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Transition of transnational social workers: a critical realist perspective on the need for a response from the profession

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the absence of a profession-wide response for facilitating the transition of transnational social workers (TSWs) into the host country. TSWs work with various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and often in unfamiliar socio-political, policy and practice contexts. A qualitative study was undertaken in New Zealand, which involved six focus groups, three with managers of TSWs and three with TSWs themselves and a face-to-face semi-structured interview with a manager who was also a TSW. Coding and analysis of data were informed by critical realism (CR). We found that TSWs' transitions are framed within an employer-employee relationship in the absence of a profession-wide response and TSWs encounter structural barriers in their transition. A suggestion has been made that the profession's leadership acknowledge responsibility that attends to the transitional space and an emotional concern about the wellbeing of TSWs. The transnational nature of the profession demands greater accountability regarding inclusion, sustainability, safety and discrimination. It can positively impact on the overall wellbeing of TSWs and the client groups they serve.

Introduction

It is now common that social workers gain their qualification in one country and relocate to another for professional practice. They are referred to as transnational social workers (TSWs). Peter et al. (2019) found no profession-wide programme of transition for TSWs, unlike nursing and teaching where the professional bodies have undertaken programmes to facilitate the transition of transnational nurses and teachers respectively. This raises questions in terms of the responsibilities of the leadership of the social work profession.

In this article we use the term 'professional leadership' to refer to any arrangement within jurisdictions for promoting the profession and acceptable social work practice

nationally and internationally. Hence leadership here does not mean individuals but institutional arrangements and organisations such as social work professional and regulatory bodies. The fact is that globally, professional bodies of social work within any jurisdiction have not intervened to provide a coherent nation-wide programme of transition for TSWs (Peter et al. 2019, 2020). This is in effect a passive act, allowing the status quo to continue and forcing TSWs to negotiate the challenging 'territories of transition' on their own and with practically no access to resources or support other than the rather ad hoc employer-led arrangements (Peter et al. 2020).

Professional place-related change has a significant impact on TSWs (Modderman et al. 2019). True to their roles and as the product of both their education and professional experience, most TSWs survive the transitional challenges and learn their work in action in the host countries, albeit with the occasional culture shock (Hakak and Anton 2021). Others experience what has been described as enduring professional dislocation (Fouché et al. 2014a, 2014b). The lack of a coherent jurisdiction-level programme of transition and the existing ad hoc local-level employer-led arrangements make TSWs responsible for whatever situation they are in and force them to find their own way to improve their situation. The onus is on them to adapt. In a profession that promotes human dignity and collective responsibility, we can better align our values and systems.

Discussions on the transition of TSWs may be framed within relations that are the effects of power (Foucault 1977; Eubanks and Brown 2012). Foucault (1981) points out, 'Power is not something that is acquired, seised or shared, something one holds on to or allows to slip away' (p. 94). What is power and where is it found then? Power is relational and it manifests only when it is practiced within social relations. Power is embedded in practices and processes that people encounter (Townley 1993). Clearly then for TSWs, the societal and structural practices in their host country are imbued with unequal power relations that impede their effective transition. They feel 'avoidable stress, disempowerment, and professional dislocation' (Peter et al. 2020, p. 11).

This study examines the absence of jurisdiction-wide transition programs and informed by Critical Realism; the implications of this absence on TSWs are further examined. A recommendation is made for the leadership of the social work profession to intervene to provide a coherent transition program within the framework of an ethic of care.

Transitional space

Situating the transition of TSWs within neoliberal contexts brings to light the 'enduring public/private split in which all human need is relegated to a gendered and racialised private sphere, while public need is simultaneously stigmatised' (Bryson 2021, p. 634). Neoliberalism assumes a binary existence of normative citizens (predominantly white western males actively participating in and contributing to the market economy) and non-normative citizens who are blamed for whatever condition they are in as a result of structural and systemic forces impacting on them (Bryson 2021). Transnational professionals become a third category of non-normative people who are additionally seen as non-members within discourses around social and political citizenship (Hugman et al. 2010) and particularly so when they remain unemployed and as non-residents. It is as though they are an undeserving group as Hugman et al. (2010, pp. 630–631) point out:

> As a set of practices, social citizenship rights are generally evoked in a deeply inegalitarian context where social need is addressed and justified on the basis of distinction between the participative citizen, generally understood in economic terms (as deserving) and the non-participative or non-employed citizen who is marginalised (as undeserving).

Peter et al. (2020) found that employment is the first 'territory' that TSWs navigate where direct recruitment provides the privilege of employment whereas migrating for social and economic prosperity and for a better quality of life is often seen by the host country as transgressive. As for the latter, traversing this 'territory' is fraught with challenges and often qualified TSWs engage in less skilled jobs for survival leading to a loss of hard-earned professional skills and they experience a professional dislocation (Fouché et al. 2014a, 2014b; Peter et al. 2020).

According to the definition approved by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) General Meeting and the IASSW General Assembly in 2014,

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. (IFSW 2022, par 2)

By this definition of social work, change and social justice form important foundations for social work practice and organisations. The definition highlights collective responsibility and respect for diversity. This points to the need to embrace a collaborative partnership involving important stakeholders for facilitating the transition of TSWs.

Research contexts

Within the Australian context, Modderman et al. (2021) found that overseas-born and overseas-educated social workers from UK and Ireland had a limited understanding of local social work when they migrated, and this was particularly evident in their lack of understanding of Australian First Nation's peoples. A similar study in the Aotearoa New Zealand context by Staniforth and Connor (2021) found that transnational social workers experience significant cultural differences, recommending mandatory bicultural work induction. Bicultural work, in the contexts of the peoples of Aotearoa refers to the 'relationships between indigenous Māori and nonindigenous Pākeha (white New Zealanders), as well as relationships across different Māori groups. It brings together indigenous and practice that enhance people's well-being. It is crucially concerned with being culturally responsive and sensitive' (Eketone and Walker 2015, p. 103). Understanding the cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand in accordance with the requirements for practice with Māori (New Zealand's Indigenous population) is described in social work professional codes, thus emphasising such matters as having an ethical dimension. Our regulator, the SWRB, explicitly requires competence to work with Māori people in its Ten Core Competence Standards (Social Workers Registration Board 2016, p. 7). Table 1 sets out how this competency must be demonstrated.

This requirement is reinforced by our largest professional association via the inclusion of this statement in the Code of Ethics: 'We uphold the core values that emanate from our National Foundation Document: Te Tiriti o Waitangi – Rangatiratanga, Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Aroha, Kotahitanga, Mātātoa and Wairuatanga, and the ethical

Table 1. Competence to practice social work with Māori.

A competent social worker must demonstrate:
1. Competence to practise social work with Māori

- demonstrating knowledge of the Treaty of Waitangi, te reo Māori and tikanga Māori;
- articulating how the wider context of Aotearoa New Zealand both historically and currently can impact on practice;
- Te Rangatiratanga: Maintaining relationships that are mana enhancing, self-determining, respectful, mindful of cultural uniqueness, and acknowledge cultural identity.
- Te Manaakitanga: Utilising practice behaviours that ensure mauri ora with a safe space, being mana enhancing and respectful, acknowledging boundaries and meeting obligations.
- Te Whanaungatanga: Engaging in practice that is culturally sustaining, strengthens relationships, is mutually contributing and connecting, and encourages warmth.

principles that derive from them' (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers 2019, p. 10).

A critical realist perspective

This study adopts a critical realist (henceforth CR) perspective to identify the structural barriers that impact the transitional experiences of TSW professionals in the New Zealand context. The CR perspective, derived from the work of Bhaskar (1978, 1979) offers researchers insight into how people interpret and give meaning to their experiences or understandings, as well as their correspondence to the enabling and constraining effects of objective social structure (Houston 2001, 2010). This is because the philosophical framework of CR acknowledges the dual existence of subjective reality created or interpreted by human agency and the objective reality of social structure independent of its identification by individuals (Danermark et al. 2002). In social work research, recognising the presence of and interaction between human agency and social structure is crucial. The International Federation of Social Workers defines social work as the engagement with 'people and structures' to promote social change (2022, para. 1). The mandate for social change is motivated by the need to challenge and alter 'structural conditions that contribute to marginalisation, social exclusion, and oppression' and by the recognition of 'human agency in advancing human rights and economic, environmental, and social justice' (IFSW 2022, para. 3). Critical realism supports the IFSW global definition's assertion of objective social structure and subjective interpretation or construction of knowledge based on human experiences.

Methodology

A qualitative strategy underpins this study. Qualitative approaches use participants' meaning of phenomena and their value positions (Creswell and Creswell 2018), enabling researchers to develop a deep insight into a topic (Clark et al. 2021). The study employed semi-structured focus groups. To provide comparisons and a balanced view of issues and concerns, focus groups were conducted with both the managers of TSWs and TSWs themselves – three with managers and three with TSWs in three Aotearoa New Zealand cities in 2017, with an additional interview with a manager who arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand as a TSW. An invitation to participate in the study was circulated

by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), which helped the research team to reach all registered TSWs and their managers. Some regional managers of national organisations further supported recruitment. In one instance, a regional manager invited the research team to speak to her local managers and team leaders at a routine meeting. A total of 20 participants attended TSWs' focus groups and 17 attended managers' focus groups. The duration of the focus groups varied from 1.5 h to 2 h, and all were audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants shared their understanding of the study topic that allowed for what Bryman (2016) calls a 'joint construction of meaning' (p. 501) in their respective groups.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (reference number: 017897) and a major employing organisation in New Zealand, Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children (Statutory Child Welfare). Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were provided with a detailed information sheet that outlined that their willingness to participate in the study would be seen as a sign of their consent. Ground rules and expectations were clearly explained at the start of the focus groups and participants agreed to keep the discussions and comments confidential. Pseudonyms have been used in this paper to protect participant confidentiality.

Data analysis involved a three-layered iterative process exploring data several times. At each stage, the researchers consulted with each other to confirm the analysis and findings. NVivo was used to manage data and conduct some coding and theme development. The method employed for analysis was a Critical Realism-informed coding, abduction and retroduction (Bunt 2018; Frederiksen and Kringelum 2020). At the initial stage, it involved a process of identifying demi-regularities (see Fletcher 2017) at the observable empirical level. This is where we looked for patterns or tendencies in relation to the transition of TSWs for coding purposes. Thirty-eight specific sub-themes from TSW focus groups and 35 from employer focus groups were developed relating to five broad themes namely: issues related to the transition of TSWS, credentialing and registration related issues, prior professional experience and skills of TSWS, existing state of affairs in relation to the transition of TSWs, and suggested strategies for facilitating the transition of TSWs. This paper reports on themes concerning TSW transition.

At the second stage, those empirical data were redescribed using the aspirations-capabilities framework that recognises human mobility as an essential part of broader processes of social change (Haas 2021). This process of theoretical re-description is known as abduction (Fletcher 2017). Abductive reasoning involves a thought operation by which a certain event or phenomenon is interpreted from a set of general ideas or concepts (Danermark et al. 2002). The demi-regularities observed at the initial stage of coding have certain 'contextual conditions for a particular causal mechanism to take effect and to result in the empirical trends observed' (Fletcher 2017, p. 189). Hence, the third stage of analysis is to identify those causal mechanisms and conditions that drive the manifestation of the observed patterns or trends. This is the final stage of analysis, and it is known as retroduction, which is defined as 'a form of reasoning that entails making an inference about the causal mechanism that lies behind and is responsible for regularities that are observed' (Bryman 2012, p. 715). Bhaskar (1979), a major proponent of the theory, explains that at the final stage of retroduction, researchers undertake a reasoning process that moves from 'the manifest phenomena of social life, as conceptualised in the experience of the social agents concerned, to the essential relations that

necessitate them' (p. 32). This is where we identified the structural barriers that impede the transition of TSWs and that relates to the human relational contexts in which invisible causal powers related to certain institutions, systems and processes operate. It is important to identify these causal mechanisms and conditions for bringing about changes to the empirical level patterns or trends. As Bryman (2012, p. 29) points out, 'the identification of generative mechanisms offers the prospect of introducing changes that can transform the status quo'.

Key findings

The four key findings from the data analysis relate to: the risks associated with manager-based induction of TSWs; the challenge of biculturalism in the Aotearoa context; challenges of legislation and policy; and workload priorities.

Risks associated with manager-based inductions of TSWs

The management of TSWs' professional transition currently rests solely with their managers, and as such, presents some risks to service users, TSWs and their colleagues, and to workforce stability. While it is accepted that a profession dedicated to engaging with people in their contexts must work sensitively and competently within localised contexts, and local expressions of cultural diversity, the TSWs and managers both remarked on the pressing challenge to integrate migrant practitioners into local cultural contexts. Those contexts are bound up with history and politics. This is particularly important for countries grappling with the ongoing impacts of colonisation. In Aotearoa social work has explicit commitments to the Treaty of Waitangi, and to the recognition of Māori as constitutional partners. This is often expressed in terms of biculturalism, and the (selective, and imperfect, sometimes tokenistic) adoption of elements of Māori cultural protocols (*tikanga*) into practice. Participants articulated highly variable experiences with their organisations' introduction to and engagement with the bicultural imperative and its implications for practice. Additionally, participants identified struggles with becoming familiar with a new legislative and policy context – which is, at least in part, informed by the politics of (de)colonisation. While acknowledging that some knowledge of law and policy will be domain-specific, there are some elements of law that all social workers practising in Aotearoa New Zealand need to know. Again, some organisations had very structured inductions for all social workers (not only TSWs) regarding the relationship between law and practice, while TSWs in other agencies floundered. Participants also identified competing workload pressures and priorities as a key factor driving these risks of patchy, inconsistent or absent induction processes: agencies already under significant strain found it too easy (or too necessary) to prioritise caseloads over induction.

The challenge of biculturalism

Since the late 1980s social work in Aotearoa New Zealand has taken steps to take seriously the status of the Māori population both as partners (with the Crown) to the Treaty of Waitangi, and as a significant client group (Eketone and Walker 2015). The

implications for practice are significant: contemporary jurisprudence and government policy acknowledges that the Treaty requires the New Zealand state to recognise that Māori hold certain status as tangata whenua,[1] whose culture and language must be preserved and protected. At the same time, the ongoing impacts of colonisation have produced devastating social and personal outcomes for the Māori population, such that Māori are overrepresented in the range of negative social statistics about health, mental health, education, unemployment, poverty, and imprisonment (Mutu 2019). As a result, social workers in all sectors frequently engage with Māori individuals and whānau (family groups), and to maintain professional registration are required to demonstrate competence to work with Māori people. The commitment to practice in ways that reflect the status of Māori, as enshrined in the Treaty of Waitangi, are typically articulated as a commitment to biculturalism. Recent high-profile failures of social work organisations – primarily Oranga Tamariki/the Ministry for Children, New Zealand's statutory child protection agency – to engage constructively with Māori whānau have prompted renewed attention to the profession's obligations to Māori, and to the commitment to biculturalism.

It is into this environment – with its mix of culture, politics, history combined with the 'poverty, deprivation, marginalisation and powerlessness that present day statistics reflect' (Mutu 2019, p. 4) – that TSWs enter. Support for entry into this new and complex milieu is inevitably demanding. In a recent study carried out with TSWs in Aotearoa Staniforth and Connor (2021, p. 15) found that for many this journey was challenging at many levels:

> participants brought with them different experiences of colonisation. Some had come from countries that had been colonised, while others had come from countries that did the colonising. For most, the process of having to explore biculturalism also challenged their own sense of identity and required a reconsideration of the stories that they had been told relative to their own histories.

In our study, participants in both the managers' and TSW focus groups spoke animatedly about the need for bicultural competence, and the ways that TSWs transition – or not – into this important form of professional competence in Aotearoa New Zealand. This was articulated in one of the managers' focus groups as the most significant difference in New Zealand social work practice, impacting on 'every single social worker':

> I suppose the biggest difference to be honest is bicultural practice. That sounds, well 'just go for the big answer', but it really is the biggest difference because it is New Zealand's point of difference I think with most other countries in the world, and we do have this high sense of valuing another group of people who we work with in a slightly different way. So, what is new to everybody who is new to New Zealand is the Treaty, bicultural practice, and the expectations around that. The fact that you have to evidence that to the Registration Board, every single social worker. So, it is not just workplace based, it's everyone. (Kim, Manager)

Despite the central importance of bicultural practice across all fields of social work practice, TSW participants had mixed experiences in accessing systematic training about the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori cultural protocols, or their implications for competent local practice. Some, like Trish, understood from their managers that these were important matters that required training, although that training never eventuated.

This left TSWs with the sense that they needed to find strategies to upskill themselves. For Trish, this meant relying on her professional supervisor.

> I think the impression it is my responsibility to learn about different cultures and they said something like everybody not qualified in New Zealand needs to go on like Treaty training, but they don't implement it. It seems like I am the only one not qualified in New Zealand … So, I use my external supervision quite a lot to give me a bit more of an insight into different cultures. I think it is my responsibility, I guess. (Trish, TSW)

Trish's experience was echoed by Tamara, a manager who was also a TSW from South Africa and had practised in the UK before moving to New Zealand. Tamara noted the lack of formal induction into bicultural practice. She articulated that it took her 'many years' to feel that she had a clear understanding of 'cultural models of practice' – which in New Zealand foreground Māori cultural values, knowledges, and practices into the practice models used by social workers.

> I definitely think in terms of models of practice I didn't know anything about cultural models of practice, and it took me many years in New Zealand before I started to get some of it. There is no purposeful training that I was exposed to around models of practice, and I think it would have been helpful if it started right at the beginning. (Tamara, Manager – also a TSW, originally from South Africa via UK)

Others like Fran, whose first job was at a large hospital, could access formal training regarding Māori tikanga, though she had been on the job for several months before it was offered. Her 'real' introduction to practice was gained by shadowing more experienced practitioners on the ward.

> There was a lot more to learn, particularly the bicultural practice side of things because there is such a big focus on Māori and those sorts of things here which isn't something that I had ever really heard about beforehand. So that was probably one of the harder things. I don't think I went on orientation with my job until a month after I had started and then I didn't have any kind of tikanga Māori (Māori cultural practices) training until probably another 2 or 3 months after I had started that. So, I had to do it myself … but that was more kind of shadowing the social workers on the ward than actually learning about the processes and the laws and the policies and things like that. (Fran, TSW)

In one of the managers' focus groups it was recounted how, some years ago, a very large social work organisation had undertaken a major overseas recruitment drive and had successfully employed a large cohort of UK-based social workers at once. However, in Krystal's assessment, due to difficulties around expectations that practitioners would commit to bicultural practice, especially without robust training and explanation of its importance, the recruitment strategy was a failure.

> They really, really struggled with the concept of biculturalism, couldn't really get to grips around how worked in New Zealand society and I think that within two years – I think they had been bonded for two years at that stage too – but I think most of them had left and it was a really unhappy situation for all involved. (Krystal, Manager)

The episode that Krystal referred to was recounted to the researchers several times, and highlights – perhaps apocryphally – the risk to the profession, and to individual practitioners, of placing upon them expectations of particular forms of competency unsupported by an ethic of care. Eileen, a manager and a TSW, identified the risks when

practitioners are unfamiliar with the culture and language of those they are engaging with. Having to ask people to slow their speech, or repeat things, or spell their names, creates a kind of professional mortification for the TSW, and complicates the relationship with service users.

> I mean [I struggled with] the Māori names here, and people would speak really quickly and say their names really quickly, and I became quite frightened because I could not … I had to keep checking with people: 'where did you say that house is, what road is that, where is that?' And I had to really slow them down and ask them to explain, and that makes you feel really stupid – and then even on the phone now, people would tell me their Māori names; some of them I understand, some I have to say, 'could you just spell that for me?' you know. (Eileen, Manager & TSW)

Another manager, Ursula, identified the need to contextualise the expectations of biculturalism with explanations of why those expectations have come about.

> I think, as New Zealanders we need to have a better explanation to people new to New Zealand about what biculturalism means, because … I don't think we sometimes do a good enough explanation of actually, these are the Treaty partners, and biculturalism is between Māori and non-Māori, and we all fit under the non-Māori, you know, tangata whenua and tauiwi [i.e. non-Māori]. So, I think sometimes if people don't get that good explanation, so they understand that, actually, we are not excluding people who are not European and Māori … So, I think that must be quite a difficult thing to grasp if you come in and think so where do I sit, where am I in this partnership? (Ursula, Manager)

When it came to the question of how such an explanation should be given, and who takes responsibility to ensure that TSWs are able competently to practice with Māori, most participants in both the managers' and TSW focus groups acknowledged from their own experience that the task was too important to leave with individual managers. This was articulated clearly in one of the managers' focus groups by Kim – despite working in a hospital with a well-established training programme in bicultural practice for all employees, including the social workers.

> I think it is necessary and it should be done, and I think it is multiple layers much higher than individual managers, but something that everybody, you know, can benefit from New Zealand culture, the cultures within New Zealand, the differences how you assimilate to that, because we are expected to be competent to work with other cultures in New Zealand … But there's nowhere to go to access this. (Kim, Manager)

Challenges of legislation and policy

Though they may have long practice experience in their home countries, TSWs often must grapple with the new legislative cultures and environment they find in Aotearoa New Zealand. Several TSW participants highlighted the pressure from realising that they might have to understand local practice without much formal support. For example, an experienced mental health social worker from the UK described how her confidence in her practice knowledge and ability – borne from many years of practice – was shaken in her new context. Indeed, she felt that suddenly she was 'back to square one'.

> In the UK [we] had the Capacity Act and you got the new Care Act and formal statutory safeguarding when you had risks around adults … over here it's like who do you talk to?

And you try to gather knowledge from your colleagues, but when you don't have it yourself your confidence is up and down every day – did I do that right? And you sat there with all those 'what do I do with it now, where does it go, who do I tell, how do I refer?' and you are literally scrambling around, which is a horrible feeling to have when you come from feeling quite confident in your role, like I know my job. Then you come over here and it's like I don't know anything, back to square one, back to basics. (Dani, TSW)

Similarly, Fran, another UK-trained TSW working in the health sector, talked about how much she would have valued having someone mentor her on local legislation governing the processes of medical decision-making when patients may not have the capacity to make decisions for themselves. This is quite a common social work process across the health sector, particularly, and involves clearly delineated legal processes.

And about the laws and legislation and things like that, because I studied in the UK; it is so different and working there, [so] having someone actually sit down and saying well this is your job this is the kind of things you are going to be following this is how … the whole process over here is so different. (Fran, TSW)

A participant from the Philippines recalled her first New Zealand job, gained after three months in the country, at a residential facility for youth mental health patients. She was overwhelmed by the sense of having to learn everything, all at once.

Then after 3 months the very first job that I applied for rang me … So, it's all right, in the mental health facility I got 19 clients and it is just me by myself. So, I really worried because I'm struggling to learn the culture, the law, and the social work processes and strategy that they're using, and the approach and then struggling with English. (Suki, TSW)

However, in one of the managers' focus groups it was suggested that learning the legislation related to social work practice is a need that also applies to New Zealand-trained social workers, not just TSWs.

I think the health environment and our legislation as a whole is quite often new to lots of social workers coming into health. Health social workers are new so we are not trained in social work and the health legislation, so I wouldn't necessarily see transnational social workers as needing any more than New Zealand trained social workers. (Uma, Manager)

Kim responded to Uma in agreement:

if I'm hearing you right, there is not a particular difference whether you trained in New Zealand or not. It is whether you're experienced in health social work or not. Maybe getting back to the UK social workers, they do quite a lot of work around [safeguarding adults] which is the same concept but different words as in our legislation. You just got to see where the changes are, but the practice is the same. They are looking for the same risks, they are understanding the same needs, they have just got a different framework to implement something to protect that person. (Kim, Manager)

Overall, managers and TSW participants alike agreed that TSWs need knowledge of the domain-specific legislation and social work context (for example, New Zealand health environment and specific legislation, such as the Protection of Personal and Property Rights Act). However, it was clear that practitioners could not necessarily rely on their managers to offer the training required to gain that specialist knowledge.

Workload priorities

Compounding the assorted challenges TSWs face is the heavy workload and lack of time they have for adjustment. Managers acknowledged that TSWs had little time to adjust to the organisational and practice cultures because of workload demands. One manager, Simon, specified that TSWs often must take personal responsibility for their professional adjustment because no one else in the agency had time to guide them outside the allotted induction period. He described giving a reading list drawn from his studies to a recent TSW he managed, who would otherwise have had no transition support.

> One of the things [for induction] was like I actually gave them some reading to do, … I said, 'look you could go and do some reading', because to be honest I had no time and even probably patience to actually sit with them and do that because they really needed a lot of that to be done before they could have at least some basic idea of what it is and how it works. … I'm glad they took it on board and took responsibility and did it. If they had not, it would have been really challenging for them and me. (Simon, Manager)

Similarly, Sarah and Eileen (managers in different organisations and in different parts of the country) admitted that TSWs in their agencies simply had to learn on the job, sometimes even before they were inducted into their respective organisations.

> I guess because like our frontline social workers are so under pressure, that the time isn't even taken to carefully coach them and mentor them into the role, because it's like we've gotta get them up to speed and get them out and they've got to have a case load. So even for staff coming in, they're not supposed to have a case load before coming into induction, well that just didn't happen, so they would've been six weeks in the organization, and they already had a case load of ten before they came into induction. (Sarah, Manager)

> So, what happens is you get a little bit of help, but you are learning whilst you've got 15 to 20 cases on your caseload … And because of the time frames and the things we have to meet at certain times, there doesn't appear to be a direction or a commitment to actually looking at [induction] as an issue. They straightaway go more or less on the after-hours rosters and that is something different here. You are not only working in the day you would be rostered to be out-of-hours social worker and, you know, it's resourcing the whole time … If you've got all these cases that need working and you can't park them anywhere, you know, and then the new person coming in just gets hammered. (Eileen, Manager)

Eileen's admission that, as a manager, she feels she has little option but to overload new transnational employees knowing they would get 'hammered' is especially compelling as she was a TSW herself, who was similarly overwhelmed when she first arrived.

> When I first started here, I was completely like fresh off the plane, I'd been here two months and they had a welcoming for me … the whole process was really weird and I thought, 'what am I doing here?' There was another temporary worker who worked for years for the organization … She took me under her wing and if it hadn't been for her, I would have left this place crying, and I didn't even know how to dial outside of [the local area]. I didn't know what the area codes were. (Eileen, Manager)

While she reflected on her own difficult experience as a TSW, Eileen offered a sad admission: 'I thought I was always going to be a better person when somebody was coming into our team, but I'm afraid it's still not great for those people'.

Susan was an unusual TSW, in that she was born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand and who had migrated to England as a trained teacher. She retrained as a social worker

working in children's services there before eventually returning to Aotearoa New Zealand, gaining a social work role in the health sector. She described her awareness of the pressures on her managers and feeling reluctant to add to that pressure by admitting her unfamiliarity with the legal and policy context and wishing to have some specialist training.

> How I felt about the problem in the District Health Board [DHB] being overseas trained, the difficulty at the start of my job … because I was a problem starting and I felt that. So, I never wanted to say 'I'm not sure about that' because I felt already that I had caused a lot of stress with my management and to mention a programme I need to do on top of my [general] induction I would be concerned that would be another barrier to getting there although I think it is definitely needed. (Susan, TSW)

Discussions and conclusions

Global aspiration

The Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession were published in March 2012 by the IFSW. Several reasons were cited for their development linked to the growth of international social work (Papadopoulos 2017). First was the desire to enable the movement of social workers across borders. It was determined that their passage should be 'enabled not blocked' (IFSW 2012, p. 11). Secondly and important to the focus of this current article, Western understandings of social work, taken as the norm, reinforce the idea of 'universal social work' critically explored by Gray and Fook (2004, p. 638) who argue that attempting to define a universal value system:

> is at odds with current thinking relating to cultural autonomy … while there are clear similarities in the discourse about social work across countries, this does not necessarily mean that it is practised similarly in different contexts. This may simply be a question of how and whether our theory matches our practice, but it may also be a question of whose discourse dominates and why?

Our participants' experiences confirm this critique of a 'universal' social work, as they have described the challenges of achieving recognition for what they bring and their needs for professional development in their new context. The ideal of universal values informing social work unravels at the point of recognising TSWs skills and knowledge, where prevailing discourses (and systems) may be exclusionary and not value their contributions. Studies by Zubrzycki et al. (2008), Peter et al. (2020), Modderman et al. (2019, 2021), and others have all suggested that TSWs receive 'a complicated welcome' where recognition of skills is problematic and prior experience may be discounted (Brown et al. 2015, p. 58). They have all noted the obstacle course of systems that must be navigated in order to gain recognition. These encountered obstacles span migration systems, professional credentialling barriers (Brown et al. 2015), poor induction (Peter et al. 2020) and discrimination and micro-aggressions (Fouché et al. 2014a, 2014b). Papadopoulos (2017, p. 222) rightly argues that 'questions of mobility and the recognition processes that enable mobility put the assessment of professional capabilities in the realm of ethical practice'. While credentialling and assessing professional capabilities focus more on qualifications and their appropriateness, people's mobility is generally not

seen as a capability. This ignores migration processes as part of broader social change. Applying Amartya Sen's capabilities framework (see Sen 1999) to migration, Haas (2021) has defined human mobility itself 'as people's capability (freedom) to choose where to live including the option to stay' (p. 2). This acknowledges migration as an active social process rather than an automated response to the push–pull factors. However, people's perception of what a good life is, and their resultant life aspirations largely vary across cultures (Haas 2021). Hence, understanding and acknowledging these aspirations and accommodating them in the context of receiving countries is important for their wellbeing. A structured orientation can allow for this to happen when TSWS migrate.

Approaching the welcome of TSWs from an ethic of care lens suggests that we might best return to some very simple concepts of hospitality and welcome. Our study and the other research we have reviewed suggests that the profession may be falling short of enacting its own principles. Three of the core values integral to the Aotearoa New Zealand Code of Ethics might have currency here in uncomplicating and enhancing the welcome (see Table 2).

As our understanding of the realities of TSWs' transition is founded on Critical Realism informed analysis, it is important to explain the application of critical realist perspectives in relation to the findings. Ontologically, Critical Realism recognises a layered or stratified reality that exists at three different levels – the empirical, the actual and the real (Bhaskar 1978). The domain of the real in the social world consists of entities such as structures, systems or processes that have properties with inherent generative mechanisms that cause the manifestation of empirical realities. In other words, this is the realm of causal mechanisms. The domain of the actual represents events and their effects that come into effect as a result of the activation of causal mechanisms. The empirical realities emerge from our experience of the world because the domain of the empirical consists of actual events that can be observed or experienced.

Thus, the Critical Realism informed analysis has identified four key empirical realities experienced by TSWs and their managers such as risks associated with manager-based induction of TSWs and the challenges of biculturalism, legislation and policy, and workload priorities. The actual level consists of what happens when the transition of TSWs is impeded. However, the domain of the actual – the events and effects – can only be explained in reference to the real level where invisible causal powers linked to entities such as regulatory/professional bodies, economic systems, and social and cultural systems are triggered. The social world is made up of numerous such entities that have properties with inherent powers. Events manifest

Table 2. Core values to guide us.

MANAAKITANGA	**SOCIAL WORKERS** recognise and support the mana of others. We act towards others with respect, kindness and compassion. We practice empathic solidarity, ensure safe space, acknowledge boundaries and meet obligations.
WHANAUNGATANGA	**SOCIAL WORKERS** work to strengthen reciprocal mana-enhancing relationships, connectedness and to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion.
KOTAHITANGA	**SOCIAL WORKERS** work to build a sense of community, solidarity and collective action for social change. We challenge injustice and oppression in all its forms, including exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

when one or more of those powers are activated. While these entities are not observable at the empirical level, the effects of their activated power are, for example, the identified risks and challenges that stem from the transitional process that mainly relies on manager-led initiatives and individual managers' or TSWs' efforts without a jurisdiction level cohesive provision.

A significant contribution of a Critical Realism informed analysis is its recognition of the absence of entities as also being capable of producing certain realities. That is to say that being (reality) is not only open, differentiated and stratified but it is also permeated by negativity such as absences (Bhaskar 2008). In his espousal of the fallacy of 'ontological monovalence', Bhaskar (2008) established how negating concepts such as absences have a legitimate and necessary ontological engagement.

Just as the absence of oxygen generates suffering and death for organisms that rely on it, an absence of strategies or mechanisms for facilitating the transition produces unfavourable experiences to TSWs including unmet transition needs and the consequent risks and challenges. An ethic of care can be the antidote to this marginalising and disempowering experience. Changes happening as a result of an ethic of care at the level of entities – structures, systems and process – can produce different events at the actual level and the effects of those events at the empirical level can be favourable to TSWs, provided the leadership of the social work profession adopts an ethic of care. We recommend the urgent development of mandated supports for TSWs to make a safe, enjoyable, and constructive transition.

Within the New Zealand context, a recommendation is to consider *pōwhiri,* a traditional formal Māori ceremony of greeting and welcome, as an ethical framework for orientating TSWs, building on the work of Walsh-Tapiata et al. (2018). Walsh-Tapiata et al.'s approach offers a way forward that is grounded in traditional Māori values as have been aligned in recent Aotearoa social work guidance documents (see Tables 1 and 2). The Treaty of Waitangi provides a base for constructing arguments for national-level frameworks and guidelines, within the scope of which individual organisations and agencies could design specific transition programmes.

Note

1. Literally *people of the land*, a Māori expression that asserts customary status, rights, and obligations within a given territory.

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