Spirituality, Ethics and Social Work

Edited by
Rainer B. Gehrig, Michal Opatrný, Nándor Birher
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IV.1. Depersonalized migrations: towards a hospitable society

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At this precise moment, although we are not aware of it, it is possible that thousands of people are fleeing their homes to protect their lives from direct death or to, through work, survive and improve their quality of life, as referred an immigrant woman from South America we were able to interview:

"My father, as far as I know, always hit my mother. He may not have physically assaulted us as daughters, but he did verbally. These are things that mark you a lot psychologically, then, of course, there comes a point where it is not normal, but you do not have that courage to do something, you do not have the courage to get out of the situation. I came to Spain at the age of 27 and said, either I do something or I kill my father with one blow. The last time, it was when I made the decision to come because he gave her a very strong beating, which could even have disabled her or something. So I suggested to my mother that we were leaving the house. Maybe we weren't going to have many comforts or I had the option of coming to Spain and working and then getting my mother and daughter out of that situation. My mother told me that yes, that she would come to me and take care of my daughter, and that is how she came to me."

We must reflect here on a specific type of migratory flows, recorded from the constitution of a world-economy (Wallerstein, 2007) and the emergence of nation-states in Europe, referring to migrations of an economic nature and more specifically to movements from *South to North* for reasons of survival, to improve the quality of life. The description of this type of migratory flow is structured based on the role played in recent centuries by two parallel processes: the gradual construction of a capitalist world-economy and the emergence of a new political *architecture* of mutually hierarchical nation-states.

WHAT YOU CAN GET FROM THIS CHAPTER

Knowledge

Readers understand the psycho-spiritual needs of the migrant person and the suffering involved in initiating migratory processes and inclusion in the community.

Skills

Readers have intercultural competence to be effective in meeting different cultures. Readers understand the spiritual need for roots of migrants.

Readers possess psycho-spiritual skills to care for migrants, such as helping relationships.

Attitudes

Readers ontologically will be able to develop attitudes such as empathy, hospitality, active listening, contact, or presence.

Readers as professionals, also suffer from individual or institutional injustices, so they can become aware of the need to take care of themselves in order to take care of the other, being able to develop as a person at a spiritual level in the self-realization of their vocation.

1. Problems of migration

The growing globalization of the economy creates the conditions for new population movements and the management of these migratory flows was carried out by a new political system, which began to organize identities based on national belonging (Wimmer & Glick - Schiller, 2002). Thus, when we speak of migrations from *South to North,* we refer to population flows from impoverished countries that try to access others with better economic conditions. This type of international migration is, today, the predominant one in the European Union but we can speak of other human movements, which differ from the previous ones, referring to the increasingly numerous group of refugees. We consider refugees to be those people who have fled their country of origin out of fear of persecution, conflict, or violence. Among them, we find refugees from war or armed conflicts, women fleeing sexual or gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, people persecuted for their sexual orientation or whose lives are in danger (IOM, 2021). In this sense, international figures tell us that out of the total world population, more than 280 million are migrant people. In relation to the total number of displaced persons and refugees, these already make up about 1% of the world population (Migration Data Portal, 2021).

However, although many may believe that these people come to consume the economic or material resources of the host countries, these people suffer uprooting when they leave their own historical-cultural community, encountering an impediment: sectarianism. This stands out for being an atrophy of the spiritual intelligence of the people who form a community, closing itself and isolating itself when considering itself superior; the other stranger produces fear in communities that manifest sectarianism, since they are unable to distance themselves from their own being and transcend the local to the global, and recognize the dignity of the other as an end in itself (Torralba, 2010). Therefore, intercultural competence is required; although this is not part of spirituality, it is relevant for an openness to the different other (American Psychological Association, 2017), to which must be added the development of spiritual intelligence (Zohar & Marshall, 2001) to recognize the other as a good and not as a hell, as stated by Sartre (1983). However, being considered hell, the migrant suffers violence, which is experienced as oppression or discrimination that causes suffering and depersonalization. Therefore, social work can be a bridge between the community and the migrant person through care in both dimensions, individual and group, towards the person to be welcomed and the host community and individuals through the care of values or beliefs of the actors involved (Moss, 2011), being able to produce an attitude of openness without judgment and acceptance (Hick, 2009), since one of the tasks of specialized social work is based on "reception services and social care for immigrants and refugees" (ANECA, 2004, p.140):

> In large-scale situations, violent social conflict, social workers, with their experience of social and medico-social practice, can play a key role in attending to the specific needs of refugees and displaced persons and in promoting community reconciliation. (ANECA, 2004, p.150)

It is noteworthy how the Spanish Code of Ethics of Social Work includes that the basic principles that govern the profession are dignity, freedom, and equality, reaffirming the objective to be achieved in migrants or refugees (Consejo General del Trabajo Social, 2001).

2. Putting down roots as a spiritual need

The person, at birth, is inserted into a historical community inheriting some cultural roots under which the human being is understood. In this legacy, the person is observed and recognized, while remaking it according to his experiences, creating affective community ties that provide him with new cultural elements. When the person is not recognized or welcomed, he suffers from being isolated, as can be seen in migratory flows for economic reasons or to safeguard one's own life, as is the case of refugees, and even due to the phenomenon of globalization where the particular cultural identity is losing strength and may incur uprooting (Torralba, 1998; Torralba, 2003). In turn, according to George (2010), many migrants may arrive in the host country with numerous psycho-spiritual traumas, which promoted migration. According to the WHO, a large part of the migrant or refugee population suffers from post-traumatic stress or schizoaffective mental illnesses, these phenomena being originated in the countries of origin, and may be the trigger for the decision to leave for another place to improve your life. Hunger, war, discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, rape, etc., are usually factors of high predisposition to abandonment of their homeland, so when they arrive in the host country they require greater attention from the institutions for their rehabilitation and the community for their integration (WHO, 2018; García-Campayo & Sanz Carrillo, 2002), so that compliance with social justice and solidarity can be achieved, these being the basic principles of social work (Consejo General del Trabajo Social, 2001). The Code of Ethics says the following in its article 43 concerning the social worker:

> From the framework of his professional competencies in the organization of which he is a part, he must facilitate cooperation with related entities and organizations, whose policies and programs are aimed at providing adequate services and promoting the quality of life of users. (Consejo General del Trabajo Social, 2001, p.15)

For Kunz (1981), the suffering of migrants can vary depending on whether the departure from the country of origin is planned or if it is due to force majeure, the latter being the most vulnerable, since, normally, programmed migrations tend to have links of union with the host country through family, friends, or an employment contract. Even so, in both cases, they may experience modifications in their life habits, customs, values and

beliefs, interpersonal ties, food, language, or politics and legislation (Guinsberg, 2005). Some people may experience suffering from the conflict between the migrant and the host culture, while others may overcome the conflict:

> Idealizing —for example— all the experiences and new aspects corresponding to the environment that has just received him, at the same time as attributing all that is devalued and persecutory to the place and the people he has left; This dissociation serves to avoid the grief, remorse and depressive anxieties that are exacerbated by the migration itself, especially when it is a voluntary migration. (Giménez, 1997, p.27)

Otherwise, they may experience anxiety, considering the host community as an enemy, without being able to connect with it due to the perception of hatred of the different. Therefore, it can trigger depressive pathological aspects, paranoid or manic processes, or processes of mourning before the break with their previous self, feelings of guilt can even arise when leaving their culture or certain aspects of it, or even interpersonal ties (Guinsberg, 2005), all these health problems being predisposing according to the characteristics of the individual and the host community. Thus, we can affirm with Weil (1996), that rooting is a spiritual need to attend, since existential or spiritual suffering or anguish depends on it:

> Putting down roots is perhaps the most important and ignored need of the human soul. It is one of the most difficult to define. A human being has a root by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the existence of a community that keeps alive certain treasures of the past and certain forebodings of the future... the human being needs to put down multiple roots, to receive the totality of his moral, intellectual and spiritual life in the means of which he is naturally a part. (Weil, 1996, p.51)

2.1. Hospitality in the face of human vulnerability

To help the person to take root, the spiritual ability of hospitality is required, which is built on the basis of the guest-host relationship, the guest being a being that represents all unknown humanity. However, while the stranger produces fear in the host, in the hospital relationship the guest maintains all his rights, the host being a being in debt to humanity (Potocky & Naseh, 2019). However, for this

relationship to become hospitable, as well as a place to welcome, it is essential to welcome everything from the other (Riesto & García, 2002). But, "the capacity for acceptance stems from a deep and personal experience of having been welcomed and recognized and loved by someone" (Pangrazzi, 1990, p.20), and the lack of hospitality in our communities of origin may be the cause of the hospitality deficit. In this way, we can define hospitality as "welcoming the other stranger and vulnerable in one's own home" (Torralba, 2003, p.22), or as stated by Lévinas (1993):

> The other as another is not only an alter ego: he is that which I am not. And he is not because of his character, because of his physiognomy or his psychology, but because of his otherness itself. He is, for example, the weak, the poor, "the widow and the orphan," while I am the rich and the powerful. We could say that the intersubjective space is not symmetric. The exteriority of the other is not simply due to the space that separates that which is conceptually identical, nor to any conceptual difference that would manifest itself through spatial exteriority (p.127).

Both people, host and guest, are equal in terms of their vulnerability and the contingency of life, but it is the guest who presents the greatest need, since:

> Affective vulnerability, metaphysical vulnerability or lack of meaning, the desire to be recognized, fear of death, fear of loneliness, remorse, the experience of guilt, constitute, for example, forms of human vulnerability that cannot be healed through technical or material progress (Torralba, 2003, p.179).

For this healing, the social worker can be the link between both parties, being able to observe the interconnection in any relationship, not only human, to contribute to respecting the different points of view and harmonizing the external and internal world (Canda, 2008).

With total security, the guest also requires to be hospitable to himself, connected with his being, so that he can understand the possible suffering he experiences and its causes and consequences, such as the loss of the meaning of the phenomena of his existence, which is why the social worker requires intercultural competence

to be able to understand the meanings of the client's world in a pre-established way but without prejudice (Furness & Gilligan, 2010).

Faced with the same phenomenon, each person attributes a meaning to it according to their conceptual theoretical framework, this being elaborated by past experiences influenced by the subject's predominant culture. However, to meet the other unknown being and understand his experience, a cultural awareness is necessary, that is, knowing that each person or community has its own culture, which drives the social worker to a cultural desire that will lead him to a cultural knowledge, that is, to deepen at a theoretical level the values or beliefs that move the migrant, both in the collective and individual ideology, the latter being only carried out after an interview with the migrant; It would not be strange to observe an incongruity in the encounter between the professional and the migrant, because although both speak of the same phenomenon, it may be that each one attributes a different meaning that could incur a disconnection and blockage between both (Vázquez-Aguado, 2002). A social worker says:

> I believe that, although, as I said before, we know more and more about immigrants and we know better how to deal with that reality, for a long time we have become aware that, for cultural and other reasons, immigrants have different reference patterns to ours, different scales of values to ours and we try to approach our work, well, taking these parameters into account. Nevertheless, I realize that immigrants are not a homogeneous block, that they are very, very heterogeneous even within the group of their own country of origin. Moroccans are so heterogeneous among themselves that I see serious difficulties in how to approach their problem, the relationship with them in a generic way, taking into account what I told you before, do not fall into the measurement of their problems, their situation, their needs, their expectations according to [...] according to ours. (Vázquez-Aguado, 2002)

In turn, as can happen in the case of the social worker, the host community or individual presents resistance to connectivity with the other, since he must be decentred to focus on the Good of the other vulnerable being. To do this, he must see the face of the other as the first meeting place: but this is not enough, it is necessary to listen to the self-revelation of the other in order not to incur communication errors.

Therefore, an indispensable tool for the social worker, in the first instance, and for the guest, is presence and listening, which will lead to empathy and compassion (Gardner, 2020).

By empathy, we can understand the ability to understand the other from his own being, without the professional's own interpretations, the result of which is that the migrant feels understood without judgment, allowing a greater depth in the interpersonal relationship and connection (Madrid, 2005; Bermejo, 2012). However, it can be limited to a mere understanding of the other without producing any repercussions on the professional, so compassion is essential, which allows the person to feel the suffering of others as his own, producing a desire to alleviate it (Nouwen, McNeill & Morrison, 2006). Even so, the social worker may be at risk of suffering compassion fatigue, which can lead to burnout, if he does not learn to distance himself from the suffering of others due to a possible messiah syndrome, being the freedom of the professional's emotional reactions and its management that would allow the social worker to enjoy compassionate satisfaction, without fear (Bermejo, 1993; Galland, 2008). Therefore, in the face of his own vulnerability, the social worker needs to develop self-compassion (Neff, 2003b), so that he can face his limitations and can take care of his own suffering in acceptance of his fears and wounds, that is, of the vulnerability of his own vulnerability. In this way, through keeping it daily, the professional could also develop spiritually, perfecting himself. Lévinas says (1995):

> The opening is the nakedness of a skin exposed to injury and outrage. Openness is the vulnerability of a skin that offers itself, outraged and hurt, beyond all that can be shown, beyond all that of the essence of being that can be exposed to compression and celebration. […] Vulnerability is more than the passivity that receives a form or an impact. It is the aptitude - which every natural being proudly would be ashamed to confess – to be struck down, to receive slaps. (pp. 88-89)

3. The social worker as a hospitality tool

For this, the social worker or the individual - host community needs self-awareness and the capacity for non-judgment (Polinska, 2004), so that the migrant feels recognized as a person and with the ability to join the host individual or community (George & Ellison, 2015). But this does not mean that all kinds of ideas have to

be accepted, but rather that it would be necessary to know the possible causes of suffering in order to transcend (Chrisp, 2020). In this way, the social worker should be aware of his judgments or prejudices so as not to cause greater harm to the migrant and accompany him in his own personal development and social inclusion (Srivastava, 2007). The social worker may experience difficulties due to his past experiences, which can lead him to distrust the migrant and not to empathize, this being an opportunity to connect with that pain of the past and be able to heal it through the mirror that the migrant creates. However, once these resistances are overcome, the empathic social worker trusting the migrant can cause repercussions on the other, empowering him through respect for his individuality (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Thus, with this connection between the guest-host, or the social worker with both parties, we can avoid identifying with our own ideas or thoughts, with an attitude that passes from the self to the us (Polinska, 2004), being the vulnerability lived and accepted, common to all humanity, the building element of all interconnection. Therefore, reciprocity could be produced, where two different people, with their respective historical individualities, recognize and observe each other, for which awareness is required, as stated by Feito (2007):

> From the point of view of social vulnerability and the demands of justice that it requires, this awareness of the difficulty of recognition by others is essential. It supposes the denunciation not only of the areas of vulnerability that generate greater susceptibility, but also of the situations in which vulnerability is caused by the lack of power, by the impossibility of fighting against such elements.

However, this vulnerability can be used as a pretext for domination, following the dialectic of power, which can be manifested by paternalism, as Ricoeur (2005) affirms:

> These imply a specific form of power, a power-over, which consists of an initial asymmetric relationship between the agent and the recipient of his action; in turn, this dissymmetry opens the way to all forms of intimidation, manipulation, or more simply, instrumentalization that corrupt service relationships between humans. (p.74)

However, we can also see different attitudes to paternalism in migration policies, such as structural violence. Migrants can be regulated in the host country but they can be relegated to the lower social ranks, these being discriminatory and inhumane, since the dignity of these people is not being recognized, treating them as labour or as social parasites (George, 2010). Although we must affirm that this depends on the ideas of each individual, the policies of European countries can have great consequences on the professional and their objectives, as in the case of countries such as Hungary, Austria or Poland, where, currently, populist or ultra-conservative ideologies govern. These policies can limit the performance of professionals, frustrating their vocation and preventing the inclusion of migrants or refugees (Krause & Schmidt, 2020). However, with greater government pressure, society acts by creating self-care groups or by moving the individual consciences of the population in favour of solidarity and generosity (Bernát, Kertész, & Tóth, 2016). Certainly, the European Union has a broad migration policy, but this is not being effective due to the sovereignty of each member state, so it is still necessary to deepen this aspect to promote inclusion and social justice (European Council, 2020).

The underlying problem that can be seen in interpersonal relationships between individuals from different cultures is fear, the possibility of losing to the perception of threat, since both the guest and the host are unknown beings with the potential to hurt and cause suffering (Feito, 2007). Thus, although the guest presents greater vulnerability, the host's fear may be the greatest resistance to hospitality, so this fear becomes a mechanism that can be used to increase self-knowledge and develop psycho-spiritual resources that promote their freedom (Torralba, 2003). In this way, the attention that the social worker should pay in both directions, guest-host, and the result to obtain between them, would be:

> Being with him, sharing his sorrows and his joys, his anguish and his expectations, ultimately not abandoning him to loneliness. […] It is letting him be, it is helping him to be, preserving his identity, his way of exercising the arduous job of being a person, in short, not meddling in his identity. (Torralba, 2002, p.114)

In this way, and for practical purposes, to achieve this goal of integration and better quality of life for migrants or refugees, the social worker could plan strategies for

welfare services, analyse and develop organizations, participate in social welfare policies, implement social marketing to improve communication and image of this group, defend human rights, implement international cooperation and development projects, or direct counselling for the community or for the migrant/refugee (ANECA, 2004).

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, we invite you to reflect on the experience of an immigrant woman.

"… You have to sacrifice yourself because you can't have everything in this life. Well, I decided to come. As I say, only what I have always had in mind, that first I was a woman and now I am a mother, so I have to think with a cool head. Super cold. Because you miss so many things that [...], birthdays, promotions, graduations (cries). My son has just graduated now and I couldn't be there, but it is true that you give something to your children, because being poor, what you can offer a child is an education. At least that is the mentality of us Latinos when we come."

- What is the cause of the departure of the migrant?
- What objective do you intend to achieve by emigrating? What are the reasons for the suffering of the migrant?
- What tools does the social worker have to alleviate her suffering?
- What difficulties could the social worker find in achieving the principle of social justice?
- What conditions could the social worker present to collaborate with the person and the community in the encounter with the vulnerable person?
- What resources do States have to cooperate with migrants?
- Indicate the interventions that the social worker could carry out directly on the migrant and on the community to achieve greater social and individual well-being.

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