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Confronting the Medusa with Athena's Shield: Empowering Social Workers with a Transformative Role in the Migration Field

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Roberta T. Di Rosa, Hannah Reich

Abstract: Along with existing challenges, there are new ones leading social workers to become involved in increasingly international intervention processes. This has led to the development of the concept of International Social Work (Hugman, Moosa-Mitha & Moyo, 2010; Cox & Pawar, 2006; Dominelli, 2010), which provides a good opportunity to both depart from old patterns of administering aid (Healy 2008) and to embody a perception of itself as a transformative actor (Wintergerst 2017, p. 236). Assuming that it is true that the presence of different cultures acts as a catalyst in the processes of change in society, then this is equally valid for the development of this profession (Di Rosa, 2021). A profound behavioural change cannot be accomplished simply through “more” techniques, more competencies, but needs to move up on the scale into actually transforming beliefs and constructing identity (Dilts, Hallbom & Smith, 2012; Ramanathan & Link, 1999). However, there is still a long way to go within educational systems and outside, in society, to transform our systems accordingly. In this paper, we share our insights, gained through intercultural participatory exchange formats (Reich & Di Rosa, 2022), to foster our vision, in which we suggest transforming our educational systems so that we can truly embrace differences in programmes, supporting authentic self-realisation and collective empowerment, whilst working towards co-creating sustainable futures.

Keywords: Social work education, international social work, human rights, transcultural competences, post-colonial curricula.

Introduction: Social workers in the field of migration

Since the first “emergency migration” in Italy (1990s), social work has represented the interface and the filter between the Italian reception system and migrants, through initial assessment, orientation and “sorting” of migrants into the various local and national welfare agencies and in the network of public and private services within the reception system (Simone, 2020; Segatto et al., 2018).

In Italy, there is still a prevailing focus on social work intervention in the initial welcoming or management of migrants in reception centres, which can be understood in relation to the leading approach to migration predominant in Italy (Ambrosini, 2019). There is still a lack of a clear mandate for social work to be able to offer a contribution towards social justice and protection of human rights, beyond the professional contribution in the reception system. Currently, national policies seem unable to decide what to do about immigrants, concentrating almost exclusively on entry and security issues (Di Rosa, 2017a; Spinelli & Accorinti, 2019).

Migrant access to (and exclusion from) welfare services has been widely discussed (Calavita, 2005; Barn, 2008; Zincone, 2011; Baldwin-Edwards, 2012; Saraceno et al., 2013; Cesareo, 2020). Moving towards an acceptance and the coexistence of this diversity entails introducing structural changes in society and political institutions (Torres, 2011).

Only recently, is thought being given to the political and social potential of intervention aimed at integration and social cohesion through the development of studies and research about best practices in intervention and training for social workers (Barberis & Boccagni, 2017; Di Rosa, 2017b; Pataro & Nigris, 2018). Furthermore, training and further education regarding social work is currently focusing on the development of intercultural professional skills, on the development of aid relationships in situations of cultural diversity (Shier et al, 2012; Di Rosa, 2017a; Cohen-Emerique, 2017). Beyond these competences, in the light of the growing awareness of the international dimension in social work praxis and training, it seems essential to support social workers not only in acquiring professional awareness regarding new forms of political, civic and social engagement to protect vulnerability, but also in bringing about individual and collective well-being. This includes the notion of “ownership”, which needs to be dealt with most carefully in international settings structured on the basis of unequal power-relations (Reich, 2006), shifting towards a structural transformation, which was already expressed as of vital importance by Younghusbands in 1973: “The role of social workers is not as obedient servants of bureaucracy but in organising community action groups, engaging (in the current jargon) in conflict strategies.” (Younghusbands, 1973, p. 1).

Social work, in the last few years, has been threatened by changes in regulations and policies that, in the name of security and cuts in reception costs, risk engendering more illegality and social marginalization, more exploitation and exclusion. The consequences of this, in terms of social unrest, are more and more evident everywhere, especially on the outskirts of cities. Every day, social workers risk, wittingly or unwittingly, colluding with political orientations opposing their ethical and professional mandate, attempting to steer through organizational imperatives that compromise their professional values, experiencing a strong disjointedness between our professional manifesto and commitment to anti-oppressive/ethical social justice practice (Jönsson, 2014). As described in previous studies (Ferguson & Lavalette, 2006; Loakimidis & Teloni, 2013), social workers are increasingly facing 'loyalty problems' based on the discrepancy and occasional conflict of interests between the needs of 'service users' and the new practices and methods of social work. In the current system, the dividing line between "aid" and "control" is more and more indistinct, the possibility of social workers making their voices heard is being reduced considerably (Di Rosa, 2021). Thus, through specific training, social workers need to assume their professional identity and the values this implies, before entering the work place.

This becomes even more obvious with the increase in fear-based or populist politics. Embedded in the current economic and social situation, the spread of populism might engender a dangerous 'erosion' of the ethical and cultural bases of the profession.

"If not countered with solid preparation and professional ethics, populist doctrine exhibits an unexpected capacity to influence the culture of social workers." (Fazzi 2015, p. 604)

Another aspect, which might lead to an erosion of values is the fact that many social workers in this current economic and social climate are facing a considerable work overload, stress and burn-out.

Working in the field of migration, the discrepancies between ideals and work-outcomes are often extremely high. In the complex world of migration, the operational choices of each professional are obviously linked to his/her ethical and civic position. As regards services for migrants, there is a plurality of diverse solutions, and they cannot always be resolved in accordance with the code of ethics and the fundamental principles of social work. In the face of contradicting orders, as a result of the triple mandate, social workers are finding it almost impossible to adhere to the ethics of their profession. According to Staub-Bernasconi (2007), the ethical basis should rest on human rights and the idea of human dignity, so that social work can be considered a "human rights profession". The triple mandate also includes considerations regarding social justice, a consistent stand against discrimination and an at-

titude which embodies the principles of recognition and respect (Lutz 2011). Ultimately, it also calls for the principle of resonance (Rosa 2016), to support the client, even if this “other” individual is perceived as strange, incomprehensible and irritating.

“A resonance-sensitive basic attitude is the prerequisite for also being able to face the completely foreign and initially completely incomprehensible and irritating in the reifying attitude of rejection, rejection or even of rejection, repudiation or even annihilation, but with a willingness to open up and to transform oneself, but with the readiness to open up and to one's own transformation.” (Rosa 2016, p. 325; Transl. by Authors)

This willingness to reach out to what is “strange” runs counter to a perception of the world as something indifferent or hostile; it demands a basic trust in yourself and the surrounding world. Here again, social work training can help in creating an atmosphere of trust and belonging for inter-culturally diverse students, while embracing, in participatory settings, the verbalisation of different experiences, perceptions and world views. This preparation is needed, particularly, in the field of migration.

Following the above-mentioned line of argument, the universities of FHWS-Wurzburg and Palermo, set up a summer school in Italy: “Migrations and Societies at the Italian Coast: Human Lives, Reception Systems and Social Work approaches” funded by DAAD. The didactic goal was not only to provide information regarding the situation in Italy, but also to foster an intercultural exchange.

Over the two weeks of training, the time was divided up into talks regarding: the political and social situation on the Mediterranean borders and the reception system, with in-depth reports on some relevant topics, such as rescue at sea and the role of NGOs; protection procedures for migrant women as victims of violence; media representation of migration, foreigners and border management; a normative and criminological outline about human smuggling and human trafficking.

Along with these talks, students were engaged in workshops devoted to Practical Approaches, i.e. listening to, and exchanging, views with professionals and sharing their professional practices with them (e.g. trauma and vulnerability in the reception process; a comparison between two reception projects for unaccompanied foreign minors, one in Sicily and one in Campania).

The Summer School also incorporated practical, cultural learning tools, such as exercises from the “Theater of the Oppressed” (Boal, 1989) and a course in “theater for witness” (Miller, 2018). Here, in-depth stories from the participants were shared and embodied knowledge generated. Other presentations included “Arts based approaches”, the action of denunciation through

drawing in the "Drawing the frontiers" project; the processes of inclusion through music in the "Sounds of integration" experience.

At the end, a round table discussion was held between Italian and foreign academics on the theme of "Empowering Refugees and Migrants."

The course was purposely conceptualized in a highly interactive manner and built on the so-called "elicitive" approach (Lederach, 1999)¹, where knowledge is drawn from the group, in such a way that students would have the chance to "build relationships" with each other and share ideas, values and approaches. All this was based on the encounter theory, a basic principle for peace building (Standish, 2020).

A second aspect was that we aimed to incorporate knowledge, not only from academics, but by listening to the experiences and accounts of practitioners in the field. Thanks to the diversity of students from different educational and cultural backgrounds (from Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, Germany, Italy), the variety of experts and abundance of approaches presented, the authors procured food for thought regarding methods and perspectives of social work training practices in the field of migration. Another significant element was represented by the plurality of the teachers' points of view, linked both to their nationality and their different roles in the field of migration: academics, NGO researchers, activists, psychosocial workers, trainers. Each of them brought to the table, and shared with the students, the experiences and knowledge acquired during their personal and professional lives, thus contributing to the breadth and variety of points of view of the working group.

The whole project was greatly affected by the pandemic and was forced to move on line rather than in live encounters (each of 10 days), with this act of resilience further shaping our reflections and insights.

1. Looking into the Medusa's Eyes: a look at the actual lives of migrants, refugees, newcomers to Italy

The first aspect to develop is awareness of what has been happening in the last few years in our society, mainly regarding all the political choices in the name of "security" or "protection". In particular, it is essential to foster access to updated information and strategies, so as to stay in touch with what is happening on the borders of Europe, especially with regard to human rights violations and in the reception centres for migrants and refugees.

It clearly emerged during the summer school talks - edited later in essays written by the speaker at the end of the summer school (Reich & Di Rosa,

¹ Lederach (1995) describes two possible approaches to *training* and education, the prescriptive and elicitive approaches. In the elicitive approach, the trainer acts as a facilitator of a collaborative learning process.

2022) – that newcomers, refugees and migrant, undergo very tough conditions both in the transit from Libya to Sicily and in the reception system in Sicily, coming up against two different situations, two different levels of problems and risks.

A critical analysis of the public and political issues and widespread mistrust or indifference on the part of the general public, may help build up awareness about the social risks linked to applying negative connotations to migrants (e.g. regular/irregular, refugee/ asylum seekers, illegal, foreigners) allied to a climate of anxiety and suspicion inculcated in the general public via the media:

“The real danger, however, remains the political instrumentalization of anger and fear. This is the scam: aggravating the malaise (anger) with catastrophic diagnoses and simultaneously promising to cure it with unfounded diagnoses and dangerous drugs.” (Battistelli, 2021, p. 17)

A constant factor in the migrant's experience is that of exposure to violence (Bartholini, 2021). Undoubtedly, this takes different forms, depending on whether we are dealing with the time in Libya, the dramatic conditions of travel by sea, or living in initial reception facilities. Yet, since social work is concerned with the excluded and marginalized, the profession cannot turn its head from these cruelties. In Europe there does exist (to some degree) a rule of law for European citizens, which is not guaranteed anywhere else in the world, in the shape of the Geneva Convention and Human Rights. Yet, the belief in the separation of human beings into different categories, the blunt protection of private capital and interests, and the “othering” of the “other” legitimizes exclusion and inhumane treatment.

In the workgroups, our students strongly underlined the importance of discussing how this kind of awareness of the real situation risks having a strong impact on professional practice and, above all, regarding professional compliance with the core principles of the deontological code; it also deeply undermines the heroic principles of human equality, distorting human rights and human dignity, allowing important phrases to become shallow, glib phrases.

In the group dynamics, thanks to the variety of students coming from different parts of the world (some also from a migratory background), the discussion and talks about the Italian situation provided an opportunity both to share experiences and opinions and to overcome initial negative personal feelings about goings-on at the frontiers of Europe. The power of confrontation and networking, behind the closed doors of the course, concentrated the debate about the possibilities for action, for collective transformation and change. Colleagues described their experiences in the field, their creative strategies and resilience to remain committed and engaged in alleviating suffering and bringing about change.

The authors built on the ideas expressed in the documents produced by the students, the talks by the speakers and theoretical research, and came to the following conclusions, of particular importance for International Social Work Education in the 21st century.

2. Principles for Social Work and Social Work Education: seizing Athena's shield to look upon the Medusa and work for transformation

Social workers in the field are tackling the challenges described above, to bring about change, regarding brutal, first-hand exclusion, inhumanity, and suffering. Reflecting on the practices of reception and mutual adaptation to the actual criticalities that social operators encounter in facilitating access to new users and in building a helping relationship, therefore becomes extremely urgent. This is especially true if we think of the social worker as a professional capable of mediating between different actors (institutions, migrant families, migrants, the community of reference), networking from a perspective of mutual valorisation. A figure is needed to demand restructuring of the current welfare system, who is able to individuate and reinforce all the conditions of intervention as conceived, planned and managed, together with the community (Pattaro & Nigris, 2018).

Strategies of social-political activism aim to raise awareness about structural injustice, which only allows certain voices to be heard and to bring about a critical reading of meaning and interpretation. All this includes examination of race, cultural racism, intersectionality, and gender construction and opens up a space to include "other voices", "the empire writes back" and the creation of third spaces, in which new meanings can emerge.

In higher education, these activisms have been backed up by cultural studies, which have emerged as an interdisciplinary discipline with their concern about power and representation, (Hall, 1994, Butler, 1990, Hook, 1994); the cultural signification of socially constructed reality within unequal power-relations has been analysed in depth. Social work is sensitive to the marginalized, dealing with how certain populations are excluded within the global, national, regional, organisational and interpersonal systems.

Post-colonial theories have entered more and more into discussions of international social work (Askeland & Payne, 2008, Anand et al., 2019; Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011) and also the understanding of truth as a construct.

"There is no knowledge that is true in itself, that is independent of the languages and institutions that we create and invent. Empirical reality does not exist as a universal truth but as an unending collection of "stories" that we tell. The truth is made, not found" (Irving in Chambron et al., 1999, p. 31)

Yet, this does not mean that within social work as such one is ready to part from a Cartesian understanding of truth.

“Social Work from the origins to the present has located its centre of gravity in these Cartesian foundations of modernism. The nature of knowledge research and truth for social work has largely relied on the methods of Decartes” (Irving in Chambon et al., 1999, p. 31).

This leads to the fact that the concept of reality as contingent and historical, constructed out of languages and cultural codes does not easily apply to the research, teaching and practice of social work. Given the need for establishing this paradigm in intercultural encounters, international social work has to transform certain assumptions within the national social work curricula and has to take the de-colonisation of the curricula seriously (Charles, 2019). This can only happen on the basis of an acceptance of a “social construction of reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and the cultural construction and inter-subjective validation of “truth” within a discourse.

The necessary re-framing and re-writing of the history of “reality” should be carried out by critically reviewing what exists and through its de-construction. Yet there is another way to encourage paradigmatic social change, which includes structural transformations. This other mode of re-writing, does not look directly to the past, but rather takes its inspiration from the future, anchoring its vision and intension there, and from there it deconstructs the blockages hindering the future from revealing the vision; it also looks to the past, but through a connection to its vision for the future². However, there are similarities in the two approaches mentioned, the second delves more into the embodiment of the future and fosters a resource-oriented approach. This approach challenges a) the mind-body separation and b) a “problem-focussed” perception of reality; this also underlies the pathogenic model of health and well-being. On the social- collective level of well-being, the future-oriented, embodied approach is developed thoroughly in research about peace and peace-building (Lederach, 1999) and on the individual well-being level by the model of salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1987). The question here is not: what can we do to combat illness, but rather, how is it that human beings remain healthy despite stress? Central to this salutogenetic model is the sense of coherence (SoC), which is a factor fostering well-being and which is connected to the sense- and meaning-making possibilities. Meaning is constructed through representation and can be conveyed in stories. Here, the social worker has to be open to “other” stories and their making sense, even though this might contradict his/her own understanding of reality. The

² For a more precise explanation of the future-oriented mode of thinking or processing, see e.g. the method of “Causal Layered Analysis” by Sohail Inayatullah (Inayatullah 2004) or Otto Scharmer’s U Theory (Scharmer 2016).

common need to give answers to transnational phenomena on a structural level has generated a multiplication of training courses and Masters in migration and cross-cultural assistance, together with a spread of cooperation across borders, perceived as “cross fertilization in the profession” (Healy, 2008, p. 160).

Central to these insights is the pursuit of the following three principles:

1. Recognizing the *power of inter/trans-cultural settings*;
2. Inserting *experienced based learning methods*;
3. Fostering *personal development and growth* moving towards self-awareness and empowerment.

The considerations that emerged regarding educational principles and methods, required social workers to arm themselves with a shield of self-competencies, values and intervention methods, which might protect their personal and professional integrity even when faced by unjust structures and inhuman mindsets, so that they might act as transformative actors embodying universal human values (Deepak, 2012).

The above-mentioned principles and their validity are outlined and further explained in the following discussion.

2.1. Recognizing the power of inter/trans cultural settings through highly participatory teaching approaches, with room for interpersonal relationship-building

Migrating from one culture, one place to another, demands new learning, un-learning and invention, creating some kind of in-between space, liminal space for reconstructing the self, creating an identity which can embrace past experiences and stories, but also allows one to act within what are now new cultural settings and circumstances. Here, there is a lot of dormant potential for growth and change, also in the host community. **Authentic encounter** with others is central for this potential to come to the surface and for new creative solutions and communal creations to emerge. Transformation needs a lot of tolerance of ambiguity.

The way that societies behave towards newcomers reflects the character of the host community; it shows us how we treat vulnerability. It shows us the gaps in our education, our social systems, economic distribution and how to distribute economic wealth constructively. It also questions how we normalize and homogenize individuals in our systems and how far they are prepared to accommodate true diversity on very different levels. Thus, on a deep level it refers to an individually and collectively constructed self-image and demands a shift in understanding the process of identity construction.

Observing global migration has led to an understanding of the social construction of identity as necessarily hybrid in nature, a “third space”, a post-colonial sociolinguistic theory of identity and community realized through

language or education, (as termed by Homi K. Bhabha). This “hybridity” is not an unaccomplished state of being. Rather it can be seen as the constant in the ever-changing experiences of life, emphasizing the uniqueness of each individual, actor or context as a “hybrid” (Bhabha, 2004), in a natural state of being. To accept the slipperiness of the identity categories demands the acceptance of ambiguity. **Ambiguity tolerance** is central to working on the frontier.

2.2. Experience-based learning methods, which allow one, on the one hand, to listen attentively to practitioners in the field, and, on the other, to develop one's thinking and embodied learning

If we look at the approaches of social workers operating in the field of migration, we can learn many principles not necessarily taught at university. For example, the attitude towards time: the principle of “faster is better” is often highly valued in school or higher education, whereas taking time to think, to take time for relationship building and to invest in a long-term process with no immediate results is not often appreciated. Listening to practitioners, such as Salvatore Ingui (see Reich & Di Rosa, 2022), who works with music in the field of integration, it becomes obvious how important it is for the social worker to accept that integration is a long-term process, not possible overnight; the ambiguities need to be dealt with one-by-one. All this depends on perceptions of the self and of the newcomer and demands that one overcomes fear and accepts the “other”. This cannot be forced into people's heads. Furthermore, if the principle of self-determination is seriously accepted, then social workers need to be ready to tackle solutions or behaviour which they are not expecting nor endorsing. They need to reinforce their trust in the process through **process orientation** and to accept not having control over the content outcome; however, they can be champions of the process itself and foster a **participatory approach**. Such approaches do lead to empowerment, needing to be central to the social worker's activity in the migration context.

This kind of learning departs from pure frontal teaching and demands that certain experiences are created, e.g. through games, sociometric line-up, role plays, encounters with practitioners etc., then discussed in the group. This allows each participant to build on what she/he already knows and integrate the new learning into his/her own construction of reality. These principles are high-lighted in migration education and peace education, which both work with intercultural settings and are thus worth taking into consideration for International Social Work education. These principles are also mentioned in post-colonial theory development. Here a central principle is to challenge the notion of “one truth”, of “a single story” (Ngozi Adichie, 2009³) and open

³ The famous TED talk of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story <https://>

up to stories which reveal the past and the present actions in a different light (Charles, 2019).

2.3. Fostering personal development and growth towards self-awareness and empowerment.

The need here is to incorporate a meta-cognitive aspect of placing oneself within a culture, recognizing thoughts not as reality, but as thoughts and to develop aspects of self-responsibility and self-care.

The principle of **empowerment** was emphasised by many speakers in their presentations in the summer school. They also showed the power of using cultural tools for representation, for telling stories and thus the re-creation of the identity of the beneficiary, aligned with the construction of identity of one's self. The power of the story is also a magical shield (Monti in Reich & Di Rosa, 2022), allowing one to recount everything one has experienced, whilst, at the same time, – through process orientation – leading towards a transformation of the victimization cycle.

Although conversation techniques and interviewing are part of the curricula of social work, time constraints, the workload and extensive administrative duties can easily lead one to rush through interpersonal encounters. Nonetheless, the fulfilment of the need to be seen and heard by another person is crucial for human beings to feel understood, to connect and to belong. Thus, the quality criterion of “more and faster is better” needs to be transformed into the acknowledgment of quality time as essential within a conversation.

In order to allow an authentic encounter to take place, the social worker needs to be fully present in those few minutes, with an **embodied presence** and not already busy planning the next step. She/he needs to pause, and be there to observe, sense, feel and listen with the totality of his/her being.

The capacity to be present and really open up to what the other has to say, even if this is only through the eyes and the body (as language might not be available), is crucial for one's feeling of dignity. This presence is based on sensing with the whole body what is there right then. It goes beyond purely extracting information, moving towards a **recognition of the other** and listening to the other's story in an open, non-judgemental, appreciative way.

The last point, which is actually obvious, given the difficult situations social work is facing in the field of migration, is the emphasis on **self-care**. This is something which is easily overlooked, particularly within the “missionary” approach. Yet, only a person who is stable enough to handle his/her own emotions, who does not feel powerless on his/her own and who has enough self-confidence and self-efficacy to act consistently, can be of support for others. This does not mean that the social worker has to be distanced and

www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

untouchable, rather the opposite: she/he needs to be fluid and permeable to allow different emotions to run through, while remaining connected to her/his inner self. This demands training, which needs to be offered in Social Work education.

3. Social Work Education: empowerment to pass on Athena's shield to future Social Workers

New challenges, along with existing ones, are involving social workers in increasingly international intervention processes, such as human trafficking or disaster response, and now in the pandemic from COVID-19. Today, the field of global social services displays the common need to provide answers for transnational phenomena.

Social work embraces various disciplines, which means that it incorporates different scientific models of reality from positivist to constructionist. However, unfortunately, the different scientific models are not often explicitly mentioned, nor are they discussed. Yet, to work in the field, we need to be aware of the effects of these different models on our perception of reality, how we organise it and act within it. This is what is termed as "culture", organisational culture or the culture of a discipline. Often dominated by a positivist assumption, social work emasculates itself if it reduces itself to this paradigm and sabotages its capacity to be an effective agent within intercultural settings and to act as a force transforming destructive "maps of meanings", cultures of separation, into more inclusive ones.

Social work needs to break free from this paradigm, and fully embrace the knowledge generated by cultural studies about power, representation and meaning-making processes in its curricula, as with positivist foundations. The importance of understanding meaning and thus recognizing culture is very palpable in the Italian case. As previously shown, the need for legitimization leads to a battlefield over meaning, which we do not easily recognize as we confuse representation with realities. Therefore, social workers need to be educated in the processes of meaning-making, the construction of reality and to be literate in "reading" categories, as sensitivity to power relations, knowledge about structural violence constitute a basis for understanding the principles of representation and the need to "unlearn" previous knowledge and acquire knowledge about meaning-making, the principles of representation and news-making (Rizzuto, 2020). Only with appropriate training in emotional intelligence can social workers distance themselves from the emotional triggers of the media and remain at a distance, contextualizing the information within their broader framework of knowledge. This is part of a much-needed self-competence for social workers. It becomes clear how

much we need to reinforce integrity and resilience in the face of extreme violence (as this is the reality social workers are facing).

Social Work Education needs to respond and reinforce personal development within its curricula, along with adequate training in self-care, building up a character strong enough not to be overwhelmed in the face of immense suffering and to remain loyal to professional principles in spite of exclusive, inhumane policies.

Not always are these ethical and deontological principles easy to realize; in fact,

“while it is true that the presence of different cultures acts as a catalyst in the processes of change in society, this is equally valid for the professional category” (Di Rosa, 2017b, p. 132).

Here we need to react to the fact that social workers seem to easily adapt to such policies (Fazzi 2013). The settings for social work education need to be intercultural *per se*, both to embody intercultural competencies and tackle certain fears of stereotypes and of the “other” and to confront their perception regarding their ability to work with clients with different cultural backgrounds (Dominelli, 2010).

3.1. Knowledge about culture

This is obligatory for true relationship building to occur between classmates and should be seen as a learning aim in the classroom. Differences should be brought to the surface and a space created for the different stories and different opinions expressed. Given the hierarchical structure of the teaching setting, (including the assignment of marks), trust first needs to be built up, so that students do not fear negative sanctions; it needs to be clear that different “truths” exist at the same time, without one being “wrong” and the other “right”.

Intercultural competence implies overcoming personal and professional prejudices on the part of social workers, improving understanding and awareness of diversity, culture, marginality and exclusion, adapting to particular individual situations and their own modes of operation (Di Rosa, 2017b, p. 132).

Every violation of human rights is lodged in the meaning-making system, in the cultural context, thus often provoking not-so-simple answers to a question, as to whether conduct is to be condemned or is culturally justified. In certain ways, it is about the question: “When is difference simply different and when is it unfair?” (Healy, 2007) To answer this question, the social worker needs to be aware of his/her interpretative system, embeddedness in a culture sustained by power relations, whilst acknowledging power without guilt, but as an opportunity to bring about change. In order to bring about constructive change, it is not so relevant how the social workers interprets

the event, but rather how the people involved connote it; a space needs to be given to the very different forms of interpretation of the situation, something which demands appropriate education be provided by social work faculties.

“Global social work deals with problems that are caused between countries, that occur across national boundaries or that are issues that countries work together to collectively solve.” (Harris, 1997, p. 429).

3.2. Personal development. Learning to work collectively and systemically

The competence required of practitioners engaged in this field is, first and foremost, that of being able to work in context-appropriate ways, whether at the level of individuals, families, communities or service systems, and that of working flexibly; a generalist approach that is adaptable and context-appropriate is preferable to a high degree of specialization, both in methods and approaches. This, in turn, has implications for how social workers are trained in international practice. In addition to training in the theories and methods of direct intervention (including counselling, casework, group work, and community work), it is vital that indirect theories, systems and methods be covered in depth (including social policy, organization and management, and research).

Working with immigrants offers a challenge and, at the same time, an opportunity to provide a social service that is authentic, based on the defence of human rights and real integration, encouraging shared citizenship between foreigners and the indigenous population. To achieve this, it would be appropriate to foster multidimensional and synergistic change, with the participation of the academic world, in the social and institutional contexts in which social workers operate:

“Educational institutions must prepare their students for these kinds of challenges which they probably will meet as social workers in a multicultural society. Social work students must be given the competence needed to work with a diverse population in a well-informed and culturally sensitive manner” (Bø, 2015, p. 562).

There are now more training courses, Masters and specializations devoted to working with migrants. University programmes, which until recently did not include specific courses for preparing social workers to interact with people belonging to other cultures, are starting to offer courses in migration and the dynamics of cross-cultural assistance, though the content of these courses varies greatly from place to place. It might therefore be opportune for the university, first of all, to integrate cross-cultural knowledge in its courses and, consequently, to urgently provide for the training of new generations of professionals (Di Rosa, 2017b).

There are three areas of knowledge and competencies, which seem to be of particular importance for Social Work Education in the 21st century:

1. Theoretical knowledge and Knowledge about the facts on the ground and the capacity for critical assessment.
2. Practical knowledge about participatory, collective methods for dialogue and empowerment.
3. Personal and Professional integrity, which includes emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-care, mindfulness and ambiguity tolerance.

These elements seem to be of particular importance in the light of an increase in group-focused enmity, along with repressive and despotic governments. We need to prepare social workers to tackle unjust structures and inhumane mindsets and create a shield to protect their personal and professional integrity. Empowerment is not only a principle needed in working with beneficiaries or the (neoliberal) "client", but is also needed as a principle in social work education. Only empowered social workers can act as transformative actors embodying universal humane values such as social work (the human rights profession).

3.3. Broadening the vision, expanding the sphere of action against global injustice

Even though social work has played a central role in the reception system, the analysis of the Italian situation shows that it has not played a very decisive role in the implementation of national immigration policies and in so-called integration policies, remaining more closely-linked to the management of reception and issues related to vulnerability than to the development of new citizenship. This is a function of social work that should be rediscovered and firmly implemented by professionals, by demanding their participation in the planning of social policies.

Moreover, the awareness of what is now a stable presence of people with a migrant background in Italy, should lead the social services to invest heavily in another field of intervention, that of community intervention with immigrants who are legally resident in Italy, at various levels of integration in local communities. Attention and specific expertise should be channelled towards "quasi-citizens" (with their own specific requirements), who can access social services in the same way as indigenous citizens.

Another direction in which to invest in terms of community work is in the promotion of participation at the level of associationism, in order to foster a sense of responsibility and encourage participation in public life (Pattaro & Nigris, 2018). On the professional level, there is a need for a collaborative relationship with immigrant associations, enhancing existing informal networks among "less protected" subjects, and taking on an active role in the promotion, development and advancement of all integrated social policies,

aimed at fostering social and civic advancement, emancipation and responsibility within the community and minority groups (including activities that encourage dialogue and integration).

This entails building a bridge between the various parties in order to guide them towards mutual recognition in a serene and non-prejudicial context, where migrants may find access to services (health, social services), social integration (neighbourhoods, schools), protection of cultural specificities (associations) and prevention of violence and discrimination.

At the same time, the resident population may thus find social reassurance and might help in redefining the concept of citizenship in the social sense, with sensitization as regards avoidance of stereotypes and prejudices and education towards democratic coexistence.

Community intervention is becoming increasingly necessary, also in response to increasing racism and rejection throughout Italy, putting at risk the limited integration laboriously achieved by migrant families. Mainly in the case of long-standing resident immigrants, specific attention is needed in terms of promoting participation to deal with the urgent necessity to satisfy not only needs and essential rights (Barberis & Boccagni, 2017), but also the higher level of community and social needs and rights, something that is even more pressing at a moment in history when openly nationalistic and discriminatory episodes are becoming more frequent.

One of the areas in which social work intervention should be urgently reinforced is in relations of local coexistence, where social workers could act as an interface between migrants and the local population “placing them in a network with a view to reciprocal enhancement” (Pattaro & Nigris, 2018, p. 8); this might require a strong commitment for the social worker in sensitizing the resident population, paying attention to the socio-relational dimension of the processes of insertion locally, and monitoring the risks of conflict or tensions linked to co-habitation, especially in multi-ethnic housing.

Closing remarks: Moving towards Transformation of Social Work Education in dealing with the Medusa

In many countries, as in Italy, there remains a need to develop, in particular, “the integration of exemplars and approaches to social work practice regarding migration as an issue in advancing social justice and human rights” (Popescu M. & Libal K., 2018, p. x). This line of professional development could well benefit from connections and exchanges with the international community (Raya & Lopez Pelaez, 2017).

It would also be appropriate to develop a scientific and methodological commitment to understanding and knowing the complex process of international migration and its connections with the local scenarios in which it

operates. Even the small local context becomes international and influenced by globalisation; this is a concept that the 21st century social worker must have very clear, otherwise all his/her territorial work will be meaningless, because it will lack links with the surrounding reality. This needs to enter the International Social Work curriculum.

Furthermore, the knowledge of cultural studies and the perception of reality as cultural constructs, needs to become an important element within International Social Work education. Along with this, come the establishment of qualitative and ethnographic research methods, to foster transcultural research.

However, a “more information” approach is not sufficient. International Social Work Education will also need to transform its teaching practice to reinforce ambiguity tolerance and the resilience of social workers and to foster their professional grounding and embodiment of the value system of the social work profession. This means that embodied practices of self-awareness and personal development should be included in curricula as well as experience-based learning and participatory teaching methods within an intercultural setting.

To summarise: international Social Work education needs to develop further with regard to its curricula and integrate principles of post-colonial curricular development, migration education and peace education. This means, in concrete terms that it needs to:

1. Spot the power of inter/trans cultural settings through a highly participatory teaching approach with room for interpersonal relationship building;
2. Insert innovative, experience-based learning methods, which, on the one hand, allow one to incorporate one's learning and, on the other, to listen to practitioners in the field;
3. Foster personal development and growth, in moving towards self-awareness and empowerment. This latter aspect needs to incorporate a meta-cognitive aspect of placing one within a culture, recognizing thoughts not as reality, but as thoughts and teaching aspects of self-responsibility and self-care.

Given the enormous challenges facing us, we cannot solve these problems thinking in the same old way. Rather, we need to transform our understanding of who we are and start to narrate our personal stories, not in the categories of separation - my mind separated from my body, me separated from you, me separated from nature – but from the perception of deep connection with each other. This demands tackling our fear of the unknown and starting to listen to wisdom emerging from other cultures and engaging deeply with embodied forms of knowledge.

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