

# Social Work and Human Rights

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## A New Paradigm for International Social Work Under the Conditions of Globalisation

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a strong moving towards rights-based theory and practice in international social work. These professional developments are closely linked to globalisation processes and the changing role of the nation state which have inspired debates about global and local aspects of human rights. The object of this study is to look at the link between human rights and international social work in relation to current globalisation discourse. This will help international social workers to better understand the meaning of global and local aspects of human rights in relation to social work action.

This study is a literature review about rights-based social work theory and its relation to globalised human rights discourse. The research method is narrative literature review, in other words a general overview on the topic. The analysis is constructed in the course of theoretical considerations.

According to this study it is highly important that social workers have sound understanding of the local as well as global effects of their action. While international networking is increasing within the profession, a human rights perspective has become more significant for social workers. There is a call for integrating human rights in social work education as a fundamental part of the teaching. While taking part in the global human rights discourse it is important that social workers embrace a multidimensional approach to human rights with the recognition of political dimensions of the human rights movement.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Basic concepts of human rights, which advocate for education, equality, health care, housing and fairness, fit neatly under the umbrella of social work. The profession, by any standard, has a commonality with human rights, which should guide the social work profession in both policy and practice. Among social workers, a detailed analysis of human rights remains in an infant stage and for social workers to truly understand the significance of human rights, a far greater emphasis on human rights education is needed. To truly fulfil its mission, the social work profession has to adopt a more focused and analytical approach to human rights.<sup>1</sup>

Social work has historical and political character. The origins of social work are not only linked to social transformation processes in the rise of modernity, associated with industrialisation and democratisation, and the need for new forms of solidarity. Even more they are linked with political agendas represented by the nation state project. In its diverse forms, social work shares the fundamental ambiguity of modernity in general. It is also caught up in the contradictions that constituted, and remain forming, the politics of the nation state.<sup>2</sup>

As the role of the nation state is currently changing dramatically under the impact of globalisation, and the project of modernisation itself appears to be in crisis, social work is inevitably affected by these contemporary developments. Social work, then, must be subjected to a fundamental examination of its relationship with society and of its founding principles. ‘The social’, as associated with the nation state, cannot longer be taken for granted, but needs to be defined in a new context.<sup>3</sup> This is linked with the strong moving towards rights-based approach in the social work profession, and with human rights discourses. A curious and perhaps dangerous coincidence for social work is that the agendas to reconstruct or ‘de-construct’ its power and structure are coming from two different directions, from neo-liberal policies on the one hand, and from user movements, on the other. This makes it very difficult for

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<sup>1</sup> NASW, 2003; Reichert 2007, p. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 12-13.

social work to respond in a non-defensive manner. Seeing this conflict in line with social work's position between system and lifeworld, new and less defensive responses become possible, also in terms of research strategies.<sup>4</sup>

It has been stated that the academic literature on human rights has been dominated by three disciplines: law, philosophy and politics. Although social workers have for a long time been linked to rights-talk, especially welfare rights, rights-based practice and a profound analysis of human rights and their implications has not been dominant in social work literature. Clearly, there is no doubt that legal processes and the practice of the legal professions have contributed a lot to the establishment and the safeguarding of human rights, but the framing of human rights in largely legal terms limits the scope of human rights as well as their potential in practice by leaving non-legal activists, social workers and community workers disempowered.<sup>5</sup>

Social work has a long history in taking stand in the inclusion-exclusion discourses in a society, which lately has culminated to the globalised discussions around social citizenship. From the very beginning social workers or their pre-professional ancestors were placed in the frontline of those micro-processes that decided on inclusion or exclusion from social citizenship. In these processes assessments were made as to whether conditions of poverty, handicap and behavioural deviations could be overcome by variable methods of reintegration.<sup>6</sup>

Under the conditions of globalisation and the developments of the nation state project social work profession is in a situation where it has to justify its position and in a process of redefining its agenda. According to Lorenz the answer to more recognition and accountability lies not in social work refining its research agenda but taking political aspect of research more seriously. This is not just as context but as a critical dimension of the methodology itself. Lorenz suggests a communicative approach that is, not taking identities as fixed, essentialist qualities, but as negotiated sets of social relationships which need to be embedded in political frameworks of

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<sup>4</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 134.

<sup>5</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 44.

rights and obligations. The aim of social work is the creation of the conditions for interactive social citizenship in research and in practice.<sup>7</sup>

Globalisation has received growing attention in the media and press as well as in the economic, political and social sciences. However, globalisation constituting several processes that affect the work of social professionals has only more recently been acknowledged. The tradition of 'local' nature of intervention does not have to be contested, but services and practices need to be viewed in the light of international perspectives and the new social problems produced under the changing conditions that often require responses at an international level.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of enhanced international engagement, social workers remain strongly divided on numerous important international issues, and there seems to be little agreement on what positions the professionals should take on these issues. What is disagreed is the nature of international social work and the profession's commitment to internationalising the curriculum and social work practice. There is dispute about the normative implications of globalisation; although many social workers stress the positive benefits that different forms of integration can bring, others are highly critical of these developments. There are different opinions on whether social work should be primarily engaged in activist or developmental forms of practice. Moreover, there is differences of opinion on the question of the universality of social work values and whether internationalism is a desirable normative position to adopt as the profession seeks to respond the effects of globalisation.<sup>9</sup>

Although there are notable efforts of the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers to promote greater international awareness, some believe that the profession has not responded adequately to the challenges and opportunities brought by the new global era. It is claimed that international activities in social work are uncoordinated and haphazard. The absence of a systematic attempt to internationalise the profession remains as an obstacle to meaningful contributions at the international level. While there is

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<sup>7</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 121.

<sup>8</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 1-7.

<sup>9</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 22.

disagreement about whether a commitment to international social work has increased or declined in recent years, it is more obvious that if the profession is to claim that it has truly transcended its interest with local concerns and adopted a broad international perspective, much more needs to be done.<sup>10</sup>

This paper examines the new paradigms for international social work under the conditions of globalisation. It aims to introduce aspects that are necessary to international social work discourse in the recognition of current global, social, political and economic phenomena. It suggests that social work action is strongly linked with human rights and that there is need for new kind of analysis of how the language of human rights should be integrated in social work theory and practice. In this paper social work is viewed as a global profession from the point of view of International Federation of Social Work definitions. It is a broad definition of the profession, where specific forms of action or certain geographical regions are not in the focus. However, some regional circumstances namely with regard to changing European social realities are considered in this context. The focus of this study is not so much on specific social phenomena or risk, but rather on the ongoing global processes that effect societies and communities and have major impact on social work theory and practice.

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<sup>10</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 23-24.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research questions

The language of human rights has not long been present in international social work research and only in recent years has the rights-based approach become more familiar among international social work scholars. The effects of globalisation have received much attention in many fields of social research and brought new aspects to the human rights discourse. The same development is true for social work and especially for the international aspect of the profession. As we are finding new solutions in managing the effects of globalisation, it becomes important for the social work profession to become more systematically familiar with and involved in the global human rights discourse. My research questions are:

1. *How do social work scholars currently view the relationship between social work and human rights? How is the new paradigm of 'rights-based practice' defined in international social work literature?*
2. *What kind of new paradigm does globalisation bring in the international social work discourse?*
3. *What is the role of social workers in responding global and local human rights claims? With regard to human rights protection, what kind of position can social work functions have at different levels of global networking and risk management?*

The aim of the study is to answer the questions by means of a literature review that covers research dealing with social work and human rights on the one hand, and social work and globalisation, on the other hand. While creating theory about the link between social work and human rights under the conditions of globalisation, analysis of the sources is simultaneously developed. The conclusions are finally drawn from this dialogue of theory and analysis.



## **2.2. Constructing social realities**

### **2.2.1. Constructionism and Critical Social Theory**

Constructionism (often also constructivism) is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being established by social actors. It implies that social categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision. More recently, the term has also come to include the notion that researchers' own accounts of the social world are also constructions, which means that the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality instead of a vision that can be regarded as definite. The constructionist position challenges the suggestion that categories such as organization or culture are pre-given and therefore confront social actors as external realities that they have no role in fashioning. Constructionism also suggests that the categories people employ in helping them to understand the natural and social world are in fact social products; the meaning of categories is constructed in and through interaction. This kind of perception has frequently displayed a concern with the language that is employed to present categories in particular ways.<sup>11</sup>

Questions of social ontology cannot be divorced from issues concerning the conduct of social research. Ontological assumptions will feed into the ways in which research questions are formulated and research is carried out. If a research question is formulated in such a way as to suggest that organizations and cultures are objective social entities, the researcher is likely to emphasise the beliefs and values of members of the culture. Alternatively, if the researcher formulates a research problem so that the tenuousness of organization and culture is heightened, it is likely that an emphasis will be placed on the active involvement of people in reality construction. The alternative ontological position to constructionism is objectivism, which asserts that social phenomena have an existence that is independent of social actors.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bryman 2008, pp. 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Bryman 2008, pp. 18-21.

There is a tradition of critical theory in social research and social work theory. By 'critical theory' we mean the tradition in social science which is characterised by an interpretive approach combined with a pronounced interest in critically disputing actual social realities. Its guiding principle is an emancipatory interest in knowledge. Critical theory maintains a dialectical view of society, claiming that social phenomena must always be viewed in the historical context. Against the assumption that societal conditions are natural and inevitable is posed the idea that societal conditions are historically created and heavily influenced by the asymmetries of power and interests, and that they can be made the subject of radical change. One of the aims of critical theory is to increase awareness of the political nature of social phenomena and to develop the ability of researchers to critically reflect those taken-for-granted realities which they are studying and of which they are inevitably a part, as members of society. Critical theory strongly supports the ideal of the independent critical researcher.<sup>13</sup>

There is disagreement on whether social work is essentially a conservative profession, one which primarily serves the interests of the dominant groups in society. A debate in these terms has little to contribute to the on-going discourse, since the profession comprises many diverse elements and contexts that seem entirely contradictory to each other, including the possibilities for both conservative and politically progressive agendas to meet. What is important, therefore, is what radical potential exists and how these possibilities are played out. Is there the possibility for engaging in social practices which enable people to participate in and create more inclusive social environments? What kind of forms might such practices take in what contexts?<sup>14</sup>

The professions of today operate in a context which potentially undercuts the assumptions upon which many of their ethos are based. Professions are a feature of modernist times; they are based on notions of the common good and unified, identifiable disciplines, or separate and clear bodies of knowledge that define them. Members are socialized into a tight professional community. A postmodern and global analysis, by pointing out the complexities and contradictions of our

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<sup>13</sup> Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000, pp. 110-111, 132.

<sup>14</sup> Fook, 2002, pp. 3.

experience, indicates that we need to be able to continually redevelop our critical practice so that it is relevant and responsive to both global and local contexts. We need to constantly revise our understandings of power and its expression, and our responsibilities to the possibilities it offers.<sup>15</sup>

The following chapter converses on the key concepts that are at the core of the outlook formulated in this study. Also some provisions of the current discourses around the terms with regard to new developments of international social work will be looked at.

### **2.2.2. Key Concepts**

#### **2.2.2.1. Human Rights**

This study does not apply a single definition of human rights. A discursive approach to human rights views human rights as essentially discursive, in other words rights are constructed through human interaction and a dialogue about what should constitute a shared humanity. Hence human rights are not static but will vary over time and in different cultures and political realities. A discursive approach suggests that universality of human rights must not be confused with a static, objectively existing, unchangeable notion of human rights. Because human rights must be seen as constructed, the important thing is the process of dialogue, discussion and exchange of that seeks to articulate such universal values.<sup>16</sup>

In this study the aim is to provide a multi-dimensional approach to human rights. On the one hand, it recognises the importance and achievements of the currently dominant human rights language of universalism with its huge potential also in future. On the other hand, it seeks to form a more balanced view of the concept of human rights, where human rights are not pre-given. In my view this is inevitable in a state of affairs, where there is a call for localised interpretations of needs and rights claims, and the currently dominate (some say, Western) language of human rights

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<sup>15</sup> Fook, 2002, pp. 25-29.

<sup>16</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 9.

has been regarded as not much more than an ideology<sup>17</sup>. For human rights to preserve its potential as a universal moral value base, these questions need to be carefully examined and analysed. Possible solutions to the question of how to localise universal human rights will be discussed later. Universal and relativistic definitions of human rights are discussed in chapter 3.

For social work the distinction between human and other rights, and the assertion that human rights must have priority over other rights, have particular relevance. There are a lot of occasions where in social work practice there is a conflict between an apparent 'right' and human rights. A common situation is where the demands of managers require that social workers deny services that can be justified on the grounds of human rights. The 'right to manage' – or the need to save resources – certainly does not qualify as a human right. In this case it would be morally justifiable to challenge the management practices that lead to a denial of human rights, but obviously there are many situational factors that have to be taken into account when choosing a wise course of action.<sup>18</sup>

#### **2.2.2.2. *International Social Work***

The definition of international social work is not standardised and there is no agreement about what international social work entails. Some define international social work as a field of practice, where social workers with specific skills and knowledge work in international agencies. A variation of this approach recognises international social work as practice with immigrants or refugees. Another approach has less emphasis on practice and defines international social work as the contacts and exchanges that take place between social workers from different parts of the world. Yet another, a broader approach, views international social work as global awareness that enhances the ability of social workers to go beyond their

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<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Makau, 2003; Kennedy, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 15.

preoccupation with local contexts and adopt a role in a broad, global setting. Many believe that the issue of definition needs to be resolved.<sup>19</sup>

Without concrete definitions about the nature and scope of international social work, it is unlikely that social workers will become more involved in the field. Furthermore, if schools of social work want to increase international curriculum content, the educators need to understand what this content is to comprise. One way to address the issue of the definition is to formulate a broad definition of international social work that incorporates different approaches. Instead of juxtaposing different views it is possible to see that global awareness as well as specific forms of practice that require specific skills all have their merit.<sup>20</sup>

In this paper the concept of social work is viewed as a global profession from the point of view of the definitions set out by the main international social work associations, International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The core definition of social work can be found on the websites of the organisations:

*The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of the people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the point where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.*

The primary mission of all social workers is to enhance the well-being and to help meet the basic human needs of all people, with specific consideration to the empowerment of people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and impoverished. (NASW 1999.) Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice in relation to individuals, groups and communities. In addition, they should object negative discrimination, respect ethnic and cultural diversity in societies, advocate for equal resources distribution and work towards more inclusive society.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> Rodgers 2009, p. 3-4.

Even in the European context, social work does not represent a picture of a unified profession. On the one hand this can be interpreted as a lack of professionalisation that could be overcome with the help of professional associations promoting for it. The lack of professionalisation is very much true; if you take a stand of examining the salaries that social workers receive in comparison to other professions that require the same level of education and enjoy similar levels of responsibility and accountability, it is not surprising that social work professionals are disadvantageous in this regard.<sup>22</sup> The professionalisation movement should not necessarily have to stand as contradictory to those ethical and other standings that social work has in relation to society and to the disadvantaged people whose rights they defend. In this regard, there is indeed a lot that the professional associations can, and in many contexts, have done for better recognition of the profession. This has impact on the desirability of social work education and the availability of qualified, committed, and motivated social workers, which is essential for achieving good quality and sustainability of services.

A historical approach, however, offers another useful perspective to the professionalisation discourse. It states that the lack of social autonomy is precisely the attribute that identifies social work as a *social* profession, an activity that does not distance itself from social processes, in the way that medicine, psychology and other therapeutic professions, and legal professions have done. Social work's mandate is derived in the process, where society, instead of a group of experts, collectively defines criteria for well-being, social integration, and social solidarity.<sup>23</sup>

The professionalisation process is linked to social work's dual dependency to the state, and to the constantly developing processes in people's lives more on a grass-roots level. Early social workers came to see that solidarity could not be built only by mechanical means of control, which was the modern states response to social instability, or by traditional natural processes. Social workers' reflection was to initiate the process of training.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 11

<sup>24</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 13.

One of the basic characteristics of social work is that it is always concerned reconciling the complex relationship between public and private responsibilities and that it carries the mandate of the pair of them, no matter whether its statutory responsibilities are located more on the public or on the private side. Social work activities are regulated to highly varying degrees by national law, and different policy frameworks induce social workers to apply the law in different ways. In Europe the notions of the state are broadly differentiated, between the Roman-catholic tradition of deriving authority from natural law which needs to pay less attention to securing the obedience and legitimation by the general population, and the protestant tradition which holds authorities to have a duty for well-being of the people and the maintenance of a public order.<sup>25</sup> Because social workers often deal with vulnerable populations and with those whose rights are violated in the private or domestic sphere, it is important for human rights-based social work to locate both social work and human rights in the public/private divide.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to international social work, there was a study<sup>27</sup> carried out in the 1990s in which data was gathered from 96 social work educators from 20 countries about their understanding of 'international social work'. The core aspects can be grouped into four main themes:<sup>28</sup>

1. international seminars and conferences, opportunities for exchanges and international practice and consultancy;
2. comparative study of social policies, values, practice approaches, etc.;
3. knowledge about the role of international organizations, financial institutions, multinational corporations, and international conventions;
4. struggles for social justice and human rights which recognize the increased relevance of international events and interdependence of populations.

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<sup>25</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Results published in Falk & Nagy 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Lyons 1999.

### *2.2.2.3. Reconciliation of social work roles and functions*

Although there is general agreement that different methods of social work, casework (or clinical social work), group work and community work, form an integral part of the profession's activities, preferences for different methods link to different conceptions of social work's roles, commitments and functions. While most social workers believe that the primary concern should be treating the problems of the needy, others think that it should be involved in social reform. Some stress the preventive forms of intervention while others want social work to promote development and progressive social change. These different views on social work's function and role are found in domestic debates, but are particularly marked in international connections, especially with reference to the developing countries of global South. In fact, in the recent times evidence of a greater commitment to developmental forms of social work practice has emerged both in the developing and the industrialised countries.<sup>29</sup>

However, it cannot be claimed that social activism has been popular in the profession or that it has inspired many social workers. Few social workers pay attention to these activities and some even regard them as inappropriate. Controversially, those social workers who are committed to social action often regard therapeutic practice as a tool for perpetuating rooted inequalities and supporting interests of elites. It will not be easy to reconcile these different views about social work's proper role and function in society. Disagreements on the issue have been expressed for many decades without a real accommodation been created. Thus, if these functions are to be effectively integrated, social workers will need to recognise the value of the profession's diverse commitments and appreciate the potential that they can all contribute to human welfare.<sup>30</sup>

Given the importance of grounding social work in its cultural, social and political context, it is essential that social work will be constructed differently in different locations. This has major benefits for social work as it allows for a diversity of interests and practices, but it also poses problems. Readers of social work literature

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<sup>29</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 28-29.

<sup>30</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 29.



will seek to apply it in different contexts, even where the very idea of social work is contested. It can also be grounds for misunderstandings and ambiguity when social workers meet across cultural boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

#### **2.2.2.4. Globalisation**

Until recent decades the social work profession and the operations of social services within the various types of welfare state were somehow exempt from the strict application of market principles. Lately they have become increasingly incorporated into them. Social work is becoming an instrument of commodification, of increasing the market value of human labour and even care itself. Part of the global economic and social changes is the reconstructing of the nation state as the mediating institution between welfare and economics. Reduction of the steering capacity of the state through social policies is one of the effects of globalisation, which is a complex interaction of developments at the technological, cultural and social, political and economic level. Walter Lorenz describes these developments as follows:<sup>32</sup>

- The technological changes, that have offered media access and communication links beyond borders and which have caused a shift in the perception of global geographic relations;
- Cultural counter-flow of homogenisation and differentiation, which re-establishes cultural boundaries and sets identities in a permanent state of flux;
- New social phenomena around the processes of identity formation – identities are no longer contained within national and geographical entities and established cultural patterns, but offered as seemingly unlimited choices, which are however denied to most on account of resources and power;
- Politically, the nature of the nation state is changing, on the one hand ‘externally’ in the processes of globalisation, regionalisation and trans-national networking, and ‘internally’ in the processes of denationalization of the state;

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<sup>31</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 138-139

- Economic changes, liberalisation of the market economy from statist policies, which has weakened the national economy as an object of economic management.

Lorenz emphasizes that these economic transformations are not to be seen as necessities akin to natural processes over which one has ultimately no control. The political choices behind these developments give reason to re-think the political mandate of social work and the political organisation of social solidarity. The political culture has impact on the variable effects in respective countries, even though there are changes that appear identical. For instance, the favoured concepts of ‘activation’ and ‘empowerment’ that can be found in social work methodology across Europe can be regarded as positive or negative developments.

Khan and Dominelli<sup>33</sup> identify globalisation as having the following key features:

- Mobility of production processes from advanced capitalist countries to developing countries;
- The spread and rising power of transnational corporations worldwide;
- The liberalization of international finance systems; and
- Reductions in transportation and communication costs.

Whatever the emphasis in different definitions of globalisation, we can identify some particular characteristics of the late twentieth century context. These include the extent to which worldwide bodies, such as the United Nations (UN) and World Bank, have encouraged international dialogue and the establishment of trans-national corporations and trading agreements. Secondly, we have witnessed the influential development of information and communication technology and rapid mass transport systems that allow both the physical interchange of people and the spread of ideas. Thirdly, there is a gradual recognition that behaviour in one country or region of the world can have profound implications for whole populations in other societies. With regard to the third characteristic, some states have been slower to recognise the reality of global interdependence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Khan & Dominelli 2000, p. 96.

<sup>34</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 23-25.

While some social work and social policy writers agree that economic globalisation driven by speculative capitalism has its effects of serious harm, some also emphasise its multifaceted dimensions and stress the opportunities that globalisation brings forth by enhancing international collaboration, promoting peace and increasing cultural awareness. Inspired by internationalism there are more optimistic views of the prospect of regulating global capitalism and of contributing to collective responsibility for social welfare.<sup>35</sup>

### **2.3. Literature review as a research method**

Scientific information has certain characteristics. One of the key elements is publicity of information: cognitions are scientific by nature only if they are public, accessible to all, and for everyone to evaluate and use. Scientific findings are reported in numerous publications. Researchers normally have to follow journals of their field of interest and attend conferences and trainings – all methods of gathering analysed data are generally welcome. Literature reviews are collected information about a particular limited field. Typically review is conducted to answer a specific research question, research problem. It is obvious that a researcher is very pleased to discover a carefully conducted literature review – someone has collected together relevant information for him. There are different types of literature reviews. Writing one requires that there is a scope of previous research on the subject. The value of a literature review is good if the review follows a certain systematics, if the reliability is evaluated and the results can be clearly counted in detail.<sup>36</sup>

Different terms are used in literature to describe methods of collecting existing data: literature review, narrative literature review, traditional literature review, systematic overview, and meta-analysis. Literature review helps to structure and classify existing research. Collecting together research data from certain field provides

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<sup>35</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> Leino-Kilpi 2007, pp. 2.

information about how much research information there is and what is the composition of the contents, structure and methods of existing research.<sup>37</sup>

Narrative, traditional, and those reviews typically simply understood as literature reviews of existing studies are useful to describe context or development of a problem, to explain theoretical or conceptual backgrounds of an issue or to combine different fields or research. Review offers a general view to the subject, but it has to be noted that literature review always presents a point of view of a certain researcher or a group of scholars. Search, selection and analyse methods of the studies are not always described in detail which means that the reader cannot carefully evaluate these aspects. In a way it means that reader must rely on the conductor of the review on these matters, which causes problems to critical examination of the research.<sup>38</sup>

Conducting literature review requires a lot of commitment as well as going deep into the subject of research: researcher must read and think critically, and critically evaluate different perspectives, research settings and results. Researcher will have to point out the detected contradictions and shortcomings in existing studies. He has to know the area well in order to select only relevant material that is clearly linked with the research topic. General and outlying studies in relation to the topic are only referred shortly, whereas those studies that form basis to the new research are looked at in more detail and given more focus. Thus, researcher does not approach existing information from the point of view of even-handedness, but deals with conflicting results in an objective, honest manner. However, the new research problem has to remain as the foundation of the new research. Then, through means of selection and argumentation, the researcher will discuss with the existing research. Literature review should be structured in a way that distinguishes different standpoints, schools and interpretations clearly from each other.<sup>39</sup>

The method of this study could be described as traditional or narrative literature review, which means that filtering and selection of the sources is not specifically systemised. It is a general overview on the topic without strict rules. Literature

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<sup>37</sup> Johansson 2007, pp. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Cook *et al.* 1997, Jones & Evans 2000, Petticrew 2003, Burns & Grove 2005, Klassen *et al.* 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Hirsjärvi *et al.*, pp. 109-110.

review is a suitable method for studying the relationship between international social work, human rights and globalisation, since the topic has only received attention in recent years and there is not much research from this field. This is also the reason why systematic literature review was not chosen as a research method – using different databases, search criteria, catalogues and journals as well as open internet was necessary in order to collect enough sources and to form a reliable general picture on the topic. A common problem concerning broad literature reviews with numerous different sources is that there might be no connection between the chosen sources or the connecting link is faint. Articles might also be selected based on personal interests, which can exclude relevant sources. Furthermore, the quality of the chosen sources might range strongly in broad literature reviews.<sup>40</sup> These possible problems are recognised and attempted to avoid by ensuring that the selected sources are strongly connected to the core research problem, and by paying attention to the publication where the articles have been published. One goal is to introduce the most well-known classics and acknowledged pioneers of the field in question. Literature review on the topic will be useful for international social workers involved in human rights discourses and other researchers interested in the link between social work and human rights under current global developments as well as future visions of rights-based social work.

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<sup>40</sup> Metsämuuronen 2006, pp. 31.

### **3. BUILDING BALANCE BETWEEN UNIVERSAL AND RELATIVISTIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

In international social work there are deeply rooted beliefs about values, cultural diversity and national identity. It is widely believed that social workers share a common set of universal values and that they respect cultural diversity, and recognise national values. However, the issue is much less straightforward as one might assume. Historically, the profession has been committed to formulating a set of universal value principles. In the United States, for instance, the principles were eventually institutionalised as a set of ethical precepts, including concepts such as self-determination, non-judgmentalism and confidentiality. This kind of values had a powerful influence on social work, and shaped attitudes of generations of social workers. Ideas such as equality of opportunity, freedom and individual responsibility were not only the base for attitudes in the United States, and the question of whether social work's liberal values are relevant to societies with variable value systems, gradually became an issue in international social work. As a result of these debates, social workers began to reflect more critically on the relevance of Western social work to cultural, economic and social realities of other societies. In this context, an idea of the need to develop indigenous forms of social work practice arose. These forms of practice could better address local cultural, economic and social realities.<sup>41</sup>

In these developments it has been asked whether social work's acceptance of cultural and social diversity is the best posture to take. Some believe that social work – with a strong link to human rights principles – does have universal values which all social workers should respect. With regard to the issue of universalism, many social workers are uneasy about abandoning their national identities in favour of membership of some kind of abstract global society. In spite of global consciousness, most people are closely identified with their countries and many are proud of their ethnic identity. Reconciling these positions is extremely difficult. However, it is helpful to recognise the centrality of ethnic and national identity in people's lives and to respect the role that international collaboration can play in promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and appreciation of cultural difference. This kind of

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<sup>41</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 31.

accommodation is urgently needed and the issues need to be more widely debated in the social work profession.<sup>42</sup>

Human rights can be seen as a set of unifying social principles, and as such they form an important toolkit that allows us to explore how the negative aspects of social division can be countered or addressed. Organisations like the UN have made much effort to arrive at universally applicable human rights that form a foundation for our understanding of how we should socially interact. However, as such a toolkit, human rights are only as good as our ability to utilise them.<sup>43</sup> The problem of universalism versus cultural relativism is central to understanding human rights and it poses difficult questions for researchers, theoreticians and practitioners<sup>44</sup>.

### **3.1. Universal approach to Human Rights**

The issue of universalism is linked to the question of social work's commitment to 'internationalism'. Internationalism is an ideology which, conversely to nationalism, advocated greater international integration. Internationalism is also in favour of replacing of completing national governments by some form of global governance.<sup>45</sup>

The concept of a universal set of human rights is not uncomplicated and without its critics. Human rights, especially as set out in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are criticised for their Western- industrialised cultural bias, and their general nature and difficulties around implementation.<sup>46</sup> It has been stated that human rights that are understood simply as "universal", or self-evident, do not consider cultural difference, and will therefore be applied in the same way regardless of context. This simplistic approach has led to the criticism that human rights are

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<sup>42</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 53.

<sup>44</sup> Ife 2007, pp. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Midgley 2001, p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 54.

merely part of a Western imperialist project and that they reflect discourses that are predominantly Western, individualist, modernist and patriarchal.<sup>47</sup>

A naïve universalism views universal human rights constant in every situation, ignoring the importance of culture and diversity in how people construct their lives and derive meaning for their experiences. It assumes that human rights somehow “exist” in an objective sense that is external to the experience of the actors involved. This view can be seen as philosophically dubious, and even dangerous, as it has been associated with colonialist practice and imposing values at the cost of others.<sup>48</sup>

However, the universality of human rights should not be inevitably viewed as static, unchangeable notion of human rights. Rather than objectively existing, human rights must be seen as constructed values. The important thing, therefore, is the process of dialogue, discussion and exchange of ideas.<sup>49</sup> Social work practice must be based on human rights that are sensitive to humanity and collective citizenship; it needs to be contextualised and sensitive to the culture and society in which it is situated.<sup>50</sup>

### **3.2. Relativistic approaches to Human Rights**

At the other end of the universalism-relativism spectrum, human rights are seen as to be under several transnational discourses. In these approaches human rights normativity itself is a key category for analysis. The instruments and legal arenas are seen as structures of knowledge and power through which human rights emerge in social practice. These discursive approaches assume that social practice is, in fact, partly to constitute the idea of human rights. The discursive understandings of human rights are internally diverse but what is common is that the concept of human rights is conceptualised, studied and understood. Even though many international lawyers and human rights activists would consider discursive approach to human rights possibly both vague and ethically questionable, there is no doubt that scholars of

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<sup>47</sup> Pereira 1997; Gibney 2003, 1-15; Ife 2007, 76.

<sup>48</sup> Ife 2007, pp. 77-78.

<sup>49</sup> Ife 2001, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> Rodgers 2009, p. 3.



human rights practices have demonstrated the usefulness in understanding human rights beyond the narrow perspective of international law.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that human rights are abstractly seen as global has misled some into assuming that human rights practices do or they should operate at a much wider scale than they actually do. Thus it makes a significant difference between how the idea of human rights in its major form must be understood and how human rights are encountered in practice. This difference makes it challenging for theoretical analysis to account for the different dimensions of contemporary human rights discourse.<sup>52</sup>

In anthropological discussions, human rights and citizenship has been a growing field since the mid- to late 1990s. More recently, there has been a shift in the discussions about rights that anthropologists are having and not having. This has meant that the universalism vs. relativism debate is no longer dominating as it used to in the latter half of the twentieth century. During that epoch, anthropologists tended to concur with relativists and to view many basic conceptions of international human rights with criticism; these included universal human dignity and notions of human nature. These abstract formulations of morality were seen as the products of an international order dominated by the West. The highpoint of the relativistic view was the early 1990s, and replacing the opposition between capitalism and socialism, the relativistic discourse was also more prevalent in the global political arena than it is today.<sup>53</sup>

However, since the mid-1990s, there has been a change in the field of global politics. The rise of ‘new humanitarianism’ and the shift towards global justice has remarkably shaped the way anthropologists approach rights. In the late 1990s the developments gave credibility to the idea of enforceable international rights. In fact, as Wilson and Mitchell<sup>54</sup> point out, between 1990-2000 there were twice as many UN humanitarian missions that were often based on human rights grounds, as there had been in the whole 1948-1990 period. This discussion refers to the development

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<sup>51</sup> Goodale 2007, pp. 7-9.

<sup>52</sup> Goodale 2007, pp. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson & Mitchell 2003, pp. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Wilson & Mitchell 2003.

of global human rights machinery, but the rights talk simultaneously expanded to other areas. In the field of economic development, key agencies such as the World Bank and government development ministries had started to adopt a 'rights-based' approach to development.<sup>55</sup>

Relativistic and social critique of rights approach has been successful in addressing some fundamental problems linked to the rights regime and legal process. These observations include the notion of how a rights regime creates certain types of subjectives, such as victims or perpetrators, as well as certain types of activities, such as common crimes vs. crimes against humanity. This kind of viewing of social reality often does injustice to the complex system of subjectivities in a social or historical setting. Qualifying individuals as either victims or perpetrators seems simplified, since the same individuals might hold alternative identities, e.g. survivors or freedom fighters.<sup>56</sup>

In the complex moral and political landscape, anthropologists need to critically evaluate the consequences of the rise of rights language. Clearly, the culture concept and its accompanying discourse of relativism are no longer appropriate to the task. Evidently, there are problems in translating global rights language to local practice, but the old relativist vision of a 'clash of cultures' or the polarities of tradition/modernity or western/non-western are too simplified to generate much insight. Consequently, criticism of the definition or operation of rights now seems more based in analyses of power and social regulation rather than the logic of cultures; the criticism towards rights fixing social categories is more criticism of state legality than cultural difference.<sup>57</sup>

The anthropological views on human rights have recently moved beyond the relativist approach on human rights and cultural phenomena. The problem has recognized not to be about universalism or relativism, but about access to global justice and about the lack of accountability of rights institutions. The discussion has been reframed in terms of interconnections, networks and movements of people,

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<sup>55</sup> Wilson & Mitchell 2003, pp. 2-3.

<sup>56</sup> Wilson & Mitchell 2003, pp. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Wilson & Mitchell 2003, pp. 4.

ideas and things rather than static cultures in conflict. Yet the challenge remains how to make the process ethical and empirically informed.<sup>58</sup> Hastrup agrees saying that anthropologists do no longer feel need to take stand either for or against (universal) human rights and thus favouring either something often interpreted as Eurocentrism or solidarity towards weaker populations of the world.<sup>59</sup>

### **3.3. The dialogue between universal and relativistic interpretations of Human Rights and tools for analysis in Social Work profession**

A problem with cultural relativism, as addressed above, is that it assumes an uncritical acceptance of societal structure that creates the cultural norms. Whoever determines the cultural, religious and legal norms in a given society controls the outcome, and therefore social workers should guard against an uncritical acceptance of cultural relativism over universal human rights principles.<sup>60</sup>

Uncritical universalism may lead to colonialist practice and uncritical relativism can lead to disempowerment. Perhaps the most commonly discussed problem concerns female circumcision, which is practiced in communities that are often associated with Islam. Many people, including many Muslims, consider the practice as unacceptable mutilation of women's bodies, deeply affiliated with male power and control, and a violation of women's rights. By taking a stand against this practice, is one imposing "Western" cultural values on others or should the action be more seen as interference to brutal violence? Stating the question as a black-and-white choice notably oversimplifies a complex issue. Yet, too often this is the way the problem is viewed in media and in the professional literature. It is thus clear that the problem of universalism versus relativism requires a more careful and sophisticated analysis. A less dualistic view of universalism and relativism is essential if we are to move beyond the simple view of seeing the two approaches as in opposition.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wilson & Mitchell 2003, pp. 9-10.

<sup>59</sup> Hastrup 2003, pp. 18.

<sup>60</sup> Reichert 2007, pp. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Ife 2007, pp. 77.

Elisabeth Reichert<sup>62</sup> introduces guidelines, which can help to identify and resolve conflicts between universal principles of human rights and specific cultural, religious and legal norms. By analyzing the background of a given culture-related curiosity it becomes easier to understand how to address the arising human rights problems in a constructive manner. According to Reichert's guidelines it is useful to examine and consider the following aspects:

1. *History of the cultural practice;*
2. *The powerbrokers who determined the cultural norm; and*
3. *The cultural norm within a contemporary human rights standard.*

By analyzing the history, relevant democratic factors and contemporary human rights standards, social workers can better understand the role of cultural relativism in human rights. The analysis helps to determine whether cultural relativism should overrule when policy or practice conflicts with certain human rights standards.

Jim Ife, too, suggests that a careful analysis of the universalism/relativism problem is needed, and that cultural context should be considered before making any strong statements about the application of human rights concepts. A way to think about universalism and relativism is to consider a range of universal rights, but with cultural, political, historical and economic factors leading different rights to the forefront in different times and places. Thus, although seen as universal, the significance of human rights will vary with the context.<sup>63</sup>

Another approach is to consider the relationship between rights and needs. There is a common assumption that there are universal human needs from which we can derive ideas of human rights. This, however, should be reversed. We can think of human rights as universal and derive needs from our understanding of rights. Even a basic human need such as need for food only makes sense if we accept the idea of the human right to live, and as reversed, if the right to life is denied, then a normative need for food cannot be readily justified. Thus, a statement of need that a social worker makes – be it needs of a person, family or community – rests on the implicit assumption of the rights of the person, family or community concerned. This

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<sup>62</sup> Reichert 2007, pp. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Ife 2007, pp. 80.

provides a useful way of thinking about universalism/relativism. While assuming that human rights are universal, needs derived from these rights will vary depending on the cultural context. The right to education, for example, might in one context mean teachers and buildings, in another it is physical structures, and in another it can be educational materials for families. Universal rights give rise to very different culturally determined needs.<sup>64</sup> The relationship between needs and rights will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Ife offers another way of moving beyond the universalism/relativism dilemma. That is to realize that human rights are universal *aspirations*, not *empirical* universals. Human rights do not exist in an objective positivist sense, but are constructed to represent our ideas about the features that we have in common with humanity. Human rights, thus, are not static, “handed down in tablets of stone” from the United Nations. According to Ife, ideas of human rights are constantly reconstructed as our ideas and values change. The universalism is found in one’s wishing that this right would apply to all human beings, not in his assertion that in fact it does.<sup>65</sup>

The fruitfulness of this way of thinking of human rights is that it opens a dialogue. If another person and I have different ideas of what should constitute our human rights, we can listen to and learn from each other in order to develop a shared understanding.<sup>66</sup> It has to be noted, however, that if one allows human rights to be left under everlasting open dialogue, without clearly defining human rights by common terms, it makes it very difficult if not impossible, to operate with human rights in practice, for example to seek justice throughout judicial processes. Undoubtedly, Ife also recognises this standpoint.

Social workers might find themselves asking the question of whose values are they protecting when defending universal human rights. The issue has been raised in the context of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), as it has been accused of fostering Western cultural supremacy and lacking focus in group or collective rights. This challenge is thought to undermine the universality of the

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<sup>64</sup> Ife 2007, pp. 80.

<sup>65</sup> Ife 2007, pp. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Ife 2007, pp. 81.

UDHR. However the charges of relativity overlook the number and variety of regimes that have signed on to the UDHR. Thus, rather than going for the universality-relativity debate, it is useful to envisage the provisions as contingent of context, as the people involved, in their social environments, create its meaning. For social workers connecting the person to a social environment is familiar, which can help social workers to encourage constructive debate on the issue.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 24.

#### **4. CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS' HUMAN RIGHTS AWARENESS AND KNOW-HOW ON HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE**

Whatever their particular roles locally, it seems likely that social workers are well placed to identify the outcomes or 'costs' of globalisation to particular individuals, families, groups and communities and to contribute to economic liberalism. This requires social professionals to go beyond the implementation of selected social policies, which many see as their role, to playing a more notable part in identifying gaps in national and international policies, and developing their skills in advocacy and lobbying.<sup>68</sup>

The International Federation of Social Work proposes that social workers should draw on human rights perspectives in formulating their analysis and responses to the impact of globalisation. The Federation suggests that social professionals should engage themselves into the following discourses at local and international levels:

1. ensuring the availability of universal education for children up to 16 years of age;
2. promoting employment opportunities;
3. lobbying for social protection programmes for people who are unable to support themselves;
4. protecting children through supporting and implementing policy measures based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
5. developing all new initiatives on the basis of citizen participation and empowerment approaches.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 33.

<sup>69</sup> IFSW; Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 35-36.

#### 4.1. Human Rights in Social Work education

There has been increase in the literature about the benefits of ‘internationalising’ the curriculum of social professionals. However, as yet, there has been relatively little systematic study at international level about how much the international perspective is in fact incorporated in social studies and research. Not much assessment has been made about to what extent newly qualified social workers include international dimensions in their knowledge for practice.<sup>70</sup>

Social work defines itself as a profession dedicated to social justice and more recently also to human rights. Silvia Staub-Bernasconi notes that if social work is to contribute to the future development of human rights, especially those of economic, social and cultural, social work education and practice must change. The international aspect in social work education is particularly important. Students must be prepared to recognize the global context of social work practice. Education should integrate social and economic justice in an understanding of distributive justice, human rights, and the global interconnections of oppression. These aims are recognized by the Council of Social Work Education, which is a nonprofit national association based in the United States.<sup>71</sup>

In the late 1980s the International Federation of Social Workers started to adopt a strong program of human rights. Because of the interdependence between human rights and social work practice, the IFSW has focused its work in the area of human rights, and in specific economic and social rights. Human rights are seen as inseparable from social work theory, values, ethics, and practice and therefore it is difficult to perform social work practice in a society where basic human rights are neglected.<sup>72</sup>

A right-based orientation and an interest in delivering social justice are today clear in the international definition of social work jointly agreed by the key international associations, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and

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<sup>70</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 196.

<sup>71</sup> Staub-Bernasconi 2007, pp. 154-155; CSWE 2008, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Healy 2001, pp. 58.



International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Thus one would assume human rights to have a high profile in social work curricula. The position of human rights teaching in the curriculum, however, except as a general commitment in social work's code of ethics, is more often optional than compulsory. Law books for social workers have little human rights focus. Many students enter employment unaware of the potential that human rights legislation can provide to enhance practice.<sup>73</sup>

Lena Dominelli argues for making human rights a central and compulsory part of social work curriculum. She wants to remedy the current situation and suggests that concern to uphold human rights should have significant role in all classroom discussions, not only those courses labeled 'human rights'. Dominelli notes that the General Assemblies of both IASSW and IFSW have accepted a global ethics document in 2004 that contains specific references to the key UN human rights instruments. She thinks that these should have well-rehearsed coverage on all social work courses. As for now, they are rarely considered. Dominelli also points out, that while the issue of embedding human rights firmly in social work curriculum remains elusive, there is a small literature available for use in teaching the subject. This suggests that a substantial initiative is needed to shift curriculum planning to this area.<sup>74</sup>

On individual and organizational levels, social workers can participate in identifying prejudices towards vulnerable and oppressed groups. Social workers should participate lobbying for economic, social and cultural rights and promote consciousness-raising in relation to these rights. Social workers can also directly assist individuals in access to education, work, and social and medical services. At an international level, the profession should refer to international documents issued by the United Nations. These could include the periodic nation reports on economic, social, and cultural rights.<sup>75</sup>

In developing policies and practices at an international level, international social work associations have produced a joint document on Global Standards for social

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<sup>73</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 17-18.

<sup>75</sup> Staub-Bernasconi 2007, pp. 156-157.

work education. The ‘Global Qualifying Standards for Social Work Education and Training’ was ratified in Adelaide, 2004, largely welcomed by members. Also in this context, however, the familiar concern over the possibilities of ‘Western imperialism’ and ‘standardization’ was raised and has been discussed.<sup>76</sup>

#### **4.2. Legal Human Rights framework relevant for Social Workers**

There is a call for preventive and community development strategies in social work profession. Reference to international conventions and standards have been identified as useful frameworks for viewing local developments as well as for forming international initiatives. However, this also needs to be linked with the need to recognise the interdependence between nations and the different globalisation-related implications for social professionals in different locations.<sup>77</sup>

The first efforts to internationalise human rights were inspired by the atrocities in World War II, particularly the Holocaust. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), ratified in 1948, came to symbolize the incredible achievement and signaled humanity’s comprehensive attempt to deal with President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” – freedom of speech and expression; freedom of worship; freedom from want; and freedom from fear. Bedrock of the British welfare state was Sir William Beveridge’s “Five Giants” – want disease, squalor, ignorance and idleness – that are also addressed in the Declaration. In British social work, for instance, they remain as practice issues since “want”, now called “poverty”, affects 80 percent of clients requiring social work support.<sup>78</sup>

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, being a child of its time, has faced criticism due to its nature of declaration. Even though it is considered to be an internationally binding agreement, the crucial limitation is that the rights that it encompasses are located in the framework of a nation-state responsible for enforcing provisions and punishing violations. Without an independent compliance

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<sup>76</sup> See special Issue of Social Work Education 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 38.

<sup>78</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 19.

mechanism, states can seriously fail to adhere to the requirements of the Declaration. In addition to the lack of independent enforcement mechanisms, other key criticism of the UDHR include its focus on individual rights and its failure to deal with the complexities of human migration and globalisation.<sup>79</sup>

It is imperative that global social workers are aware of how to apply human rights principles to their professional practice. In order to do so, social workers need to define and identify human rights, recognise the value of these rights, analyse them, and take action towards realisation of these rights. In addition, social workers need to understand the relationship between the national code of ethics of a given country and human rights, and critically analyse whether human rights have been incorporated into the code of ethics. This would include analysis of whether social work code of ethics give human rights a prominent place with the definition of social worker's human responsibility, as well as evaluation of national and global sanctioning with regard to human rights. Moreover, social workers should aim toward making their national code of ethics consistent with international human rights principles. They need not only to ensure that human rights are valued in client systems, but also safeguard that human rights are protected and enforced. Understanding national codes of ethics and how relate to human rights helps social workers to practice and advocate within a culturally competent mindset. To strengthen the ability to provide effective practice throughout the world, governments need to incorporate the national code of ethics into national law in order to have legal power and sanctioning to ensure human rights are properly protected.<sup>80</sup>

#### **4.3. Regenerating Social Work Curriculum for a stronger promotion of Human Rights**

Globally, we continue to see forms of power imbalance, in the relationships both within and between countries, and it is important to promote policies, practices, and curricula in the social and education fields that do not re-create forms of dominance and dependence. New developments need to facilitate cross-national relationships

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<sup>79</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 23.

<sup>80</sup> Rodgers 2009, p. 7-8.

and research, to endorse internationally informed analysis and action. It is apparent that there is an inter-relationship between international problems that are a concern of social professionals. For instance, it is hard to separate out issues related to health care needs from those of poverty, or from migration or conflict. Thus, a multi-factor analysis of social problems should be adopted, and in cooperation with other professionals to develop services and programmes which connect personal problems with structural and political aspects.<sup>81</sup>

Human Rights are central in promoting human well-being. Being able to intervene while upholding human rights is integral to this goal. To make the most of social workers' expertise in ensuring that human rights are practiced, it is crucial that the social work curriculum provides the framework for acquiring the knowledge and developing the skills that assist realising human rights. Dominelli<sup>82</sup> suggests that human rights should be included in all existing foundational courses and specific human rights electives should be offered in addition. With regard to these goals, social work curriculum could include the following contents:

- *The history of human rights*
- *International legislation, namely the relevant UN documents*
- *National and regional legislation on human rights*
- *Key issues and illustrations for practice, e.g. women and domestic violence, violence victims of war, human trafficking, child soldiers*
- *Examples of human rights violations and actions that can be taken*
- *Processes that uphold human dignity and worth*
- *Enhancing human rights in practice*
- *Possibilities and dangers of taking action*
- *Cross-cultural issues and human rights*
- *Skills in mediation and non-violent conflict resolution*
- *Whistle-blowing procedures*

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<sup>81</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 185-186.

<sup>82</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 39-41.

The mission of social work and all forms of social work education need to be redefined to make them relevant to new globalised conditions. New developments would recognise the growing importance of international civil societies with different missions in different locations. Social workers are now required to work at global and local levels and to combine the two, and in this sense, international social work should not be a specialisation. However, Lyons *et al.* also call for development in specialist knowledge and personnel. They note that international professional associations and those engaged in social work education and research bear responsibility for developing this area.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Lyons *et al.*, 2006, pp. 204.

## **5. THE NEW PARADIGMS FOR INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK ENGAGED TO HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **5.1. Globalisation and Human Rights**

‘Globalisation’ is a familiar term to many people, but there are ongoing debates about its meaning, effects, and relevance. Globalisation is understood by many to be essentially an economic phenomenon, and other approaches include numerous perspectives – international relations, government, politics, social theory, industrial relations, management, trade, and so on.<sup>84</sup>

Lena Dominelli<sup>85</sup> notes that challenges in protecting human rights have become more difficult as the world is filled with insecurity and uncertainty caused by increasingly frequent natural disaster, environmental degradation, armed conflict and terrorism. Human rights in today’s world have complicated multilayered and internationalised contexts. Respect for diversity in increasingly multicultural societies places new challenge to human rights protection. Globalisation, migration and internationalism are now near at hand. Existing responds to situations face problems as these factors interact with regional, national and local levels.

Dominelli states that social workers are obliged to understand multilayered, international contexts and meanings for those people they serve. Social workers, along with other practitioners, have a vital role in helping people to realise their human rights around culture and identity, ensuring that people understand the links between the local, national and international aspects of these rights. Social work education should provide tools and skills to address these points in practice.<sup>86</sup>

As for increasing global uncertainties and criminal action, efforts should be made to examine ways that uphold moral integrity and behaviour consistent with recognizing human rights in dealing with lawbreakers. We know from historical examples, like

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<sup>84</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 22.

<sup>85</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 26-27.

<sup>86</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 27-28.

the developments in Northern Ireland, that bringing opposing parties into a dialogue has produced progress in resolving conflict. Social workers with expertise in non-violent resolutions to conflict can transfer this knowledge to the human rights arena, provided that the curriculum prioritizes human rights as an issue.<sup>87</sup>

One of the major consequences of globalisation is the increasing homogeneity in the ethnicity of societies. Viewed from the historical perspective in Europe, it was not before the 1950s that the states of Europe had experienced an unprecedented ethnic homogenisation of their populations. Therefore the question of ethnic and cultural identity did not appear on social work's methodology agenda before the 1980s when the intersection of academic discourses and civil society processes had to be revised entirely. The articulation of ethnic diversity in European societies which occurred during the 1980s and 90s raised fundamental questions about social work's role in society and about social work methods.<sup>88</sup>

Increasing migration, namely in the European nation state project, calls for questioning the myth of homogeneity of a society, where insecurities and anxieties become exposed and defensive reactions take place. It also tests the boundaries of solidarity. It was the concept of the nation state that determined these boundaries, and it is the state that, by its definitions, produces 'minorities'.<sup>89</sup> The crisis of the geo-political limits of solidarity, which was precipitated by globalisation and the collapse of the Soviet regime, has also been referred to as 'identity panic'.<sup>90</sup>

The current confusion does not only show the contradictory premises of national solidarity with regard to ethnic arguments, but has challenged the solidarity principle on many grounds, in relation to homeless people, single mothers and other people on the margins. For economic reasons the 'contract between the generations' that had ensured the payment of old age pensions and that has been paid by those presently earning a wage, is being questioned. Solidarity no longer exists automatically

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<sup>87</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 36.

<sup>88</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 63-67.

<sup>89</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 68.

<sup>90</sup> Balibar 1991, pp. 226.

between the economically active and those in retirement. The latter get constructed as a separate cultural group, as is the case with groups of ethnicity.<sup>91</sup>

#### 5.1.1. The nation state project

The debate around state/globalisation relationship has inspired a number of writers. Many have emphasised the assumed ongoing weakening of the state institution. In these views it has been suggested that globalisation of culture, communication, and especially capital, has led to a point where the state can no longer steer its own course. As a consequence of seeing the institutional forms of the state inadequate in the processes of economic globalisation, new forms of global governance have been envisaged. This course of viewing the state/globalisation relationship was popular especially in the early years of the discourse, and it was likely to show the state and globalisation in opposing positions.<sup>92</sup>

However, as Pikalo<sup>93</sup> notes, there is a remarkable count of empirical research suggesting that states, especially stronger ones in the north regions of the world, retain substantial capacities with regard to industrial policy, welfare delivery, and environmental regulation, despite of the developments of globalisation. This is not to suggest that things have not changed; undoubtedly there are new challenges and phenomena forming in the developments of new technologies, global awareness, capitalist production, new environmental problems etc. In this context of global interconnections the efficacy of human rights is constantly tested. Certain developments of economic globalisation can hardly be described as ‘a positive sum game’ for the whole human population. Under the multi-dimensional conditions of globalisation human rights have the potential to become a universal moral code for those global actions that do not fall under the traditional control of the state.

Pikalo calls for a better recognition of the constructivist approach in the state/globalisation accounts. He reminds that positions that are adopted in discourses

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<sup>91</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 70.

<sup>92</sup> Pikalo 2007, pp. 17-18.

<sup>93</sup> Pikalo 2007, pp. 19.



have a potential to both present and to construct the reality. As at the present, this approach is more or less omitted in the analysis, and much more focus needs to be given to the constructionist function of discourses.<sup>94</sup>

A great deal of the state/globalisation debates have focused on whether the state has lost its *sovereignty* because of the process of globalisation. In the course of formulating the functions of the state, the concept of sovereignty has historically been significant. However, in the globalist view on the state/globalisation relation, sovereignty is presented as an ideal type theoretical concept. Instead of focusing on the issue of whether the nation-state with its sovereignty is endangered, we should instead ask ourselves if a nation state with full and complete sovereignty has ever existed. There has always been a challenge to the sovereignty of territorial states, and international cooperation amongst those territories. Furthermore, definitions of sovereignty are typically based on reasoning that is centuries old, from the time where nation states first became sovereign through military control. In viewing and describing today's world with outdated terms it is then easy to note that states are no longer fully sovereign, as it appears obvious. Such reasoning tends to juxtapose evolutionary circumstances to static concepts.<sup>95</sup>

What is the impact of the role-of-the-state discourse on social work theory? The ambivalence regarding the principles upon which to base solidarity and integration characterised modern nation states. This ambivalence facilitated the role of social and educational services as a stabilising part in modern societies. Social and education workers became automatically involved in the formation of collective, as well as individual identities, of which especially the formation of collective identities was such an important part of their work. Not necessarily realising this role, the profession until recently failed to problematise social work's link to the 'nation-state building project'. Thus social workers could not develop their actual identity-building mandate accountably. Professional autonomy for social professions is to make a positive contribution to the political and social conditions under which processes lead to social solidarity and equality in a society. By engaging in the negotiation of non-essentialist, non-racist identities, social workers develop their

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<sup>94</sup> Pikalo 2007, pp. 24.

<sup>95</sup> Pikalo 2007, pp. 27-28.

professional potential. Walter Lorenz calls this practice ‘the practice of social citizenship’.<sup>96</sup>

For the social work profession, the engagement with political, citizenship and identity building processes that link the discourses of identity and equality, is becoming apparent under the conditions of globalisation. One effect of globalisation is that the nation as a reference point for identity has become questionable. Along with this process has appeared a new wave of nationalism. The emerged polarisation between the global fusion and the tightening of national boundaries challenges the historical concept of the nation. The discourse around collective identities includes a fundamental paradox: On the one hand, as global connections and influences have been formed, the global village shares the same fashions, entertainment and communication forums. On the other hand, in the desperate search of belonging, sub-cultures, regions, ethnic groupings and individuals define their identities with an increasingly exclusive manner.<sup>97</sup>

Lorenz<sup>98</sup> goes on reflecting the new ethical and methodological challenges to international social work and to the nation state project by asking:

*“Is it still the national agenda that frames the social work mandate to ensure solidarity [...]? Has the distinction between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ cases, which was always part of the profession’s patriotic, nation-building, nation-purifying legacy, really disappeared and given way to a universal, critical, objective, scientifically based approach to diagnosis and intervention? Or can social work face up multi-cultural societies and ground solidarity in a human rights approach that negotiates with minorities their cultural preferences without taking national standards as the decisive yardstick? Can the social professions find an operational space between total relativism and indifference to standards on the one hand and fixed, essentialist assumptions about standards of behaviour that leave no room for negotiation and development?”*

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<sup>96</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 21.

<sup>97</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 22.

<sup>98</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 73-74.

The concepts of nation state and citizenship being under reformation social work can get involved in the interplay between personal and political factors. When the basis of 'belonging' to a given society is in question on psychological, cultural and legal grounds, it is an occasion to social work to reflect on the critical, multi-layered approach to its methods. Through a combination of perspectives and skills social work can contribute to the development of a critical social policy perspective. Social policy, particularly at European level, is no longer a matter of top-down developments but contains a growing bottom-up element in the form of new forms of representation. At European level the distinction between political refugees or asylum seekers and of migrant workers is becoming more tenuous. Practices of selective exclusion, which had prevailed in the formation of nation states, are now being reproduced rather uncritically. Non-citizens challenge European societies to declare on which principles they want to ground citizenship and solidarity.<sup>99</sup>

The call for anti-racist social work does not only apply to the work with migrants and refugees but to the full range of social work tasks in today's multicultural and diverse societies. This forms need for reflexivity to allow individuals to accept their multi-layered identities in uneasily definable societies. This creates uncertainties, and responding to them with simple solutions would be counter-productive and irresponsible for the fostering of new forms of solidarity. Globalisation and migration challenge social work to contribute imaginatively to the required reconstruction of the social space.<sup>100</sup>

### **5.1.2. Economic globalisation and human rights**

Globalisation is linked to complex trade flows that have unequal ramifications for countries. As a consequence there is a rising level of poverty between and within countries.<sup>101</sup> States without economic resources cannot meet their human rights

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<sup>99</sup>Lorenz 2006, pp. 77-78.

<sup>100</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 79-80.

<sup>101</sup> Wichterich 2000, pp. 9.

obligations and people without economic resources are unable to realize their social and economic rights, even if they enjoy political rights.<sup>102</sup>

Globalisation has affected labour rights. Jobs have moved from the public sector into the private sector or to other location with lower wages.<sup>103</sup> Competition among nation-states to secure jobs produces a “race to the bottom” to achieve the most conducive environment to maximize profits throughout tax breaks, low wages, lack of union-protected labour and limited social security. The overall outcome is that people are less able to take care of themselves.<sup>104</sup> These circumstances, naturally, create pressure to social safety nets including social work.

It has been suggested that governments, global corporations and individuals should be held more accountable of their actions. People should enjoy their right to having access to information in order to be able to criticise the actions the powerful decision-makers take. Social workers can assist people in acquiring the information they need and to navigate around organizations holding this data.<sup>105</sup> Vandana Shiva adopts a gender perspective by pointing out that both men and women should be involved in promoting a world order that places people and the environment at the centre of the social, economic and political agendas, instead of narrow sectional corporate interests. She notes that ensuring gender equality remains a global issue that requires urgent attention and that is a social work concern.<sup>106</sup>

Negative developments driven by economic globalisation have been noted by many. However, as suggested before, more optimistic views are also possible. What is clear is that human rights response to economic globalisation needs to take place at global level. A common language of rights allows identifying common causes of violations in different countries, which constitutes grounds and justification for enhancing the accountability and responsibility of global economic organizations as well as

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<sup>102</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 32.

<sup>103</sup> Dominelli 2007, pp. 33.

<sup>104</sup> Wichterich 2000, 10.

<sup>105</sup> Shiva 2003, pp. 89-91; Dominelli 2007, 35.

<sup>106</sup> Shiva 2003, pp. 107.

corporations.<sup>107</sup> It would be also simplistic to argue that globalisation simply increases inequality, since global inequality is nothing new and has been a consequence of colonialism and global capitalism of the last two centuries. What has changed is not the reality of an unequal world, but rather the boundaries of that inequality.<sup>108</sup>

The impacts of economic globalisation on human rights protection differs from society to society. Therefore, as De Feyter<sup>109</sup> suggests, human rights need to be situation-specific, they need to be localised. In response to the adverse impacts of economic globalisation, itself a top-down process, human rights need to be advocated by a bottom-up approach. They need to be as locally relevant as possible, founded by the principle that human rights needs are formulated by local people. Because human rights crises emerge and violations occur at the local level, it is necessary that local communities contribute to the interpretation of human rights, elaboration of human rights norms, and the development of human rights action. Practices at the local level need to constitute a basis for human rights action at all levels. Moreover, localisation avoids building human rights movement as a one-way relationship between 'saviours' and 'victims'. In order to foster further development of human rights, community based organisations need to be the starting point. From a human rights perspective, the contributions are particularly salient when community based organisations apply human rights language. The notion has relevance, since not all community based organisations use human rights language or define their work in terms of human rights.

Another link in the chain of the development of effective human rights protection mechanisms are the so-called local human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs). 'Local' here means that they are based in the same country as community actors, although they may be located in the capital and thus physically far away from community organisations. They may also be based on expertise rather than grassroots community membership. Local human rights NGOs are important in assisting community based organisations in identifying the human rights angle of view to the

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<sup>107</sup> De Feyter 2007, pp. 91.

<sup>108</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 21.

<sup>109</sup> De Feyter 2007, pp. 92-93.

situations they face, and in formulating human rights strategies that foster the community to develop namely at the national level. Another important role of local human rights organisations is to learn from community organisations about the reality of human rights related struggles at the grassroots level, and to transmit the lessons learned to the international level. As community organisations often will not have contacts with international human rights structure, local organisations are an important partner community organisations need to rely on.<sup>110</sup>

The third link in the chain is the communication of international non-governmental human rights organisations (INGOs). The involvement of INGOs is vital when domestic legislation restrains the actions of local human rights NGOs. Additionally, under the conditions of globalisation, the consequences of human rights abuses are increasingly not exclusively domestic. Finally, in the fields of law making and enforcement, all of these civil society organisations are dependent on alliances with other relevant partners such as governments and inter-governmental organisations. A bottom-up approach to human rights depends on the existence of the mentioned four partners. As at the present, although some networks of this kind may function, this type of networking is not currently a general practice. A number of community based organisations function without human rights awareness, many local human rights organisations remain disconnected from grassroots NGOs, international NGOs define their priorities without communications with local partners, and governmental and intergovernmental actors perceive international relations and international law as a reserved domain of governments. Ideally, the experiences of communities would set the agenda for the whole network, and the discourse would result in a common understanding of the human rights strategy to be pursued. In reality, there are major imbalances in the division of resources between the actors, and top-down hierarchy may prevail unless these imbalances of power are carefully negotiated.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> De Feyter 2007, pp. 94.

<sup>111</sup> De Feyter 2007, pp. 93-95.

### 5.1.3. Social Justice and Human Rights

In viewing social work as the cornerstone of social justice, it may be helpful to examine the roots of the term “social justice”. The word “social”, from the Latin *Socius*, means “friend, ally, partner” or in another context, “sharing, accompanying, acting together”. Justice, Latin *Justus*, means “just, equitable, fair”, mainly of persons. Thus, when speaking of social justice, we mean working with other as equals, as partners for a socially just world.<sup>112</sup>

When analyzing the core issues of the profession, social work literature prefers the term ‘social justice’. The advantage of referring to human rights principles, however, is that the concept of human rights involves a clearer set of guidelines than those associated with social justice. Human rights can provide social work profession with a global and contemporary set of guidelines. Social justice, on the other hand, tends to be defined in vague terminology such as fairness or unfairness, and equality or inequality. The problem with such terminology is that it provides a civil and political leeway in deciding what is just and unjust.<sup>113</sup>

According to Joseph Wronka,<sup>114</sup> to lessen the inequalities of wealth, power, and other important values throughout the world, and to use human rights as guiding principles to assist the development of a human rights culture, which will result in socially just policies, we must acknowledge certain principles. Firstly, we have to see that only chosen values endure, that is to say that no one can force such a culture on anyone. Human rights discourse ought to serve as a means to provide grounding for a culture where all humans can develop to their fullest capacities. The change, however, will be temporary unless there is a change of heart.

Furthermore, according to Wronka, we must have a commitment for human rights education from grammar school to postsecondary levels. The UN has recently initiated a World Program on Human Rights Education which emphasizes the right

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<sup>112</sup> Wronka 2007, pp. 64-65.

<sup>113</sup> NASW 2003, p. 211; Reichert 2003; Reichert 2007, pp. 4-5.

<sup>114</sup> Wronka 2007, pp. 64-65.

to know one's rights.<sup>115</sup> It is furthermore important that the National Association for Social Work endorses the fundamental principles of the UN, supports the two fundamental Human Rights Covenants of the UN – which confirm the civil and political rights as well as those of social, economic and cultural – and that the profession endorses the treaties and conventions which have evolved to establish that the rights of people take precedent over social customs when they infringe on human rights. Social work must also engage in dialogue across disciplines and with other service and health professions that have similar human rights commitments.<sup>116</sup>

We are living in a time when there are impending concerns about global food security, freshwater resources, energy availability and pandemics, as well as increased incidence of civilian casualties in conflicts and exploitation of women and children. The increased mobility of people, rich and poor, means that it is in the best interest of the rich to pay attention to the poor.<sup>117</sup>

#### **5.1.4. The Third Generation of Human Rights and Social Development**

The third generation of Human Rights involves collective rights among nations and under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms of the document can be fully realised. The promotion of collective human rights requires intergovernmental cooperation on world issues such as economic development and environmental protection. Any group of countries should not dictate conditions to another, and the industrialised countries should not take advantage of the less economically developed countries by exploiting resources.<sup>118</sup>

Along with political and social rights, the last crucial notion of the UDHR is solidarity rights as expressed in articles 28-30. These rights correspond with Roosevelt's third and fourth freedoms from want and fear. One country alone cannot

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<sup>115</sup> Human Rights Education Associates 2011.

<sup>116</sup> Falk, 1999, p. 17; Wronka 2007, pp. 64-65.

<sup>117</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 10.

<sup>118</sup> Reichert 2003; Reichert 2007, pp. 7-8.



effectively deal with global inequities as distributive injustice, pollution, war, economic development, self-determination, oppression of minorities and natural and man-made disasters. Solidarity rights, therefore, emphasize a person's right to intergovernmental cooperation. Global cooperation and fair trade are necessary to ensure that income and food are distributed equitably.<sup>119</sup>

Solidarity rights have a strong association with development. Development is widely defined as the economic and social changes driven by industrialisation and it has been a prominent concern in the social sciences and public policy for more than a century. This way of defining "development" is of course based on the historical experience of the Western countries that underwent modernisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The prospects of development have also inspired governments in many developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Central and South America as they have sought to foster economic growth.<sup>120</sup>

A major problem with economic development is that it often benefits only a small part of the population. Development has indeed brought prosperity to many regions of the world. However, a relatively small segment of the population in many developing countries has been drawn into modern wage employment, while similarly, improvements in living standards are concentrated in urban areas. In many countries a considerable proportion of the rural population continues to live in poverty, and urban slums are prevalent in numerous developing countries. In parts of the Global South, economic modernisation has led to distorted development, where economic growth has not been followed by degrees of social progress.<sup>121</sup>

To challenge the problems of poverty and deprivation by harmonising social policies with economic development, the term "social development" has been employed. However, human rights, even though widely debated in political, journalistic, and academic circles, have not been systematically incorporated in social development theory and practice. A number of social development writers and practitioners want to see a change that would result in stronger integration of human rights into social

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<sup>119</sup> Wronka 2007, pp. 54.

<sup>120</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 97.

<sup>121</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 97.

development activities. Many of them have been inspired by grass-roots advocacy activities of developmental organizations that have effectively adopted human rights approaches. To connote these efforts, the term “rights-based development” has been popularised.<sup>122</sup>

Over the last fifty years the development process has produced significant gains in many parts of the world. However, the hope that the development would transform the impoverished, colonised societies of the developing world into modern industrial states has not been realised, with some exceptions. Many have benefited because of the expansion of the modern economy, but many others have been left behind. The result is a process of twisted development in which the rapid rates of economic growth recorded have not been accompanied with corresponding prosperity, an equal distribution of wanted as well as unwanted outcomes of the development processes. The existing problem of poverty in the centre of economic affluence remains the paradox of the development project and presents a huge challenge for the future of the international community.<sup>123</sup>

Moving on to possible solutions, Midgley points out that ideally, human rights are justiciable in that those who believe their rights have been violated may seek for redress through the legal system. Formal human rights instruments provide a passage to these processes. They consist of national constitutions, statutes and case law, as well as regional human rights instruments that include the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1950, the American Convention on Human Rights of 1969, and the African Charter on Human and people’s Rights of 1981. Perhaps the most important are the international instruments adopted by the UN and its agencies. As relevant in the development context, Migley emphasises the UDHR of 1948 and the two Covenants of 1966, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, the Declaration on the Right to Development of 1986, the Convention on the Rights of

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<sup>122</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 98.

<sup>123</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 101.

the Child of 1989, and the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Punishments of 1984.<sup>124</sup>

The adoption of the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development was part of an effort to promote greater collaboration on international development between the industrialised and developing nations. The idea of greater equity among nations was reinforced by the work of the Brandt Commission, which urged stronger North-South cooperation to address debt, global poverty, and the negative effects of neo-liberal globalisation policies. The Right to Development has also been informed by the growing concern about environmental issues and the need to promote sustainable development.<sup>125</sup>

The Declaration is only ten articles in length, at the core of the article lying that the right to development is an inalienable human right that includes the right to self-determination. It requires states to ensure that their citizens benefit from development. It asserts that states are obliged to cooperate in formulating international policies that promote the rapid growth of the developing countries. The Declaration requires states to take steps to eliminate the violations of human rights that arise from racism, colonialism, foreign occupation, and other forms of oppression. Not surprisingly, the United States among other Western nations, have opposed the Declaration. Consequently, it has not been formalised as a binding Convention. What has been criticised the most is the idea that the economically developed nations should be required to modify their trade and related international policies to address the needs of the world's poor nations.<sup>126</sup>

The various human rights instruments described earlier provide for a rights-based approach to development that has considerable implications for social development. Recognising the indivisibility and universality of human rights, the rights-based approach gives expression to a number of human rights instruments and activities, and it does not exclusively depend on the Declaration on the Right to Development. The rights-based approach can contribute social development with the language of

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<sup>124</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 105.

<sup>125</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 110.

<sup>126</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 110-111.

human rights and foster to incorporate human rights discourse I social development practice. Although human rights and development have long been treated as separate domains, there is growing support for the view that human rights should be integrated more systematically into social development thinking. The United Nations Development Program has played a major role in measuring social development and it has also contributed to measuring human rights performance.<sup>127</sup>

In addition to viewing human rights as the ultimate goal of social development, it is also possible to see the provision of human rights as a precondition for successful social development efforts. This reflects the belief that social development policies can be most successfully implemented in conditions of political stability, freedom, peace and security. Social development performance is obviously inhibited by civil conflicts, corruption, high crime rates, hierarchical inequalities, lack of opportunities, political oppression, and the denial of basic freedoms. Widespread violence is likely to have the most devastating impact on social development policies and programs. Use of torture and other abuses associated with military occupation, is hardly conducive to realizing economic and social progress in conflict areas.<sup>128</sup>

Political oppression and the denial of basic freedoms are also suited to hinder social development efforts. It can be seen how totalitarian governments have inhibited economic growth and social progress. However, it has been also argued that political authoritarianism can promote development, as examples such as Chile and South Korea have directed in their economic performance under authoritarian military governments. The economic success of non-military authoritarian governments such as China, Singapore and Taiwan is notable, as well. However, the exceptions do not negate the argument that civil and political freedom are conducive to economic growth and urge forward social development goals. Further obstacles to social development are entrenched inequalities, racism, and discrimination against women and minorities. The problem of distorted development relates to economic participation, which can be linked with race and ethnicity. Exclusion of minorities from participating in the political, social and economic life of the community has

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<sup>127</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 114.

<sup>128</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 115.

lead to unsuccessful development programs and violence in many parts of the world, and has thereby delayed improvements in living standards.<sup>129</sup>

Fortunately, the importance of addressing factors that either assist or impede successful social development efforts are being increasingly recognized. Emphasis is placed on the need to promote democratic institutions and good governance, ensure civil liberties, facilitate social integration, and support full participation in political and social affairs. Rights-based approach can also contribute to establishing social development policies and programs. This is where formal international human rights instruments as well as the institutional system of information dissemination, program implementation, and accountability have a significant role. A system that can promote human rights is at the same time likely to support social development efforts. Both public organizations and NGOs are involved in this task, with an increasing focus of the NGO sector also in economic, social and cultural rights.<sup>130</sup>

## **5.2. Globalisation and culture**

James Midgley<sup>131</sup> suggests that international social work practitioners should be informed about the effects of globalisation on culture. This will permit them to practice effectively in diverse international settings. He offers four perspectives of globalisation and culture, which will foster an understanding of the reflections of these relations to international social work. First, there is the argument that globalisation is creating a chaos and destroying world's traditional, local cultures. This approach is based on the view of globalisation as an economic phenomenon that involves activities associated with international capitalism, where the drive for profits is devastating vulnerable cultural traditions and institutions. Scholars who emphasise globalisation's destructive effect on culture do not believe that new cultural institutions of social interaction, however, have positive consequences for economic development. Instead, globalisation has generated conditions of chaos and

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<sup>129</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 115-116.

<sup>130</sup> Midgley 2007, p. 117.

<sup>131</sup> Midgley 2008.

social disorganisation. The idea of disorganised capitalism has been reinforced by postmodernist observations that associate globalisation with the passing of Enlightenment modernism and its well-ordered cultural institutions. Enlightenment thinking has given way to new cultural forms characterised by ambiguity and fragmentation. They believe that people have become organised around issues of ethnicity, religion and gender, and that centrally managed forms of political, social and economic organisation have been replaced by localised and fragmented patterns of social interaction. With respect to material achievement, it is believed that even the most cherished social institutions such as family has been undermined by globalisation. Scholars of the cultural destruction approach believe that these problems have been aggravated by the disintegration of the social and political institutions that previously alleviated the worst effects of capitalism.<sup>132</sup>

Second, there is the claim that globalisation is fostering the survival of a single world culture based on Western values that is leading to cultural homogenisation. Some believe that globalisation is gradually transforming local cultures and surrogating them with a new, universal culture rooted in values of modernity, such as individualism, rationalism, secularism and other values essentially Western in character. As a result, they believe that the world's cultures are becoming gradually similar. However, this is not viewed as a sudden process. Media and communication technologies as well as increased international connections have a significant role in fostering these developments.<sup>133</sup>

Third, there is the argument that globalisation is creating a powerful cultural backlash among those who believe their cultural institutions being destroyed by Westernisation. In the process of resisting the developments and preserving their culture, they vigorously reinforce traditional values and beliefs. This leads to consolidation of indigenous culture, and increasing cultural polarisation. In postmodern world we can identify numerous incidents and developments that can be associated with these processes. One explanation views cultural polarisation as a logical reaction to the confusion and uncertainty created by modernity. Some scholars regard the rise of religious fundamentalism as a predictable response to the

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<sup>132</sup> Midgley 2008, p. 1-3.

<sup>133</sup> Midgley 2008, p. 3-5.

corrosive effects of globalisation, which dislodges shared traditional beliefs and meanings, and creates confusion. A relevant note is the way that political elites seek to resist the effects of global cultural forces that could endanger established institutions. In many parts of the world, the access of the Western media, as well as literature, music and film, has been denied.<sup>134</sup>

Finally, Midgley points out the belief that globalisation is creating new, hybrid, cultural forms, where features of existing cultures are incorporated, and at the same time way is given to new cultural patterns. This perspective comes from scholars who believe that the increasing international contacts and the growing international interdependence are promoting the sharing of cultures. They view the processes of cultural change and exchange as dynamic, fluid, multifaceted and multidirectional. This complexity is shaped by phenomena such as travel, communications technologies, the media, trade, increased political cooperation, and migration. Many societies are becoming increasingly multicultural as a result of immigration. It is indisputable that immigrants have an influence on host societies. The desirable outcomes have been remarked, as globalisation promotes the increment of choice and new cultural opportunities, and the possibility to experience the cultural products of many other societies. Moreover, not all agree with the argument that cosmopolitanism inevitably equates with Westernisation. The optimistic interpretations of globalisation's potential to foster peace, global solidarity, and ethical universality have been expressed, but they have been rudely disappointed by events such as Western imperialism and militarism. Also the optimistic accounts that cultural cosmopolitanism will address the real imbalances in economic and political power need to be viewed with some scepticism.<sup>135</sup>

As can be discovered there is not a single, generally accepted interpretation of the impact of globalisation on culture, and many perspectives offer a simple explanation without multi-dimensional analysis. The exception is the cultural syncretisation approach which emphasises the fluid and multifaceted nature of cultural exchanges. What also needs to be recognised is that culture should not be viewed as an objective steadiness, a 'thing' that is independent of human action. Social work has already

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<sup>134</sup> Midgley 2008, p. 5-6.

<sup>135</sup> Midgley 2008, p. 6-8.

been engaged with these issues and it is clear that practitioners today are increasingly facing cultural realities and challenges. There is a growing emphasis on cultural sensitivity and competence in social work education. The profession has also supported campaigns for civil and human rights by ethnic minorities and immigrants who have challenged discrimination. It becomes obvious that practitioners can enhance their effectiveness when working in diverse cultural environments and contexts by appreciating these complexities. Moreover, cultural complexity can no longer be viewed as a challenge facing international social work practitioners alone. As Midgley points out, “the ‘international’ is no longer remote, but a present reality as diversity and multiculturalism associated with migration and population movement affects social work practice everywhere”.<sup>136</sup>

The different perspectives on globalisation on culture have direct implications for international social work practice. Practitioners need to be aware of the discourse and struggle with the relevance of the different interpretations for practice. Furthermore, social work scholars need to abandon their preference to simplistic interpretations and become more engaged in tackling the paradoxical and confusing challenges of cultural developments. A problematic issue is the question of cultural relativism and social work’s position in situations where cultural beliefs and practices appear to conflict with social work’s liberal values and ethics. Similar challenges associated with cultural change and globalisation are faced by social workers in other parts of the world, for example, with regard to family structures and roles. To deal with these issues, social workers need to be adequately prepared. International social work organisations can contribute to this by providing leadership. A more nuanced analysis on the issue is needed by social scientists, and while it may not provide a final conclusion, it can show way to more useful interpretations that have significance to social workers in changing cultural realities.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Midgley 2008, p. 11.

<sup>137</sup> Midgley 2008, p. 8-9.



### 5.3. Needs-speech and Rights-speech in Social Work

The concept of human rights aims to overcome sectarianism and unite people by codifying a universal value system. One result has been the emergence of the ethos called a rights-based approach. The key aspect of this approach is the right to participate, including the right to vote and the ability to advocate for one's rights. The rights-based approach replaces the conception of charity-benefactor relationship with a view where access to services and resources are considered as basic human rights in themselves. It is founded on the principle of equality, often pointed to the UDHR as the basis of its methods. Women's rights and other rights movements have inspired the development of rights-based approaches. The approach has helped to drive debates on legitimacy action, power hierarchies, and accountability. Framing social work as a human rights profession has opened new avenues and fostered to create a new form of identity as a global citizen. A rights-based approach views individuals as citizens, not stakeholders or beneficiaries of welfare. In addition, development agencies are beginning to see people in developing countries as partners and citizens, not recipients of aid.<sup>138</sup>

The rights-based approach raises a number of questions. According to Lyons, these include the questions of if the rights of a community or the individual have more value, and when do rights of a child take precedence over those of parents. The rights-based approach can offer potential for positive developments, but some fear its importance. Among social change agencies there is shortage and unwillingness to put the achievements of the approach into practice. The terminology might be adopted but considerations of the meanings are not taken to the level of implementation.<sup>139</sup>

Jim Ife, whose views on rights-based social work have been cited in numerous articles that deal with the social work/globalisation paradigm, thinks that human rights can provide social workers with a moral basis for their practice, both at the level of case work with a direct connection with clients, and also in community development, policy advocacy and activism. Ife reminds that scarcely a day passes in

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<sup>138</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 56-57.

<sup>139</sup> Lyons *et al.* 2006, pp. 57.

any social worker's life when the word 'need' is not used on numerous occasions. Social workers do 'needs assessments' and talk about the needs of individuals, of client groups, of communities, of service delivery systems and of the whole society. Needs are also present in social workers speech about 'unmet needs', 'needing more resources', 'needing more social workers', 'needing supervision' and so on. When talking about needs one somehow makes an assumption that needs are independent phenomena to be objectively identified, and that different social workers, if given the same 'case', and asked to do a needs assessment, would come up with the same conclusion. Otherwise, and without a more careful analysis and definition of the meaning of the concept of 'needs' in a given context, the term would have no grounds. Needs are value-laden by their nature. Different value positions will have very different views on what is 'needed' in a particular situation. With regard to social work, this can be linked to different interpretations of 'family values', for example. As needs are not objective measurements but are affected by theoretical understandings, namely ideologies, different social workers might disagree on the 'needs' of the victim, the perpetrator and the family in a domestic violence case.<sup>140</sup>

The observation that needs are value-led is not to say that they have no significance to professional expertise. When a social worker defines what is 'needed' in given circumstances, the need definition is based on a professional understanding of what is likely to 'work' in that situation and to lead to a desired result. However, one of the criticisms of all human service professionals, including social workers, is that they use their professional position to privilege their definitions of need over other definitions. This can cause unintended, disempowering consequences and is likely to render people passive consumers of professionalised services.<sup>141</sup>

A needs statement suggests that something is necessary in order for something else to occur. In other words, needs are means to a particular end. Statements such as I need a pen in order to write, I need medication in order to cure an illness, I need food in order to stay alive can be drawn as examples. Two things need to be noted here. First, some of the desired ends of the statements might be regarded as more important than others. Second, one might question whether the 'needed' thing is the

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<sup>140</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 89-90.

<sup>141</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 91.

best or only way to achieve the desired end. When social workers make statements of need, the desired end can be described in terms of meeting a certain right, and this is the essence of the link between needs and rights in social work practice. As statements of need within social work are therefore also statements about rights, the problem arises when the associated rights remain unstated, as they often do. Hence, an important principle for human rights social work is that social workers should seek to identify the rights issues behind the statements of needs that they make in every-day practice. In recognising the critical connection between needs and rights, social workers can move towards developing a human rights basis for practice. It provides a stronger reference point to courses of action and grounds human rights in the day-to-day practice of social work. Moreover it contextualises human rights within particular cultural and organisational locations and helps to establish praxis that incorporates both relativistic and universal themes. Therefore making the connection between needs and rights is a key component of human rights-based social work practice.<sup>142</sup>

Analysing the relationship between needs and rights Ife makes an important notion that seeking full clarity in language of needs and rights might be naïve, since the relationship is complex and a clear linguistic separation would be quite artificial. From the point of view of rights-based social work practice, however, it is important that a discourse of needs not be allowed to dominate the profession to the exclusion of a discourse of rights. In any case of discussing a need, social workers should stop and assess the implied rights behind the claim of need, and examine the link between the two. Similarly, when human rights are claimed, social workers will have to translate this into a statement of needs (whether consciously or not), bearing in mind the necessity of identifying what that right means in terms of needs within the specific cultural, economic, social and political context.<sup>143</sup> The latter approach, I suggest, has until recent times been more easily recognisable to social work practitioners, who are familiar with realising a variety of all kinds of claims in different legal, political and cultural contexts.

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<sup>142</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 93, 102-103.

<sup>143</sup> Ife 2008, pp. 100-101.

Derived from the discussion above, analysing the relationship between needs and rights does not fully solve the problems related to the professionalisation of welfare and human services. Neither can it simply show the way to future social work moral grounds, since as we will see, the concept of human rights is also characterised by a great deal of complexity, it is not free from political nature or critique, and these issues need to be more carefully examined.

#### **5.4. A Human Rights Politics Approach**

It is clear that the international human rights movement has done a great deal of good providing an emancipatory vocabulary and institutional machinery for people across the world and raising the standards by which governments judge one another. A career in human rights movement has provided many professionals with a sense of dignity and confidence of doing good. Among well-meaning professionals the human rights movement has become a central object of devotion. However, questions have been raised about international human rights by people who worry that the human rights movement might, acknowledging its huge achievements, be more part of the problem in today's world than part of the solution.<sup>144</sup>

For David Kennedy the aim of addressing the above mentioned problem with human rights movement is to encourage legal professions to adopt a more pragmatic attitude toward human rights. He calls for a stronger will to develop a practice of weighting the costs and benefits of the articulation, institutionalisation and enforcement of human rights. He notes that it is tempting to move pragmatic concerns aside and to treat human rights as an object of devotion rather than calculation. Pragmatic evaluation means analysing the benefits and harms that might attend human rights initiatives in particular cases, under specific conditions, in particular time, and so forth. Those conditions may be very specific or general, but they need to be articulated and ultimately demonstrated in concrete terms. At the same time, concrete

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<sup>144</sup> Kennedy 2002, p. 101.

does not mean inevitable, since the factors that influence policy making are not all proven empirically.<sup>145</sup>

Weighing the costs and benefits of ‘human rights’ is not at all easy because the costs are often articulated in much more general terms than the benefits. The benefits are more often cast in local terms. It may turn out that the entire human rights discourse suffers from blindness or works as an effect that we should count as a cost. Moreover, people in the movement will evaluate risks and benefits in quite different ways. The language of human rights and the human rights movement are themselves in a flux, many of the terms are subject to ongoing revision exactly to correct the difficulties mentioned above. Whatever the history of human rights, we do not know its future. Perhaps these difficulties can be overcome till some extent, but we will not avoid them by avoiding their articulation, discussion, and assessment, that is to treat human rights movement as a fair child in need of protection from critical assessment and pragmatic calculation.<sup>146</sup>

Human rights activism likes to portray itself as an anti-political movement, in defence of universal moral claims designed to delegitimize political or ideological justifications for the abuse of human beings. In reality, impartiality and neutrality are as impossible as equal concern for everyone’s human rights. Human rights activism means taking sides; it is bound to be partial and political. Yet at the same time, human rights politics is constrained by moral universals. In fact, the role of moral universalism is not to take activists out of politics but to get activists to discipline their partiality.<sup>147</sup>

Human rights activists tend to take it for granted that they represent universal values and interests. That is why they have not always taken as much care as they might about the question whether they truly represent the human interests they allege they defend. Normally, they are not elected by the victims they represent. As international human rights have gained power, its scope and remit have become increasingly blurred. Ignatieff touches an actual topic by asking: “What precise balance is to be

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<sup>145</sup> Kennedy 2002, p. 102.

<sup>146</sup> Kennedy 2002, p. 102-103, 125.

<sup>147</sup> Ignatieff 2001, pp. 9-10.

struck between international human rights and state sovereignty? When is intervention justified to reverse human rights abuses in another state?” So far the international community has failed to provide coherent answers to these problems, which has resulted in increasing uncertainty as to how far international human rights can go. The judicial, advocacy, and enforcement revolutions have vigorously raised expectations, and unsurprisingly the reality of human rights will be a disappointment.<sup>148</sup>

What limits the human rights discourse is a matter of logic and formal consistency. Because the very purpose of rights language is to protect individual agency, rights advocates must – in order to avoid contradicting their own principles – respect the autonomy of those agents. Similarly, at the collective level, rights language fosters the desire of groups to rule themselves. Being so, human rights discourse must respect the rights of those groups to define the type of collective life they choose to participate, provided that this life meets the minimalist standards of enjoyment of any human rights at all. If human rights principles exist to support individual agency and collective rights of self-rule, human rights practice is obliged to seek consent for its norms and to refrain from interference when consent is not freely given. Only in strictly defined cases of necessity can human rights interventions be justified.<sup>149</sup> Practice has clearly shown the extreme difficulty to draw the line of necessity in these terms.

Samuel Moyn<sup>150</sup> suggests an alternative approach to the assumption that the human rights movement was created in the aftermath of World War II. He states that those ‘rights’ set out in the 1948 Declaration were fundamentally not about the same ‘human rights’ movement that were only to be occurred a few decades later. After the war the priority fell on a victory of one or the other of the two Cold War visions, and the struggle for decolonisation of empire made the Cold War competition global. The United States introduced the new idea of ‘human rights’ into minor circulation, but in terms of its political significance and practical outcomes the phrase was soon dropped. Additionally, both the Soviet Union and anticolonialist forces were more

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<sup>148</sup> Ignatieff 2001, pp. 10, 17-18.

<sup>149</sup> Ignatieff 2001, pp. 18.

<sup>150</sup> Moyn 2010.

committed to collective ideas of emancipation – communism and nationalism – as the way into the future, instead of individual rights directly, or their enshrinement in international law. Even until the times of 1968, which the UN declared “International Human Rights Year”, such rights remained almost non-existing as a movement. In the UN twentieth anniversary conference in Tehran the liberation of nations formerly under imperial rule was presented as the most significant achievement so far with the notion of what was yet to be accomplished. However the crucial fact is that outside the UN in 1968, human rights had not yet become a powerful set of ideas. People were demanding change around the globe, from Eastern Europe to China and across the United States, but few thought the better world they demanded as a world to be governed by ‘human rights’.<sup>151</sup>

What Moyn notes happened after that then was that human rights emerged in the 1970s seemingly from nowhere. During the 1960s crisis of superpower order, other utopian visions prospered, which called for redeeming the United States from hollow consumerism, or for ‘socialism with a human face’ in the Soviet empire. At the time there were very few nongovernmental organisations that pursued human rights. However, within a decade human rights would begin to be invoked across the developed world and by much more ordinary people than ever before. Instead of implying colonial liberation, human rights most often now meant individual protection against the state. Most visibly, the public relevance of human rights skyrocketed, as measured by the presence of the phrase in the newspaper. The words ‘human rights’ were printed in 1977 in *The New York Times* nearly five times as often as in any prior year in the publication’s history.<sup>152</sup>

It is not possible to analyse the recent emergence and contemporary power of human rights without focusing on their utopian dimension: the image of a better world of dignity and respect. In Moyn’s words:

*“But far from being the sole idealism that has inspired faith and activism in the course of human events, human rights emerged historically as the last utopia – one that became powerful and dominant because other visions imploded. Human rights are only a particular modern version of the ancient commitment [...] to the cause*

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<sup>151</sup> Moyn 2010, pp. 1-3.

<sup>152</sup> Moyn 2010, pp. 3-4.

*of justice. Even among modern schemes of freedom and equality, they are only one among others; they were far from the first to make humanity's global aspirations the central focus. Nor are human rights the only imaginable rallying cry around which to build a grassroots popular movement. [...] (H)uman rights would have to win or lose on the terrain of the imagination, first and foremost. And for them to win, others would have to lose. [...] (H)uman rights are best understood as survivors: the dog that did not fail while other political ideologies did. If they avoided failure, it was most of all because they were widely understood as moral alternative to bankrupt political utopias.*"<sup>153</sup>

An alternative historical approach to human rights, with a much more recent timeline, differs notably from conventional approaches. Rather than attributing their sources to Greek philosophy, European natural law, early modern revolutions, horror against American slavery and Hitler's Jew-killing, it shows that human rights as a powerful transnational ideal and movement have origins of a much more recent date. Rights have long existed, and they were most visible in revolutionary nationalism through modern history – until 'human rights' displaced revolutionary nationalism. The 1940s later turned out to be crucial – not only for the Universal Declaration, but it is essential to ask why human rights failed to interest many people including international lawyers at the time, or for decades. Human rights were peripheral to postwar reconstruction, not central to its outcome. Contrary to conventional assumptions, there was not widespread Holocaust awareness in the postwar era, so human rights could not be a response to it. More importantly, no international rights movement emerged at the time. Human rights at the time were bound up with an international organisation rather than a larger popular language. This alternative history therefore takes its main challenge understanding why it was not in the mid 1940s but in the middle of 1970s that human rights came to be a foundation of an international movement and a utopia of international law.<sup>154</sup>

The true history – as Moyn calls it – of human rights matters most of all in order to encounter their prospects today and in the future. If they do capture some longstanding values, it is critical to understand more honestly how and when human rights took shape as a powerful set of aspirations for a more humane world. Though

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<sup>153</sup> Moyn 2010, pp. 4-5.

<sup>154</sup> Moyn 2010, pp. 7.



they were born as an alternative to great political missions, or even as moral criticism of politics, human rights were forced to take on the grand political mission of providing a global framework for the achievement of freedom, identity and prosperity. Paradoxically they were forced, slowly but surely, to assume what they triumphed to avoid. For many, human rights today are simply a modern version of a longstanding universalistic faith. If the Greeks or the Bible announced that mankind is one, it is often assumed that they must have their place in the history of human rights. But there have been many different and opposed universalisms in history, with each equally committed to the belief that humans are part of the same moral group. From there, they diverged about what humans share, what goods they should acknowledge, and what rules they should follow.<sup>155</sup>

Debates have concentrated on the issue whether bringing human rights law into international affairs genuinely improves them. What has not received much attention, however, is how recently international lawyers themselves turned to their concern with human rights. In organising themselves in the mid-nineteenth century as a new profession, international lawyers adopted the goal of mastering power through rules, and it was hoped that formalising interstate relations and supervising rules by benevolent jurists would bring more humanity to world affairs. International rules achieved through treaty and custom would lead toward more harmonious integration. It is impossible to isolate the developments of the law from its intersections with social action. Human rights, like other norms, depended on a rising social movement to be canonised by lawyers, as a professional priority. The human rights movement was just one social paradigm among others, and anticolonialism as far more global social movement had considerably more impact on the theory and practice of Western, international lawyers. Today, the law plays an unprecedented role in how to pursue aspirations for change in the international forum. Human rights movement made international law a privileged instrument of moral improvement and provided it great appeal as a framework for idealistic pursuits. But the debt of international lawyers to a very specific social movement of human rights meant that they would

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<sup>155</sup> Moyn 2010, pp. 9-13.

not simply inherit a fund of powerful energy but also face limitations in advancing an idealistic agenda in coming years.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Moyn 2010, pp. 177, 210-211.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

There appears to be scope within the political agenda of ‘activation’ set for social work by neo-liberal governments to formulate a sophisticated response which takes on the challenges posed in the name of accountability. Recognising this social work needs to operate with cross-national comparisons in order to recognise the political changes it becomes imposed to. Cross-national and cross-cultural alliances need to be built in order to play an active role in the transformation processes in collaboration with those immediately affected by them. While social work will always have to carry functions of social control, it also needs to critically engage with the new forms of governance. Social work profession’s historical roots in social movements and its commitment to theoretical discourses that emphasise social justice and human dignity should foster to make a constructive contribution to the development aimed at solidarity across differences rather than exclusion.<sup>157</sup>

Social workers are uniquely positioned in the field to promote economic and social human rights. The very nature of the work is to be the first to see the social deprivations in people’s lives. To fulfil the mission of the social work profession, the role of social workers should be to assist the needy, inform the public about prevailing conditions and advocate laws that promote education and economic opportunities for the impoverished individuals and communities. No other group has an equivalent firsthand knowledge of what is happening at the forefront, at the grassroots. The position of social work profession is unique, compared to lawyers, for instance, who often address human rights issues from a more distant perspective. Whereas social work approach is direct involvement right on the spot, law professionals, particularly courts, must generally wait until a human rights issue comes to them. Lawyers do not actively walk the streets looking for human rights violations. This is a capacity to social work, but remains also a practical challenge for successful social work action.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 177.

<sup>158</sup> McCormick 2007, pp. 266-274.

The question of equality can be approached from different perspectives. On the one hand, one can think of equality of conduct. The idea of equality of conduct is based on the assumption that everybody holds certain basic rights and everyone is entitled to equal respect and good treatment. Normally it refers to equality before law. In social work practice this would roughly mean that all similar cases until certain degree be dealt in a similar, and therefore, equal manner. More important, however, is to distinguish between equality in opportunities and equality of outcome. Equality in opportunities means as a principle that the access to important social institutions should be universal, and that everyone should have opportunity to do something, become something, or achieve something. Equality of outcome means that the result of achievement ought to be equal. What is relevant for equality of outcome is how welfare and well-being are distributed. Equality of outcome can act as reasoning for differences in action of conduct.<sup>159</sup> This point of view has long been in the core of social work ethical discourse, and balancing the principles of different equalities is very familiar for social work practitioners. However, globalisation and the ever stronger international influences to national welfare policies and professions bring along a whole new aspect into social work methodology and practice challenging social workers to re-think equality in a global context.

The human right to equality of all members of a community is ultimately a political and not a biological postulate. The right can only arise once diversity has been fully recognised. The ensuring political and legal arrangements, once they secure such equality, are in turn the basis on which cultural, ideological, and biological differences can be recognised, evaluated, and given social significance. The development of anti-racist approaches in social work is not an issue for specialists in work with minority groups. Recognising the lessons from the history and the crucial crossroads in the developments of the European nation state, it becomes necessary to strengthen the critical political function of social work and social pedagogy. The anti-racist agenda seeks for the positive contents of collective, inter-cultural, non-exclusive identities and negotiated rights of citizenship.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Uusitalo 1988, pp. 19.

<sup>160</sup> Lorenz 2006, pp. 39.

Social work practitioners all over the world are familiar with the question of gender equality. Inequality of genders goes hand in hand with social deprivation. As women remain among the most socially deprived people in the world, gender inequality incorporates economic, social and political ramifications. Women's deprivation compromises not only their lives but also other lives in their community; clearly the human rights of woman go far beyond their own well-being to the well-being of the family and the community. Social workers, given their values and skills, must move the question of women's human rights forward.<sup>161</sup>

There have been variable suggestions on how to govern economic globalisation. These have ranged from hegemonic unilateralism to global governance based on global democratic institutions. Common to these approaches is the recognition that since we have a global economy there is also a need for global policy that will deliver global public goods. There is no agreement on till what extent the suggested global governance is already in place; whether such institutions are still to be developed or whether these global structures are already set in the form of multilateral treaties and regulations. Opinions also differ with regard to the nature of global governance mechanisms. Some see similarities in early nation-building and contemporary developments on a global level and suggest establishing similar sets of institutions as within the nation state. Others view governance of the global economy as quantitatively different from that of national economy. Seeking for further solutions, it is important to note that global governance is not inevitably challenging the state or in contradiction with national governance.<sup>162</sup>

Global governance has most potential to succeed when applying different approaches for different levels of problems, and when agencies on different scales manage to cooperate for a common objective. Human rights as a common moral ground that global governance can be based on, are global by nature and should be protected and enforced globally, in a multi-scalar and multi-dimensional manner. But when taking human rights as the grounds for global governance, one should not view them as an end-state of affairs. Human rights need to be viewed as a process, in the constructionist sense, being enriched by different local, regional, national, and

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<sup>161</sup> Wood Wetzel 2007, pp. 181.

<sup>162</sup> Pikalo 2007, pp. 30-31.

supranational experiences. The multi-dimensional governance approach in mind, it is important to note that states are still the prime bearers of responsibility of human rights protection. This remains an important duty, as it has been shown that economic development does not bring improved human rights practices on its own. Welfare delivery and equity in distribution are not likely to be successfully managed without a strong involvement of the state.<sup>163</sup>

Different forms of globalisation have created new opportunities for international affairs, but also unforeseen challenges for human rights. Although there is disagreement about how global phenomena have affected the State, it seems clear that the role is changing and new schemes of shared responsibility have to be established. International realities are characterised by the reduction of borders, increased international interconnectedness and growing importance of non-state actors. As a result we are in a process of re-defining the functions of the State. As systems of human rights protection are no longer firmly bounded to the territorial state and the challenges of economic globalisation call for a broader approach, we have to ask the question of how human dignity can be protected by human rights whenever economic globalisation has an adverse impact on local conditions. Moreover, how human rights need to develop in response to a global economy that is no longer under the domination of States.<sup>164</sup>

A holistic approach to human rights is necessary when combating the new social challenges resulting from economic globalisation. Monitoring mechanisms in the field of social and economic rights have increased, which is a step towards making this set of rights more relevant and operational. Responding to new challenges also requires the full realisation of civil and political rights, which means, for example, that those individuals and communities affected by globalisation need to be ensured participation in decision-making processes. When conflicts arise between obligations of international economic agreements and human rights they need to be resolved with regard to the wider objectives of international economic cooperation.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Pikalo 2007, pp. 30-34.

<sup>164</sup> Benedek & Marella 2007, pp. 311-312.

<sup>165</sup> Benedek & Marella 2007, pp. 312.

The increase of the number of state and non-state actors in the governance of economic globalisation raises issues of legitimacy to global governance. These actors include intergovernmental organisations as well as non-governmental organisations representing public interests and transnational corporations that represent private interests. In the field of international law, the State will remain a significant actor, but will share the field with many others. This does not have to lead to the erosion of the state, but it calls for more participative decision-making structures. As more and more people are daily affected by the new economic realities, there are increasing concerns about human rights as sufficient instruments in the protection against threats caused by economic globalisation, but also voices challenging the existing governance structures in intergovernmental economic organisations. Civil society organisations demand accountability of these economic organisations and call for social responsibility of transnational corporations. In response to these challenges in the global economy, alternative human rights mechanisms have been developed, including UN special procedures, The World Bank Inspection Panel and *amicus curiae* briefs in World Trade Organization disputes. Corporate social responsibility has also been recognised as a potential set of principles in the establishment of a 'legal avenue' or 'new rules of the game' for corporations. With the assumption that economic developments do not automatically lead to more respect to human rights, it has been suggested that global institutions need to be capable of supplying global public goods such as basic human rights.<sup>166</sup>

With regard to economic globalisation, as well as other forms of globalisation (cultural, political) it has been noted by many that in order for human rights to be relevant in a globalised world, they need to be localised. Localised human rights are situation specific, and the efficiency of human rights mechanisms needs to be tested at the local level. This is linked to the importance of a bottom-up approach and the chain of dialogue at all levels, where local experiences are connected with national and transnational advocacy networks. Key actors in these processes include governments, inter-governmental organisations and businesses.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Benedek & Marella 2007, pp. 312-321.

<sup>167</sup> Benedek & Marella 2007, pp. 316.

There is call for a stronger presence of human rights in social work curriculum. In addition, a level of international social political considerations should be included as a compulsory part of social work education. Social workers need to be aware of what is happening beyond the national borders with regard to welfare policies and the related possibilities and challenges to actual human rights discourses. In the European context, a level of knowledge about the institutional structure and functions of the European Union, regional as well as international treaties, and legal enforcement mechanisms is necessary for recognising international social work's role and potential in the ongoing inclusion/exclusion discourses on both regional and global levels. Lena Dominelli has suggested that human rights should form a fundamental basis for social work education in any country. She would like to see social work curriculum consisting of various aspects of human rights, such as the history of human rights, national, regional and international legislation on human rights, and practical field skills that could be rehearsed through situation and group specific case exercises. I will add to the list an approach that covers multi-dimensional and political aspects to human rights.

It seems that the rights-based approach will continue to contribute to the formation of a new language for international social work. This development has its justification as there can be clear benefits in bringing the two discourses of human rights and social work closer to each other. This will make defining common goals by common terms easier and help the struggles in the field. Obviously social workers have not been widely active in involving themselves in international human rights discourse, and much more could be done to promote wider human rights understanding among social work professionals. In a globalised world this kind of international activism and networking fall neatly under social work's mission set in professional code of ethics. In many countries social work's primary task has been seen as implementing national strategies, applying national legislation, and therefore reinforcing a simply national perspective to social work action. Under the current global developments it will be necessary for social workers to adopt a more globally orientated attitude towards the social and other phenomena they face in every-day practice.

Perhaps the rights-based approach will provide social work practice for a more discussed basis for decision-making and assist social workers in choosing action. Understanding the long-standing and border-crossing effects of the policies social



workers realise it is required that they pursue political awareness among social professionals and have sound understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of human rights. As the view of 'West and the rest' remains one of the main questions addressed to the human rights movement, social workers need to be aware of the standings they take when they enter the arena of global human rights discourse. Ultimately, needs and rights seem to face many of the same problems with regard to power-relations or someone's definition over other definitions. Rights either are not free from connections to values and politics, unlike many actors in the human rights would like to believe. More research will be needed in future to see whether rights-talk can bring new potential to the language and practice of social work and other welfare professions provided that it is systematically accommodated in the structures at all levels of governance. The well-known saying: Think Global - Act Local seems more suited as ever for today's international social workers.

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