



THE TENSIONS BETWEEN CULTURE AND HUMAN RIGHTS: Emancipatory Social Work and Afrocentricity in a Global World

Edited by Vishanthie Sewpaul, Linda Kreitzer, and Tanusha Raniga

ISBN 978-1-77385-183-9

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

Culture, Human Rights, and Social Work: Colonialism, Eurocentricism, and Afrocentricity

Vishanthie Sewpaul and Linda Kreitzer

We stand at the thick of human experience, in the space of human problems, in the real-life local places where people live in the face of dangers, grave and minor, real and imagined. Here is where fear and aspiration, desire and obligation, mesh in the close encounters of ordinary men and women with the pain and disaster and with the infrapolitics of power that apportion those threats unequally and distribute responses to them unfairly across social fault lines in actual worlds.

—Kleinman, 1998, p. 376.

We begin with the above quotation by Kleinman (1998), whose treatise on human suffering bears direct relevance for social work. At the heart of our concern is the human suffering and consequences born out of cultural practices—spaces within which people breathe, live, learn, marry, work, play, and become mothers and fathers; daughters; sons; brothers; sisters; friends and colleagues—in the face of “grave and minor, real and imagined” threats and dangers. The threats and dangers relate as much to the consequences of pernicious cultural practices as they do to the

possible threats and dangers of giving up customs, traditions, and norms that have come to be inscribed as parts of core identities and entangled with socio-economic realities. Such understanding bears important implications for how we deal with the vexing issues of diversities and human rights that are discussed in the various chapters in this book, and which are consolidated and detailed in the conclusion in relation to socio-economic and political governance, and to social work education, research, and practice.

Culture has been variously defined through different disciplinary lenses. Generally, it incorporates elements of the arts, values, beliefs, symbols, customs, traditions, and practices of groups of persons, with an emphasis on the intergenerational and contemporaneous transmission of these. We accept the definition of Spencer-Oatey (2008), as it addresses the ambiguities inherent in culture; embraces the formal and informal dimensions of culture; addresses intersubjectivity and the role of the individual within the group; and speaks to both culture's constraints and the agency that people possess, and can exercise, in the face of such constraints.

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour. (p. 3)

Culture does not exist in isolation. It is interlinked with histories and socio-economic and political structures and can contribute to the development and flourishing of humanity or the curtailment of human freedoms. Culture is learned and is not static or cast in stone; in its various facets it is forever changing. It is the specific elements of customs and traditions of culture, that may or may not be linked with broader cultural epistemologies, that we are particularly concerned with. Frantz Fanon (1963), one of the most eminent of post-colonial intellectuals, cogently posited that:

Culture has never the translucidity of custom; it abhors all simplifications. In its essence it is opposed to custom, for

custom is always the deterioration of culture. The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one's people. (p. 180)

As we discuss in this chapter, there is a richness and value to African philosophical world views that, if abided by, would prevent the reproduction of customs and traditions that violate human rights. In a globalizing world, there are numerous factors at multi-systemic levels that influence local customs and traditions. However, the power of intersubjectivity, the interpersonal and immediate group affiliations at the local level cannot be underestimated in the reproduction of culture. But the subjectivities of human beings are not fixed; neither are the social circumstances or the moral reasoning of people (Kleinman, 1998), and it is these that the authors of the various chapters of this book invoke in their call for a retention of the affirming aspects of African cultures, and a repudiation of those aspects that depreciate and violate human dignity and human rights. As in other parts of the world, in "African societies . . . there are multiple universes of discourses" that include the "commonsensical, the scientific, and the religious" (Hallen, 2002, p. 42).

The salient issues discussed in each of the chapters are by no means intended to convey the message that human rights violations occur in the name of culture on the African continent only. Such violations occur on a global level. But our focus of interest is Africa, and we argue that an authentic commitment to Afrocentricity must serve as a guiding principle in stemming the abuse of human rights in the name of culture. Interrogating the intersection of political economy, culture, and human rights in Africa, with country-specific examples and the kinds of pedagogical and practice strategies that social work students, educators, researchers, and practitioners might use, holds promise for interventions in other contexts.

Africa is not homogenous; it comprises 54 countries, each with its varying levels of socio-economic development, forms of socio-political governance, unique languages, cultures, histories, and liberation struggles. Like many other colonized societies, countries across Africa have reflected a strong culture of anti-colonial resistance, which has been its source of strength and development. As much as there are diversities

across countries in Africa, there are in-country differences as well, and we must not essentialize the cultural norms and practices within countries. A discussion on culture and human rights would be invalid if we did not locate contemporary Africa in the context of its colonial legacies and the impacts of Eurocentrism. It is this that we turn our attention to in the following section.

Colonialism, Eurocentricism, and Afrocentrism

There is widespread acceptance that colonialism has imposed an indelible footprint on colonized peoples across the world. The effects of colonialism in Africa in respect of the denigration of African people—reducing them to the level of non-beings; the cultural annihilation through assimilation into the languages, religion, and cultures of the colonized; the dispossession of African peoples of their lands; the fragmentation of their families; and the deliberate retention of the colonized in slave-like working conditions in abject poverty—have been widely documented. Through colonialism and missionization a Western or Eurocentric hegemony has come to characterize education, research, and practice in the humanities, and the social and natural sciences broadly (Asante, 2014a; Biko, 1978; Dei, 1994; Dei, 2012; Fanon, 1963; Hallen, 2002; Kumah-Abiwu, 2016) and in social work in particular (Harms Smith & Nathane, 2018; Midgley, 1981; Mwansa & Kreitzer, 2012; Sewpaul, 2014). Unfortunately, in a rapidly and intensely globalizing world, various forms of imperialism continue to exist that materially disadvantage people in the Global South, and archetypes of the presumed superiority of the West and the presumed inferiority of the rest of the world abound, which do impact the self-conceptualization of people (Asante, 2014a; Biko, 1978; Fanon, 1963; Hallen, 2002; Sewpaul, 2016). In addition, new forms of imperialism, in the face of neoliberal capitalist expansion, influence life choices, which have become increasingly commodified, as seen, for instance, in changing *ilobolo* practices. Apart from ideological beliefs, growing inequality and poverty caused by free market ideologies constrain choices, and may contribute to violations of human rights, as, for example, lack of employment opportunities may induce women to remain as active agents as they perform female genital mutilation.

Colonialism changed Africa's religious, cultural, economic, and political landscapes. Contemporary intercountry and intra-country, inter-ethnic and inter-religious forms of violence, rooted in a colonial history, are major contributors to human rights violations in Africa, with poverty being a precursor to and a consequence of conflicts and human rights violations (Adejumobi, 2006; Annan, 2006; Fanon, 1963). In the words of Fanon (1963), "the poverty of the people, national oppression and the inhibition of culture are one and the same thing" (p. 191). The colonialists denied people their local languages and cultures and created arbitrary borders that cut across national territories, forcing in some instances people of different ethnicities to live together and in other instances separating ethnic groups and sowing seeds of division, fear, suspicion, and prejudice (Mwansa & Kreitzer, 2012). This did not augur well for democracy, development, respect for human rights, or shared values and identities.

Africans have been, for centuries, the subject of colonial denigration, and with ongoing forms of imperialism, continue to live in the gaze of the colonizer (Fanon, 1963). That Africans must resist colonial domination is beyond dispute. But should Africans do this at their own peril by holding on to customs and traditions that work against their own peoples? The often-cited refrain is: "It's in our culture. The West must not tell us what to do." We agree! Our argument is that we must do it for ourselves, by ourselves. Detailing colonial Europe's assault on humanity, Fanon (1963) asserted: "Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation [of Europe], which would be almost an obscene caricature," and in his conclusion beseeches: "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity . . . we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man [*sic*]" (p. 255). Afrocentricity, which according to Chukwuokolo (2009), is "*a resolute attempt to put the records right*" by historicizing African peoples in Africa and across the African diaspora and by acknowledging the "contributions of Africans in all areas of civilization be reflected in world history" (p. 33, emphasis added), has been one response to such a call. This was the major pursuit of Steve Biko (see Biko, 1978), the champion of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa (who was beaten to death in prison at the age of 31), who dedicated his life to the transformation of the thinking of black people, and to the alteration of their material conditions of life.

Asante's (2014a; 2014b) seminal writings on Afrocentricity have informed many academic disciplines, including social work, with their emphasis on the agency, rather than the subjugation of African peoples; centring African identities and experiences in relation to location and place; and conceptualizing Africans as subjects rather than as objects of history (Asante, 2014a). According to Asante (2014b):

Afrocentricity seeks a mature relationship to other cultures, neither imposing nor seeking to advance its own material advantage. By centering their culture and claiming it as a valuable part of humanity, African people own or assume agency within their own contexts, thereby fulfilling their roles as legitimate partners in multicultural discourse, something constructed together. Such an idea is fundamentally more about humanity than materialism, winning, and domination. (p. 1)

At the centre of Afrocentricity are the humanism and humanistic ethics needed to deal with the multiple problems of Africa, with social solidarity and deepened people-centred social democracy being the lifeblood of societies (Asante, 2014a; Biko, 1978; Hallen, 2002; Fanon, 1963; Fashina, 1989). According to Fashina (1989), "the only justified institutions and practices are those which promote concern and respect for all, tend to minimize pain and suffering, and recognize the moral claim of everyone, irrespective of social class, status or race" (p. 182). To this we add the categories of gender, age, sexual identity and sexual orientation, religion, language, ethnicity, marital status, family type, disability, and illness.

Afrocentricity is not anti-white. It is anti-oppression; it seeks to rectify distorted Eurocentric histories and archetypal constructions and reconstructions of Africa. It does not seek to replace Eurocentrism—it is a countering of Western hegemony, an epitome of resistance politics. Given the internalization of Western archetypes by African peoples, and the subsequent interiorizing of inferiority by African peoples (Asante, 2014a, 2014b; Biko, 1978; Chawane, 2016; Fanon, 1963; Hallen, 2002; Sewpaul, 2016), Afrocentricity—with its validations of African identities—is not just desirable, but a necessity. Authentic multicultural relations and

dialogue cannot happen without inclusion of all the world's population. Afrocentricity benefits Europe (by offering the Western world alternative perspectives) as much as it does Africa and the African diaspora (Asante, 2014a, 2014b; Chawane, 2016, Fanon, 1973; Hallen, 2002). It affirms the co-existence of all cultures and examines how power and privilege are played out in global political, economic, and multicultural arenas.

Ubuntu, which roughly translates into “humanity” or “African humanism,” has several derivatives such as *bomoto* (Congo), *gimuntu* (Angola), *botho* (Botswana), *umunthu* (Malawi), *bumuntu* (Tanzania), *umuntu* (Uganda), and *hunu* among the Shona majority of Zimbabwe. However, *Ubuntu* has come to be seen as a Pan-African philosophical framework (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). *Ubuntu*, signifying the aphorism of “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” meaning “a person is a person through other persons,” is an Afrocentric ideal that has become post-apartheid South Africa’s national ethos. *Ubuntu* played a major role in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as it embraced the virtues of forgiveness, compassion, the interconnectedness of humanity, and restorative justice. Given the atrocities inflicted on Blacks¹ during apartheid, South Africa could have easily decompensated into civil war. It was the spirit of *Ubuntu* that allowed for a peaceful transition into a non-racial democracy (Barnard, 2014; Sewpaul, 2015; Stengel, 2012). Mandela (1994), who is the epitome of *Ubuntu*, wrote of his mission to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor, saying that “a man who takes away another man’s freedom is a prisoner of hatred; is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness” (p. 544).

The seven principles of Kwanzaa² (InterExchange, 2019) represent core Afrocentric principles, which are:

1. Umoja (Unity): To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.
2. Kujichagulia (Self-Determination): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.
3. Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility): To build and maintain our community together and make our

brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and solve them together.

4. Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics): To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.
5. Nia (Purpose): To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
6. Kuumba (Creativity): To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
7. Imani (Faith): To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle. (para. 4)

These principles, developed in the United States by African-Americans to acknowledge and uphold their African heritage, have significant implications for socio-economic and political governance systems—a discussion that we take up in the concluding chapter—and for human rights discourses.

There are undoubted virtues to *Ubuntu*, whatever structures of society it is made manifest in, and the emphasis on collective responsibility and communal caring, as seen in extended family systems of caring for the elderly and children in Africa, must be celebrated. But unfortunately, with the romanticization and idealization of traditional communities and of *Ubuntu*, their potential downsides have often been overlooked. *Ubuntu* has become corrupted in some instances to privilege one's family or tribal group over others, thus contributing to nepotism, has been used to subjugate some groups of persons and to hinder the progress of individuals who must not be seen to be above the group or community. Pawar and Cox (2004, p. 256) wrote about the “mean spirited, superstitious, religious, constraining and backward” characteristics of traditional communities that need to be eradicated. As in the Asian context, it is the often the “specialness” of African values, traditions, respect for authority,

and group identification that are used as justification for suppression of civil and political rights and freedom (Adejumobi, 2006; Sewpaul, 2016), with Adejumobi (2006) warning about the dangers of group and ethnic identification, which can become “exclusionary and bifurcated” (p. 255), as evident in the genocide of Rwanda. Sono (1994) asserted that the emphasis on group solidarity, consensus, and community could degenerate into a “total communalism” (p. xiii), and eloquently articulated that the group could be

overwhelming, totalistic, even totalitarian. Group psychology, though parochially and narrowly based . . . nonetheless pretends universality. . . . Discursive rationality is overwhelmed by emotional identity. . . . To agree is more important than to disagree; conformity is cherished more than innovation. Tradition is venerated, continuity revered, change feared and difference shunned. Heresies [i.e., the innovative creations of intellectual individuals, or refusal to participate in communalism] are not tolerated in such communities. (Sono, 1994, p. 7, square brackets in original)

It is these aspects of traditional communities that the various chapters in this book challenge. The prevalence of human rights’ abuses on the continent, and across the globe, speaks to the gap between rhetoric and reality. Sadly, on a global level the moral arc is not bending toward greater equality, inclusion, justice, emancipation, and protection and promotion of human rights. On the one hand, there are the ideals of democratic participation, unity, collective caring, and respect for diversities while, on the other hand, we have seen the erosion of *Ubuntu*—the most inhumane and atrocious violations, especially against women and children, justified mainly on the basis of culture. Human rights violations cannot be condoned within traditional African value systems that hold human dignity to be inviolable, and where respect, restraint, and collective responsibility (Cobbah, 1987) are exalted. Indeed, as previously pointed out by Sewpaul (2016), genuine adherence to these cultural precepts can serve to stem abuses in the political and personal spheres of people’s lives.

Of salience to our deliberations is the often dichotomous relationship constructed between the West and the rest of the world. Afrocentricity, as discussed above, is not intended to replace Eurocentrism. While African cultures do represent collectivism and respect for family, and embody unifying and holistic principles, this does not mean these are non-existent in the West. Makgoba and Seepe (2004) call for a replacement of the Eurocentric with the Afrocentric, asserting that the Afrocentric is “emancipatory and liberatory,” compared with that which is “authoritarian, patriarchal and Eurocentric” (p. 14). In the Chinese context, Chung and Haynes (1993) emphasize the concepts of “love, humanity, perfect virtue and benevolence,” and they dichotomize Western culture as “low context culture” that is “left-minded” and Eastern culture as “relatively high context” and “right-minded” (p. 38), while Cobbah (1987) claimed that the we-centredness of the African marks a self-conception that is different from the Western conception. Repudiating claims such as these, Sewpaul (2016) concluded that “there are inherent dangers in trying to substitute one form of domination with another, and as with the cultural conceit of the West, the arrogance of the Rest is unbecoming” (p. 34). Zeleza (2006) challenged such dichotomies, asserting that “communality in Africa is often as exaggerated as individuality is in Europe. . . . In both contexts . . . individuals and community are mutually constituting and the practice of rights claiming, consuming or constraining them—entail a social context” (p. 47).

The chapters in this book challenge such dichotomies and the notion of an essentialist or monolithic African or Western culture, both of which preclude the wide range of cultural diversities within these contexts. Given the impact of colonialism in undermining the intellectuality and self-confidence of colonized peoples and destroying local traditions and cultures, one can understand the rarefication of African cultures. Perhaps as a reactionary measure, tradition gets to be upheld as the core of an authentic indigenous culture, an emancipatory alternative to a hegemonic Western culture (Sewpaul, 2016). The various chapters in this book engage with the complex relationships between culture and human rights, and their concomitants—democracy and socio-economic development—and the implications of these for social work practice, research, education, and social policy. While the chapters do not specifically use the concept

Afrocentricity, almost all of them invoke indigenous African values and practices to contribute to individual, family, and community well-being, and to stem human rights abuses. In this chapter and in the conclusion, we consolidate the discussion, and more specifically the recommendations, within the Afrocentric and emancipatory theoretical frameworks.

The economic exploitation of Africa, and its underdevelopment, cannot be used as an argument that freedom from want and hunger must prevail over political and civil liberties. Sen (1999), a development economist and a Nobel Laureate, provides ample evidence to demonstrate the interdependence among the different types of rights, asserting that agency and freedom are central to addressing social, economic, and cultural deprivations. As with the debate about the applicability of civil and political rights in Africa, there are dissenting views on culture and human rights. Notwithstanding the popular critique that universal human rights instruments are rooted in a Western, individualistically framed ideology, the African (Banjul) Charter on Human and People's Rights, adopted in 1981 by the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union), embraces civil and political rights, socio-economic and cultural rights, and environmental rights (Organization of African Unity [OAU], 1981). Like other regional declarations, it tries to marry universal human rights with culturally specific norms, with emphasis on the collective, the family, and community, and on duties and responsibilities.

The West has not always been the carrier and transmitter of democratic ideals and practices. History reflects that in some instances African and Asian countries were ahead of Western countries in embracing diversities and human rights (Sen, 2005). We need to reclaim those positive parts of our histories and, as Fanon (1963) points out, reject those traditions that are in violation of human rights. Our anti-colonial stance must work for Africa! There is a difference between challenging the cultural conceit of the West and a defensive approach where we withdraw into practices that are contrary to the core values that we hold as Africans. African world views place a ubiquitous importance on human dignity, recognizing our common humanity, and doing no harm. This fundamental, we-centred approach is inconsistent with some traditional cultural practices that violate the rights of women, men, and children and that social workers have a moral and ethical obligation to engage with, challenge, and change.

Culture, Human Rights, and Social Work

Social work's respect for cultural diversity is one of its most unifying, constitutive aspects, and debates around universal human rights and cultural specificity abound in the literature (Hugman, 2013; Ife, 2008; Ife & Fiske, 2016; Sewpaul, 2016). Issues that are central to human rights, as reflected in various international and national declarations and conventions, are crucial to social work. From its inception social work has been regarded as a human rights profession. In 1936, Bertha Reynolds, an American social worker with radical Marxist leanings who lost her job as associate dean at Smith College on account of her attempt to unionize workers (NASW Foundation, 2004), warned: "If they [social workers] do not stand courageously for all human rights, they will lose their own, including the right to practice their profession as a high and honorable calling" (p. 12). Drawing on the ethical leadership of Nelson Mandela, Sewpaul (2015) asserted that, if imbued with the values of *Ubuntu* and an emancipatory focus, social work is politics with soul. The Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (GSWSEP) (IASSW, 2018), the Global Definition of Social Work (IASSW/IFSW, 2014), the Global Standards on Social Work Education and Training (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004), and the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (IASSW/ICSW/IFSW, 2012) all affirm that commitment to social justice and human rights grants social work its legitimacy. These core global documents are discussed in the concluding chapter.

Social work's commitments to respecting cultural diversity and doing no harm are accepted on global, regional, and local levels. While these are noble ideals, and on the surface may appear to be unproblematic, the reality is that the values of respect for cultural diversity and doing no harm may often reflect competing and conflicting interests. These over-arching principles are subject to political and cultural context-specific interpretations, which engender relativistic discourses and practices that do often inflict harm and violate human rights. While communities might hold doing no harm as a prized value, the problem with this principle is that when one is socialized into a culture, one often does not see the harm induced by certain cultural practices; they become naturalized and normalized (Sewpaul, 2016). It is the countering of such normalization and

naturalization that is at the heart of emancipatory social work, which is discussed in the concluding chapter. A critical question, previously posed by Sewpaul (2016), “how far do we stretch the boundaries of moral relativism” (p. 35) in the name of cultural diversity, bears relevance.

Brown (as cited in Ife, 2008) asserted that “arguments about cultural difference represent perhaps the strongest criticisms of the idea of human rights, and for many they are the most difficult” (p. 68). Given the pre-eminence placed on respect for cultural diversity, it is not surprising that some social workers choose to remain neutral and not make pronouncements on violations that occur in the name of culture. But no culture must be regarded as sacrosanct and above criticism. The pre-eminence placed on respect for cultural diversity is such that, in response to such a principle in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (GSWSEP) (IASSW, 2018) reading as

“recognizing that culture often serves as a disguise to violate human rights, social workers serve as cultural mediators to enable consensus building, to find an appropriate balance between competing human rights, and to advocate for the rights of marginalized, stigmatized, excluded and oppressed individuals and groups of persons,” one global social work organization responded with: “regarding the first part of the sentence. . . . members have questioned whether the statement is judgmental and/or lacks cultural sensitivity that is key to social work practice” (e-mail communication).

The debates around cultural relativism and universal human rights warrant specific consideration. Many countries have policies and legislation opposing human rights violations. This does help, but legislation alone is insufficient to protect people against human rights violations that occur in the name of culture, where in almost all instances, as the various chapters in this book reflect, children and women are on the receiving end of such violations. Social workers must challenge the violations of basic rights to bodily integrity, to security, and to life that occur in the guise of culture.

We concede that the issues around culture and human rights are extremely complex, which places great demands on one’s ethical reasoning,

and in a world of ethical plurality one must make choices. While these choices might be well reasoned, they are often not neutral. Similarly, writing is not neutral; it reflects the subject location and the world views of the writer. As human beings we use empirical data—and sometimes not-so-empirical data—and at times rely on outright superstition, myths, blind faith, and commonsensical taken-for-granted assumptions to assert our truths. While the authors of the various chapters in this book strengthen their arguments with logic, reasoning, and empirical data, they do adopt standpoints in the interests of human rights and social justice. We acknowledge alternative interpretations and experiences in relation to all of the human rights issues discussed, and the controversies surrounding them. The very framing of female genital mutilation, for example, has been critiqued as a Western imposition, which is acknowledged by Alice Boateng and Cynthia A. Sottie in chapter 5 and by Paul Bukuluki in chapter 10. Some defenders of the practice, such as Fuambai Ahmadu, call for the use of female genital cutting/circumcision, and for an affirmation and validation of the practice, which they claim has aesthetic, cultural, and medical benefits (Tierney, 2008; Wax, 2006).

Outline of the Book

The book includes 12 chapters, written by social work authors from various parts of Africa. We wanted a continental diversity of voices and experiences that speak to culture, human rights, and social work in Africa. Many of the chapters are research based, where the authors use empirical data to support their arguments. The reader will note that there are similarities of cultural values, beliefs, and practices across Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe in relation to, for example, wife inheritance, property rights, and widowhood rites.

Chapter 1 begins with a look at the custom of *ilobolo* (bride wealth) in South Africa that is practised widely by isiZulu-speaking people in the province of Kwa Zulu Natal. The three South African writers, Vishanthie Sewpaul, Manqoba Victor Mdamba, and Boitumelo Seepamore, are concerned with the detrimental effects of *ilobolo* on women, men, and children. Through research, voices of community members, and student discussion forums, involving both women and men, it becomes clear there

are different views on this cultural practice in relation to human rights. For some, it is an oppressive, patriarchal practice that should be modified or abolished, and for others it is a way for men and women to value each other's role in their marriage and is constructed as the essence of the identity of isiZulu-speaking people. Consequent upon neoliberal capitalism, the costs of ilobolo are rising, thus blocking opportunities for people to marry, and it accentuates poverty. The authors conclude with the difficulties that social workers face in relation to the compromising of civil and socio-economic rights on account of traditional norms. They identify emancipatory educational and practice strategies, including critical reflexivity and reflexive dialogue, as ways that social workers can begin to engage with communities in thinking differently about this cultural tradition that does undermine people's human rights.

Chapter 2 takes the reader to Nigeria, where marital cultural practices are critiqued in relation to human rights. The authors, Augusta Yetunde Olaore, Julie Drolet, and Israel Bamidele Olaore, begin by acknowledging the strong role culture plays in Nigerian life. They present research findings from a study concerning how indigenous, Afrocentric social care practices contribute to child and family well-being in Nigeria. This chapter specifically looks at widowhood cultural practices, inheritance and property rights, and marital infidelity. Following an explanation of each of these cultural practices, the authors discuss them in light of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (OAU, 1981) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). They conclude that these practices violate women's rights and freedoms and work against the above-mentioned international instruments that are designed to protect all people. Recommendations for eliminating the discriminatory practices and human rights infringements, inherent in the marital cultural practices, are discussed.

Chapter 3 takes us back to South Africa, looking at domestic workers' experience of distance parenting and their conceptualization of motherhood. Boitumelo Seepamore and Vishanthie Sewpaul discuss research completed on mothering, othermothering, and distance mothering, whereby women are forced through economic necessity to parent from a distance, and question whether this practice is in the best interests of the child. This qualitative research was conducted in the eThekweni

Metropolitan Municipality, to understand the experiences of female domestic workers who parent from a distance, and the meanings that participants attach to motherhood. Their discussion centres around four interrelated themes concerning distance mothering and its effect on the mother's own self-worth and the child's experience of having a mother who parents from a distance. Patriarchy and colonialist attitudes feed into a negative view of women who have no choice but to work away from home. The focus is on the intersection of race, class, and gender in connection with women who parent from a distance and the effect this has on them and their children's human rights. The chapter concludes by calling for a shift from the discourse on intensive mothering to intensive parenting, and ways in which social workers can effect change through consciousness raising.

The misrecognition of rights of people with epilepsy takes the reader, in chapter 4, to Zimbabwe, where authors' Jacob Rugare Mugumbate and Mel Gray discuss this growing issue worldwide. Through Nancy Fraser's social justice lens, they discuss the misrepresentation of this medical condition in relation to human rights. The qualitative research was conducted in Harare to identify social injustices arising from misrecognition of the rights of people with epilepsy. Their findings suggest that lack of educational and vocational support services, lack of medical health services, lack of public social welfare and disability services, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of recourse to justice in the workplace are factors that violate the human rights of people with epilepsy. They conclude with a proposed integrated model of epilepsy management that would address injustices experienced by people with epilepsy.

Chapter 5 looks at harmful cultural practices directed against women and children in Ghana. These are practices that are usually justified on grounds of religion or culture but violate international human rights. The traditions discussed are widowhood rites, widow inheritance, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), female ritual bondage (trokosi), and early marriage. Alice Boateng and Cynthia A. Sottie provide backgrounds to each of the cultural traditions and examine how patriarchy and oppressive relationships are upheld through these traditions. Conflict within the family, unequal access to resources, health risks, and child exploitation are consequences of these negative cultural traditions. There is a conflict

between knowing that there is an infringement of human rights and, on the other hand, wanting to preserve cultural traditions. The authors advocate for social workers to educate communities about the harmful effects of these practices and work together to adopt a less punitive stance and to engage with custodians of traditional and religious practices to gain a deeper understanding of the beliefs behind these practices. Together, communities can brainstorm ways in which such beliefs and practices can be expressed and acted upon without any harmful effects on women and children.

Chapter 6 looks at the intersection between culture, religion (Islam), and women's rights in Ethiopia. Yania Seid-Mekiye and Linda Kreitzer explore the human rights instruments that uphold women's rights in a country where men hold more socio-economic and political power than women and exercise authority over women both in the home and in the public sphere. This research study looks at the intersection of culture and Islam in relation to marital relationships and argues that the present interpretation of the Quran favours men and limits women's human rights in family relationships. Three of the themes explored show the influence of patriarchy over Islamic women: (1) marital relationships generally; (2) polygamous practices; and (3) property and inheritance rights. The interpretation of the Quran that supports patriarchy is challenged by Islamic female scholars who refute these interpretations and offer a different interpretation of the more controversial Quranic scriptures in relation to the three areas mentioned above. The voices of Islamic women interviewed in the research also add to the argument that the Quran is used by men to subjugate and oppress Islamic wives in their marital relationships. The authors conclude that social workers are change agents and need to advocate for women's human rights. They need to work for the establishment of a system to abolish or reinterpret the unjust readings/understandings/interpretations of Islam's scriptures, and educate Muslims to understand how to maintain balanced, fair, and just relationships.

Chapter 7 looks at the patriarchal culture in South Africa, which permeates marital relationships in the form of domestic violence. Shahana Rasool conducted research to understand the help-seeking patterns of abused women. Her findings are supported by international and continental human rights instruments along with the voices of the women who

were interviewed. Her study analyzed the theme of curtailments through the headings of freedom of expression and association and freedom of movement. Her findings show that women do not readily seek help to protect themselves from violence in the home. Her conclusion is that unless patriarchy is addressed at the deepest level, in the private, public, and political domains, not much will change for these women in terms of having the courage to address or walk out of the relationship. The way in which men exert power and control over women in abusive relationships challenges the constitutional rights of women, including their right to dignity, equality, bodily integrity, and freedom of expression, association, and movement. She concludes by challenging all social workers and citizens to support women in violent relationships in navigating their way out of abusive relationships, and to educate women about their rights as well as the different resources available to help them.

Chapter 8 introduces the issue of child marriages in the Apostolic sect in Zimbabwe. Munyaradzi Muchacha, Abel Blessing Matsika, and Tatenda Nhapi set the context in relation to human rights instruments that consider child marriage as a major violation of child rights. In exploring this conflictual cultural tradition through those who advocate for child marriage and those who consider that it violates the precepts of human rights instruments, the authors critically look at the different factors that have favoured child marriages and the reasons why this practice remains, including the role of poverty. More broadly, the authors argue that child marriages are underpinned by patriarchy and gender relations that marginalize and restrict opportunities for girls and women. The authors argue that legally prohibiting child marriage does not necessarily eliminate the practice in communities. Any attempt to change behaviours must be promoted and implemented in a manner that appreciates the local socio-economic, religious, and cultural circumstances. They argue that the role of social workers is to dialogue and engage with sect leaders by promoting active participation, mutual learning, and collective decision making with the community. More importantly, social workers need to continue to be involved with poverty reduction policies and urge the Zimbabwean government to implement a social safety net.

Chapter 9 looks at child protection in Ghana. Ziblim Abukari examines the present child protection laws in Ghana by briefly explaining

these laws and how they compare to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (OAU, 1990). Traditional beliefs about the notion of the child and childhood are explained, and how vulnerable children were protected before colonization through a fostering system. He then concentrates on Ghanaian child laws concerning the education of the child and child labour. He concludes by offering ways that social workers can advocate for social protection of the child by educating themselves about the relevance of children's rights to their work in the field, and he identifies the need for human rights to be front and centre of social work education. Children and their families and communities should also be educated about the rights of the child. Finally, social workers need to be involved in policy making to ensure children are treated with the dignity and respect that human rights instruments advocate for.

Chapter 10 takes the reader to Sudan and the issue of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Paul Bukuluki shares the findings from his phenomenological study on FGM/C using document analysis plus consultative meetings in the form of focus group discussions (FGDs) with health workers, particularly midwives, in Khartoum, Sudan. He lays out the background of FGM/C and the controversy surrounding this practice in relation to human rights. Themes from the study discussed in this chapter include the magnitude of FGM/C in Sudan, medicalization of FGM/C, health consequences of FGM/C, the violation of health rights, and negotiations with society's values and policies. He identifies a need for a health-system and multi-sectoral response to FGM/C, including poverty alleviation and strengthening accountability frameworks for health workers. The development of training tools that, from the onset, conceptualizes FGM/C and its medicalization as a violation of human rights is needed. Health professionals and social workers can use education to highlight the risks of FGM/C through collaboration with leaders and community members to develop alternatives to this practice which have proven successful in other parts of Africa.

Bukuluki and colleagues, in chapter 11, take the reader to Uganda, to discuss HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence (GBV). They conducted qualitative research to document the socio-cultural norms, values, and beliefs that impact on HIV/AIDS and GBV; to document good community

practices in responding to HIV/AIDS and GBV, based on Afrocentric values; and to synthesize community-proposed recommendations for positive change. They argue that there is a link between culture and HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. Human behaviour is influenced by culture, and positive cultural resources can be tapped into to decrease the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence. Their research findings showed practices and beliefs related to death and widow inheritance, practices related to healing and body beautification, and practices related to sexuality as factors in the perpetuation of HIV/AIDS and GBV. They conclude by giving recommendations of positive Afrocentric cultural values that can be used to address HIV/AIDS and GBV.

Chapter 12 looks at the challenge of children's human rights in relation to corporal punishment (CP) in Botswana. Poloko Nuggert Ntshwarang and Vishanthie Sewpaul begin with a brief literature review concerning CP and its meaning in Botswana in relation to human rights instruments. They detail a qualitative phenomenological study of women parenting children in Selebi Phikwe town in Botswana. Their aim was to understand the parenting practices of women with children in single female-parent families where the female is working, two-parent families where both parents are working, and two-parent families where the female is not working and the male is employed. The results of the study indicate that the entrenchment of CP in Botswana is deep, and it cuts across different family structures and socio-economic status, with most families having used CP as a form of discipline. They suggest that legal reform is needed to abolish CP and that the Convention on the Rights of the Child be upheld. Recognizing that it is difficult to change cultural behaviours, they advocate for educators and social workers to educate themselves on the effects of CP on children, and to advocate for conscious positive parenting, and alternate ways to parent children that do not use violence as a disciplinary measure.

The Conclusion features a discussion of emancipatory social work and Afrocentricity and their importance to social work in Africa in a world that is powered by neoliberalism and ethnocentricity, and where human rights and culture clash in the everyday lives of people. It brings together the salient themes of this book, which offers important knowledge to social workers around the world and in particular those social workers in Africa.

NOTES

- 1 Used in the political sense as in the Black Consciousness Movement to refer to all people of colour, which in South Africa included African Blacks, Coloureds and Indians.
- 2 Kwanzaa was developed by Maulana Karenga (who was a professor of Africana Studies at California State University, Long Beach) and was first celebrated in 1966/7 in the USA to honor the African heritage of African American culture. It is usually celebrated annually in late December and has spread from the USA to places like Jamaica, London, Ghana, South Africa, Toronto and Paris.

REFERENCES

- Adejumobi, S. (2006). Citizenship, rights, and the problem of conflicts and civil wars in Africa. In C. Heyns & K. Stefiszyn (Eds.), *Human rights, peace and justice in Africa: A reader* (pp. 250–271). Pretoria, ZA: Pretoria University Law Press.
- Annan, K. (2006). The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. In C. Heyns & K. Stefiszyn (Eds.), *Human rights, peace and justice in Africa: A reader* (pp. 239–243). Pretoria, ZA: Pretoria University Law Press.
- Asante, M. K. (2014a). Afrocentricity: Toward a new understanding of African thought in the world. In M. K. Asante, Y. Miike, & J. Yin (Eds.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (2nd ed., pp. 101–110). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Asante, M. K. (2014b). *Afrocentricity: Key concepts in intercultural dialogue*. No. 23(1). Center for Intercultural Dialogue. Retrieved September 2020 from <https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/key-concept-afrocentricity.pdf>
- Barnard, R. (2014). 'Introduction.' In R. Barnard (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Nelson Mandela* (pp 1–25). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Biko, N. M. (1978). *I write what I like* (A. Stubbs, Ed.). Johannesburg, ZA: Heinemann.
- Chawane, M. (2016). The development of Afrocentricity: An historical survey. *Yesterday and Today*, 16, 78–99.
- Chukwuokolo, J. C. (2009). Afrocentrism or Eurocentrism: The dilemma of African development. *New Journal of African Studies*, 6, 24–39.
- Chung, D. K., & Haynes, A. W. (1993). Confucian welfare philosophy and social change technology: An integrated approach for international social development. *International Social Welfare*, 36, 37–46.
- Cobbah, J. A. M. (1987). African values and the human rights debate: An African perspective. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 9(3), 309–331.
- Dei, G. S. (1994). Afrocentricity: A cornerstone of pedagogy. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 25(1), 3–28.

- Dei, G. S. (2012). Reclaiming our Africanness in the diasporized context: The challenges of asserting a critical African personality. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4(10), 42–57.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Fashina, O. (1989). Frantz Fanon and the ethical justification of anti-colonial violence. *Social Theory and Practice*, 15(2), 179–212.
- Hallen, B. (2002). *A short history of African philosophy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Harms Smith, L., & Nathane, M. (2018). Not domestication, not indigenization: Decoloniality in social work education. *Southern African Journal of Work and Social Development*, 30(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2415-5829/2400>
- Hugman, R. (2013). *Culture, values and ethics in social work: Embracing diversity*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Ife, J. (2008). *Human rights and social work: Towards rights-based practice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ife, J., & Fiske, L. (2016). Human rights and community work: Complementary theories and practices, *International Social Work*, 49(3), 297–308.
- InterExchange. (2019). *The history, principles and symbols of Kwanzaa*. <https://www.interexchange.org/articles/career-training-usa/history-principles-and-symbols-of-kwanzaa/>
- IASSW. (2018). *Global social work statement of ethical principles*. <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/2018/04/18/global-social-work-statement-of-ethical-principles-iassw/>
- IASSW/IFSW. (2014). *Global definition of social work*. <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/global-definition-of-social-work-review-of-the-global-definition/>
- IASSW/IFSW/ICSW. (2012). *Global agenda for social work and social development*. Retrieved February 2019 from <https://www.iassw-aiets.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Global-Agenda-English.pdf> in
- Kleinman, A. (1998, April 13–16). *Experience and its moral modes: Culture, human conditions, and disorder*. The Tanner lectures on human values. Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.
- Kumah-Abiwu, F. (2016). Beyond intellectual construct to policy ideas: The case of the Afrocentric paradigm. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(2), 7–27.
- Makgoba, M., & Seepe, S. (2004). Knowledge and identity: An African vision of higher education transformation. In S. Seepe (Ed.), *Towards an African Identity in Higher Education* (pp. 13–57). Pretoria, ZA: Vista University.
- Mandela, N. (1994). *Long walk to freedom*. London, UK: Little, Brown.
- Midgley, J. (1981). *Professional imperialism: Social work in the Third World*. London, UK: Ashgate.
- Mupedziswa, R., Rankopo, M., & Mwansa, L. K. (2019). *Ubuntu as a Pan-African philosophical framework for social work in Africa*. In J. M. Twikirize & H. Spitzer

- (Eds.), *Social work practice in Africa: Indigenous and innovative approaches* (pp. 21–38). Kampala, UG: Fountain.
- Mwansa, L. K., & Kreitzer, L. (2012). Social work in Africa. In K. Lyons, T. Hokenstad, M. Pawar, N. Huegler, & N. Hall (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of international social work* (pp. 393–406). London, UK: Sage.
- NASW Foundation (2004). Bertha Capen Reynolds (1885–1978)—*Social worker, author and professor of social work*. *Social Welfare History Project*. <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/people/reynolds-bertha-capen/>
- Organization of African Unity (OAU). (1981). African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Addis Ababa, ET: Author.
- Organization of African Unity (OAU). (1990). African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Addis Ababa, ET: Author.
- Pawar, M., & Cox, D. (2004). *Community informal care and welfare systems: A training manual*. Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University, New South Wales, AU.
- Reynolds, B. C. (1936). Social case work: What is it? What is its place in the world today? *Child and Family Welfare*, 11(6), 12.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, A. (2005). *The argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian culture, history and identity*. London, UK: Penguin.
- Sewpaul, V. (2014). Social work education: Current trends and future directions. In C. Noble, H. Strauss, & B. Littlechild (Eds.), *Global social work: Crossing borders, blurring boundaries* (pp. 353–367). Sydney, AU: Sydney University Press.
- Sewpaul, V. (2015). Politics with soul: Social work and the legacy of Nelson Mandela. *International Social Work*, 59(6), 697–708. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872815594226>.
- Sewpaul, V. (2016). The West and the Rest divide: Culture, human rights and social work. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 1, 30–39.
- Sewpaul, V., & Jones, D. (2004). Global standards for social work education and training. *Social Work Education*, 23(5), 493–513.
- Sono, T. (1994). *Dilemmas of African intellectuals in South Africa*. Pretoria, ZA: UNISA.
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2008). *Culturally speaking: Culture, communication and politeness theory* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Continuum Books.
- Stengel, R. (2012). *Nelson Mandela 1918–2013: Portrait of an extraordinary man*. Croydon, UK: Virgin Books.
- Tierney, J. (2008). *A compromise on female "circumcision"*. <https://tierneylab.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/03/19/a-compromise-on-female-circumcision/>
- UN. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Paris, FR: Author.
- UN. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Paris, FR: Author.

- Wax, D. (2006). Female genital cutting, sexuality and anti-FGC advocacy. https://www.academia.edu/1622829/Female_Genital_Cutting_Sexuality_and_Anti-FGC_Advocacy
- Zeleza, P. T. (2006). The Struggle for human rights in Africa. In C. Heyns & K. Stefiszyn (Eds.), *Human rights, peace and justice in Africa: A reader* (pp. 42–48). Pretoria, ZA: Pretoria University Law Press.