job and I am happy and proud of the woman I have become. I have proved that those in my country who said that the time to give birth to a woman is wasted time were wrong.

And as I watch Felicity, my eldest daughter who is now 14 years old, the same age as when I left Nigeria, I know that it is thanks to our important choices that we women can contribute to building a better future.