

# Challenging Colonial Legacies: Developing Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practicum in Dominican Republic

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*Corresponde a nosotros[as] mismos[as] a superar la dependencia, la miseria, el atraso y la corrupción, lo cual solo lograremos si hemos realizado la comprensión ... de nuestra historia social y política (Objío, 2009, p. 7) <sup>1</sup>*

## Abstract

This paper is based on six years of collaborative work in the DR for a project titled, ‘Children and Youth Human Rights and Empowerment’, funded by the Canadian International Development agency (now Global Affairs Canada), to develop the practicum of a Baccalaureate in social work (BSW) with the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD). The focus of this article will be on the collaborative work of a team of professors from Canada and the DR to develop a BSW placement structure. Grassroots social work and welfare in the DR, had a long standing history with community development (Baker & Maxwell, 2012), a focus that UASD wanted to maintain while professionalizing social work practice. The outcomes relating to this project were then to create a BSW curriculum that could shape a social work practice in the DR that built upon its history of community development to influence government and NGOs to focus on reducing marginalization from a policy or macro perspective. To do so, one of the key objectives was to foster a complementary relationship between casework and governments, to actualize pre-existing and develop new policy.

## Background

The Dominican Republic (DR) was violently conquered and colonised by Spain. Even though formal colonialism ended in 1822 and Haitian occupation in 1844 (Gates, 2011), its imprint continues in its institutions and cultural milieu. In contemporary times this is known as the coloniality of power (CoP) (Quijano, 2007). Such domination is directed towards vulnerable groups such as those living in poverty, isolated, people with disabilities, women and children, particularly those living in rural and impoverished areas and of Indigenous and Afro descent. In many ways this domination has been codified in State policies, or perhaps more

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: “It is up to us [as] to overcome dependency, misery, backwardness and corruption, which we will only achieve if we have realized the understanding ... of our social and political history” (Objío, 2009, p. 7).

appropriately, evident in the lack of State response to social issues. To some extent the DR has, historically and in contemporary times, had some macro level policies and a miniscule level of government support for community development work, mostly poverty alleviation, with marginalised people. Despite the existence of a policy framework geared towards a social safety net, there was no effort to actualise or develop on the ground practices to intervene or protect citizens, particularly the most vulnerable. Such policies remained in the imaginary at the government level.

Social work in Latin America and the Caribbean, as in other parts of the world, has its roots in a welfare philosophy born of the 'goodness' of the privileged class's concern for the 'other', those social groups that lived in marginalization or poverty (Parada, 2007). This paper is based on six years of collaborative work in the DR for a project titled, 'Children and Youth Human Rights and Empowerment', funded by the Canadian International Development agency (now Global Affairs Canada), to develop the practicum of a Baccalaureate in social work (BSW) with the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD). The focus of this article will be on the collaborative work of a team of professors from Canada and the DR to develop a BSW placement structure. Grassroots social work and welfare in the DR, had a long standing history with community development (Baker & Maxwell, 2012), a focus that UASD wanted to maintain while professionalizing social work practice. The outcomes relating to this project were then to create a BSW curriculum that could shape a social work practice in the DR that built upon its history of community development to influence government and NGOs to focus on reducing marginalization from a policy or macro perspective. To do so, one of the key objectives was to foster a complementary relationship between casework and governments, to actualize pre-existing and develop new policy. During my involvement, the DR recently had government and non-government ministries and organizations focus on the well-being of women, children and criminal justice (Parada, Moffatt & Duval, 2007). The social policies and legislation related to these organisations was undergoing some process related changes, which meant that practice interventions, including social work remained ill- defined or not implemented (Parada, et al., 2007). It was determined that the placement component could advance community engagement, fostering the development of local grassroots knowledge to inform how the school taught. Implicit in this collaboration was attempting to avoid some of the trapping of both International Social Work (ISW) and the neoliberalism of the profession, while navigating the socio-historical power structure in the DR. As people coming from the Global North, particular attention was paid to how personal identity impacted working within the deeply embedded context of domination and subordination both at the local and global levels. To illustrate this discussion, considerations made by the

Canadian and the UASD academics in the development of practicum's structure as related to the outset of social justice goals in Santo Domingo will be explored.

To situate this discussion, I present some reflections related to the process described above, from my own position on the colonial grid (Carranza, 2016) coupled with engagement with International Social Work (ISW) as a member of a diaspora community. Theories related to the CoP (Quijano, 2007) will frame my own implicated role as someone who lives and works in the Global North, including social work's role in the subordination of the South, and the ways this relationship underscored practicum development in the DR. In the Global North community development within social work practice often rests on building the capacity of citizens or members of a group to develop their personal, social, economic capital to improve their situations. This approach often follows a pre-set ideology of development or improvement, but gives voice to members by centering their experiences to increase the possibility of sustainability (Green & Haines, 2015). These practices have been criticized as colonial and dependent on neoliberal goals of development and progress. As an educator committed to decolonizing work, this was an opportunity to re-learn from the grassroots in the DR.

It is important to note, that commitments regarding funding and outcomes had been made prior to my involvement with this project. Thus, my involvement occurred later in the process and was more in a supportive rather than a decision making-making role. Challenges and opportunities for learning and reflection were many. These will be presented in the discussion section.

## **Positioning of Self**

It is important to note that to develop and/or to 'transport' a BSW practicum in the DR, rooted in Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP), that takes into account the historical/socio/economic/political context has several implications. To begin with, dependent on my geography, I occupy a number of social locations, some of which represent the North-South colonial encounter. Throughout the project, I drew upon my "standpoint" (Wylie, Figueroa & Harding, 2003) to understand how my placement in the colonial matrix of meaning implicated me in the South/North dynamic. Despite my Central American origins, fluency in Spanish, and embodying some common historical and cultural tenants as those experienced by some in the DR, one should not assume homogeneity across countries and regions, mostly its inhabitants-as this could not be further from the reality. Further, in my role as Professor at a school in the Global North, not recognising the nuances and differences in experiences with those in the DR, contributes to an erasure of their history and contemporary context.

## **Learning to speak and understand Dominican.**

Although Spanish is the official language in most Latin American and some Caribbean countries, one should not assume parity amongst countries. Even though Spanish is the official language in the DR, it is spoken with a vast integration of colorful, colloquial terminology unique to the country. This too, has been brought to the written word. It can be safely assumed that it is part of the Dominican's resistance to being fully assimilated by the Spaniards. As a way to learn such language, I carried a notebook, creating a glossary of such terms and their interpretation in both English and Spanish, the way I knew it. This proved to be a critical practice as it served to inform my teachings. It pained me to hear the reductionist interpretations my English speaking colleagues were receiving, as it was a form of assimilation of language. From my perspective, choosing to, or being unable to weave the colloquial and uniqueness of the language, denied their long history of resistance to the Spaniards.

## **DR: Its Historical Context and Colonial Legacy**

In order to understand the context in which the BSW practicum took place, we must understand the context permeating the institutions and the day-to-day dynamics in which field instructors, students and, service users operate. Silva (2004) argues that social work in Latin America and the Caribbean has developed under the interpretive social framework of the most dominant social group. For the power of discourse is not the same as the discourse of power. In the context of the DR the most powerful have attempted to institutionalise or codify the unequal power in the social worker and client relationship. The author postulates that the existence of the profession itself developed in the midst of a web of discourses and against discourse that co-exist in a hierarchy of relationships (Silva, 2004). Objío (2009) posits:

that Dominican people live their lives in a permanent condition of colonialism. This is manifested in excessive forms of labor exploitation, double slavery of aborigines and blacks, racism, domination of the political army and despot, the foreign class that continues to dominate the country. Corruption and generalized misery are added to the above through the history of the country... Dominican people are the product of the meeting of old Peoples and ethnic groups... they are kept in ignorance of its own political processes as the existing attempts of re-colonization and the elimination of a national conscience (pp. 7-8).

It is also necessary to know some unique elements of the lived realities of Dominican citizens. Since elements of Coloniality of Power, actualised in various ways through caudillismo<sup>2</sup>, anti-Haitian sentiments and religiosity, dictate the day-

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<sup>2</sup> See section on caudillismo below.

to-day, not only of students in practice, but also of all the actors involved (service users, field instructors and peers). Thus, informing their daily life as part of the platform in which the practicum training of social work students took place. In both national and international social work, the imprints of colonialism must be understood within the historical and contemporary contexts. As Gregory (2014) contends the history of the DR has deeply embedded colorism, sexism, racism and belonging in the fabric of its systems. These structures have demarcated spaces of inclusion and exclusion in which social work has, to varying degrees, been implicit in policing. It is within this history that social work was developed and provides a site of inquiry for students to locate themselves and the profession, to inform anti-oppressive practice and resistance.

Geographically the island of Hispaniola is shared between the DR and Haiti. The DR was discovered and colonised by Christopher Columbus in 1492. This was the first European settlement in the Americas. A source of pride is the fact that, Santo Domingo is therefore home to the first Catholic cathedral in the American continent (Gregory, 2014). Encrusted in the walls of history across Santo Domingo are the manifestos of the ships going across the Americas, bringing with them Indigenous peoples—Tainos. Embedded in the history of the DR is the fact, that the arrival of the Spaniards meant the disappearance of the Tainos, who were extinguished either by slavery or transported to other parts of the Americas (Betances, 2018 Gregory, 2014). One can see this imprint as DR citizens bluntly deny Taino ancestry.

## **Independence of Spain, Haitian Occupation and Invasion of the United States**

The process of independence of the Dominican people did not happen easily. According to Objío (2009) it was a result of the political movement of a small elite group of that time. However, this independence was momentary for the island, which was later invaded and occupied by Haiti for more than 20 years. It was not until 1844 that again the revolutionary movement "La Trinitaria" led a coup and a new independence from Haiti. DR again became a colony of Spain for 72 more years (Betances, 2018).

During the years 1916-1924, the DR was again occupied, this time by the United States of America (USA), under the guise of protecting the construction of the Panama Canal. This occupation culminated after the First World War in the armed peasant resistance and the pacific urban resistance - Nationalist Union. In 1930, the presidency of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina began, who according to the civilian population ruled with a "heavy hand". His presidency lasted until 1961 and is often categorised as a dictatorship (Gregory, 2014). Ending this dictatorship was a civil war led by the USA. The country was then governed by a series of presidents, but has yet to achieve political stability (). The occupation by Haiti and

the USA, contributed to a political instability that has left the DR open to current day, neoliberal restructuring in their economic, social and cultural lives. Fueling the desire for current and previous governments to focus on support for the upper class, has structured the on-ground realities for DR citizens (Gregory, 2014). Poverty alleviation, one of the only tangible interventions by the government, has political and historical implications in the uneven economics of the DR.

## **Anti-Haitianism and Haitian Migration**

The sugar industry, during 1870-1924, used primarily Haitian workers. These were mostly groups of peasants who arrived for an immediate job placement, because they were brought directly to the sugar mills-thus giving rise to the Bateyes (spaces occupy by Haitian people working on the sugar mills). According to the records, the first groups of Haitian migrants were paid lower wages, could be abused and overexploited, therefore more favourable (Martínez, 2015). The exclusion of Haitians in the DR is codified in policies of citizenship, land ownership and employment (Gregory, 2014). This is the latest iteration of the political movement to remove Haitians and stop the flow of migration. During the dictatorship of Trujillo, author of some of the largest massacres in the history of the DR, there was the genocide of approximately 35,000 Haitians. The massacre of October 2-8, 1937 also called 'The Massacre of the Parsley' responded to a policy called "the dominicanization of the frontier" that sought to reduce the number of foreigners (Haitians) in the country (Wooding & Moseley-Williams, Arregui, & Paiewonsky, 2004).

## **Caudillismo [Warlordism]**

*Caudillismo* is one of the most important elements of the political system of Latin America (Balcácer, 2007). Objío (2009) postulates that in the case of the DR, *caudillismo* is a social phenomenon that conditions the behavior and political ideology of the Dominican people (p. 32). The author adds, it is an essential element by means of which the oligarchical power exercises the domination of class, forming thus the patronage. According to Latorre (1995):

The caudillismo as a political system of the state was [or is] an inherently unstable hierarchical arrangement, a structure composed of a network of personal alliances espoused by a community of interest, by force of personality, by bonds of friendship and even of family.

Therefore, in the relations of the *caudillismo* one of the actors subordinates the other. A fundamental strategy in these relationships is the psychology of the gift, which was perceived by the recipient as an expression of goodness. Objío (2009) states this is the basis of the reciprocity of the peasantry, the working class and, in general, the marginalised classes and groups excluded from the *patron* or the leader. It is the gratitude and respect for the goodness towards those considered by

society to be the 'Others'. It is argued that the heyday of *caudillismo* declined during the Trujillista dictatorship and the American occupation, but like colonialism, its remnants remain. Rather, it acquired new expressions. This change is due to the penetration of capitalist-type social relations under globalisation, and entrenched the divide between the upper classes and the 'others'- those in need of assistance. Additionally, political relations and the ability to achieve upward mobility, remain rooted in personal ties- known as amiguismo.

One of the legacies of *caudillismo*, is expressed as cronyism. For example, in the DR it is not possible to obtain employment without having a letter of recommendation from the current leader of the political party (Objío, 2009), which is next to impossible for those of Haitian decent, those who have struggled with poverty, addictions, intimate partner violence or gang affiliation or deportees. Objío (2009) adds, "the determinant factor of modern *caudillismo* is structural misery, which in turn determines the permanence of clientelism" (Pp. 65-66) or those "in need" of services. Domínguez (1994) suggests that misery is perpetuated by the national press and fed by a lack of opportunity for people- low education, poor health outcomes, etc.

## Religiosity

The colonial domination of religious underpinnings in the system of the Dominican government continues and works in tandem with anti-Haitian sentiments and amiguismo, to structure who belongs and who does not. For example, it was officially stipulated, "The predominant religion of the state must always be Catholic" (Objío, 2009, p. 25). In locking religion with government structures, it can be argued that this marks a historical consortium in which sexual diversity, for example, is considered a mortal sin. Thus, closing any space and possibility of dialogue for those or those who diverged from heterosexuality.

It is amidst these political and social structures that academics from the Global North partnered with those from the Global South to develop the practicum. As the DR's government had little involvement, much of the social welfare work was delivered in the community- churches, national and international NGO's. Informal networks and partnerships were strategically utilised to respond to the needs of vulnerable populations. As such, the UASD wanted to ensure communities felt this was a collaborative, as opposed to a "top down" approach. Building on their knowledge of the needs of community would create a more holistic program and practicum structure. The UASD would have the opportunity to provide training that was reflective of the local context. With this in mind it was still important to navigate the landscape that field instructors worked in and would be training students in state institutions and NGO's whose policies, practices and protocols have been informed by historical processes (Parada, 2007). These historical markers continue to permeate interpersonal relationships between field instructors,

students and service users. Further, these embedded ideologies shape perceptions of both in relation to social work interventions with the user.

## **Social Work in the DR in Globalised Times**

Since the late 1990's social work in the global north has been increasingly involved with issues beyond national borders (Hiranandani, 2011), primarily in countries of the Global South. Critics of International Social Work suggest that this crossing of national borders is a continuation of social work's early development, which occurred during North American and Europe's late nineteenth century period of imperial expansion, a history which continues to root the profession in Western ideology (Healy & Link 2012, p. 13). While there has been a number of promising approaches that seek to democratise knowledge, there remains a tension and apprehension around the theoretical foundation and practical applications of ISW. Within the entanglements of social work and neoliberalism, this export based model also includes managerialist agendas, which can subsume social justice goals to a focus reporting and producing measurable outcomes (Wehbi, Parada, George & Lessa, 2016). This agenda is one of the central, organising principles of neoliberalism in social work- where agencies or institutions set benchmarks of accountability, outcomes and performance measures to increase productivity and efficiency (Todd, Barnoff, Moffatt, Panitch, Parada, Mucina, & Williams, 2013). These criticisms of ISW were at the forefront of the pedagogy used in this project. The author, in particular, was very mindful of the history of DR and the Caribbean historical and contemporary position in the Global Order. Significant attention was paid to not re-creating the colonial encounter during program development. As under the current context of globalisation, the Global North's desire to 'save' the Global South through exporting knowledge of appropriate ways of, and teaching how to, "help" (Healy & Link, 2012; Razack, 2009).

Attention was paid to the current structure of the DR's economy under the global capitalist regime. Under the globalised division of labour, the DR's labour specialisation is the sex trade and tourism. The division of labour and exploitation has contributed to the current configuration of poverty in DR, which has informed policies and legislations, yet as mentioned before, with very little intervention (Parada, et al., 2007). The high level of vulnerabilities that frame the economy in the DR, resulting from dictatorships and foreign occupation, has meant successive governments have relied on foreign aid. This has meant the DR government, to some extent, has been operating under the logic of austerity (Lamb, 2010). Political will to alleviate poverty, women's issues and the protection of children, as the primary social concerns, ends with the development of government ministries and policies. Programs and services have been under or not funded, in favour of giving tax breaks to the rich and developing capital (Lamb, 2010). Another example is the DR has established child protection legislation, yet



does not adequately fund organisations charged with this mission. There is a lack of qualified personnel to conduct assessments and appear in court (Parada, 2007). The structure of the DR's social landscape- exclusion of specific populations, amiguismo and the rigid adherence to religiosity, also supports the maintenance of the 'other', making it difficult for people to navigate their own lived reality. Finding ways out of poverty, leaving violent situations or protecting children. Prevention remains elusive, and even short term interventions such as food supplements have been haphazard.

Those engaged in social welfare work have typically been from a range of disciplines, and are most often employed by NGO's to carry out poverty alleviation work through developing community plans of action, micro finance opportunities and working with members of groups to increase well-being. This approach to community development in the Caribbean has had some involvement with government, but for the most part involves foreign aid organisations and funders (Lamb, 2010). However, pressures on government to address concerns and escalating social issues required trained and knowledgeable staff in casework and community interventions. In Latin America and the Caribbean, defining the social work profession has presented some challenges. The professionalisation of social work has meant in the Global South moving away from its roots of revolutions and social activism. This tension arises as the social justice goals of social work have at times been at odds with the political landscape of global neoliberal restructuring across the globe (Parada, 2007). This has meant that it has been unable to meaningfully respond to contemporary issues, such as Indigenous rights, child protection, poverty and women's rights (Parada, 2007). The development of the profession has been complicated by Global North imports, such as neo-liberal managerialism, austerity measures and notions of accountability.

## **Development of the Social Work Practicum Rooted in Anti-oppressive Practice**

This process began with a consultation process that lasted approximately one year. The purpose was twofold: (i) systematise the perceptions of NGOs and state institutions imagined practitioners of social work and what was needed, and (ii) systematise existing capacities and needs related to the supervision of social work students.

The beginning of this process was carried out with the support of the Canadian Consulate in DR. This body served as a bridge between the consultations and the community in general. We visited agencies working on issues related to violence against women, abuse and neglect of children and adolescents, in communities near Santo Domingo such as Boca Chica, San Cristóbal and women's associations in rural areas such as Cambita. As well, those communities close to the sugar mills

who are deemed the most vulnerable - Bateyes not functioning due to the collapse of the sugar industry. We needed to learn, from their perspectives, how they understood social issues and interventions, and what the possibilities could be- to weave into the training for field instructors and student learnings. This in itself sought to develop community and centre marginalised voices.

One of the essential tools of anti-oppressive social work is self-reflection and including reflexivity in practice. A constant reflection in this process was the dynamics of power between the Canadian Consulate and the non-governmental organisations. Since the former had financed several projects at the local level in the city of Santo Domingo, the issue of 'gratitude', linked to the psychology of the gift from Canada tended to arise in community consultations. Given this experience and the history of hierarchy in the DR, it was evident that these unequal power dynamics had the potential to become a key organising principle for the development of the practicum. Therefore, constantly safeguarding against the danger of creating *caudillista* relations based on friendship or looking for "special favors" that could compromise the integrity of the social work field practicum, was a priority.

## **Training of Field Instructors**

In part, the training of the field instructors had the potential to streamline practices that were already in place. It provided the opportunity for practitioners to meet, discuss and learn from each other. Most importantly it began to develop a community of practice for social services and social workers within the areas of the DR that linked academia with the community. This community had the capability to develop local knowledges, develop new opportunities for programs and funding. This was an opportunity to advance the profession, while enhancing the current and future work.

Once identified, the capacities and needs were systematised, informing the design of the training for future field instructors. Building on the social services favouring of community work, the exchanges included micro work, but were largely taught from the *mezzo* perspective. Dialogues concerning how the community has been involved as in many ways they have been protecting women and children was paramount. Learning about and operationalising these capacities would shape how social work was understood and practiced in the placements. This approach also removed the idea that the social worker is the 'knower' and positions communities and citizens to articulate and remedy their concerns. It was determined that this approach may be more lengthy than previous interventions. Building capacity meant increased sustainability, but may produce less immediate outcomes. Field supervisors engaged in active dialogues around how child protection and women's safety could be approached from a holistic perspective, reducing the need for intervention.

The training took place at various times. The first, in preparation for receiving social work students. The second was during the course of the social work students' practicum, for the purposes of carrying out partial evaluations. The third was around the time of the final evaluations. Challenges, successes, lessons learned and gaps were discussed in the respective government agencies and institutions. The latter was subsequently systematised, analysed, and presented at a national conference to strengthen the career of social work in general.

## **Preparation**

This stage included the theoretical preparation of field instructors. Concepts such as anti-oppressive social work and how it could operate within the context of the DR were discussed in depth, as it would look very different to Canada. How in a space that structures and codifies marginalisation in policy and daily life, could social workers both shed their preconceived notions and practice advocacy and resistance? This opened space for potential discussions around how to navigate the rigidity of religiosity, to advocate for the rights of people who identified as queer. Or, the issues of belonging for Haitian migrants who were without citizenships and rights. All of these questions, and more, were discussed from a local perspective, creating new ideas that could shape practice. It was during this time that the team from Canada was cautious to not import how AOP was operationalised and more importantly, what issues should be centered.

Also incorporated in this training were theories and related process to students' learning style. Discussions related to the development of a learning plan and mid-term and final students' evaluations proved to be challenging. As the evaluative process differs from that used in Canada, i.e., punitive vs supportive, students' voices were crucial in the development of such tools of how their learning could be fostered, i.e., more hands on practice and what should be the areas of focus-learning how to conduct community based assessments.

It is noteworthy that, given the lack of social work as a career in the country for a long period, the practice supervisors were mostly professionals trained in another career such as psychology, sociology, law, nursing and teachers. This presented challenges and opportunities. Challenges because they feared social work students would displace them from their respective areas of work. Opportunities because most of these professionals had a very rich and diverse experience. They not only possessed many lessons learned, but also embodied the different areas of social work practice in the country. Theories of anti-oppressive social work were absorbed with much enthusiasm - thus opening space for dialogue in the naming of many of their lived experiences, as well as applying this knowledge to the Dominican reality.

## **Support during students' practicum**

Initially, the students' practice was carried out mostly at the National Council of Children and Adolescents (CONANI-in Spanish). This is the administrative body of the national system for the protection of the rights of children and adolescents, created by Law 136-03. This code for the system of protection and the fundamental rights of children and adolescents, came into effect on October 17, 2004. This institution has a national headquarters, regional and municipal offices. Within an institutional agreement between CONANI and UASD-Santo Domingo, the first generations of social work practitioners were placed in the CONANI-Santo Domingo precincts.

Training sessions were held to support the work carried out by the CONANI's field instructors and through conferences specifically related to anti-oppressive work. These were spaces of critical reflection in relation to the challenges encountered in the process of supervising social work students, while simultaneously maintaining their work responsibilities in their respective instances.

## **Evaluation of the process of social work practice**

Most field instructors verbalised job dissatisfaction, but at the same time reiterated their commitment to future social work practitioners and in general to the social work career. In this space, the void social work students had filled in their respective practicum setting was expressed with much hopefulness. Thus arising, with much urgency, their own need to acquire more knowledge related to the social work profession through continuing education.

## **Practice seminar**

The primary objective of the practice seminar was to promote, support and ensure the continued integration of anti-oppressive theory into social work practices, similar to those completed in some Canadian universities. Students met once a week for a period of three years and during the course of their practicum. In this space students presented situations of their respective practices related to programs, services and professional ethics of the social worker. They, too, reflected on the ongoing challenges of AOP social work in a context where *caudillismo/amiguismo* predominated, wherein they, too, were implicated. It became a central discussion to locate oneself and their practice on the colonial grid.

## **Evaluation of Students Of Social Work Practice: Field Visits**

Two field visits were planned during the practice period. The first, to carry out a partial evaluation. The former presented the opportunity to ensure that the relationship between supervisor and student was adequate and to enhance the

practitioner's learning or make changes if the situation warranted. The second was to carry out the final evaluation and to solicit feedback for the field practicum. In social work, field visits to students are very important, since this allows the joint articulation between the academic and institutional bodies to encourage communication and an open relationship between the two. The above has the purpose of supporting the learning and success of social work students, as well as fostering the link between academia and career practitioners. However, most field visits to carry out the partial and final evaluations were not held for administrative reasons in the UASD in hiring the person in charge of facilitating the practice seminar.

## **Discussion**

In learning from the processes of this practicum development, the author had the opportunity to engage with knowledge translation- from education to practice- beyond the established framework in their home universities. The collaboration was informed by using key learnings from each stage of the project informing the next stage. We had an iterative approach to knowledge development which was congruent with reflexive ethical practice. For example, during the consultations and the training for fieldworkers, the team learned about the on-the-ground realities of their work and their clients. From the consultations we learned about the vision for the practice, the iterative approach allowing the team to respond by developing the learnings to meet both the ideals and realities. For example, ethical dilemmas in practice, as perceived by the teams, were identified and woven into the learning and discussions to built and integrate the learnings. This mechanism allowed both teams to ensure that a critical lens was always applied to the work, to help minimise power imbalances and strengthen open communication channels. It also allowed the author to learn about processes in the DR, to ensure that practices were appropriately localised. The importance of connecting race, class, 'ethnicity' and colonial history to current realities was a continual priority throughout the project, specifically in how to mobilise this knowledge to students and field instructors. In community development, attention to process in practice, was the central way to see how structural oppression has marginalised voices and implicated social work. This is the case in the DR and in Canada. In different ways community work due to funding or lack thereof, had often been framed through aid or intervention. The idea of development is often synonymous with progress, upward mobility and improving daily realities- a remnant of colonialism. Social work, practiced in community development has been promised as a way to work from the grassroots and de-centre the voice of the professional. Working within the constraints of funding, and the remnants of colonialism, has to some extent prevented this promise from actualising. Often the social worker must balance the responsibilities of being an employee and delivering outcomes with the processes of community development and engagement. In working across borders, the

author worked towards reversing the narrative of the export model to a hybrid approach that was rooted in local, geopolitical realities.

In contemporary times, the colonial legacy of the DR prevails as a blueprint designing not only the state policies and agencies that represent it, but also the programs and services of some NGOs. It also paves the way for ISW to replicate a relationship that places the Global North as 'knower'. The foci on AOP required a reflexive approach to ensure that it was the interests of those in the DR being met, which included challenging perceptions of its citizens in what is considered 'common sense and normality'. Interpersonal relationships are also permeated by the socio-historical and political context of class, race, ethnicity and homophobia-which as we discovered are entrenched in the 'helping' relationships. One of the key areas of this work was developing a community of practice that supported and was reflective and supportive of the educational components of the BSW practicum. The school, field instructors and students became aware of their own implications along the colonial grid, and how the current structure of power, as evidence in punitive feedback forms, would not support the work of AOP and social justice. The coming generations of social workers in the DR have before them a very fertile land to start social changes and to work together in partnership with members of historically marginalised and excluded groups.

Embedded within this challenge will be not only to resist participation, but not to replicate *caudillistas/amignistas* relations, as these continue the pattern of inequality and oppression for excluded and historically marginalised populations. This is not a challenge exclusive to the DR, but presents uniquely as social work struggles for legitimacy. In the DR context, of domination/subordination, social work will be challenged to gain credence by its own merits and not in competition with a similar helping profession. Scholars of ISW, such as Healy & Link (2012), have suggested that what has plagued social work in the Caribbean is a lack of validation of educational credentials outside of the region and an absence of theory development and publishing. This suggests that the Global North determines what is 'valid', reinforcing knowledge from the Global South as existing on the margins. As with this practicum development, knowledge that informs theory and practice elements such as assessments, needs to be developed in the DR for their citizens.

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