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A Critical Glocalization Approach: Attending to Power in the Innovation Space

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Introduction

More and more, community practitioners are realizing that all social concerns are globally interdependent (Flem et al., 2016; Healy, 2008, p. 4; Hong, 2010). In conjunction with this, educators have emphasized teaching the importance of local context in preparing social workers to engage cross-culturally (Dominelli, 2010, p. 4; Healy, 2008, p. 202; Martinez-Brawley & Zorita, 2015; Razack, 2009) and studies show that students are strongly interested in the link between local and global social issues (Lalayants et al., 2015; Smith & Cheung, 2015). The ideas used to conceptualize the processes of interaction of ideas and structures in the global world will circumscribe a practitioner's ability to define problems, conceive of solutions, understand responses, and recognize potential sources of influence and power. This paper argues for a conceptual approach that while not privileging one community, region or country's ideas, models, or interventions over another, does highlight that power differentials are always in play and must be considered. In this paper, globalization as a contested term is reviewed and several globalization paradigms are presented. Glocalization is a paradigm that leaves room for underprivileged voices and the paper advocates for an approach called critical glocalization. The word 'critical' is used in the tradition of critical theory, which seeks to uncover the way in which power is woven into societies and discover ways of changing social structures. A critical glocalization approach explores the power dynamics occurring as global and local discourses interact in a glocal space, respecting that the glocal can produce innovations that spread to the local and the global.

Before diving into the theoretical discussion, a brief example of someone working in the intersection of local and global space (in the glocal) and creating innovative services is

presented. Muhammad Yunus developed a microfinance approach to empowering the poorest of the rural poor, particularly women, in Bangladesh in 1976. Some global factors that influenced the emergence of microfinance in Bangladesh included the banking system as a legacy of the British colonial financial system, historical examples in other countries of types of community lending (Mia et al., 2019), and Yunus' PhD in economics and his academic career in the U.S. as well as his international exposure to women's rights (Yunus, 2003, pp. 16–17). Local factors included poverty exacerbated by the recently-ended war for independence, culturally conservative views of gender roles, the exclusion of most women from financial services, and usurious lending practices (Yunus, 2003, pp. 48–49). These factors mingled in the glocal space, and Muhammad Yunus identified the power dynamics playing out. He saw the oppressive functioning of the formal and informal banking systems alongside the powerlessness of rural women in poverty. In the glocal space, he engaged stakeholders with various levels of power, created new discourses around poverty, financial mechanisms, and women, and innovated a form of microfinance geared to those previously excluded from financial institutions, allowing small groups of people, with a focus on women, to take out small loans to start microbusinesses to feed their families (Mia et al., 2019; Yunus, 2003, p. 71). His successful intervention, created in the glocal space, eventually spread throughout the country, became the Grameen Bank, and influenced organizations throughout the world to imitate his model (Mia et al., 2019; Yunus, 2003, p. 155).

As this example illustrates, Yunus was working in a space in which global and local discourses, structures, and power intermingled, and by taking a critical glocalization approach, was able to engage variously powered stakeholders to resist current structural barriers and

innovate in ways that positively impacted marginalized communities. A more in-depth example of innovation in the globalization space follows the theoretical section below.

Globalization as process and as result

Globalization is a term that can refer to both a process and a result. As a process, globalization is variously defined. The International Federation of Social Workers broadly and simply defines it as, “the process by which all peoples and communities come to experience an increasingly common economic, social and cultural environment. By definition, the process affects everybody throughout the world” (*Globalization and the environment*, 2012) Scholars point to the drivers of globalization as the growth of information and communication technology and the spread of neoliberal economic policies (Findlay & McCormack, 2007; West & Heath, 2011). Neoliberal policies push for reduction of government interference in the economy, privatization of business and industry, flexible labor markets, and balanced government budgets. Although globalization is talked about as if it were a singular process, the literature suggests that it is an umbrella term for multiple processes. “It is important to restate the obvious fact that the term globalization is a linguistic form of shorthand which connotes an extremely complex and volatile set of international events” (Midgley, 2007).

While scholars have trouble settling on a definition, they often agree on the apparent results of globalization, summarized here by Dominelli:

- “• cultural diffusion and rapprochement contradicted by increasingly nationalist tendencies in many different countries;
- social relations that shape all aspects of life by giving primacy to market mechanisms and discipline;

- migration as a response to economic hardship, environmental degradation and violence;
- general integration and a widening of economic forces across borders compared with protectionism and exclusion;
- rapid technological change that has introduced new forms of social exclusion, e.g. the digital divide;
- disparities between urban and rural; and
- urbanization and centralization that stress environmental capacities to support ever rising population numbers” (2010).

Assumptions underlying globalization theories

The assumption underlying some definitions are that globalization is an unstoppable force of Western hegemony over developing countries. In other words, globalization is a form of Western imperialism that developing countries are unable to resist. For example, some globalization theorists adhere to modernization theory, which asserts that countries will develop if they copy the forms and structures of Western capitalist democracy. This perspective has given rise to competing theorists, who argue that development is not a semi- evolutionary or predictable process. For example, world-systems theory contends that Western capitalism reproduces the economic dependency of the developing world on the developed; without this dependency, Western capitalism would not survive. In other words, developing countries are not free to follow the supposed developmental path because they are being dominated by more powerful countries (Wallerstein, 1974, p. 349). Although modernization and world-systems theories are at odds with each other, they both assume a type of Western imperialism at their foundations, viewing less developed countries as mainly passive recipients of outside ideas and forces.

Many theorists talk about globalization in this way. Swyngedouw reframes the discussion by pointing to globalization as a discourse in which the idea of the overwhelming power of global economic and political forces is embedded, therefore providing additional uncontested legitimacy to globalization's outcomes (2004). He traces the emergence of this "neoliberal discourse of market-led internationalism and globalisation" to the 1980's, and states that it has become "a hegemonic, incontestable and virtually naturalised and self-evident set of arguments and beliefs" (Swyngedouw, 2004). He believes that the result of this discourse is to suppress both resistance and the conception of alternatives.

The attribution of globalization to neoliberal policy is widespread. Historically, neoliberal ideology considered that social institutions that form the core of social work and community practice are costly features to a society in which maximizing economic productivity was the main goal (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Much of this thinking was spread by international economic development organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Their structural adjustment programs were linked to loan agreements, and imposed policies that impacted the social welfare structures of developing and transitioning countries (Baker & Hinds, 2012; Cox & Pawar, 2006, p. 113; Deacon et al., 1997, p. 62; Healy, 2008, p. 38). As a result, neo-liberal economic policy is difficult for individual countries to resist when they face a choice of either changing their policy or not receiving critical loan aid.

Although the discourse painting neo-liberal globalization as inevitable and irresistible is widespread, some globalization theorists have contested it (Harris & Chou, 2001; Midgley, 2007; Pugh & Gould, 2000; Webb, 2003). While they would agree that ideas and structures are increasingly interconnected, and that certain ideas are having a greater impact around the world than others, they would not characterize the process of globalization as omnipotent. "The highly

deterministic and reductionist account of globalization provided in some macrostructural approaches ignores the role of forces which seek to resist globalization, such as national and international people's movements, by assuming that globalization is both irreversible and all-consuming" (Khan & Dominelli, 2010). Pugh & Gould go so far as to plead with social workers "to reject the oversimplified, inconsistent, and inaccurate aspects of some accounts of globalization thus far offered. By embracing the omnipotence and inevitability thesis, some social theorists seem, paradoxically, to be accepting the catechisms of neo-liberal economists who reify market forces and posit a crude economic determinism," (Pugh & Gould, 2000).

More recently, the term "post-globalization" has appeared in various academic literatures. However, scholars are not using the term to describe a state in which globalization is either decreasing or has finished. Rather, they talk about it as representing a world in which national cultures are pushing back against globalization rather than welcoming neoliberal economic policies and ideas (Flew, 2018). Political populism and nationalistic tendencies are on the rise across the world, a result of resistance against economic and social structures that have increased income inequality and against perceived Western cultural imperialism (Flew, 2018; Peters, 2018). In an important book on globalization and communities, Dominelli describes that "people respond to changing communities by revitalising them in various ways - embracing change; restructuring to accommodate it; or resisting it" (2007, p. 3). The current paper adds to the options that communities have, by conceptualizing a space in which communities and their members can participate to create new possibilities.

Glocalization

This space of new possibilities is called glocalization. Ritzer, in his book *The Globalization of Nothing*, asserted that globalization can be broken into two somewhat

contradictory subprocesses: globalization and glocalization (2004, p. xiii). Globalization is a process in which “growth imperatives push organizations and nations to expand globally and to impose themselves on the local” (G. Ritzer, 2004, p. xiii).. This more economically deterministic view of the globalization process owes its roots to Marxian and neo-Marxian theory, with corporate profitability as the driving force. In addition, Weber’s emphasis on the continual spread of ‘rationalized’ structures around the world, and their growing control over people, is inherent in globalization. Thus, globalization arises out of modernism.

On the other hand, glocalization is “a process whereby the interaction of the global and the local produces something new – the glocal” (G. Ritzer, 2004, p. xiii). This greater emphasis on diversity, individual narrative, and differentiation arises out of postmodernism. Ritzer explained that glocalization is a more specific term for how many globalization theorists already describe transnational processes, as “the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas” (George Ritzer, 2010, p. 255).

Robertson, as one of the earliest glocalization social theorists, argued that globalization was not simply a homogenizing force, but also a vehicle through which economic, structural, and cultural heterogenization could take place (1995). He rejects the idea of a global-local dichotomy. Robertson would say that the integration of global and local produces an ever-expanding variety of outcomes, as each context includes unique actors at all social levels that influence the interaction.

Ritzer summarizes some of the key elements of glocalization in four points:

“1. The world is growing more pluralistic – globalization theory is sensitive to differences within and between areas of the world.

2. Individuals and local groups have great power to adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a glocalized world.
3. Social processes are relational and contingent, and globalization produces variety.
4. Commodities and the media, arenas and key forces are not seen as totally coercive” (G. Ritzer, 2004, p. 77).

Similar to how Swyngedouw (2004) talked about globalization as a discourse, Szulecki described glocalization as an ongoing conversation (2011). This conversation leaves room for the power and efficacy of local actors, as opposed to the hegemony of global discourse and actors.

A different way of thinking of glocalization in community practice is offered by Raz, who conceptualizes glocalization as an analytic perspective (1999). With this perspective, we do not predict what forms will emerge from the intersection of the global and the local, but rather affirm that a type of continuum exists, ranging from domination to resistance, and that the interaction is constantly in flux in ways unique to each culture. Payne and Askeland agreed with this perspective and, for example, alleged that there is no such thing as a single, unified social work, but rather “social works,” based on local cultural assumptions and needs (2008, p. 65).

In summary, the various definitions surrounding globalization in the literature point to a variety of ideological positions that can have an impact on social work education, community practice, social policy, and social welfare systems. The prevailing conceptualization of globalization (e.g. grobalization) is often negative, presenting a discourse that pays little attention to processes of resistance and to actions of those with less power. The discourse around glocalization as an alternative is more positive. Glocalization recognizes that power is not unilateral, but that as global ideas and forces interact with local places, a mix of acceptance, resistance, adaptation, and reformulation occurs. Voices which are ignored in the predominant

globalization narrative are heard in glocalization – voices such as local professional organizations, governments, policymakers, educators, and social work practitioners.

Picturing Glocalization

Glocalization is “a process whereby the interaction of the global and the local produces something new – the glocal” (G. Ritzer, 2004, p. xiii). A simple glocalization model is shown in Figure 1. In this model, the local and the global intersect, creating a unique space in which a continual process of glocalization takes place. Both the global and the local exert influence on the intersection to varying degrees. The glocal space is a place of creativity and innovation, and new ideas emanate out, back into the global and the local.

In addition, the space of the glocal can vary according to how much interaction is taking place, and how many new ideas the glocal is already producing. This allows for thinking about how interactions function differently in different places. For example, prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union, social work as a profession did not exist in the geographic region that is now Russia. While social work practice has developed in Russia since 1991 through local initiatives and international projects, there are regions in Russia that have been relatively untouched by international influence (Romanov & Kononenko, 2014). The glocal space in such regions would be rather small, with minimal overlap between the local and global. In contrast, cities such as

Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Tomsk have had significant foreign social work collaborations take place. In these places, the glocal space would be getting larger. Figure 2 illustrates this scenario.

Figure 2. Glocalization with Greater Global Influence

Power & Change

According to glocalization theory, every glocalization space is unique, because every local context differs and every interaction with cultural forms from a foreign source is differentially received and interpreted (Robertson, 1995). A strength of this approach is cultural sensitivity. However, the danger with using a simple glocalization model is that power dynamics may not be considered. Looking at the Venn diagrams, it appears that local and global forces have equal influence, especially when looking at figure 1. As figure 2 shows, the size and relative influence of the local and global can change. Often it is the global that wields more power, as in the case of the International Monetary Fund's influence on Russian economic and social policy of the early 1990s, when Russia was in dire need of financial assistance. However, it is possible for the local to have more power. In addition, actors within a sphere may hold varying degrees of power. The focus on power is central to social justice and social work. Therefore, social workers, particularly those planning to work in a new context, must apply the theory of glocalization while accounting for power. This is the approach proposed in this paper: critical glocalization.

Critical Glocalization

Power to accept, change, or create new social policy and social interventions resides in actors, structures, values, and discourse. A critical glocalization approach explores the power dynamics in all arenas as global and local discourses interact in a glocal space, and social workers using such an approach intentionally identify low-power and disenfranchised voices and groups as they seek to collaborate.

A first step towards a critical glocalization approach is to identify the key actors interacting in a context. An example is found below (see Figure 3). In the center area of the Venn diagram lies the glocal space, where innovation, interaction of ideas, and influence in all directions is created. The local and global areas surround the glocal. Surrounding the Venn diagram are possible actors, structures, values and discourses that are at work in the spaces of the diagram, depending on the topic being explored. The list is not exhaustive, and practitioners must determine the key components for their context.

What is not directly shown in the model is the differential power of actors, structures, discourse, and values. This is where social work educators, researchers, and practitioners need to take the second step in a critical glocalization approach – analysis of power within and among the actors and spaces. This approach incorporates an examination of power that intentionally includes individuals, groups, discourses, values, and structures that are marginalized. An awareness of the power dynamics at play is facilitated by key questions. For example: Who is making decisions? In which direction(s) does their influence flow? Who benefits and who is disadvantaged? How? What alliances are there between actors? What discourse binds them together? Where does friction occur? Who would benefit from change? Who would resist and why? Questions should also intentionally explore less obvious influences. What international issues and/or ideas are influencing this community? In what ways are those issues interacting in the glocal space, what innovations are appearing, and what actors or groups stand to win or lose? By asking these and a myriad of other questions, social workers, be they natives of a context or outsiders coming in, will be better able to collaborate with and empower low-power actors to play roles in designing, implementing, and evaluating intervention or policy.

Critical Glocalization: a retrospective example

One example of glocalization and power within the glocalization space occurred in Russia. Since Soviet times, children who were removed from their homes or otherwise without family were placed in state institutions called children's homes (historical legal structure and social policy) (Malisheva, 2009). Minimal services existed for their biological families and children rarely returned to them (Rebrov & Agafonov, 2008). In 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved and Russia became an independent country. The 1990s saw an influx of foreign ideas

into this formerly closed region, including ideas regarding child welfare from Europe and the United States (international influence and training) (Aleksandrova, 2008; Belenkaya, 2007).

In 1994, Maria Feliksovna Ternovskaya, director of Children's Home #19 in Moscow (government social service provider), decided to implement an innovative structure in collaboration with a foundation (foreign funder) (Channel 1 News, 2007; Malisheva, 2009). This innovation combined the local, historical reality of children's homes with the global idea of foster care. In the glocalization space Maria Ternovskaya created a completely new program called "Our Family" (Milkus, 2009). The program's priority was to place children in foster-care-like families – and this form of child placement was called "patronat" (Aleksandrova, 2008; Maiers & Grebneva, 2008). Families in the community were recruited and trained to receive children into their homes. These families signed an agreement that made them actual employees with Children's Home #19 (Milkus, 2009). Families received monetary vouchers for food and clothing for the children and also a stipend (economic policy). The family and the patronat institution were jointly responsible for protecting the rights of the child. The greatest innovation was transforming the building that housed Children's Home #19 into a resource center for the patronat families (social work intervention) (Belenkaya, 2007; Maiers & Grebneva, 2008). Professionals providing services at the center were psychologists, lawyers, psychiatrists, doctors, social pedagogues, social workers, education specialists, speech therapists, neurologists, and others (Aleksandrova, 2008; Ternovskaya, 2007). Placing children with families and transforming the children's home into a comprehensive service center was a new institutional form of child welfare service provision in Russia and the idea spread to other regions of the country through practitioners who traveled to Moscow to be trained through "Our Family" and Children's Home #19 (Belenkaya, 2007; Ternovskaya, 2007)(Aleksandrova, 2008; Kirilenko,

2009; Malisheva, 2009). This form of service provision arose in the glocalization space, where local and global ideas interacted, and spread out into the global, as the “Our Family” program received a “Road to the Future” award from UNICEF in 2000 (Russia Today, n.d.).

While at first glance this example of glocalization seemed to be a success story for a new intervention in social welfare involving community activation, it also became an example of how power intersects in the glocal space and how innovation could be crushed. In 2009 a national law was passed that the Russian government Department of Child Services would be solely responsible for children without families, and banned the patronat model and the nonprofit organizations that were working with it (social policy, political system) (Kirilenko, 2009). The passage of this bill illustrates the culmination of work by various sources of opposition to the patronat model, and how they were able to harness power in the glocal arena.

Prior to the passage of the bill, Maria Ternovskaya had described efforts by her and other professionals around the country working in patronat organizations to have a national bill passed to further support the patronat system (legal system, social policy) (Belenkaya, 2007). At the same time, one member of the Duma (lower house of the Federal Assembly in Russia), Ekaterina Lakhova, argued that the regional laws governing the patronat system were in contradiction to federal law (Belenkaya, 2007). Those working in the patronat system disagreed, saying that the regional patronat laws were based on the Family Code of the Russian Federation Article 123 (Belenkaya, 2007).

Various other rationales for resistance to the patronat model emerged. One was that grants from foreign sources helped support the patronat organizations (Kirilenko, 2009). Those in the government who were wary of foreign influence cited this in opposition. In addition, they questioned the use of nongovernmental organizations in the child welfare process (Maiers &

Grebneva, 2008) and whether the patronat model was financially responsible or prudent by paying patronat families as employees (Milkus, 2009). Problems in the regions aligning new patronat models with existing institutional administrative practices also produced resistance (Aleksandrova, 2008)

Proponents of the patronat model pointed to their child-centered values and rate of successful child placements, arguing that going back to government control would be valuing efficiency over children (Milkus, 2009; Ternovskaya, 2007). Some legislators, such as Oleg Smolin, lobbied in the State Duma Committee on Women, Family and Children Affairs on behalf of the patronat model: “I found understanding in the committee, but apparently this is not enough,” he said in an interview (Kirilenko, 2009). In the end, Moscow closed its “center for patronat child welfare, Children’s Home #19, which not long ago was priding itself on the fact that all of its children were living in families. The home will return to being a regular children’s home and the director of many years resigned” (Kirilenko, 2009).

While this example does not go into the intricacies of all of the political power that various actors wielded in this scenario, it does illustrate how a new community social work intervention arose in the glocal space, and how various actors used their power to influence the fate of the patronat model. Actors included legislators, government officials who controlled money streams, government administrators that were losing power in the patronat system, those in the institutional children’s home system who lost their jobs, outside contractors who supplied children’s homes, professionals who gained new roles, children who moved to living in families, patronat parents and schools in the community, biological families who received help, and other experts in child welfare in Russia. These actors each had varying levels of power; for example, as the patronat model spread, the power (in terms of influence) of those running the patronat

system increased, while the power of traditional administrators decreased. Those in government jobs, however, had longstanding lines of connection higher in the institutional system. As Olga Alfer said in an interview before the 2009 law was passed, “Unfortunately, the voice of professionals [in the patronat system] is weaker than the voice of administrators” (Belenkaya, 2007).

The story does not end here. The glocalization space is dynamic, and while the 2009 law seemed to predict a reversion to an old system, this was not the case. This paper will not elaborate on further developments except to say that the Russian government established new family crisis centers, instituted a foster care-type system, and began to work with and even fund NGOs providing support to foster families. In other words, the innovations of the patronat model stayed in glocalization’s discursive mix for further innovation and change in child welfare. For a more comprehensive analysis of the changes in Russian child welfare, see Kulmala et al. (2017).

Implications

The implications of different perspectives of global change for community practice are immense. Each lead to different approaches to mobilization, social policy, and advocacy. Globalization as commonly conceived is based on modernism, holding that universal knowledge exists and is applicable across cultures. Those with a modernist approach would not have a problem advising on best practices or in changing existing structures with limited regard for local context. Such an approach lends credence to the hegemonic globalization narrative, and if the actors using such an approach have power, their approach muffles the voices of other stakeholders in the system.

Strict post-modernists would repudiate the claim of universal knowledge in the social sphere and assert that all knowledge is socially constructed; therefore, if someone wants to enter

a new culture, one must discard pre-existing ideas and begin by understanding the culture. In fact, at the extreme some might even say it would be unethical or maybe even impossible for an outsider to create change.

Although glocalization arises from post-modernism, it finds a compromise. In glocalization, neither the global nor the local is discredited. The local retains value. Global universals may not exist, but global ideas, discourse, and practice may contain elements that are applicable in multiple situations and cultures. The goal of critical glocalization is to participate respectfully in the glocal space, expecting that the interactions occurring therein can create something new. Understanding the power complexities of a context and the change processes using a critical glocalization approach makes room for various stakeholders to act, recognizing that globalization is not an irresistible force.

This paper reviews globalization as a contested term and argues that glocalization is a globalization paradigm that leaves room for underprivileged voices. For community practitioners immersed in the glocalization space, the potential and pace of innovation can be so exhilarating that they short-change a careful examination of power. Taking a critical glocalization approach facilitates attention to social justice by exploring the power dynamics occurring as global and local discourses, policies, and actors interact in a glocal space. An awareness of the power dynamics at play is facilitated by key questions and how resultant innovations affect the power dynamics between actors. The example of the patronat model illustrates how a glocal innovation affected various groups, how different actors sought to control the patronat model, and how the glocal space continued to influence the overall trajectory of child welfare reform. In this example, the lowest power groups of children, biological families, and patronat parents had little influence in the glocal space where the child welfare system was in flux. What would they have

wanted to say and to contribute? How could their voices have been amplified? These are the questions that community workers practicing critical glocalization keep in mind as they work in glocal innovation spaces.

The examples in Russia and in Bangladesh set forth in this paper are specific to the historic contexts in which the innovations of the patronat system and the Grameen Bank microfinance systems were formed. As glocalization spaces are unique in time, geography, discourse, and culture, no one example can suffice to fully illustrate all possible facets of a critical glocalization framework. However, the flexibility of the framework allows practitioners to use the concepts therein to analyze settings in which they are working.

The framework through which social workers gaze as they enter a new culture and/or location will dictate to what degree they will look for and respect various sources of power, particularly in a world in which the global and local increasingly interact. A generic “globalization” framework does not suffice, as the common understanding of the term connotes the overwhelming influence of a powerful actor or force over a less powerful one. Critical glocalization as a guiding approach sensitizes social workers to power dynamics, develops their respect for local expertise, values, and ways of knowing, and reminds them to reflect on their own values and biases. With this approach, social workers will be encouraged to look for new solutions and novel adaptations/creations of interventions that arise in the sphere of the glocal. Finally, they will seek to understand the broader political, economic, structural, policy, and discursive contexts in which they are working, and intentionally look for the marginalized voices in our complex, interconnected world.

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