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Internationalizing professional practices: The place of social work in the international arena

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Abstract
Internationalizing practices are seldom explicitly considered in social work theory, practice and education. This article examines internationalizing practices, using both historical materials and empirical data recently obtained through a project involving humanitarian aid in a disaster to demonstrate that when people want help in such situations, they prefer locality-specific, culturally-relevant forms of interventions under their own control. Responding to their wishes means that social work educators and practitioners from overseas have to interrogate their internationalism to ensure that they do not damage the people they aim to help further, but work with them in local empowering partnerships that they control.

Introduction

Social work educators and practitioners have a long history of being active in the international arena. Formal cross-country professional relationships began in Paris in 1928 when the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Council for Social Welfare (ICSW) were formed. Exchanges of curricula, staff and students had been occurring previously, with some practices being transferred across borders to excellent effect. A notable example was Jane Addams's adaptation of practices from the British Settlement Movement and Toynbee Hall in London to create Hull House for poor people in Chicago.

Atrocious instances of classism and colonialism also crossed borders. Poor working-class children removed from white British families, transported to Australia, New Zealand and Canada performed unpaid manual farm labour that benefitted those allegedly providing care while their exploitation and assaults were ignored by those overseeing these, including Thomas Bernardo

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(Bagnell, 2001). Indigenous peoples and their cultures throughout Africa, Latin America, Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand were virtually obliterated under colonialist practices that included forced labour, Europeanization and/or removal of children from their families for relocation in residential homes that undermined their identities and sense of self (Dominelli, 1997, 2009; Haig-Brown, 1988; Siggins, 2005).

Neither these practices nor more recent ones including the delivery of humanitarian aid to vulnerable people surviving catastrophes following natural and/or '(hu)man-made' disasters have been considered internationalizing professional practices. Nor has aid-giving been deconstructed as neo-colonial practices that increase survivors' vulnerability rather than enhancing their resilience. This article examines internationalizing practices, referring to historical materials, and recent research data obtained from humanitarian aid projects including two that involved university staff and students, some from social work, tracing their journeys from providers of humanitarian aid to capacity building. It concludes that people receiving help in disasters prefer locality-specific, culturally-relevant interventions under their control. Responding to local wishes means that social work educators and practitioners ought to interrogate their internationalism to ensure that they do not further endanger the people they seek to help.

Historical internationalizing practices in social work

Defining internationalization

Internationalization refers to objectives, processes, practices, policies, challenges and strategies that link the local with the global and vice versa (Dominelli, 2012a). Globalization involves unifying tendencies and practices (Sklair, 1998). Internationalization and globalization are contentious terms, often used interchangeably when they are different phenomena (Dominelli, 2009; Knight, 1997). Midgley (1997: 37) calls internationalism an ideology that focuses on processes of international collaboration to reduce ethnic tensions and share the commonalities of a global humanity. Internationalization processes have turned education and aid-giving into exportable commodities utilizing enhanced innovative information and communication technologies, cheaper travel and the spread of English globally (Healey, 2008). It also increased competition for international students throughout the English-speaking West.

Internationalization may be beneficial or exploitative; its outcomes vary according to the values and aims of different institutions practising it (Callan, 1998; Dominelli, 2000; Knight, 1997; Lyons et al., 2006). Institutions of higher education including universities, civil society organizations (CSOs) and human professions like social work are increasingly 'becoming international' but its meanings are vague. A trendy buzzword in universities and civil society organizations (CSOs), internationalization appears in websites, value statements, policy documents and institutional strategies (Dominelli, 2012a).

Power dynamics conceptually encompassed by globalization highlight tendencies that amplify cultural homogeneity and undermine local and global diversities as Western cultural hegemony dominated other spaces to create Wallerstein's (1976) 'world system'. Internationalizing practices cross national borders and may or may not respect locality-specific values, cultures and perspectives. Sensitivity to these issues has given those involved sophisticated understandings of their interactions with diversities including identity and community formation to acknowledge their creative potential (Gray, 2005; Knight, 1997). Internationalizing practices are dynamic, constantly evolving (Knight and de Wit, 1995), of benefit to both parties (Yang, 2002) and create new cultural practices. Internationalization contrasts with the unidimensionality and unilinear flow of globalizing practices (Dominelli, 2009).

Internal and external colonialism

Social work has been complicit in both internal and external forms of internationalizing practices under colonialism. Internal colonialism is illustrated through exchanges of people and ideas across the Atlantic where theories and practices were transposed and adapted locally. The Charity Organization Society (COS) popularized individual casework, providing a European model usefully replicated in North America (Kendall, 2000). Jane Addams imported lessons from the British Settlement Movement into the USA by founding Hull House in Chicago. Much later, Alice Salomon sought political asylum in the USA to escape the horrors of Nazi Germany, bringing new insights into internationalizing processes (Kendall, 1978).

Walter Lorenz (1994) highlighted social workers' roles in actively oppressing people understate auspices during the abuse of marginalized peoples under the globalizing tendencies of Nazi Germany. Today, Roma peoples across Europe are being compelled to lead sedentary lives (Zorn, 2009), often with social work collusion through child-care concerns.

Assimilationist policies also encompass metropolitan populations including poor, white working-class families. In the UK, the imposition of hegemonic middle-class relations deprived these families of their children. Shipped overseas, these children were called the 'stolen generation' in Australia (Read, 1981) and 'home children' or child migrants in Canada. Wrongly depicted as orphans, they were denied access to birth relatives and seriously abused (Bagnell, 2001; Humphreys, 1996). Social workers' collusion in sending poor white working-class British children to colonies overseas (Bagnell, 2001) constitutes internal colonialism expressed abroad (Dominelli, 2009, 2012a).

In contrast, external colonialism utilized globalizing assimilationist policies, processes and practices; exploited indigenous peoples and their resources; and promoted ideas of Western superiority (Osterhammel, 2005). Their implementation obliterated indigenous cultures, including languages and religions, in order to 'civilize' and 'Europeanize' them. This ideology destroyed self-identified systems of welfare that aboriginal peoples in North America, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand had formed (Chrisjohn et al., 2006). Indigenous families were deprived of their children and dispossessed of lands, resources and cultures (Haig-Brown, 1988). Local resistance embedded in everyday life practices (Grande, 2004) and overt rebellions were precipitated by these interventions (Siggins, 2005). The Sami, Inuit and Greenlanders were also subjected to assimilationist practices that undermined nomadic life-styles (Rink, 2004). Environmental damage, including melting Arctic glaciers caused by climate change, currently compounds the erosion of indigenous livelihoods and ecosystems providing food and other essentials, although indigenous peoples have benefited little from industrialization (CBC News, 2013). Moreover, they receive inferior social services provisions compared to settlers (Hier and Bolaria, 2006).

In Africa, a brutal slave trade flourished at the expense of African lives, cultures, languages, religions and homelands (Klein, 1999). While this culminated in apartheid, resistance was continuous, ranging from individual action to collective rebellions and liberation struggles in Africa, North and South America and the Caribbean (Popkin, 2010).

Social work practices in contemporary internationalizing practices in humanitarian situations

Globalizing and internationalizing practices as socially constructed phenomena impact upon social work when individuals secure institutional resources to promote 'international' endeavours. These can perpetrate neo-colonial educational practices that impose Western models on other countries (Razack, 2002). Some have resisted such pressures, to work in egalitarian, empowering,

reciprocated, culturally appropriate and locality-specific ways with local people. Below, I examine internationalizing practices expressed through humanitarian aid delivered in Sri Lanka after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.

Aid-giving

Aid-giving is a contentious activity accused of benefiting donors more than recipients (Hancock, 1991; Hoogvelt, 2007). It is a complex business with various models for involving recipients. These are:

- Donor driven (external).
- Recipient driven (local self-help initiatives).
- Partnership between donors and recipients (external and internal players).

Humanitarian aid-giving occurs in phases covering the:

- Immediate aftermath, focusing on delivering food, water, medicines and shelter.
- Recovery, short- to medium-term assistance providing financial resources, medical help, housing and psychosocial support.
- Long-term reconstruction and infrastructural development including capacity building of institutions and people.

A glut of external agencies typifies the early stages, but most leave quickly. Transitions and 'fit' between phases can be poorly planned and/or orchestrated.

The 2004 tsunami killed 40,000 people and destroyed thousands of livelihoods in Sri Lanka, attracting expressions of goodwill and substantial resources to humanitarian endeavours. These were studied in the three-year 'Internationalising Institutional and Professional Practices' Project funded by the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council (ESRC) in the UK. Several publications ensued (Dominelli, 2013a). This article focuses on a sub-set of the total data to explore empowering partnerships in delivering aid. It compares the Institutional Model (IM) initiated by a British university and the Professional Model (PM) mainly involving social work students with general aid-donors. Both models are ongoing and were chosen because their external donors purport to follow empowering practices that respond to local people's needs and involve them in decision-making. The IM, supported at the highest levels of a British university, formed partnerships with a large Sri Lankan CSO and invited university staff and students to engage with the initiative. Funds were secured through several sources including the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HFCE) and the British Council. The IM became a significant element within this university's internationalization strategy which aimed to establish meaningful relationships in education and research with academic institutions and attract students from diverse countries. A Memorandum of Agreement with several Sri Lankan universities facilitated staff and student two-way exchanges through bursaries. The PM involved an educational CSO with networks of social work educators in universities across the world and consultative status at the United Nations. Educational and curricula exchanges and capacity building in social work and community development formed key activities. The IM and PM claim transferability.

Research methods

The research question 'are some models of humanitarian aid better than others?' was explored through an ethnographic case-study approach. Data were collected through 35 sets of field-notes, 368

in-depth interviews involving a cross-section of stakeholders, an online survey and 10 focus groups in 12 villages in southern Sri Lanka (Dominelli, 2013a). Sri Lankan researchers living nearby, speaking local languages ensured that Sri Lankan recipients' voices were heard. Their involvement as equal partners in research followed the commitment to empowering research practices. The fieldwork in IM and PM sites began in 2009. Its commencement several years after the tsunami gave Sri Lankans time to reflect upon aid received during its immediate aftermath and subsequently.

Data collection and analysis

Local researchers collected and digitally recorded data; translated and transcribed all materials. They also translated for the UK researchers. Data analysed through Nvivo software revealed 'the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed. . . prior to data collection and analysis' (Mathbor, 2008: 37).

The UK-based research team and Sri Lankan researchers developed a set of open themes during the first stage of coding and rough summaries of these themes with illustrative quotations were produced. These were subsequently utilized to generate more specific sub-themes which were then regrouped into key areas of findings. Internal verification occurred through the process of 'coding down' from the general initial themes to the specific sub-themes because similar sub-themes emerged from within more than one broad theme. The Nvivo analysis for this article produced 173 interviews involving 62 villagers, 38 university staff (seven from social work) and 79 students (30 from social work) exploring the (dis)empowering partnerships theme. Names of organizations, people and places have been removed to protect anonymity.

Findings

The data revealed both advantages and disadvantages in aid delivery processes, simultaneously corroborating and challenging Hancock's (1991) assertions. The following general patterns emerged:

- Help during the immediate aftermath was welcomed.
- Internationalization proceeds as exchanges between players.
- Exchanges could be reciprocal and/or equal or not.
- People with connections in the right places received help more speedily and more in keeping with their needs.
- Some people received more than their share of aid and were better off after the disaster than before it.
- Some people did not get the assistance they needed.

These patterns provided the context for comparing IM and PPM performance with other external aid-givers. Residents defined as empowering those exchanges that were reciprocal, met locally-determined needs, and involved them in decision-making about aid offered/delivered.

Comments about external aid-givers (not IM or PPM)

Differentiated experiences. Disasters impact differently on those affected. Experienced external aid-givers recognize those with greater vulnerabilities. A villager reported approvingly:

Children suffered a lot, they not only lost belongings but some of them lost one or both parents. . . . Children were caught by the waters and injured. . . . Some . . . could not sleep at night. . . They were scared

to leave their mothers. . . . The [Red Cross, World Vision, FORUT, Christian Children's Fund] did some programs for the children. . . They made them play games, made them draw, sing and dance. . . gave the children clothes, school equipment, milk foods and other useful things. . . Some school children even gave the children note books with their notes.

Women were configured within gendered caring relations (Dominelli, 2013b), limited engagement with external agencies and few direct benefits from aid. Women were also excluded from managing aid and endangered as aid workers:

If men's economic activities were hampered they are excused by society. . . . Women are not excused by the society. They are supposed to. . . deal with the problems. . . [and] take care of the household and the children. (Villager)

People with the right connections and resources got more than their share. External and internal aid sometimes perpetuated inequalities:

Some people were very good they treated all of us alike. Some people who came only helped their friends and political parties. Those people got more than what they had; others did not get anything. Sometimes their names were also struck from the list as they did not have money or did not go behind them. (Villager)

Several villagers suggested this remedy:

The donors [should] closely supervise the distribution without just handing over to any person who comes forward, otherwise the real persons who should get support will not, [and] only those [with] political friends and those who can spend a little money will benefit. (Villager)

Some people did not get their needs met. Young single men became vulnerable, losing their connections to community and livelihoods because aid failed to reach them:

The young people did lots of work in the village. There were also some boys who just did nothing. They smoked cigarettes, drank and made trouble in the village. . . . Most of the youth were good. Some of the young people lost their jobs because they all are fishermen. For over six months they did not go to sea. They were also very afraid of the sea. Some youths got fishing boats, but some of the boys who lost their boats did not get any help. (Villager)

Some external aid undermined local cohesion

Some bad things also happened. Some of the boys got to drink arrack and began to fight. Some boys became lazy. (Villager)

Some people got help when none was needed

A few youths who had political support got boats even if they were not fishermen. So what they did was they sold these and spent the money on drinks. It was a waste. This happened because the people who were involved in the distribution did not select the right people. They took money and gave it to those people and their friends. (Villager)

Suggested improvements. Villagers suggested general external aid-donors could improve by having:

- More effective assessments of needs.
- Clearer criteria around entitlements.
- More transparency at all levels.
- Better systems of resource allocation and distribution.
- Consideration of long-term sustainability at the beginning of aid-giving.
- Monitoring mechanisms to ensure that help reached all those in need and met targets.
- Locally driven processes and power-sharing between external and local organizations.
- Humanitarian aid should be treated as a constantly evolving, adaptable and resilient process.

Villagers' evaluations of IM and PM performances

The IM and PM donors were considered better integrated into village life and consequently viewed more positively than the others. Villagers' comments on their specific outcomes were as follows.

Reciprocal local partnerships were appreciated

I can remember some of the white students who visited us. . . some months later. . . They came with students from [Sri Lankan university], there were also white teachers with them. . . Our young people were very happy to walk with them and visit the homes. They stayed two weeks, in a hotel in Tangalle. . . Every morning they come to the village during their stay and visited the homes of the people. . . giving [poor] people money to repair damaged houses. . . [IM students] taught our children English. . . told our young people about their customs. I can remember one of our boys had a birthday and they had a small party for him. . . they gave him flowers. (Villager)

Help was welcomed if reciprocal. Assistance provided in partnership with local CSOs was especially appreciated if initiating learning in both directions:

Actually [local CSO] brought them to the village, most of the villagers volunteered their labour. [IM] students did all the nice painting on the walls. We taught them our dances as return. We made lots of handicraft items together. (Villager)

Egalitarian relationships were valued

The [IM] students had helped the villages with donations, the students were not proud, they visited the simple homes of the poor people in the village and even have their food with the youth of the village whom they worked with. (Villager)

Reciprocal relationships with students

It was good experience we got when we met the [PM] students. They played with us. They sang songs; they worked with us to help build houses. We went to the beach and played on the shore. We had parties. They gave us nice flowers which made us happy and it was a new thing for us to give flowers. (Villager)

Students assist in meeting local needs

When the [PM] students came there were many youths in the area who were very happy as they would take them to go visiting the houses, get them involved in whatever work they planned, like helping people to repair their houses. Play with them, sit with them and have their meals [with them]. (Villager)

Mutual learning

For local people, 'The chance to go abroad itself was a new experience and a learning opportunity' (Sri Lankan exchange student, PM). This signalled reciprocity in the exchanges in both IM and PM models. Structural change was not initiated, so gains were considered fragile:

I feel that my daughter is better now, all her improvements are from the village [IM] pre-school. She participated in two pre-school concerts, she is not shy, she is better in English and she sings well, so all these came through the village pre-school. Now we have got a new building and more kids. They get food from the pre-school. . . so, my opinion is that this pre-school is improving, we have to protect it and we have to send our kids to this one. (Villager)

IM and PM reflections

IM and PM players reflected upon their involvement in internationalizing practices. Despite positive overall experiences, they highlighted contradictions, as follows.

Ensuring synergies between short- and long-term initiatives

The village community. . . benefitted from the structural building. . . they enjoyed having us there, and. . . learnt stuff about Western culture. We made friends. . . there is more that could be done. . . there are problems with the [IM] educational program out there. (IM student)

Practising equality

I personally feel that we have a form of preferential prejudice. . . a visiting dignitary from the United States is. . . accorded first class status. . . but. . . a professor of similar standing from a poorer country [is not treated]. . . the same way. [I made] sure that our Sri Lankan counterparts [were] not. . . treated as somewhat lower down the scale compared with someone from New York or Los Angeles. (IM academic)

Learning from others

[Sri Lankans] teach children to be independent and how to live. . . without help of parents so really it was me who was learning. (PM student)

Discussion

Internationalizing processes can have differentiated beneficial and/or detrimental effects. Outcomes depend on values, social divisions and quality of interactions between local and external players. One villager explained:

We learnt that if you want to survive you have to work hard. . . have the money and right connections. There were good people and bad people. Some people liked to help while others looked at their benefit only.

Internationalizing practices can be difficult to disentangle from globalizing ones because the former are complex and involve many actors and agencies, often in contradictory relationships. This research revealed that general external aid was more problematic than that delivered by the PM and IM because these remained for the long-term, working in reciprocated partnerships with local people and organizations.

Conclusions

Non-exploitative external aid maximizes the beneficial aspects of internationalization by following these key principles:

- Observing local cultures, traditions and languages to promote empowering aid processes.
- Humanitarian assistance should improve the quality of life amongst local people and their communities during the immediate aftermath of a disaster and during long-term reconstruction.
- Values involving equality and empowerment require vigilance to be practised across all groups and settings.
- Listening to women and children are integral aspects of aid-giving and receiving processes.
- Capacity building for long-term sustainable development should be considered at the beginning of humanitarian aid endeavours.

Funding

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