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Article

A social pedagogy lens for social work practice with return migrants

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Abstract

The number of asylum rejections has increased in recent years, yet successful claims differ dependent on the originating country of the asylum seekers. In 2018, the European Union rejected 25 per cent of the 519,000 asylum requests which it received (Eurostat, 2019). Kosovars were the fourth-largest group of asylum seekers in Europe in 2015 and 96 per cent of them were rejected and returned to Kosovo. Rejected asylum seekers and those who lose their temporary status are returned to their countries of origin partly because the EU endorses repatriation, or the return of forced migrants to their country of origin, as a preferred solution to the migration crisis. This, despite a significant body of research which substantiates that repatriation is not sustainable and current repatriation policies have seldom considered the experiences of rejected asylum seekers. Considering that social

workers are the first point of contact for many rejected asylum seekers, models of practice which inform social work with this population are needed. This article uses the case of Kosovar returnees to examine the utility of a social pedagogy lens to better prepare social workers to work with returnees. Social pedagogy, with its dedication to social justice, the importance it places on local and regional contexts, as well as its attention to praxis, is well placed to guide social workers in partnering with return migrants as they navigate the complex realities of reintegration. While grounded in Kosova's context, the social pedagogy framework has global implications considering the increasing number of return migrants worldwide.

Keywords Kosova; return migrants; social pedagogy; social work; framework of practice

Introduction

Since 2015, when the number of displaced peoples reached an all-time high, the heightened focus on the experiences of refugees has largely portrayed displaced peoples as a homogeneous group, silencing the multiplicity of their experiences and identities (Kusari, 2019). The diversity of experiences of return migrants, such as former refugees and/or those who were never granted refugee status, have not been examined partly because the UNHCR considers the return to one's home country as satisfying all conditions for the cessation of refugee status and has adopted repatriation, or the right of displaced people to return to their country of origin, as the preferred solution to the migration crisis (Chimni, 2004; Ighodaro, 2002; Poggiali, 2006; UNHCR, 1996; Zieck, 2004).

Contrary to the preference for repatriation, research suggests that repatriation is neither durable nor the end of the migration journey (Chimni, 2004; Ighodaro, 2002; Zieck, 2004); instead, it poses unique challenges for migrants (Carr, 2014; Chimni, 2004; Davies, Borland, Blake and West, 2011; Kusari, 2019). Returnees fare much worse in health and integration measures when compared to those who never left or those who resettled in host countries (Davies et al., 2011; Zhang, Liu, Zhang and Wu, 2015). Specifically forced return has adverse effects as living within the constraints of restrictive migration policies, while in the host country it can negatively impact their ability to reintegrate upon return (Ruben, van Houte and Davids, 2009). As a result, between 70 per cent and 75 per cent of forced returnees prefer to re-emigrate rather than repatriate (Möllers, Traikova, Herzfeld and Bajrami, 2017; Ruben et al., 2009).

Despite accumulating literature indicating negative psychosocial impacts associated with return, social work scholarship focusing on repatriation is scarce (Carr, 2014; Chu, Stec, Dunnwald and Loran, 2008; Humphries, 2004; Siriwardhana, 2015). The politicised status of returnees and the logistical difficulties in reaching this population are among the factors leading to their exclusion from research (Humphries, 2004; Siriwardhana, 2015). Moreover, most research comes out of the Global North, although forced returnees largely return to countries in the Global South (De Bree, Davids and De Haas, 2010; King, Desmarais, Lindsay, Piérart and Tétreault, 2014; Kusari, 2019). These gaps within social work scholarship can be considered a social justice issue because it leads to lack of preparedness for practice with forced returnees (Humphries, 2004; Masocha, 2014).

We seek to challenge the professional imperialism carried out by helping professionals who rely on the assumption that models of practice developed in the Global North are relevant to Global South realities (El-Lahib, 2015; Gray, 2005; Ife, 2009), by referencing the specific case of Kosovar returnees. Focusing on Kosova¹ is useful as it has one of the highest rates of asylum rejection in the European Union (EU),² seeing that only 4 per cent of Kosovars who applied for asylum were granted refugee status. Kosova also ranks among the top 10 countries of origin for returnees (Hart, Graviano and Klink, 2015; Sacchetti, 2016). Thus, the return of Kosovar rejected asylum seekers provides a chance to examine the psychosocial needs of this population and identify adequate interventions (Kusari, 2019).

We propose that social pedagogy, with its dedication to social justice, the importance it places on local and regional contexts and its attention to the role of practitioners in engaging marginalised communities, provides a promising framework to guide social workers in partnering with return migrants as they navigate the complex realities of reintegration (Petrie, 2011). Social pedagogy and social work are both community-oriented, drawing on the experience and knowledge of local communities to foster

change (Zembylas, 2012). Social pedagogy encourages developing education initiatives, whereas social work targets community development to create spaces for critical consciousness to assist individuals in challenging the status quo and help individuals to resist inequities, navigate cultural identities and become agents of change (Rosner, 2016; Winman, 2019; Zembylas, 2012).

Social work and social pedagogy have been aligned in less honourable spaces as well; by assuming that they know best and/or that they can single-handedly liberate others (Freire, 2000; Shukla and Dash, 2020), they potentially perpetuate the oppression that marginalised groups experience. Furthermore, both social pedagogy and social work face challenges when trying to measure the impact of programmes which are based on their key principles, leading to difficulties in measuring outcomes and applying relevant and appropriate interventions (Kirkwood, Roesch-Marsh and Cooper, 2017).

Despite these alignments, differences between these disciplines are apparent. First, the field of social pedagogy has historically 'borne the stigma of being different, or abnormal; precisely because it was concerned with those who were different' (Úcar, 2016, p. 3), whereas social work typically acts to maintain the status quo and/or what is considered normal. As it concerns migration, social workers have often adopted negative stereotypes, categorizing asylum seekers as deserving or undeserving (Masocha, 2014). Second, social pedagogy, largely developed in non-English-speaking countries, has had a slower uptake in Anglophone and Western countries (Moss and Petrie, 2019), unlike social work, which was first developed in Western and English-speaking countries. Third, although social work has seen a rise in anti-oppressive practice, it has also been significantly impacted by neoliberal measures which give priority to needs assessment at the expense of critical engagement with the issues faced by a certain individual and/or community (Spolander et al., 2014). Social pedagogy, in contrast, is centred on challenging neoliberal measures which further impoverish already marginalised communities and thus is better equipped to deal with the issues brought about by globalisation and neoliberalism (Moss and Petrie, 2019; Úcar, 2016).

Despite these differences, social pedagogy offers a useful lens for social workers with complementary theoretical foundations to better equip practitioners in supporting marginalised groups to resist systemic oppression. In this article we first provide a brief overview of Kosova, and then discuss how social pedagogy's focus on dialogue, context and praxis, can inform social work practice with returnees.

Contextualising Kosova

Kosova, comprising 91 per cent Albanians, 3.4 per cent Serbs and 5.6 per cent other minorities (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2019), was a UN protectorate under the administration of the United Nations Mission in Kosova (UNMIK) until it declared independence on 17 February 2008 (Uberti, 2015), becoming the youngest country in Europe. The independence came nine years after the 1999 war waged by the Serbian government on Kosova. UNMIK consisted of the UN, the EU and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Papadimitriou, Petrov and Greiçevci, 2007). In 2008, the EU Rule of Law in Kosova (EULEX, 2019) took over the responsibility of strengthening the rule of law in an independent Kosova, aiming to assure Kosova's alignment with EU policies.

While the UN and EU interventions have promoted democracy (United Nations General Assembly, 2005), their engagement in Kosova's state-building process has been largely ineffective (Blumi, 2003; Uberti, 2015). For example, despite receiving the second-largest amount of development aid in Europe, Kosova continues to suffer from high rates of poverty, political instability and migration crisis (Blumi, 2003; Mulaj, 2008; Uberti, 2015; World Bank, 2011). This is, in part, due to as much as 80 per cent of the aid to Kosova being returned to donor countries through salaries for international staff and capacity-building efforts of organisations involved in the post-war intervention (Lemay-Hebert, 2011). Also, the state-building process in Kosova has produced a political elite more interested in their own gains than the creation of a democratic society (Krasniqi, 2014; Visoka and Richmond, 2016).

Kosovar citizens report that poverty (57.1 per cent), unemployment (21.4 per cent) and corruption (5.6 per cent) are the three major problems that negatively impact their social well-being (Hetemi, Duri and Kusari, 2016). In 2016 the poverty rate in Kosova was 29.7 per cent and the unemployment rate was 32.9 per cent (UNDP, 2017). This is concerning given that Kosova has the youngest population in Europe, with an average age of 28.2 years; about 45 per cent of the population is under the age of 25 and another 42 per cent are between the ages of 25 and 54 (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2019). Consequently, many

university graduates and young families consider migration to Western European countries as a solution to their socio-economic problems (UNDP, 2014) – a recurring theme in Kosovo's history.

Migration trends in Kosovo

Since the 1950s Kosovo has experienced several waves of mass emigration. Kosovo's diaspora of at least 874,000 people (UNDP, 2014) is significant in a population of only 1.8 million. Those living abroad are relevant players in Kosovo's economy, politics and culture (European Stability Initiative, 2006; UNDP, 2014), largely because the financial resources that come with emigrating can often mitigate the consequences of unemployment and poverty in Kosovo (European Stability Initiative, 2006; Möllers and Meyer, 2014). Nonetheless, emigration from Kosovo is often approached as a difficult occurrence, best documented by popular idioms such as 'he who has not tasted the sorrows of migration does not know what life is about' (European Stability Initiative, 2006, p. 9).

Despite the centrality of emigration in studies from Kosovo (i.e. Ivlevs and King, 2012; Kotorri, 2017; Mulaj, 2008) and return migration as a key migration pattern in Kosovo post-1999 (Emini, 2015), there is a noted absence of return migration studies. As returnees are a persistent phenomenon in Kosovo and social workers are one of the first points of contact to facilitate reintegration, the development of effective practices with returnees is imperative.

Social work and return migration

Social work practice literature has paid little attention to the migration–social work nexus, leading to a lack of preparedness among social workers to adequately respond to the many challenges and opportunities that come with migration (Williams and Graham, 2014). Indeed, social workers report feeling ill-equipped to navigate the 'range of difficult, ambivalent, situations' that characterise migration (Vandervoordt, 2018, p. 283). This dilemma is reinforced in Carr's (2014) systematic review, which concludes: 'social work is in a challenging and challengeable position; whilst service users need to be at the heart of practice, practitioners are required to follow current legislation' (p. 152).

Social work is well placed 'to significantly identify the nature of needs, shape the discourses of settlement and integration, [and] develop practice models and contribute to policy development' (Williams and Graham, 2014, p. i6). A social pedagogy lens might offer a theoretical orientation to better prepare social workers practising with return migration as it emphasises how marginalised individuals are impacted by and impact their communities (Rosner, 2016; Schugurensky and Silver, 2013) and is aligned with social work in several aspects. Social pedagogy emphasises the role of education in shaping individuals and society (Freire, 2000; Rosner, 2016), and social work relies on a person-in-environment approach which considers how social, political, economic and cultural aspects impact the individual (Baines, 2017; Dominelli, 2002; Mullaly and Dupré, 2018; Schugurensky and Silver, 2013). They share a commitment to social justice through engaging marginalised populations to foster change (Hallstedt and Högström, 2005; Rosner, 2016; Stephens, 2009). Social pedagogy 'attempts to reshape society by providing strategies based on justice and equality' (Winman, 2019, p. 7), while social workers engage in anti-oppressive practices to challenge systemic inequalities operating at individual, community and institutional levels (Baines, 2017).

By combining these fields, practitioners can be more responsive to emerging societal shifts in power dynamics (Baines, 2017; Winman, 2019). As migration and displacement are often a result of (and produce) changing needs in society, a social pedagogy lens can guide social work practice with return migrants, in that it serves as a preventative strategy to address the exclusion and marginalisation of these populations through education (Winman, 2019). Key concepts within social pedagogy, such as relational ontology, dialogue, context and praxis can help shape social work practice with return migrants.

Relational ontology

A main tenet of social pedagogy is that service providers work with service users, instead of working for them, to understand the impact that the context has on how the two interact and how they make meaning of the world (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017; Freire, 2000). This relational approach, premised on the idea that the oppressed are objects of humanisation, supports breaking the cycle of oppression (Freire, 2000). This stance demands that social workers interrogate their complicity in perpetuating oppression and

move towards questioning policies which guide their practice with return migrants (Cuadra and Staaf, 2014; Koch, 2014; Vandervoordt, 2018). Social workers, while aware that return migrants are often denied fundamental rights, do not feel complicit in perpetuating oppression and, instead, shift the blame to restrictive migration policies, organisational frameworks and returnees themselves (Cuadra and Staaf, 2014; Koch, 2014; Vandervoordt, 2018).

Social pedagogy underscores that effective practice is predicated on mutual trust (Freire, 2000), compelling social workers to examine their perceptions of returnees as 'undeserving' and instead consider returnees as individuals who fall at various intersections including the Global North–Global South power dynamic. In Kosova, for example, constructing repatriated persons as a 'burden' reinforces the conceptualisations of the EU as powerful and Kosova as 'impoverished', 'underdeveloped' and 'in need of aid' (Kusari and Walsh, 2021). Recognising the importance of context, social pedagogy relies on socio-cultural perspectives of service provision, which emphasise the importance of incorporating the service users' 'linguistic resources, funds of knowledge, and home and community experiences into the classroom' (Stevenson and Beck, 2017, p. 243). This emphasises the heterogeneity of return migrants and their diverse migration trajectories.

Trajectories of return migrants differ: some are rejected asylum having never lived in a host country; others who have gained legal status in host countries may choose to return. As social pedagogy proposes, relating to heterogeneous populations depends on their circumstances, thus social workers employing a social pedagogy lens are called to move beyond generalisations to find unique ways to engage effectively with the diversity of returnees. As co-inquirers with social workers, returnees can share their reality and how best to act upon this reality (Freire, 2000).

For example, as economic considerations among rejected asylum seekers are paramount, social pedagogy can be used to uncover that 'access to financial resources and material circumstances constitute tangible power states that strengthen or limit the room for manoeuvre of the individual' (Rosner, 2016, p. 15). Social workers should follow the lead of return migrants to identify and address those needs. Beyond this, social pedagogy encourages social workers to understand needs in relation to structural injustice (Freire, 2000). In reference to employment, Freire (2000) asserts that employment and higher salary demand can be seen as merely one dimension rather than 'a definitive solution' (p. 183). Engaging the expertise of return migrants can uncover and subject to scrutiny the larger structural factors that marginalise them.

The priorities among those who return to Kosova differ; some may have greater employment opportunities upon return as a consequence of work experience and/or education they gained while abroad (Gashi and Adnett, 2015; Kotorri, 2017), others return with accrued savings to invest in Kosova and use their transnational ties to leverage investments in businesses that link Kosova and their former host country (Dahinden, 2005; Gashi and Adnett, 2015), and while they might not approach social workers for services, they may serve as a community resource or asset to draw upon.

Indeed, drawing on local resources and recognising the role of transnational ties allows social workers to move from the 'expert' role to engage in preventative work centred on facilitating 'schemes and initiatives generated by migrant communities themselves' (Williams and Graham, 2014, p. i13). Engaging in this collaborative dialogue may be difficult in the face of the dual role that social workers hold as both agents of the government tasked with implementing policies which can limit returnees' access to various services and professionals committed to social justice and respect for the inherent dignity of returnees (International Federation of Social Workers, 2018). Critical dialogue is key to navigating this dual role to 'cease being *over* or *inside* (as foreigners) in order to be *with* (as comrades)' (Freire, 2000, p. 120).

Dialogue

Dialogue is a key technique within social pedagogy to create space wherein an individual's or community's needs are voiced and addressed in moving toward social change. Similarly, social workers are encouraged to 'dialogue with the people about their view and ours' (Freire, 2000, p. 96). Dialogue, Campbell and Ungar (2003) advise, allows social workers to understand how service users see the world and approach knowledge as something that is created through interaction, and not necessarily dictated by current policies (Kusari, 2020; Sinatti, 2015). Indeed, the adoption of repatriation as a preferred policy to migration crisis contravenes what current research tells us about the experiences and desires of returnees. Although romanticised as returning 'home', return is often forced, producing multiple

challenges for returnees (Carr, 2014; Davies et al., 2011; Setrana and Tonah, 2014; White, 2014; Zhang et al., 2015).

Dialogue allows social workers to counter imperialising and preconceived notions of what is best for returnees, while challenging their role as expert. In this way notions that social workers 'liberate' returnees is relegated to the myth of 'the oppressor ideology that defines social workers as those "who know or were born to know"' (Freire, 2000, p. 120). Rather, through dialogue, social workers can bridge the gap between themselves and returnees. Indeed, critical dialogue is described as the only way to 'authentically advocate', providing 'greater access to, and an understanding of, different communities and different worlds, and how individuals and communities interpret and give meaning to their worlds' (Pisani, 2012, p. 192).

Beyond social work's historical emphasis on rapport and trust building (Leach, 2005), social pedagogy introduces critical dialogue as a possible way forward. In contrast to the prominence of needs assessment in social work with migrants, critical dialogue invites social workers to contextualise the experiences of return migrants within the historical and social hierarchies maintained by forces such as colonialism, neoliberalism and globalisation, which impact migration experiences and reintegration (Kusari, 2019; Rosner, 2016). As Zembylas (2018) summarises, critical dialogue allows social workers to approach return as 'historicized rather than psychologized' (p. 104).

Social pedagogy offers concrete ways in which social workers and return migrants can engage in critical dialogue directed towards liberatory practices. First, practitioners must reconcile the contradictions which exist between themselves and those who are marginalised, establishing themselves as both teacher and student (Freire, 2000). The first author's role as a researcher with returnees (Kusari, 2019), parallels the social worker–returnee experience in service provision. Bridging this gap meant in this case being open to and responsive to returnees' questions, rather than operating solely as the 'questioner'. Holding dual identities as both a native Albanian and a student researcher from a Canadian post-secondary institution, the first author represented someone who had reached a migration goal that study participants failed to meet. Their different migration journeys added an interesting power dynamic. Participants inquired about my immigration status in Canada and expressed surprise at my decision to return to live in Kosova. Explaining that I returned because of family, participants acknowledged that being away from their families was the most difficult part of their own asylum journeys. In sharing the ways they navigated migration, co-inquiries were invited into deeper considerations and shared meaning.

In addition to establishing rapport with service users, critical dialogue may offer a way for social workers to interrogate how the preference for repatriation is informed by the needs of the Global North (Ighodaro, 2002; Koch, 2014; Toft, 2007). As the Global North–South power imbalance manifests itself differently in various countries, the contents of critical dialogue 'can and should vary in accordance with the historical conditions and the level at which the oppressed perceive reality' (Freire, 2000, p. 65). In Kosova's context, the recognition of how the EU–Kosova power asymmetry impacts return, especially when it comes to the voluntariness of return is critical. For example, since 2015, 25 per cent of rejected asylum seekers from Kosova were forced to return (Möllers et al., 2017). As such, many of those who return lack a sense of belonging to Kosova and wish to return to their host country (von Lersner, Elbert and Neuner, 2008). Considering that returnees lack a sense of belonging in both country of origin and host country, social workers could adopt social pedagogy's strategic empathy.

Strategic empathy

Dialogue and relationships with marginalised communities must be rooted in love and compassion (Freire, 2000; Zembylas, 2012), for the 'act of creation and re-creation' is 'not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself' (Freire, 2000, p. 89). This kind of love, termed *strategic empathy*, allows the practitioner to use their empathy in critical ways, especially 'troubled' knowledge (Lindquist, 2004; Zembylas, 2012).

Among the troubled concepts for return migrants is the lack of belonging. Drita,³ a participant in Kusari's (2019) study who had been rejected asylum, likened her asylum and return experiences to 'knocking on doors that never open' (p. 1). In the face of feeling as though there was no one she could turn to, Drita countered 'you came to talk with me for example, and it makes me feel like someone's listening'. Participants understood that as a researcher I was not able to provide them assistance, yet expressed feeling better because someone had cared enough to listen. The use of strategic empathy

in this case allowed the author to create 'affective spaces which might eventually disrupt the emotional roots of troubled knowledge' (Zembylas, 2012, p. 186).

Strategic empathy can also help social workers situate themselves within the system that oppresses return migrants as it requires them to move beyond 'expressing grief' to challenging oppression (Zembylas, 2018). If social workers focus on how 'saddened' they are by the experiences of return migrants, they derive benefit 'as benevolent Western [or upper-class] subjects who feel the appropriate remorse about the suffering' of return migrants (Ruti, 2017, p. 101). As Kosova is increasingly characterised by a significant gap between upper and lower socio-economic classes (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2017), moving away from an approach that equates feeling sorry for someone with caring is especially important.

When both return migrants and social workers become aware of the structural factors that impact return, many struggle with feelings of hopelessness. Awareness of social injustice can also fuel action if it is shared with a group, as Freire (2000) articulates:

Hope is rooted in men's [and women's] incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with others. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. (p. 92)

Engaging in strategic empathy could allow social workers to approach return migrants with care, creating a space where both social workers and returnees recognise another key tenet of social pedagogy – the importance of context.

Context

Paying attention to contextual factors which impact migration outcomes counters migration research that has largely focused on 'individual and economic factors, isolated from their social context' (Rosner, 2016, p. 5) and social work literature that has largely failed to contextualise the experiences of migrants within local, regional and global power dynamics (Williams and Graham, 2014). As such, social pedagogy may be useful to attune social work to both local and transnational context as well as the historical, social, political and economic factors that shape migration (Winman, 2019). For return migrants this often means examining employment, education, ethnicity, gender and health (Jorieman, 2017; Kusari, 2019; Möllers et al., 2017).

Social workers must first examine how in-country dynamics impact the migratory trajectories and the transition of returnees into their countries of origin (Williams and Graham, 2014). Return experiences in Kosova are impacted by gender, class and ethnic power dynamics, among other factors. Perhaps the most comprehensive profile of recent returnees is offered by Möllers et al. (2017) who examined the socio-economic situation of 179 (61 women and 118 men) Albanian, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian returnees from 10 municipalities in Kosova. They note that women returnees have significantly lower levels of education (8.6 years) than men (9.4 years) and lack work experience in Kosova and abroad when compared to their male counterparts. The lower levels of education and work experience among women increased their dependency on male household members. With regard to ethnicity, those who identify as Egyptian or Roma were more likely to report that their general health worsened upon return. While 38 per cent of Albanians reported significantly higher somatic symptoms such as dizziness, heart and chest pain, stomach problems or difficulties breathing among Roma (43 per cent), Ashkali (46 per cent) and Egyptian (64 per cent) communities. The authors suggest that the involuntary return might be linked to reported symptoms of somatisation and depression considering that returnees have lower life satisfaction scores than the general population. As many as 41 per cent of returnees stated that they were dissatisfied with their lives.

Ethnic tensions in Kosova continue, in part because the post-war intervention has failed to address the consequences of the war and has 'been premised on "forgetting" the past, rather than confronting it – an attempt to prevent old wounds from re-opening in the post-war period' (Krasniqi, 2014, p. 155). As an example of its utility, social pedagogy has been used in South Africa to engage students in discussions of reconciliation and the impact of historical injustices in current relations of power (Bozalek and Zembylas, 2017; Leibowitz, Bozalek, Rohleder, Carolissen and Swartz, 2010; Zembylas and McGlynn, 2012). A social

pedagogy lens, therefore, would facilitate how social workers engage not merely with the return process, but also the historical factors impacting such a process.

In addition to local power dynamics, the Kosova–EU power dynamic has a major impact. The EU, a key player in Kosova since the end of the 1999 war, continues to exert power because Kosova aspires to join the EU and is therefore working towards meeting EU standards. In its 2014 assessment of Kosova's path towards visa liberalisation, the European Commission highlighted the areas of readmission and illegal migration thus influencing internal politics as Kosovar institutions begun to pay careful attention to illegal migration and the readmission process (Emini, 2015).

Contrary to the EU push for the return of those Kosovars who lose their temporary status and/or are classified as 'illegal' migrants, some authors warn that a mass return to Kosova could aggravate poverty and potentiate instability in Kosova, in the Balkan region and in Europe (Möllers et al., 2017; Vathi and Black, 2007). Commenting on the EU emphasis on the readmission and return of irregular migration, Bulley (2010) notes that return migration 'is not then primarily to protect populations, but to completely transform the candidate states into modern, liberal democracies. It is an exercise of what Enlargement Commissioners call the EU's "transformative power"' (p. 59). Social pedagogy, with its focus on context, helps social workers to understand such dynamics in the EU as acts of 'inclusion and exclusion, where immigrants are perceived as neither Europeans nor part of European history or culture but rather possessors of characteristics conflicting with the existing rules and values' (Rosner, 2016, p. 14). By challenging the constructions of rejected asylum seekers and Kosova itself as 'undeserving' of EU membership, social pedagogy attunes social workers to local, regional and global power dynamics.

Praxis

Understanding the contextual factors that give rise to social injustice is key to fulfil social work commitment to social justice, but also in discovering, through dialogue, how they limit individuals and how they can be overcome (Freire, 2000). The cyclical and dialectic process of coming to see one's worth is often referred to as praxis in social pedagogy and defined as the 'reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed' (Freire, 2000, p. 126). Through praxis, those who are oppressed develop critical awareness of their own condition, and, in collaboration with allies, struggle for liberation.

Regarding returnees, the action and reflection process of praxis can assist them to become aware of how current policies and regulations, which shape their return, have emerged, and how they, as individuals, are both impacted by such policies and can act against them. Moreover, praxis guides social workers to reflect on their relationship with returnees as a way of naming social injustices while at the same time becoming aware of opportunities for the development of return migrants into active citizens (Winman, 2019).

Social pedagogy warns against forms of resistance which rely on neoliberal conceptualisations of resilience that tend to depoliticise precarity (Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay, 2016) experienced by various marginalised groups, such as return migrants. Some strategies offered by social pedagogy, such as artistic interventions, school and community projects, might be helpful to social workers (Zembylas, 2018). Another potentially useful form of activism is what Horton and Kraftl (2009) term 'implicit activism', such as 'standing up for those who are discriminated in the public sphere through supportive words and gestures' (Zembylas, 2018, p. 107). Encouraging acts of implicit activism does not have to end with return migrants, as social workers can expand community development activities to include those who have never left, but who see the injustices experienced by returnees and want to right such wrongs. Indeed, as most returnees suffer from unemployment and poverty, similar to most Kosovars, engaging others in their mutual challenges offers synergies.

Freire's (2000) works suggest that social workers can contribute to community development by both attending to the problems identified by rejected asylum seekers while also offering what he calls 'hinged themes'. These themes, while fundamental to dealing with key issues that impact the experiences of return migrants, might not be recognised by returnees themselves. Thus, praxis allows social workers to engage with return migrants, while at the same time being mindful of their contributions to the discussion.

Conclusion

While offering advice on how to relate to each individual returnee, social pedagogy brings attention to the fact that migrants exist across borders. Thus social workers need to remain aware of global power dynamics as well as the web of stakeholders that are needed to support return migrants (Kusari, 2019; Rosner, 2016; Williams and Graham, 2014). Insights offered by social pedagogy can help advance social work, which 'as a field needs to articulate its theoretical and pragmatic framework in order to be able to develop interventions that address new forms of socio-cultural spaces and support inclusive social communities' (Rosner, 2016, p. 19). To this end, the core aspects of social pedagogy, which examine the process of integration and are concerned with the prevention of social exclusion, can help in further social work with return migrants (Grunwald and Thiersch, 2009).

Although social pedagogy offers a promising framework for social work, it is not without risks. As a way of concluding, we identify some of these risks to signal that no approach should be implemented without a critical eye. Among others, while social pedagogy is focused on challenging oppression and fostering change, change takes time (Zembylas, 2012) and there is no guarantee that changes in the status quo will occur. Also, like any other educational or social intervention, social pedagogy could be used to reproduce societal inequalities and reinforce mechanisms of social control (Schugurensky and Silver, 2013). As Freire (2000) cautioned, practitioners who see themselves as able to liberate others consider those who are oppressed to be subjects who need saving and in doing so perpetuate a cycle of oppression.

Notes

¹We use the term Kosova instead of Kosovo throughout this paper as Kosova is the name of the country in the Albanian language, which is spoken by 92 per cent of the population in Kosova (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2019). Although the majority population, Albanians in Kosova have been largely marginalised by the international community. As such, using the name Kosova is an attempt to reflect and give importance to the voices of the local population. Kosovo, the term used by Serbian leaders to emphasise that Kosova is Serbian land, was adopted by the international community since the war, when Kosova was part of Yugoslavia. The term Kosova makes apparent the power of language and resists the use of a word which has been used to oppress Kosovar Albanians.

²Between 2008 and 2018, 203,330 Kosovars applied for asylum in EU countries and another 141,330 were living illegally in these countries, representing approximately 20 per cent of Kosova's population (European Policy Institute in Kosovo, 2019).

³Each participant chose to remain completely anonymous, be referred to by a pseudonym, or by their name. All participants chose to use their own names and in the text I use only first names to respect their wishes and maintain confidentiality.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest with this work.

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