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# International field training in social work education: beyond colonial divides

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of and need for a critical and global-oriented social work education on students' learning and developments in the context of international field training. The study uses mixed methods strategy of web survey, focus groups and document review of field reports. Participants in the study are social work students from social work programs in Norway and Sweden who have conducted their international field training in the Global South. The results of the study show that in order to obtain a critical and postcolonial understanding of global inequalities and the role of social work, students need to be truly prepared for international field training by critical and postcolonial knowledge, which will challenge many students' West-centric perspectives and facilitate them by a self-reflective positioning throughout their field training. The imagination of traveling to and 'learning about the others' should be then replaced by a move beyond 'us-and-them' divides in line with the ethical principles and values of social work.

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Field training; social work education; social work ethics; postcolonialism; West-centrism

## Introduction

Globalization of neoliberalism in a postcolonial world order has created major challenges for social work globally in terms of uneven developments and increasing inequalities, which make the reform of social work education necessary. Social work education need to prepare students for working in a new global environment as articulated in the *Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development* (IFSW, IASSW & ICSW, 2012; Jones & Truell, 2012) and the *Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training* (IASSW & IFSW, 2004; Sewpaul & Jones, 2004). In this respect, a critical and globally informed education of social work (e.g. Ferguson, 2017; Flem, Jönsson, Alseth, Strauss, & Antczak, 2017; Morley, 2016) is important and necessary as it aims at challenging the dominant social forces and power relations behind the reproduction of inequalities. Referring to social work education in the

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current context of neoliberal structural transformation and unequal global relationships in creating and reinforcing social injustices and problems, Kamali (2015, p. 167) suggests that:

The education of social work should revitalise its critical position and challenge the political and the global market's pressures for a passive education, i.e. one suitable for paving the way for the reproduction of an unequal world. This makes social work teachers' and researchers' engagement in the production of a critical curriculum for social work and the conducting of critical research—which puts benefitting people and those in need at the centre of their activities—more crucial than ever for the existence of a progressive social work.

In this article, we stress the importance of developing critical and anti-oppressive practice learning for social work students in the neoliberal and postcolonial context of international field training in social work education. This is illustrated by examples from Mid Sweden University in Sweden (MIUN) and Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Norway (NTNU), which have developed critical and global knowledge content in their social work program and curricula, in theoretical courses, professional- and field training. Field training is recognized as one of the major components of social work education and a major determinant of its quality (Domakin, 2014; Lam, Wong, & Leung, 2007). Social work programs throughout Western countries provide international field training and placements as part of their curriculum. The ways international field training and placement is organized and formalized in terms of models, principles and perspectives vary between different countries and universities. In Sweden at MIUN and in Norway at NTNU, many students conduct their field training in the Global South, to learn about social problems and social work in a 'different' context. Such international field training creates unique learning opportunities such as development of critical consciousness and understanding of dominant social forces and power relations behind the reproduction of inequalities in a neoliberal and postcolonial context. However, one major problem for students doing international field training in the Global South is the West-centric frames of reference they obtain through their educations in the Global North (Razack, 2012). There is, therefore, a need for the development of new ways to educate social work students for engagement with anti-oppressive social work learning. These may occur by using pedagogical practices within a critical and post-colonial framework (Razack, 2009, 2012; Schwartz, Kreitzer, Barlow, & Macdonald, 2014) for 'progressive social work learning' (Smith & Ferguson, 2016).

In students' international field training and placements for three months/three and a half months (Norway/Sweden) or in four to five weeks field project (Norway), they have obligatory preparatory and follow-up seminars, a local supervisor and a social work educator in the home institution following them up during placements and projects. Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate values within a critical and global framework while undertaking the field training. During and after international field training, the students submit assignments focusing on their learning processes in accordance with Field Training and Placements Goals and Objectives (Handbook of International Practice at NTNU, 2016; Social Work Ba, Supervised field located education at MIUN, 2016; Project regulations for project studies in Social Work at NTNU). So far, students' motivations to and practice learning experiences from international field training have not been systematically examined at MIUN and NTNU.

In this paper, we elaborate on this by reporting from a study, which examines the influence of and need for a critical and global-oriented social work education in Norway and

Sweden on students' practice learning in the neoliberal and postcolonial context of international field training.

## The study

In examining the influence of and need for a critical and global-oriented social work education on students' practice learning and personal and professional development in the neoliberal and postcolonial context of international field training, the following key questions have guided the study:

- Which are students' motives to and expectations about international field training in the Global South?
- What are students' key experiences and learnings from international field training in the Global South?
- How students assess the compatibility of their obtained critical and global knowledge content through their education with the needs and settings in their international field training?
- How do students reflect on their privileged positions and West-centric frames of reference in international field training?

The results of the study are based on mixed methods of web survey, focus groups and document review of field reports. We invited all students conducting international field training at MIUN and NTNU during year 2016 to participate in the study. In total, 24 students who conducted their international field training in the Global South (Bahamas, Cameroon, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Philippines and Zambia) participated in the study. As a first step, prior to their international field training, we invited the students to answer a web survey with closed- and open-ended questions related to their own motivations to and expectations about international field training, including frames of references, own positioning in social work as a global profession, preparation for international field training, opportunities and challenges. Then, after finalizing their field training, we invited the students to participate in small focus group interviews focusing on questions about their insights and learning experiences from international training based on a semi-structured interview guide. The themes in the interview guide were personal and professional learning and development, compatibility of obtained knowledge, linking theory and practice learning, challenges, dilemmas, opportunities and supervision. In total, we conducted eight focus groups with two to six students in each group. To complement the data of web surveys and focus group interviews, we have reviewed students' field reports. In the field reports, students are required to demonstrate practice goals such as learning about the social context, learning about the agency/organization, learning about social work practice and learning about the self, their personal and professional development from a critical and global framework and with references to knowledge content and course literature. The data collected from the web survey, focus groups and students' reports were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (e.g. Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Using this method of analysis, it was possible to identify relevant themes and to provide a comprehensive understanding of its manifest and latent contents in the frame of relevant critical and global theoretical perspectives.

## Theoretical and research context of the study

The theoretical perspectives in this study are influenced by the theoretical approach of multiple modernities, postcolonial studies, and critical development studies (see also Jönsson, 2014, 2016). Such theoretical perspectives provide guidance in understanding global inequalities, privileges, and unequal power relations and the role of social work in combating social injustices on a global level. This also includes the linkage between personal experiences at the individual level, to what is happening on the structural and global level. Postcolonial theories highlight the importance of historical contexts in understanding the mechanisms that produce and reproduce uneven developments and unequal alliances that privilege dominant Western interests (Loomba, 2005). Critical and postcolonial theoretical perspectives help to increase understanding of ongoing recolonization through processes of neoliberal globalization. The strong belief in the ideology and practices of a linear and universal modernity and development in accordance with Western models ignores the West-centric agenda of modern development and the role of colonialism and imperialism in the globalization of Western dominance in the world (Kamali, 2015). Based on the division of the inferior ‘underdeveloped world’ and the superior ‘developed world’, a central feature of the ‘Third World’ development discourse is the narration of underdevelopment focusing on lack of development (Escobar, 1995). This serves to erase differences within the Global South and the many variations in socioeconomic structures, institutional patterns, sociocultural practices, and political systems (Kamali, 2015). The Global South emerges as a homogeneous whole, in need of the same development, based on a West-centric model of modernity as a singular process of social transformation (Escobar, 1995; Kamali, 2015). Such an understanding of development is also part of international social work discourses, followed by the criticism of international social work’s universalizing tendencies as a continuation of colonialism and imperialism (e.g. Dominelli, 2010; Goudge, 2003; Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird, & Hetherington, 2013; Haug, 2005; Midgley, 1981; Razack, 2012; Sewpaul, 2006). Given those structures, one of the most dominant challenges is development of social work curriculum promoting human rights and social justice beyond colonial discriminatory discourses and practices and contribute to students’ critical and postcolonial understanding of global inequalities through their international field training. New horizons are needed for an international field training responding appropriately to local concerns while critically aware of the impact of West-centric discourses on local activities. This requires new pedagogical practices and educational tools to envision possibilities for change within the dominant discourses (such as neo-liberalism, colonization, imperialism, and Third world development) that influence the contexts of international field training.

Pedagogical practices using critical reflection may enhance social work educators’ capacity to prepare students to work towards progressive social change and social justice, despite the ongoing colonizing processes that sustain inappropriate social work approaches based on West-centric models and discourses (Morley & O’Connor, 2016). Critical reflection as an educational tool, creating emancipatory possibilities in international field training is well documented (e.g. Askeland & Bradley, 2007; Askeland, Døhlie, & Grosvold, 2016; Barlow, 2007; Das & Anand, 2014; Ferguson & Smith, 2012; Jones, 2015; Lindsey, 2005; Morley & Dunstan, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2014; Testa & Egan, 2016; Wehbi, 2009). Referring to the importance of social work educators to organize the international field training in accordance with critical pedagogy, Wehbi (2009, p. 57), suggests that:

Educators need to provide all students with the space to critically reflect on their placements before going abroad. In this way, we would play our part in fostering generations of social workers who may indeed contribute to the valuing of social justice through their placements and their future practice.

In other words, the arrangement of social work education and international field training is crucial to make it progressive in ways that lead to a strong commitment to social justice (Flynn et al., 2014; Lough, 2009; Lough, McBride Moore, & Sherraden, 2012). Social work education should offer students opportunities to integrate their field training experiences into a framework of values of social justice, the dignity and worth of peoples and human relationships—the global ethics and commitments of social work profession (Barlow, 2007; Ferguson & Smith, 2012; Heron, 2005; Kahn & Sussman, 2015; Lindsey, 2005). This means that practice educators and supervisors has an important role in linking critical theory and practice and integrating learning with the academic curriculum (Domakin, 2014). This may occur by utilizing progressive, non-traditional placements for engagement with more radical, social justice, and social change-oriented practice (Smith & Ferguson, 2016). In that sense, the profession and education of social work may also broaden the definition of what constitutes good international field training supervision in social work and include people from different disciplines and backgrounds engaged in progressive justice work, which can provide social work students with valuable experiences and in turn enrich social work curriculum (Wiebe, 2010).

Several studies call for revitalization of practice learning and international field training in a global, neoliberal, and postcolonial environment (e.g. Ashencaen Crabtree, Parker, Azman, & Paul Carlo, 2014; Morley & Dunstan, 2013; Morley & O'Connor, 2016; Razack, 2012; Smith & Ferguson, 2016). However, not much attention has been given critical perspectives on the 'whiteness of power' (Goudge, 2003). Likewise, the 'multicultural' approach and 'cross-cultural' learning are often given higher priority than focusing on critical and postcolonial perspectives (e.g. Akintayo, Hämäläinen, & Rissanen, 2016; Askeland et al., 2016; Barlow, 2007; Engstrom & Jones, 2007; Lindsey, 2005; Magnus 2009; Nimmagadda, Charles, & Cowger, 1999; Nuttman-Shwarz & Berger, 2012; Panos, Cox, Pettys, & Jones-Hart, 2004). Many of such studies resonates with 'culturalisation of social problems' rather than challenge situations of inequality, oppression and social change at the structural level or 'undoing privileges' at the individual (Pease, 2010). Perspectives on how own biases, assumptions, and dominant worldviews affect the ways students perceive differences and power dynamics in international field trainings in the Global South (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005), are also limited.

In the following presentation and analyze of the results of the study, we elaborate more on these perspectives in relation to students' motivations to and learning experiences from international training in the Global South.

## **Result and analysis**

Illustrated and analyzed in the following, are the students' responses to the web survey, narratives and reflections in focus groups and writings in their field reports.

## ***Students motives to and expectations about international field training in the Global South***

The first stage of the research involved a web survey with social work students prior to their international field training. When analyzing the responses from the web survey, the students' motives to and expectations about their international field training turned out to be foremost related to their own 'journey' of personal and professional development through practice learning and to gain insights into 'international social work', differences in social problems, social welfare and methods of practicing social work. In addition, they expected opportunities to link obtained knowledge content through their education with the local needs and settings in their international field training but also to learn more about the specific country and its political, economic and cultural, structural and institutional arrangements influencing social work practices. Closely tied to such expectation, some students expressed their uncertainties related to the new and 'different' context and culture, norms, values and languages. Students frequently mentioned power relations and social divisions along the lines of gender, ethnicity and age and their own positions as being white and Western. However, in many cases, without a critical reflection of how own biases, assumptions and dominant worldviews may affect the ways they perceive differences and power dynamics in international field trainings in the Global South. As one student, express it: 'I have to take into consideration that gender roles are not as equal as in Nordic countries, and that can create situations where I can meet less respect, especially from men'. Alternatively, as another student comments: 'I do not want to consider myself superior to people in ... [the country of field training], although they are far back in their development of social work'. Referring to ambivalent expectations of how they would or would not gain respect as young women but still respect as 'white and wealthy' women, one of the students commented, 'I don't want to be considered a Santa Claus solving their social problems'. Nevertheless, many of the students put forward the importance of 'openness to new cultures', new experiences and other ways of understanding and practicing social work.

## ***Key experiences from international field training and learnings among social work students***

The second stage of the research involved conducting focus group interviews and review of students' field reports concerning experiences and learnings from international field training. When analyzing the students' narratives, reflections and writings, their own personal and professional development and a broader understanding of social work and social development, turned out to be central themes.

For the students, practice training and placement in the Global South, had many benefits. Living and working in the community allowed them to be 'inhabitants' as well as students and social workers, to provide social services, contributing to change and well-being, and to 'make a difference', in their own words. The focus group interviews showed how active engagement with people and communities, in social work activities and social development in the setting of structural oppression, inequality, and poverty contributed to the personal and professional development of the students. Different voices and writings from the students illustrate development of critical consciousness; post-colonial awareness; competencies in community work processes; understanding of social justice and human rights



principles and structural dimensions to social problems. At the same time, majority of the students acknowledged that although being part of active engagement in such social work activities, social work that confronts oppression, work with marginalized people requires much of the students in terms of personal and professional strategies for dealing with such experiences. As one second-year student by referring to empathy as a vital skill in developing a professional social work identity, reflects:

I have developed much that I can bring into my personal and professional role as becoming a social worker. I have always wanted to do this type of international social work. I have learned so much about empathy and understanding in the context of social work, but in my efforts to understand the everyday lives of people in the slum, I found it many times hard to tackle personally when many revealed very personal and horrible aspects of their lives and vulnerability.

Many students put forward the group discussions, dialogs with local supervisors and social work educators at the university as valuable for learning how to handle their own personal issues and for linking theory and practice learning in personal and professional development. In engaging with a new and broader understanding of social work activities, the students considered, for example, the relationship between sustainable development and social work practice. Students were committed to addressing the link between social inequality and environmental disasters, making connections between environmental justice and social justice. In one of the focus groups, one student reflects:

A social work practice that involve environmentally related work that takes into account the practical realities of everyday interaction with individuals, groups and communities is important. For example, water is fundamental to well-being and it was interesting for me to learn more about how social workers can be active in mobilising the larger community to work with special emphasis on water resources and awareness on the issues of sanitation.

As another example, referring to social work and social development in more structural terms, through mobilization to empower local communities, one students commented:

When studying social work at a child orphanage, we discovered various programs outside the organisation. The support at the orphanage was not sufficient, cooperation with Community Based Organisations was necessary to make sustainable changes. Through our field training, we got unique insights in various programs based on mobilisation of groups to strengthen the local communities.

### ***Compatibility of critical and global approaches with needs in international field training***

In asking students to assess the compatibility of their obtained knowledge through their education with the needs in their field training, they mention, for example, ‘intersectionality’ as a useful tool for critical reflection, oppression and injustices and ‘empowerment’ as a useful approach to community- and participatory-based activities for the improvement of peoples’ living conditions. Some of them mention also ‘Us and Them’ as useful anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles of critical analysis in linking the personal with the social. As a female student stated:

I remember when we had the lectures at school about theoretical reflections on power, integration and structural discrimination ... it was very interesting ... and I felt that during field training, we could really grasp the meaning of ‘Us and Them’ and we felt prepared to make sense of differences and inequalities compared to other foreign students at the same placements,



who used very racist language about 'blacks'... and they were taking problematic photos, e.g. of themselves smiling when donating money to poor begging children in the streets, without reflecting ...

According to the students, such theoretical concepts and perspectives enabled them to make sense of inequalities and injustices they encountered on a daily basis during field training. Importantly, many of the students could relate the individual and the social, the micro- and the macro-levels of social structure and empowerment (Jönsson, 2010). In both focus groups and in field reports, students refer back to course contents on globalization, social work and social development in a postcolonial world order including indigenous social work and sustainable development. In their narratives and writings, students are referring to negative aspects of globalization on social work and of how social problems is shaped by (neoliberal) reforms imposed by international financial institutions and companies resulting in the destruction of traditional lifestyles, exploitation of local resources, and increased socioeconomic problems. As one student illustrates:

After visiting these indigenous communities living in these industrial corridors, I truly understand the negative consequences of globalisation and its effects on local communities and peoples' everyday lives in other parts of the world.

Another student group, in developing a broader understanding of the consequences of development influences by structural adjustment and weakening role of the state in direct service provision, increased privatization and dependency of external funding, commented:

During our stay and after we tried to understand why the welfare services were organised within NGO's an INGO's. Instead of making up simple explanations, we reread some of the curriculum in development theory and postcolonial economy from earlier courses in our studies. By connecting this theory with our experiences, we really understood how structural adjustment policies had reduced state services and paved the way for privatisation of welfare services.

Thus, the focus group interviews and review of field reports demonstrated that to some extent critical and global perspectives from the social work education at MIUN and NTNU enable students to be reflective to their frame of reference of social problems and social work globally in terms of uneven developments and inequalities. However, even though a majority of the students can tell us about, and in their field reports describe, power relations, global relations of domination and subordination, the unequal distribution of resources and social work practices across diverse contexts, many of the students are using the same discourses they are criticizing. As for example, stereotypical categorizations of groups and their social problems through cultural discourses are frequently used. For example, by students referring to the lack of cultural competency for both understanding and finding solutions for social problems in the Global South. As one student argues:

I believe it is necessary with cultural competency, especially when going to countries very far away where people have very different problems mainly associated with their cultures. I take the example of living in ghettos, *we* think it is wrong but *they* actually want to live there, it is part of their cultures and ways of living. Therefore, we should not push our own cultural values.

This demonstrate how challenging the task is for social work education (even if having critical and global perspectives) to 'revitalise its critical position' (Flem et al., 2017; Kamali, 2015) and move beyond dominant international social work discourses. The results of the study show that integration of critical and global social work literature is not enough. Social work educators need to ensure that curricula help social work students to develop

and demonstrate skills in critical reflections and ethical awareness. For example, the lack of critical reflection on the privileged side of social division, which allows the students to reinforce their dominance (Pease, 2010), suggest stronger engagement in critical reflections about global inequalities and privileges when preparing for international field training in the Global South. Without having strategic approaches of teaching critical consciousness and self-reflection concerning, for example, ‘whiteness of power’ (Goudge, 2003), student risk reproducing the notion of ‘the other’ in need of (white, western) development interventions (Escobar, 1995).

### ***Students’ reflections on their privileged positions and West-centric perspectives in international field training***

Several of the focus group interviews reflect the ‘Third World’ development discourse (Escobar, 1995) and ‘whiteness of power’ (Goudge, 2003), by focusing on underdevelopment and legitimizing necessary forms of interventions as a means of ‘make a change’ or rescuing the communities and people living there. The empathy with poor peoples was apparent in the focus group discussions, especially from young, white women. Related, there are several examples of goodwill during international field training, as one student, who felt the urge to help stated:

We started some small-scale projects through which we could engage with the families and empower them. We have also after returning home put all our efforts to collect money, school material and other things to continue to help the families and children. It feels good to help them.

Based on students assumptions or explicit statements that what has ‘gone wrong’ with many social work activities is their planning procedures, which have not been good enough, and that if only organizations and social workers could organize themselves more efficiently in the Global South and be on time—then they could start to make progress. This quote explores the connections made by the students, emphasizing how they personally felt about issues of time and planning in relation to their field training:

For us, it was terribly frustrating with the lack of structure and planning at the organisation. For them, [social workers and staff at a local NGO] it seemed to function because it is like that in their culture.

Or, as another student comments:

Never in my life, have I waited so long without getting an excuse of the delays from my ‘partner’. I was prepared before going abroad, but still I found it frustrating getting used to ‘African time’.

However, in other cases, it was clear that students tried to reflect on power and privileges. When becoming aware of white privileges, students discussed how their idea of global inequalities and postcolonial relations changed after being exposed to resistance in narratives provided by voices from within the local communities. One male student reflects:

It was hard how to tackle it [the privileged side of social division]. I did not think of it before my international field placement but it was so obvious when I was there ... I was seen as a representative for the injustices of Western colonialism ... I struggled with that all the time.

Other illustrations show how personal emotions, particularly the feeling of being exposed, emerge in discussions of whiteness. For example, as one student says:

We were overwhelmed of the attention we received when visiting an activity in the village, we were treated almost as if we were movie stars. All the children surrounded the car, fighting to get close up to us, wanting to touch us, many were asking for gifts. I was shocked.

This allowed some students to strategically position themselves as relatively powerless and in a victim role:

It was difficult when they asked me about my opinion on how they could do better at the [social work] office, but then I was seen as one who only criticised and destroyed for them without any knowledge and skills. I felt this was reverse racism, because I was the only white ... For example, in relation to how they treated the kids, I said, this would never be accepted in my country. I can understand, it was not funny for them to hear, but they asked about my opinion ...

However, another student made a very different reflection with her involvement with issues around whiteness and power after her international field training:

I would not say that I have been discriminated against, but rather that I made others to be discriminated against. Because I was, white, blue-eyed and from a rich country in West, I got more opportunities and benefits in the community than the others [the locals] did. I did not like that.

Although most of the students talked about their personal and professional development and as having become more critically and globally aware, many of them perceived themselves as rather unprepared for postcolonial challenges in international field training in the Global South. Students showed a strong wish for more preparation, as suggested by Wehbi (2009), critically reflect on their placements before going abroad, which could contribute to their critical and postcolonial understanding of global inequalities through their international field training.

## Summary and conclusion

In this article, we have been examining the influence of, need for a critical, and global-oriented social work education on students' learning and developments in the context of international field training. Prior to international field training, multiple motives to and expectations about international field training were expressed by the students, such as broadening the understanding of social work and social problems as well opportunities for professional and personal development. Such expectations were also mixed with uncertainties related to encountering differences and ethical dilemmas preventing them from understanding and contributing. Experiencing new ways of organizing and methods of practices social work and social development and critical reflections were adopted in student's analyses. They could identify and actively use in their field training concepts and tools such as intersectionality and empowerment to better understand social inequalities, social work, and responding appropriately to local concerns and settings. However, and as illustrated, when exploring the students' narratives with a critical and post-postcolonial lens, we could see an uneven and ambiguous use of critical and global perspectives in international field training.

Although the study shows that critical and global perspectives from the social work education enable students to be reflective to their frame of reference of social problems and social work globally in terms of uneven developments and inequalities, the 'Third World' development discourse with its characteristics was (although seemingly unintentionally) often present in students' narratives. For example through judgments of what was preventing social progress, of understanding their roles and identities in the settings, or responding

to power and privilege when encountering unexpected situations. Emotional distress and powerlessness often seemed to prevent students in entering into a critical reflection process with the risk of ending up with simplistic analyses of 'the other'.

Conclusions from this study are twofold: Critical and global perspectives informing international field training in the Global South can create unique opportunities to prepare students in challenging the dominant social forces and power relations behind the reproduction of inequalities. Multiple challenges are demonstrated in the article, which call for development of social work curriculum promoting human rights and social justice beyond colonial discriminatory discourses and practices and contribute to students' critical and postcolonial understanding of global inequalities through their international field training. This requires new pedagogical practices and educational tools to envision possibilities for change. Close supervision based on critical and global perspectives and critical pedagogical practices will be necessary to support and challenge students in entering into critical reflection processes. Besides, cooperation with local partners in the Global South familiar with the social work program and its course goals, sharing similar perspectives and commitments, including new progressive ways of organizing international field placements, training and supervision, will be of unique value. The study shows that we still have a long way to go. We should, in collaborations with students develop curriculum that improve students' self-reflexivity and understanding of global postcolonial context of social work and their privileges and West-centric positioning in relation to 'the others' beyond colonial divides in international field training.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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*Jessica H. Jönsson* (PhD) is a senior lecturer at the Department of Social Work, Mid Sweden University, Sweden. Her research area concerns social work as a globalized and socio-political field facing increasing theoretical and practical challenges caused by socioeconomic, political and cultural transformations. She has been actively involved in studying the impact of global neoliberalism on social welfare; austerity and social work; migration, welfare nationalism and social work; global social problems; developmental social work and international social work; social work education including professional and field training. Her research also includes studies of critical social work resistance at the global and local level.

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