

LOCALISED GLOBALITIES AND SOCIAL WORK

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Jessica H. Jönsson

Department of Social Work

Mid Sweden University, SE-831 25 Östersund, Sweden

ISSN 1652-893X, Mid Sweden University Doctoral Thesis 177; ISBN 978-91-87557-30-9

ABSTRACT

Recent global and structural transformations, a West-centric development agenda and the triumph of neoliberal politics have led to destructive consequences for many local communities and individual life chances. The global dominance of the West-centric development agenda, with its roots in the colonial past, has created uneven developments and an unjust world in which Western countries continue to gain advantages and increase their prosperity. Although a minority elite in many non-Western countries share the same interests as Western countries and their global organs, the majority of people in these countries are suffering from increasing socioeconomic inequalities. As a result of the dogmatic belief in a singular and West-centric modernity and its practices, many problems are considered to be the result of non-Western countries' inability to complete the project of modernity in accordance with Western blueprints. This has also influenced social work as a global and modern profession. Social problems are often individualised and the reasons behind many inequalities are increasingly related to non-Western people's individual shortcomings and traditional cultural backgrounds. In Western and non-Western countries equally are the neoliberal structural and institutional transformations ignored and social problems of individuals and families defined as a matter of wrong and deviant actions and choices.

The main objective of the dissertation, which is constituted of four articles and an overall introduction and summary, is to examine the consequences of recent neoliberal globalisation based on the belief in a single and West-centric modernity and development agenda and their consequences for social work facing increasing global inequalities. The following research questions have guided the work: 'How can social work play an effective role in combating social problems and otherisation, marginalisation and increasing inequalities in a globalised world?', 'How does the global development agenda function within the local arenas of social work?', 'Are development projects improving people's life chances in local communities in non-Western countries?', 'How informed and responsive are social workers towards the global context of local problems?'

The work is based on a qualitative design using qualitative content analysis for analysing data collected through interviews, participant observations and official documents. The results show that irrespective of where and in which context social problems are appearing, since local problems often have global roots, a global perspective to local problems should be included in every practice of social work in order to develop new methods of practices in an increasingly globalised field of work. Destruction of local communities, forced migration from non-Western countries, and marginalisation of people with immigrant background in Western countries should not be considered only as local problems, but also as problems with their roots in global structural inequalities which reproduces global social problems with local consequences.

It is argued that social work should consider the dilemmas and problems connected to the taken for granted West-centric theories, understandings and practices of social work in order to develop new methods of practices for combating social problems, marginalisation and increasing inequalities

in a globalised world. Such a position includes practicing multilevel social work, social work in global alliances beyond the division of East and West, and mobilisation against neoliberalism and the retreat of the welfare state. This requires critical standpoints against the relationship between the global context of the neoliberal ideology and practices in a Western-dominated and postcolonial world and the daily practices of social work.

Keywords: globalisation, global social problems, glocalisation, multiple modernities, neoliberalism, social work, West-centric development