

International Social Work

Preparing the year abroad

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Katherine Kendall 2008 in her preface to the second edition of Lynne Healy's "International Social Work Professional Action in an Interdependent World" (Healy, 2008):

“Neglect of international content in the social work curriculum is perhaps due not so much to lack of interest on the part of faculty members, but rather to lack of knowledge, particularly knowledge drawn from firsthand experience in other lands”.

Angelika Groterath's international experiences – consultancies to the UN, INGOs and other, 1991-2006



School in Rwanda 2005, assessing a EU project



Canal Hotel Baghdad, office of the United Nations' Special Representative in Iraq who died in the bombing in 2003 – emergency psychologist for UNSECOORD – the United Nations Security Coordinator

- Around the turn of the last century – social work as a profession in Europe, later: through-out the USA; associated with charity work and settlement housing in the era of industrialization and urbanization.
- But then exported to South America, the Caribbean, India and South Africa.
- ***“At that time imperialism and colonization included slavery and indentureship in many developing countries. Social work also operated through missionary activity, which resulted in controlling the minds of the natives through spiritual and religious conversion. Social work is not innocent of historical abuses associated with colonial practices, especially and foremost among Aboriginal peoples.” (Razack, 2009:11)***

Definition of International Social Work from the 1930s:

1937: “exchanges of ideas by social workers at international meetings as well as inter-country work, or intergovernmental work, and relief work” – Warren in Social Work Yearbook, cited by A. Campanini, ppt, private.

- 1928 and 1929: formation of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) – important actors.
- IASSW and IFSW have provided leadership in connecting social work to international agencies and international development organization.
- Second World War → profound changes.
- Eastern Europe: communist takeover – social work was abolished as unnecessary and bourgeois.

Western part of the world: Major Shift to International Organizations in the 50ies – (mainly American and to a minor extent British) social workers involvement in the efforts of the UNRRA = United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, established by 44 nations: “For social work and social welfare, the restoration period following World War II can be described as a rich cornucopia filled with international programs, projects and opportunities” (Kendall, 1978, quoted from Healy, 2008:152).

For American and British social work, as could be added.

“[...] the UN soon became the largest contributor to the spread of professional social work throughout the world, taking responsibility for starting schools of social work in a number of developing countries (Younghusband, 1963). ... One of these [a series of studies] Training for Social Work: An International Survey by Katherine Kendall, was issued in 1950” (Healy 2008:152).

→ Definition of International Social Work by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), USA:



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[...] the term ‘international social work’ should properly be confined to programs of social work of international scope, such as those carried on by intergovernmental agencies, chiefly those of the U.N.; governmental; or non-governmental agencies with international programs (Stein 1953:3; zit.n. Healy 2008:8).

See also Friedlander, 1955: “Friedlander uses the term international social work to refer specifically to the social welfare activities of international agencies such as the Red Cross and the United Nations” (Campanini, ppt, private).

But: After expanding social work in developing countries with the help of the UN, 1950s and 60s were periods of independence movements and decolonization – also thanks to the UN and people like Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary General of the United Nations who died in the crash of his airplane during the Congo Crisis in 1961.

For social work started what has been called the “era of indigenization”.

Concurrent definitions of International Social Work today*:

Hokenstad et al. (1992):

International social work is concerned with the profession and practice in different parts of the world . . . the different roles social workers perform, the practice methods they use, the problems they deal with and the challenges they face.

Healy (2001/08):

International professional action and the capacity for international action by the social work profession and its members, having four dimensions:

- Internationally related domestic practice and advocacy
- Professional exchange
- International practice
- International policy development and advocacy

Ahmadi (2003):

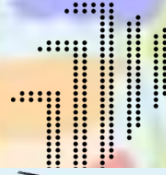
International social work can and should play an important role in consolidating democracy, social justice and the implementation of international conventions such as human rights, elimination of discrimination against women, rights of children and so on, as well as preventing conflicts and supporting peace by promoting global cultural integration.

Lyons, Manion, Carlsen (2006):

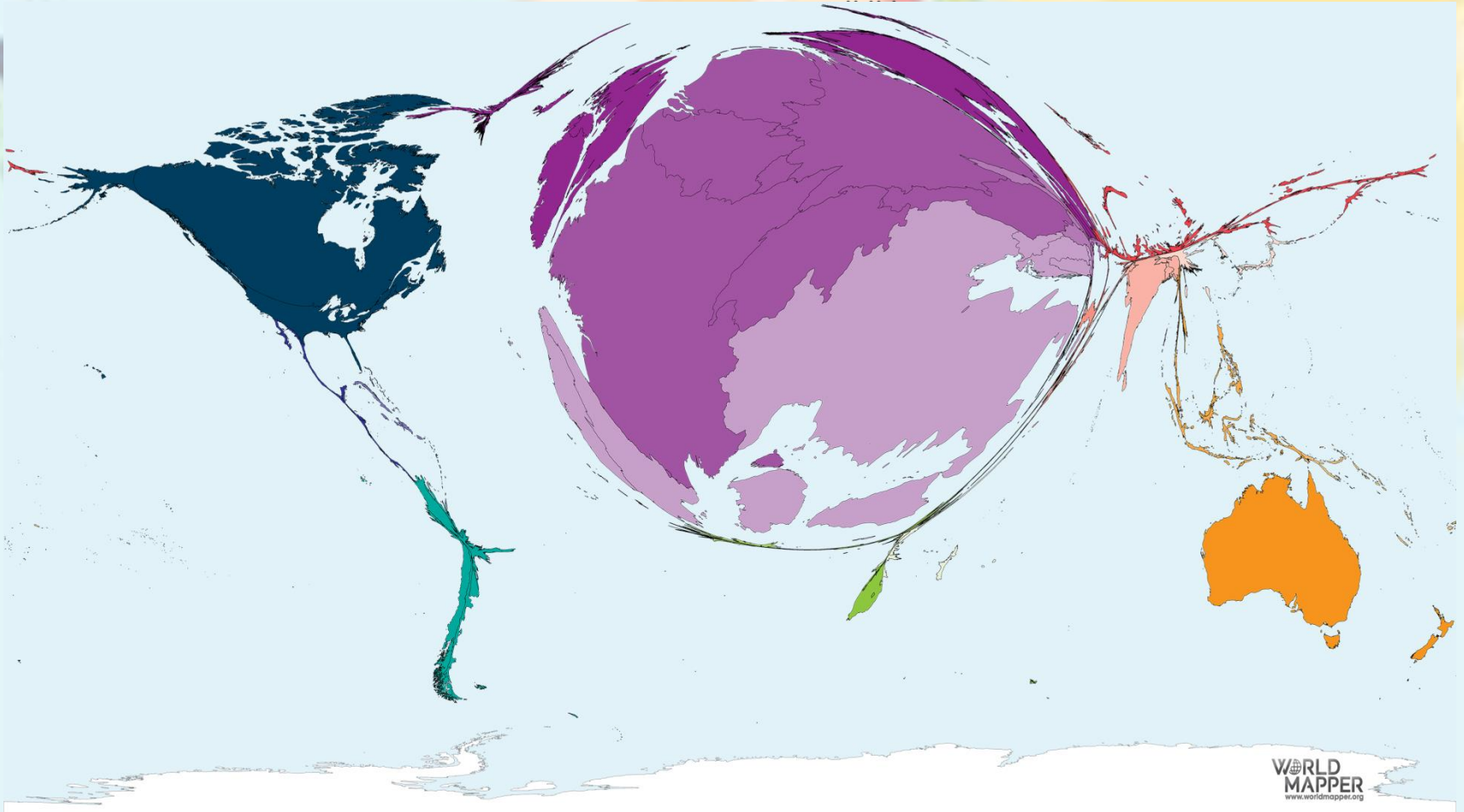
Having an increased understanding of global events, influences and problems; recognizing the international and crosscultural dimension of local issues; utilizing comparative or internationally derived knowledge to inform their analyses of problem areas and evaluation of possible strategies for intervention.

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The Classroom as a postcolonial space -

Students who participate in an international social work course do so for a variety of reasons. Some want to be able to practice social work abroad, some want to return to their country of origin to give back to the people from their country, some want to practice locally with a global understanding, and others want to aim to focus on human rights, social justice, equity and anti-oppression. Many are motivated by a combination of the above (Razack 2009:13f).

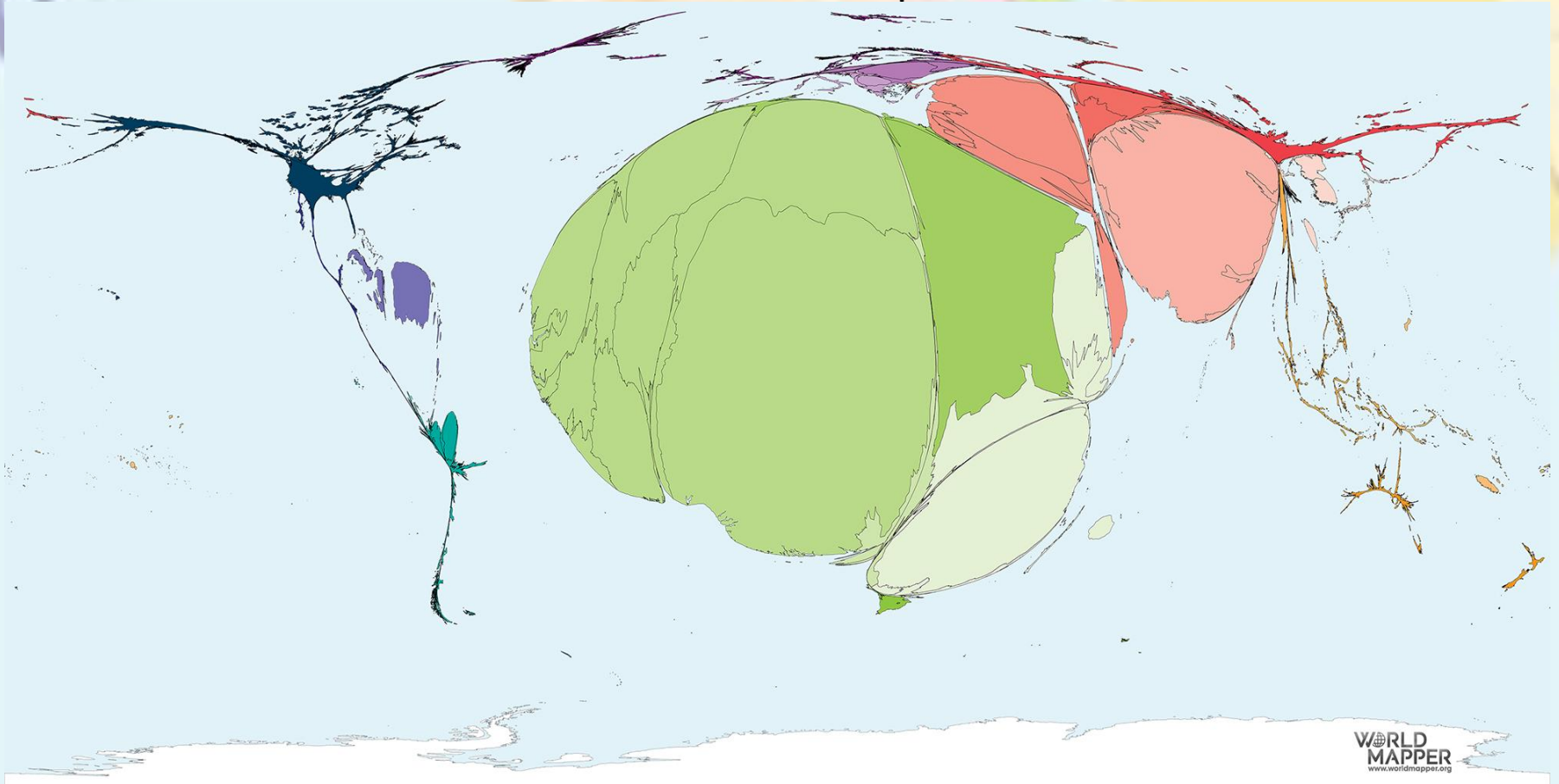
A white student, with others in agreement, vehemently voiced her view that child labor is exploitation which we should categorically denounce. She further stated that this is in fact a human rights issue. There were students in the classroom who earlier in the term had already shared personal experiences of working in the field as children and others had discussed how many children in their own village had to go to work in order for their family to survive. Thus, as the white student shared her views I observed the looks of annoyance and disengagement of many racialized students in the class. This particular student's passionate beliefs help to illustrate Northern superiority in the classroom in the positioning of the privileged white body over the subordinate body of color, because according to Smythe (2001: 153), 'international rules per se are not the problem but, rather, the balance of interests those rules serve, and who has a voice in making the rules'.

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