Social Work at the Edge

Social Work in the Context of Political Conflict
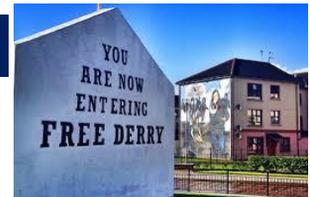
Jane Lindsay

Personal/ Professional and the Political

Derry

Northern Ireland

Belfast

Republic of Ireland

Dublin

1980-1988

YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE DERRY

LONDONDERRY WEST BANK LOYALISTS STILL UNDER SIEGE NO SURRENDER

ODCs vs PMOs

H.M. PRISONS MAGHABERRY

"What ever you say, say nothing" land (Seamus Heaney)

"Religion's never mentioned here", of course.
"You know them by their eyes," and hold your tongue.
"One side's as bad as the other," never worse" ……

"Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
In Ballymurphy. Competence with pain,
Coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
We hug our little destiny again"

PMOs and ODCs

"In some situations of political and ethnic conflict, particularly where there is suspicion about the purpose of the intervention and the identity of the professional, a neutral approach can in fact be dangerous and counterproductive (Jones, 1988). Social workers therefore need to be aware of the competing interests in any political conflict which leads to violence, and understand how this affects their view of their own and client's identities"

Campbell J (2007) Social Work, Political Violence and Historical Change: Reflections from Northern Ireland *Social Work and Society* Vol 5, No 3

quoting **Jones, L. 1988**: *The question of political neutrality when doing psychosocial work with survivors of political violence*, in: International Review of Psychiatry, 10, pp.239-247.

Questioning, approaches and reflection

- Own **identity**, personal safety, "community punishment", negotiating between state, law and individual service users and their communities.

- **Conceptualising approaches**: *Training for Transformation* and Paulo Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

- **Interventions** – use of creative approaches and including art therapy and self-help materials

- **Escape**
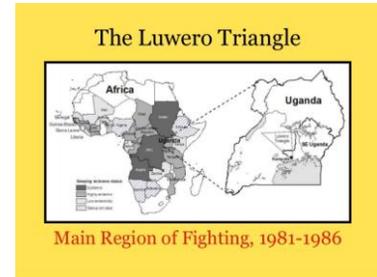
Questioning and reflection - Uganda

- **Similarities and differences** – conflict and colonial legacies, own identity -Conflict and sectarianism, ethnic differences (including language)
- **New professionals/ or specialism?** Approach to professional education; using Frierian ideas;
- **Interventions –** creative approaches; inter-professional working; quilts; training and evaluation, "local and international helpers", the impact of funding, is "PSTD" meaningful/ critical psychiatry? (see also Bracken P. and Petty, C(1998) *Rethinking the Trauma of War*
- **Supervision** – and its role in supporting workers

Occupied Palestinian Territories 1997 - 2009
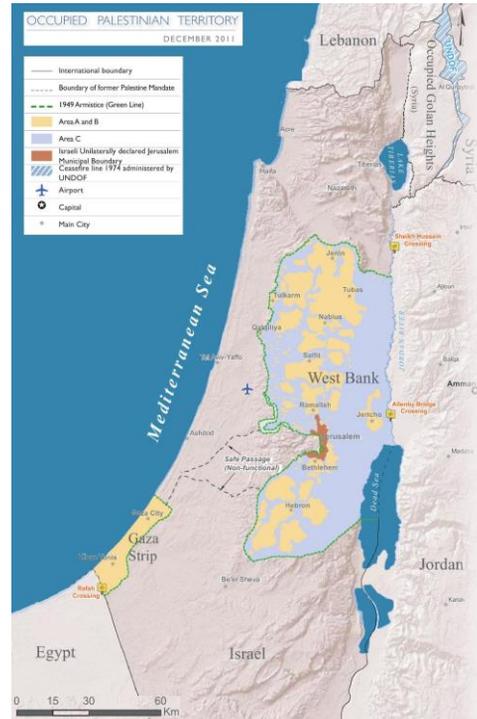
Majdoleen:

I was appointed to my post as social worker with UNRWA three years ago in the emergency relief section. I work in a refugee camp and with refugees who have left the camp and settled in villages. My job is to assess the needs of families for relief- mostly food and cash. I visit and talk to families. They ask for food and money for economic reasons, but we listen and hear their problems. There is a lot of domestic violence, violence between family members; divorce, housing problems, ill health and some people misuse drugs and alcohol. Many men have lost their jobs because they are no longer allowed to enter Israel to work.

We talk to them as social workers; we never see ourselves as only giving food and cash. Because of what we have studied, we want to help them improve their situation and for them not just depend on the help UNRWA gives. We have the idea that most of the families are so busy thinking about how to survive that they forget many things about how to live their lives. We want to work in a human way.

We know we need to work on ourselves so we can be suitable to sit down with a family about how to deal with problems. There is a lot of respect between us as a group and we can use our experience. We want to learn as much as we can so we can help people and we are planning the next course we want to do.. We want to do the best we can. We are proud of the steps we are taking."

Laila

In my work in the school I am always dealing with emergencies, mostly to do with violence – girls fighting, talking about each other, about boyfriends, and about boyfriends coming to school. The girls can fight physically. I talk to them individually and try to understand their point of view. A lot of the time I work with individuals and small groups and I also work with parents. As my school is in Jerusalem, there are problems with child protection. We are under Israeli rule and we would not call the police or Israeli social workers, though we are meant to. We try to solve these problems ourselves.

Lindsay, Jane, Baidoun, Mahmoud and Jones, David N. (2011) Case study: working with sexual abuse in East Jerusalem. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 5(3), pp. 298-305. ISSN (print) 1749-6535

Inter-sections between conflicts

Starting to think about this with others working in areas of political conflict

Sense making Weick (1995) (the importance of sense making in the construction of the identity of the self, sense making as a social process; rendering meaningful lived experience)

Conversations leading to conference in Queens, Belfast 2003

- Northern Ireland, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel (Campbell. Lindsay and Baidoun, Ramon)

Starting to think about this with others working in areas of political conflict

Sense making and making comparisons

- Comparative research project – Occupied Palestinian Territories, Israel, Northern Ireland Ramon, Shulamit, Campbell, Jim, Lindsay, Jane, McCrystal, Patrick and Baidoun, Naimeh (2006) The impact of political conflict on social work: experiences from Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 36(3), pp. 435-450. ISSN (print) 0045-3102

  - Lindsay, Jane (2007) The impact of the 2nd Intifada: an exploration of the experiences of Palestinian psychosocial counsellors and social workers. *Illness, Crisis, and Loss*, 15(2), pp. 137-153. ISSN (print) 1054-1373

The impact of the 2nd Intifada: an exploration of the experiences of Palestinian psychosocial counsellors and social workers

- 26 interviews with workers from the West Bank and Gaza in the period 2003-2004, during a crisis phase in this long-term conflict when Israeli forces reoccupied the West Bank and Gaza. Interview data were supplemented by two surveys of psychosocial workers in the OPT
- Findings:
  - Resourcefulness and commitment of workers to providing services
  - Common experiences of conflict appeared to lead to feelings of collective solidarity in which survival becomes a form of resistance.
  - The cumulative impact of being both a helper and a victim/survivor in times of war increased stress and feelings of anger and presented challenges to professional values.

The impact of the 2nd Intifada: an exploration of the experiences of Palestinian psychosocial counsellors and social workers

"To work during the war and in bad conditions is not easy for anyone. As a social worker we have to believe in change and choice and that we can reduce the pressure. Here in Palestine we do many things but nothing changes because the political issues are fixed and the occupation is still. And because of that sometimes, yanny, I feel like burnout because nothing changes. Always we go to the families and we see the same problems and hear bad experiences and bad memories and bad stories and nothing changes. It is not easy for me as a social worker just to listen. We have to work for changes but nothing changes. It is because of the occupation"

"It has given me feelings that we have to find some way to live together because there is no end for this violence. We have to understand each other more. I think it is difficult because in this situation our heart is full. We have to find some way. The Israelis are human beings too".

"You discover something internal, that you have patience, you can work under pressure and in bad conditions and you can make something happen. Working with people who have been tortured, I draw on my own experience".

Questioning, approaches and reflection

- **Interventions** – development of supervision framework and professional development programmes in OPT (see refs)
- **Sense making –** Ramon, S (ed) *Social Work in the Context of Political Conflict (2008)* – <u>defined</u> as

  "political conflict- that fought for resolution between social groups which may differ in size, and where violence is/has been a major feature either in the present or in the past relationships between these groups. Violence is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, with emotional, physical, social and symbolic layers. It includes exploitation of the weak, all too often accompanied by disregard of the human rights of those perceived as belonging to the other side of the conflict" (p.5)

  Contributions from 12 countries. JL – **Education in situations of Political Conflict**

Next steps in thinking this through further

IASSW projects

a)   www.ISW4peace.org – to set up a web-based community of practice.

International Social Work for Peace aimed to enhance professional education and research in social work in political conflict and post-conflict situations, and to provide a wider supportive community, united in obligations to pursue social justice and social development- *led to*

b) Project to **develop a social work curriculum on political conflict**

Duffy, Joe, Ramon, Shulamit, Guru, Surinder, Lindsay, Jane, Cemlyn, Sarah and Nuttman-Shwartz, Orit (2013) Developing a social work curriculum on political conflict: findings from an IASSW-funded project. *European Journal of Social Work*, 16(5), pp. 689-707. ISSN (print) 1369-1457

Where are we now?
Social Work for Critical peace?

- Since 2013 a mushrooming of **case studies** of social work responses to war and conflict from a wide number of countries both currently experiencing conflict and in a post conflict phase

- Campbell, J. Ioakimidis V & Maglajlic R.A (2018) recent **comparative analysis** (Northern Ireland, Bosnia Herzegovina and Cyprus) attempt to move the debate forward. They identify 4 analytical themes which may be helpful while recognising **flux, ambiguity and change** in spaces of conflict

Campbell, J. Ioakimidis V & Maglajlic R.A (2018): Social work for critical peace: a comparative approach to understanding social work and political conflict, European Journal of Social Work, DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1462149

Where are we now?
Social Work for Critical peace?

Theme 1: colonialism past and present -dealing with legacy issues, past and present

Theme 2: political systems and the reification of identities Simplistic dichotomies need to be challenged and deconstructed. 'The mandate to silence' (a collective avoidance of the need to consider the complexities of segregation and conflict) needs to be challenged.

Where are we now?
Social Work for Critical peace?

Theme 3: neo-liberal politics and new social movements Organisations and practitioners should avoid intervention approaches based on a 'tool-kit' approach/ focus on the technical dimensions which minimise issues of social justice caused by political conflict

Theme 4: towards a position of 'social work for critical peace' A major contradiction characterises social work: although the profession is deeply involved and often complicit in practices that could be considered as oppressive, in most cases social workers believe in the need for social change and to challenge social injustice. Campbell et al argue that **transformation** is only possible if the profession builds political alliances with the communities directly affected by the consequences of conflict and is willing to articulate and implement a coherent vision of social change.

Where are we now?
Social Work for Critical peace?

Campbell et at suggest

- We challenge the intersecting social, political, historical and cultural injustices in societies affected by conflict
- We challenge dominant narratives and practices that perpetuate sectarianism and the militarisation of social services (legacy issues)
- We problematise approaches prescribed by the "orthodoxy of liberal peace".
- We enter a more ambiguous, critical space in which different sets of relationships emerge and become understood
- We embrace a position of '**experts of uncertainty**', developing mutually trusting and respectful relationships and daring to work creatively and innovatively in this significant area of social work practice

Remembering Forwards: How to live together with divided memories (Brewer, 2016)

- A conscious decision to remember not to let the past that lives in us keep us locked in the past
- Remembering forward is not cultural amnesia. To transcend the hold that divided memories, we need to remember not to allow this past to distort our future.
- <u>Societies</u> emerging out of conflict need to revisit those divided and persisting memories
- Brewer suggests a 4 Ts approach

Remembering Forwards: How to live together with divided memories – the 4 Ts (Brewer, 2016)

1. **Truth** is about remembering events as they occurred, not as they are selectively perceived in subsequent symbolic representations of the past.
2. **Tolerance** - respect for competing narratives and acceptance that others will see these events differently. Recognise that selectivity of memory is normal and should not be amplified into sculpting mutually exclusive identities. Respect differences rather than eliminating differences. Honour diversity rather than us becoming all the same.

Remembering Forwards: How to live together with divided memories – the 4 Ts (Brewer, 2016)

3. Togetherness - Remembering together is a liberating form of memory, for sharing divided memories *together* facilitates acceptance of the other's standpoint and encourages the tolerance. Joint remembrances.

4. **Trajectory** - Truth, tolerance and togetherness need to be contextualised by trajectory. **Trajectory** is about looking forward rather than backwards. Remember the future. It is precisely this trajectory that distinguishes "remembering forwards".

"The past lives in us always; **remembering forwards** assists in us in not living in the past"
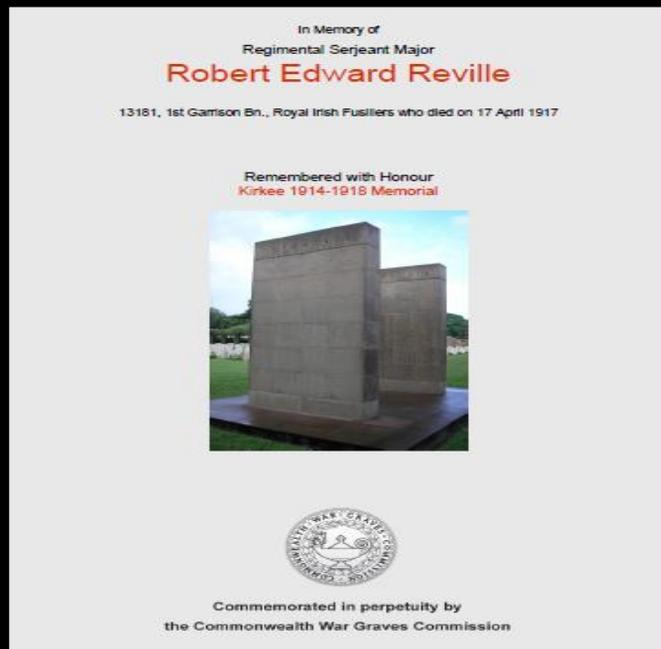
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