Living in Harmony:
Empowering Practice Amongst Diverse
Populations in a Globalising World

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Migration a Historical Process

- Migration has featured as a continuous theme in human life since migration began out of Africa about 4 million years ago.
- The creation of nation-states with boundaries to defend has problematised this movement and imposed controls at the frontiers to regulate movement in and out of a particular country.
- Migration today occurs both within countries from rural to urban areas as well as between countries.

Living with diverse populations

- Migration occurs for many reasons:
  - Economic improvement
  - Political persecution
  - Climate change
  - Adventure
- The challenge today is accepting diverse populations within national borders and living in harmony with these.
- Migration is not the only bringer of diversity in populations; some are internal to the population, e.g., gender, age, disability, mental health, ethnicity.
- Poverty is an important context that intensifies fear, exacerbates insecurities (political, social, economic, cultural), intensifies exclusion and marginalisation of growing numbers of people and is integral to neo-liberalism.

'Othering' people expresses fear of diversity

Othering' is:
- a socially formed and reproduced process.
- the process of differentiating the self from other people by relying on a dualism that defines the self as superior and others as inferior.
- a process that values only those like oneself, i.e., who are the same, and underpins assimilationist responses to difference, i.e., they insist everyone is and behaves as if they were the same.
- predicated on unitary and homogeneous concepts of the self and others.
- central to reproducing taken-for-granted assumptions about superior attributes through daily practices that are not subjected to analysis and/or criticism/

Lack of reflexivity undermines social work practice with diverse populations.

Fear of the unknown

The 'norm' or the known is not feared

The unknown is feared

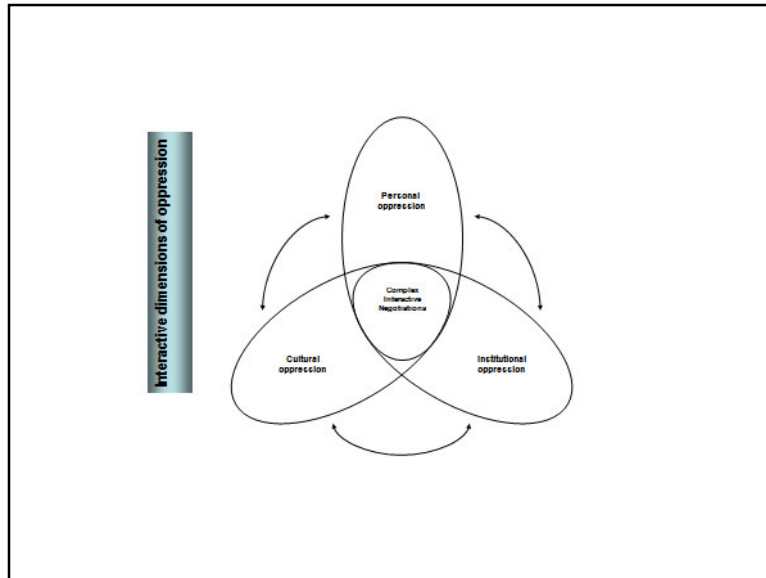## Challenges to harmonious social relations

Living in harmony amongst diverse populations relies on:
- Acceptance and belonging
- Tolerance
- Compromises
- Solidarity
- Egalitarian values

Understanding the dynamics of oppressive social relations is crucial to living in harmony with others who are different from oneself.
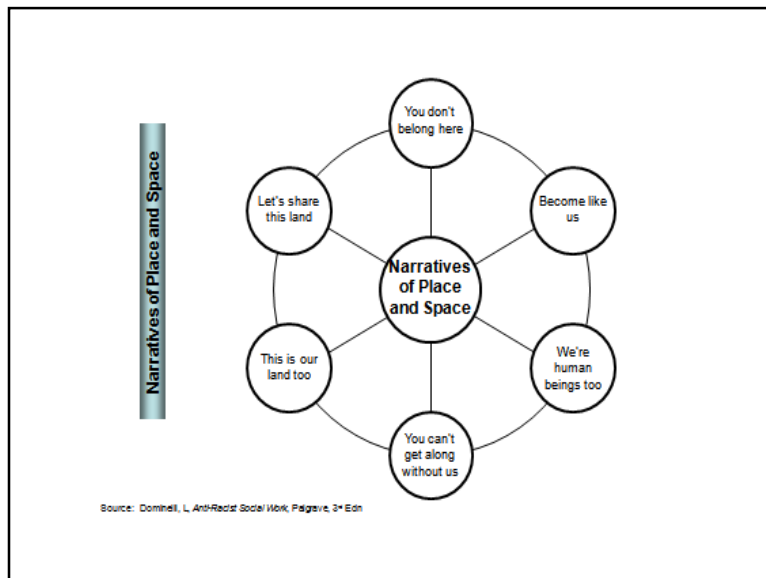
Not fearing difference promotes acceptance and tolerance.

Celebrating diversity helps, as does looking for commonalities.

Interactive dimensions of oppression

Personal oppression

Complex Interactive Negotiations

Cultural oppression

Institutional oppression

Social workers can perpetuate oppression and exclusion through their practice

- Exclusion, marginalisation and oppression occur at the personal (beliefs), institutional (routines of practice) and cultural (social norms) levels.
- Institutional and cultural oppression can implicate social workers in oppressive practices, e.g., through rationing resources that indirectly exclude those from a particular ethnic or religious group.
- Social workers use unitary concepts of identity that often stereotype service users.
- Social workers provide culturally inappropriate services (one size fits all).
- Universalism enables social workers to ignore difference (the colourblind approach).
- Social workers think identity issues do not concern them either individually or collectively, only their clients.
- Social workers fear the 'oppressor' or 'racist' label if they admit they do not know about or understand diversity or a particular culture.

Narratives of Place and Space

You don't belong here

Become like us

Let's share this land

Narratives of Place and Space

We're human beings too

This is our land too

You can't get along without us

Source: Dominelli, L, Anti-Racist Social Work, Palgrave, 3ª Edn

Responses to exclusion

Responses vary from oppressive rejection to partial acceptance to inclusion in an egalitarian framework:

- Segregation (you don't belong here)
- Assimilation (become like us)
- Multiculturalism (we're human beings too)
- Interculturalism (we're human beings too)
- Integration (this is our land too)
- Anti-racism (let's share this land)
- Black, Asian and Afri-centric perspectives (you can't get along without us and let's share this land)
- Egalitarianism that values diversity (let's share this land)
- Several of these discourses co-exist in any one place.

Creating harmony amongst diverse populations

- Recognise that social workers and service users are agents who *together* create helping relationships.
- Treat people with respect and dignity.
- Respect others' knowledge/ways of doing things and empower each other through reciprocated relationships.
- Develop *mutually interdependent* practice relationships.
- Help service users claim their rights and entitlements as citizens in control their own destiny, not as victims of others' machinations.
- Hold accountable those responsible for creating those inegalitarian environments in which people work and live.
- Undertake research and knowledge-building endeavours that assist service users to take control of their situations.
- Find common objectives amongst different stakeholders.
- Build bridges between those holding power and excluded people by understanding the *causes* of power and resource *imbalances* between them and working to equalise these.
- Work holistically – from the local to the global; from the physical to the social environment; from the economic to the political spheres.

We can celebrate diversity

We can live in harmony

Repeat the breaking news:

We can live in harmony

THIS LIFE by Rick Brookes
BREAKING NEWS

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THANK YOU!