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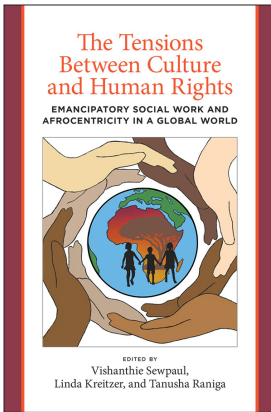
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THE TENSIONS BETWEEN CULTURE AND HUMAN RIGHTS: Emancipatory Social Work and Afrocentricity in a Global World

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When National Law and Culture Coalesce: Challenges for Children's Rights in Botswana with Specific Reference to Corporal Punishment

Poloko Nuggert Ntshwarang and Vishanthie Sewpaul

Botswana has made several strides in its attempt to adhere to human rights standards, especially in relation to children's rights. The country is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948); the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UN, 1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (African Commission on Human and People's Rights [ACHPR], 1990), and the UN World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children (UNDSPDC) (UN, 1990). The CRC (UN, 1989) requires states to take

all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. (Article 19)

The CRC and the ACRWC emphasize the right to be treated with dignity, protection, and integrity, with the CRC calling for children to be protected from “torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (Article 37), a right also enshrined in the UDHR.

Botswana promulgated the Children’s Act of 2009 (Government of Botswana, 2009), which is largely (but not entirely) aligned with the CRC and the ACRWC. Nonetheless, the use of corporal punishment (hereafter referred to as CP) in Botswana at family and state levels indicates that disciplinary practices that are normalized in law and culture are unlikely to be perceived as a threat to children’s rights and well-being. It is an anomaly that while adults are protected in law against assaults, children—who because of their age and size are more vulnerable—are not granted such protection.

The UNDSPDC (UN, 1990) asserts that “all children must be given the chance to find their identity and realize their worth in a safe and supportive environment, through families and other care-givers committed to their welfare” (Article 15). However, not every society conforms to established rights, largely because of entrenched and enduring cultural practices. The majority of countries do not prohibit CP in the home, even where it is prohibited in other spheres, and CP affects 80 percent of the world’s 1.7 billion children who experience violence (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children [GIEACPC], 2017). Despite progress, with 53 states across the world now banning all forms of CP in all settings, 9 out of 10 children worldwide live in states where the law does not recognize their rights to protection from CP (GIEACPC, 2017).

Botswana is one of the few countries where CP is not prohibited in *any* setting and is one of six African countries with non-prohibition in *all* settings, with others being Mauritania, Nigeria, Somalia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe (GIEACPC, 2017). Botswana’s Penal Code (Government of Botswana, 1964, Section 28); the Botswana Education Act (Government of Botswana, 1967, Sections 23 and 24); the Botswana Customary Law Act (Government of Botswana, 1969, Sections 21 (2)), and the Botswana Children’s Act (Government of Botswana, 2009) all condone CP of children. The Children’s Act (Government of Botswana, 2009) prohibits only “unreasonable” correction of a child by parents, thus allowing “reasonable” correction. The Children’s Act also expressly states that the legal

provisions protecting a child's dignity and prohibiting cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment or punishment do not preclude the use of CP (Articles 27 and 61).

CP is performed with the deliberate intention to cause pain on other persons to correct undesirable behaviours without causing injuries (Lansford, 2010). While Lansford emphasizes not causing injuries, the GIEACPC (2018) asserts that CP “includes any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light, as well as *non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading*” (emphasis added, para. 1). CP is an assault not only on the bodies of children, but their spirits; it is degrading and inhumane and produces enduring effects. The Government of Botswana rejected the recommendations of the international community to ban CP, arguing that “it is a legitimate and acceptable form of punishment, as informed by the norms of society” (GIEACPC, 2018, p. 5).

The norms of society and the legal sanction of CP in all spheres in Botswana enable its pervasive use. The state, as custodian of children's rights, has an obligation to protect children, educate its citizens about the harmful consequences of CP, and foster positive parenting practices. The justification of the law being informed by “the norms of society” is akin to the tail wagging the dog, and the state abrogating its responsibilities. Legal reform is no guarantee of the protection and promotion of human rights, but it does play a huge role in enabling the achievement and protection of rights. At the very least, it makes the roles of advocates against the use of CP easier. It is harder to confront, challenge, and change harmful cultural practices when there is legal sanction for them.

Brief Literature Review

The use of CP in the home is not distinctive to African countries; it is practised in both Western and non-Western societies. With international pressure, advocacy, and public education campaigns, seven African countries have achieved prohibition of CP in all settings, while a further 18 countries have expressed commitment to banning CP in all settings (GIEACPC, 2017). The persistent use of CP across the world represents a major challenge in penetrating culturally entrenched parenting practices.

The GIEACPC (2017) points to the double standards adopted by states, asserting that “too many governments claim to support ending all forms of violence against children while failing to prohibit violence disguised as discipline or punishment” (p. 4).

The normalization of CP to discipline children is endorsed by supportive societal attitudes and norms, even where CP is not condoned in law (Ellison & Bradshaw, 2009; Lansford, 2010). Renzaho et al. (2011), for example, found that parents used CP when the children failed to comply with their demands, and Weis and Toolis (2010) found that parents of African descent used parenting practices that valued respect for authority figures and unquestioning obedience to adults’ expectations. This coheres with the finding of Julius (2013) in the Kenyan context, where the majority (78 percent) of guidance counsellors expressed the view that CP was very effective or effective in disciplining children, yet paradoxically the majority of the 300 male and female learners, from day and boarding schools included in the study, believed that they should be referred to guidance counsellors, for assistance, rather than be subject to CP. However, Durrant (2000), a strong advocate against CP, discussed attitudinal changes following the legal banning of CP in Sweden.

There are several factors that contribute to the use of CP. These include: (1) the belief that it is the right and duty of parents to discipline children via the use of CP, as enshrined in the Biblical injunction “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24, New King James Version); (2) in African traditional practices there is a pre-eminent respect for authority, elders, and customs, and there is a tendency to conflate fear with respect—and thus the misuse of values like *Ubuntu* and *Botho*, as discussed in chapter 1 (Weis & Toolis, 2010); (3) CP allows parents to feel in control and to ensure children’s compliance (Renzaho et al., 2011); (4) fear that children will become uncontrollable in the absence of the use of CP; (5) belief that CP shapes character and strengthens children’s moral development; and that (6) CP serves as a deterrent to undesirable behaviours (Gudyanga et al., 2014).

While CP gives parents immediate gratification, with children’s conformity and obedience (Bitensky, 1997; Gershoff & Bitensky, 2007), there is evidence that it has physical, psychological, and emotional consequences that impede healthy functioning. The negative consequences of CP have

been documented in relation to decreased cognitive ability, poor academic performance, and school dropout (Ahmad et al., 2013; Gershoff, 2010; Tafa, 2002; UNICEF, 2014); manifestations of depression and anxiety in later life; reproduction of violence and aggression (Gershoff, 2010; Smith et al., 2004); inability to contribute to the internalization of ethics and desired societal values (Shumba, 2004); and poorer problem-solving skills (Smith et al., 2004).

Apart from its consequences, there are arguments that the use of CP is intrinsically unacceptable, as it violates the dignity of children; children are not property for parents to act upon as they please (Shumba, 2004). The distinction between CP and physical abuse is thin, thus the call for its total abolishment (Durrant, 2016; Gershoff, 2010; Lansford, 2010). However, Gudyanga et al. (2014), who approve of the use of CP under specific circumstances, argue that “the absence of corporal punishment is not a guarantee to achieving zero physical abuse of children” (p. 495). Given the size and age of parents compared with children, and the power differential between them, and the harmful effects of CP on a child’s sense of self (Bradshaw, 1996), its potential for physical injuries cannot be refuted (Gershoff, 2010). Parents might not intend to harm children, but the use of CP does cause emotional and physical harm (Gershoff, 2010; Lansford, 2010).

CP is abuse, but it also opens doors to other forms of child abuse. The frequent use of CP is associated with poor parent-child relations and poor attachment, as parents who use CP fail to build emotional bonds with their children (Gershoff, 2010). Parents are the primary caregivers who are supposed to ensure that children feel safe, secure, and protected, factors that are prized from an Afrocentric perspective. When children are exposed to pain by the very persons who are supposed to protect them, it contributes to mistrust and internalized shame, which may in later life manifest in codependent or survival personalities that typify a range of mental health problems, including addictive disorders (Bradshaw, 1996). It is against this background that this study sought to understand the parenting practices adopted by women across three different family structures.

Methodology

Guided by critical, structural social work theory (Mullaly & Mullaly, 2014), a cross-sectional qualitative, phenomenological research was conducted with 24 women, parenting children under 19 years of age from Selebi Phikwe town in Botswana. The main aim of the study was to understand the parenting practices of women with children in the following family structures: (a) female-headed families where the head of the family was employed; (b) two-parent families where both parents were employed; and (c) a two-parent family where the woman was unemployed and her partner was employed.

Snowball and purposive sampling strategies were used to select eight women in each category for inclusion in this study. Although these sampling strategies are haphazard and prone to researcher bias (Neuman, 2007), they were useful as they offered control over sample selection in relation to the required characteristics of the participants.

Data were collected using face-to-face interviews with the help of genograms and eco-maps to elicit data on the composition and structure of families, and on personal and family relationships (Rempel et al., 2007), and were primarily collected via home visits. Data were audio-recorded and transcribed, and thematic qualitative analysis was used (Babbie, 2016), with thick descriptions helping to retain the participants' voices in the presentation of the data. All ethical research requisites in relation to doing no harm, maintaining confidentiality, informed consent (forms were translated into Setswana and the interviews were conducted in the local language, when necessary), assurance that participants could withdraw participation at any time, and ensuring anonymity in the reporting of the data, were assured. Ethical approval was granted from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee.

Key Research Results

One of the main objectives of the study was to understand whether family structure played a role in the types of parenting practices that the women adopted. The ages of the participants ranged from 31 to 52 years, with the average age being 42 years. The relatively mature age of the participants is

linked to one of the inclusion criteria: that the participants must have parented at least one child who had reached adolescence or adulthood. As per the national norm, most women identified as belonging to the Christian faith. One woman had no formal education. Of those who had been to school, one-third acquired tertiary education, followed by 25 percent who had completed primary school, and 20.8 percent who had completed secondary school.

It was interesting to note that five of the eight women who held tertiary qualifications were from female-headed households, perhaps supporting the notion that women with higher educational qualifications are more financially independent, and three were from families where both partners were working. None of the unemployed women held any post-school qualification. Regarding CP, family structure seemed to make no difference.

The results of the study indicated that the entrenchment of CP in Botswana is deep, and it cuts across different family structures and socio-economic status, with most women (21) having used CP as a form of discipline. This resonates with Sebonego's (1994) findings that CP was a universal form of discipline in Botswana, embedded in Tswana traditions. The results are presented under two key interrelated themes: (1) parental versus children's rights and responsibilities; and (2) the normalization of the use of CP.

Parental versus Children's Rights and Responsibilities

The findings of the study showed that there was limited awareness and understanding of the law pertaining to children's rights in Botswana. All 24 women indicated that they had heard of children's rights in the abstract, but the majority (18) were unaware of the Botswana Children's Act (Government of Botswana, 2009). The results indicated that women who held higher educational qualifications, and who worked in specific sectors such as education and health, had an advantage in terms of access to the Children's Act. Gorata, who was a 42-year-old single parent and a teacher, and had worked as a school guidance counsellor said:

I am aware of that. I have read it. It is helpful because it sends a reminder to the parent that one has to act in the best interest of the child. . . . It is helpful in curbing abuse of children. . . . Children sometimes misuse their rights, but they have to know them. A parent should teach her children about their rights. . . . I tell her [her daughter] that she should not use her rights to abuse me or to abuse others, because if one is not aware of his or her rights the child could take advantage of a parent's lack of knowledge and abuse him or her. Sometimes when I tell her that I am going to beat her, she tells me that "this time when you beat me, I am going to the social workers to report you that you abuse my rights," I tell her that "this house is mine, as long as you live with me and under my care, you have to listen to me, whether you have rights or not, we both have rights so we need to meet somewhere."

Gorata's narrative emphasizes both children's and parental rights and responsibilities. Even with her background and knowledge, there was an overriding narrative of parental power over children. The discourse speaks to the lesser status of children, with the child's dependent status translating into "you have to listen to me," and to fear of parental abuse by children. Gorata's knowledge of children's rights did not prevent her from using CP. This coheres with the finding of Julius (2013) in the Kenyan context, which is discussed earlier.

The fear of giving up parental authority, and the possibility of the emphasis on children's rights paving the way for parental abuse by children, was reiterated by Maano, who held a college diploma and worked as a nurse:

Yes, children abuse us. When you talk to today's children, they talk about Childline, and children's rights. . . . When you attempt to discipline a child, the child tells you "I will report you." . . . I think children should also be taught about their parents' rights, they should not only emphasize their own rights.

In desperation Maano said, “The law only pays attention to child abuse but overlooks parent abuse. Children abuse us, yes,” and she was of the view that the issue of parental abuse required urgent attention. Maano’s concerns bear some legitimacy, particularly in the face of lack of public education campaigns for children and adults on their reciprocal rights and responsibilities (which the ACRWC does pay attention to), and on the use of alternative, conscious positive parenting practices in the home, in schools, and in alternative care settings for children. While Mweru (2010) found higher levels of indiscipline among learners following the banning of CP in Kenyan schools, the author did not recommend its reinstatement, but called for education and sensitization about alternative forms of discipline.

Normalization of the Use of CP

The women’s knowledge about children’s rights did not translate into ensuring that those rights were respected. Sharon, who was a 43-year-old stay-at-home mum, adopted primarily authoritarian parental practices. She said:

I think I should discipline the child, I am not afraid to beat my child on the basis that my child has rights. My child cannot threaten me by telling me that he or she has rights and therefore she or he is going to report me for beating him or her . . . Sometimes when I listen to radio discussions about children’s deviant behaviours, I have heard parents complaining that we fail to discipline our children because of children’s rights.

Naledi, a 40-year-old unemployed woman, said: “I only heard about children’s rights but not that much. I know that we are not supposed to abuse children such as beating them too much.” Naledi’s view resonates with the Children’s Act (Government of Botswana, 2009), which approves *reasonable* use of CP. Regina, a 34-year-old unemployed woman with primary school education, who said she knew about children’s rights, indicated that they played no role in her disciplining her children. She said: “I beat

them and when a person comes by and says, ‘their rights,’ I tell them to go away with them [rights] because I am disciplining my child.” She said, “I beat a child just right,” adding, “I never play with a child” (meaning she was hard on children when disciplining them).

Regina, as with the other participants, said she knew that the child had a right not to be beaten, but believed it was wholly okay for her to do so. The women expressed the view that they had to exercise control, and that it was their duty to discipline their children. Baboloki, who was from a female-headed family, and worked as a cleaner, said: “I like to talk to them before I introduce the whip, but when they do not listen or do as I want, I really discipline them,” while Lesedi asserted, “If one doesn’t beat them a bit one may find that one song is sung on a daily basis. Once you introduce a whip to beat them they will do as you want quickly.” The voices of the women support the notion of parents getting gratification from children’s immediate compliance and obedience, while failing to consider the long-term consequences of their actions.

As they did not know of the specific provisions of the Children’s Act (Government of Botswana, 2009) allowing for *reasonable* CP, the participants erroneously believed that all forms of CP were illegal. Their responses suggest that even if national law prohibited CP, they would most likely continue to use it. Disciplining of children was clearly not seen to be within the purview of the state, but as a private matter with the state having no right to intrude into the private space of the family. Given the extent of the normalization of the use of CP, this is not unusual. Julius (2013) reported that over 90 percent of the 300 learners in his study, in Kenya, reported the continued use of CP despite its banning, a finding reported by others such as Mweru (2010). The views of the participants were contrary to that expressed by the GIEACPC (2017), which proclaimed, “Violence is not a private matter that should be left to families to resolve, but a matter of human rights that states have a duty to uphold” (p. 11).

Kaone, a stay-at-home mum, who also believed that the law prohibited CP, had this to say: “Yes, . . . it is very difficult for me, when it comes to rights. . . . I just talk on the side saying, ‘Hey, these rights I think they have spoiled our children.’” Kaone went on to say:

If one gives her a few lashes she would go to the police. When you get there, they will tell you, “this child has rights.” When she is 19 years old! And then you ask yourself, they say she has rights, but she is 19 years old and I feed her and clothe her, but they say she has rights!

Kaone described how “I lashed them with everything I find near me. . . . And honestly speaking I lashed them too hard. . . . I beat children with anything” and talked about the intervention of the pastor at church in getting her to desist from extreme assaults on her children.

Koane’s utterances reflect the refrain of those who support CP about children’s rights “spoiling children,” and parental entitlement to discipline via the use of CP, as they are the primary providers for their children. Mareledi’s use of force is reflected in the following: “I would just look at them while they fight. . . . I would silently go to get a rod and whip them . . . and whip, whip, whip!”

Maipelo chuckled as she emphasized the severity of her use of CP: “I don’t really talk to a child many times. . . . I lash them, and I do it soundly.” Another participant asserted, “I used to beat him when he was young, he was naughty. He would go and play the whole day, he would come late. . . . When he comes I’ll whip him” (MmaThobo). While MmaThobo stopped beating her son as he grew older, Kaone felt entitled to beat up her 19-year-old daughter, as “I feed and clothe her.”

Of salience is that CP is often accompanied by negative verbal communication that is intended to belittle, humiliate, and emotionally blackmail children. In an extreme pronouncement, loaded with emotional blackmail with the injunction that the children owed her gratitude for being born, Sarah, a 52-year-old single parent with no formal schooling, said:

I also threaten to beat them or kill them. I also tell them that if I did not like them, I could have aborted them but the fact that I carried them in my tummy for nine months and bore them shows that I love them. They listen!

There was no reason to doubt Sarah's love for her children, and she was unaware of the potentially destructive nature of her communication (see Bradshaw, 1996). The fact that parents do not intend harm, but inadvertently inflict harm in their day-to-day practice, calls for conscious, positive parenting educational programs.

Discussion of Results

The women's accounts of the use of CP indicate that children are exposed to physical discipline from an early age, and for some it continues into adolescence. The women spoke of using CP not to hurt, but to "bring children in line," with many of them being careful to differentiate between child abuse and discipline. However, the non-physical manifestations of CP in relation to a child's poor sense of self and negative childhood life experiences can contribute to survival/codependent personalities (Bradshaw, 1996). Research evidence of CP being linked to school dropout, anxiety, depression, aggression, and anti-social behaviours, and reproduction of violence, are all ignored. The participants saw their actions as legitimate, and they disregarded children's rights to be free from pain and suffering, and from inhumane and degrading conduct.

While the Education Act (Government of Botswana, 1967) specifies under what conditions and how CP is to be administered, and the Children's Act speaks of "reasonable" use of CP, what constitutes "reasonableness" is open to interpretation. The findings of the study support Donnelly's (1984) assertion that, in a cultural context where CP is a deep-rooted parenting practice, its potential for harm is often overlooked. Almost all the 21 women who used CP used the whip, and some talked about hitting children in anger. Therein lies one of the dangers in the use of CP; it is generally associated with hostile parenting, which Smith et al. (2004), in their longitudinal study in Australia, found produced adverse social and psychological consequences.

CP in Botswana is a normalized part of day-to-day practice that is replicated in the school setting. Some women indicated that when children complained about being beaten at school, they responded that teachers were doing it for the children's own good. There is a paradox in teaching children non-violence by inflicting violence upon them. The use of

CP denies children control, relegates them to subordinate positions, and contributes to intergenerational patterns of its use (GIEACPC, 2017). CP undermines the democratic ideals of society (Jotia & Boikhutso, 2012), and its immediate and long-term effects on children compromise the achievement of the 2030 sustainable development goals (GIEACPC, 2017).

An interesting finding is that the women had heard about children's rights in the abstract, and expressed concerns that the focus on children's rights, and the inability to discipline as they saw fit, would threaten parental authority. None of them were aware of the specific legal provisions in Botswana that allow for CP. Although they believed that the use of CP was illegal, they commonly used it as a disciplinary practice. The question that this raises is: If they knew that CP is sanctioned in law might it contribute to its greater use? At the very least for the women, such knowledge would have served to legitimate their choice of CP.

Child rights advocates, who support a child's right to be treated with dignity, and with freedom from torture and inhumane and degrading treatment, experience greater challenges when structural conditions, rooted in legal frameworks, support CP. Given the ideological hegemony of deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and practices, it becomes more difficult when the law supports the violation of child rights. As ideology constitutes "socially, culturally and politically constructed" taken-for-granted assumptions (Sewpaul, 2013, p. 119), there is a need for counter-hegemonic discourses and practices. Such counter-hegemony can be provided through legal and policy reform and broad-based societal education that challenge cultural constructions of children as property to do as adults wish with them, and the way children are treated. Such reforms and education must be directed toward child-centred family policies, programs and laws where conscious, positive parenting practices are advocated for and supported.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Tearing up the roots of such an authoritarian and degrading parenting practice as CP is challenging, as it is normalized in law and in culture in Botswana. The results of this study show that CP is used by parents regardless of family structure and socio-economic background. The

structural dimensions of law and culture intersect to play a critical role in maintaining and reproducing parenting practices that hinder children's rights, particularly their right to protection.

Legal reform is central to challenging and deconstructing dominant constructions of children and the ways in which adults relate with them. The laws supporting the use of CP in Botswana must be amended to ban the use of CP. But beyond the law is the role of social workers as cultural mediators, as evidence suggests that banning of CP is insufficient to produce desired changes. Social workers need to engage communities in dialogue to challenge some of the taken-for-granted assumptions underlying CP by providing evidence-based research that documents the negative consequences of CP, and engage in public education about alternatives, embracing conscious, positive parenting practices.

The banning of CP, combined with public education, holds the potential for disrupting intergenerational cycle of abuse, and for reducing the long-term negative impact of CP on children, families, and society at large (GIEACPC, 2017). Such education must be underscored by emancipatory forms of praxis and consciousness raising, designed to disrupt deeply held myths and misconceptions. Harmful cultural practices endure, often from one generation into the next, as ideology constitutes false consciousness that one is generally not aware of (Althusser, 2006; Sewpaul, 2013). But this does not mean that ideology cannot be disrupted. Sewpaul (2013) argued that "if people are provided with alternative learning experiences whether formal or informal they have the ability to disrupt dominant thinking" (p. 119). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) advises:

The first purpose of law reform to prohibit corporal punishment of children within the family is prevention: to prevent violence against children by changing attitudes and practice, underlining children's right to equal protection and providing an unambiguous foundation for child protection and for the promotion of positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing. . . . The aim should be to stop parents from using violent or other cruel or degrading punishments through supportive and educational, not punitive, interventions. (Article 1)

Prevention includes having resources available to support families in changing their practices concerning CP.

Parenting is challenging and daunting, and parents need support with child rearing and positive parenting, which include the following key components: long-term solutions directed at children's self-regulation; clear communication of expectations, rules, and limits; building mutually respectful relationships; teaching children skills for life; increasing children's confidence and ability to deal with challenging life circumstances; and teaching courtesy, non-violence, empathy, human rights, self-respect, and respect for others (Durrant, 2016, p. 6). Activities such as public meetings, workshops, and media programs to educate families and the public about the effects of CP are needed to enhance positive parenting practices.

Educational programs, based on dialogue and the development of critical consciousness (Parsons, 1991) rather than didactic pedagogical strategies, have the potential to empower people. For example, in Botswana, issues concerning CP can be dialogued in "*kgotla*" and Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meetings. The "*kgotla*," which is based on Afrocentric communitarian values, is a community-centred gathering place where members of a particular community meet to discuss various issues (Maudeni & Jacques, 2012). Education and sensitization about alternative forms of discipline can help community leaders, parents, professionals, and the community at large to rethink their stance on CP.

As professionals in Botswana, including social workers, are part of their socio-cultural and legal contexts, they are subject to the same dominant discourses and practices, and might have themselves normalized the use of CP (see IASSW, 2018). Research into the views of social workers, as was done by Julius (2013) with school principals, guidance counsellors, and teachers in Kenya, will be useful. Julius (2013) stated that over 90 percent of the 300 learners in his study, in Kenya, reported the continued use of CP, despite its banning, a finding reported by others such as Mweru (2010).

Social workers must engage in processes of ongoing self-reflexivity in order to be aware of the values and assumptions that they bring into their relationships in working with people, and they must work toward social justice by challenging all forms of discrimination, oppression, and transgression of human rights (Sewpaul, 2013; IASSW, 2018). Social work researchers, educators, and practitioners, in collaboration with other

stakeholders nationally and internationally, must advocate for laws and policies that prohibit CP in all settings.

Parents in this study had no awareness of the long-term repercussions of CP on their children, and of their violation of children's rights. Some of them were also concerned that the dominant discourse on children's rights might hinder parental rights and contribute to the abuse of parents. While there are huge power imbalances between children and parents, and CP cannot be condoned, the concerns of parents must be addressed. Parental abuse by children is equally unacceptable. There is a need for broad-based community education that deals with parents' and children's rights and responsibilities, combined, when necessary, with individual, family, and small-group based interventions to deal with family conflicts and violence, and to enhance parent-child relationships.

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Emancipatory Social Work, *Ubuntu*, and Afrocentricity: Antidotes to Human Rights Violations

Vishanthie Sewpaul and Linda Kreitzer

Social work's commitment to respect for cultural diversity must be balanced against adherence to universal human rights values and practices. There are core global social work documents that conceptualize social work as a human rights profession and that highlight the centrality of human rights and social justice in social work. 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 and Jones, 2004), and the Global Agenda (IASSW/ICSW/IFSW, 2012) resonate with the provisions of various international conventions and declarations on human rights. Dealing with the complex individual and structural, socio-economic and political issues around culture and human rights, as discussed by the various authors in this book, demands that social workers adopt multiple approaches at multi-systemic levels, a view that is entrenched in the key global social work documents.

The Global Definition of Social Work (IASSW/IFSW, 2014) reads as follows:

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. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being. (para. 1)

Given the understanding that social work is a contextual profession that must be responsive to local contexts, the following: “The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels” (para. 1) was added as part of the definition. The definition is followed by a six-page commentary unpacking key concepts that are informed by critical, post-colonial theorizing, and structural, emancipatory approaches to social work education, research, policy, and practice.

There is detailed commentary on social work’s core mandates, principles, knowledge, and practice. In terms of social work’s core mandates, the emphasis is on: working toward social change as well as promoting social stability, continuity, and harmony; promoting social development, which is conceptualized as desired end states, strategies for intervention, and as a policy framework; and the empowerment and liberation of people. The core principles are: respect for the inherent worth and dignity of human beings; doing no harm; respect for diversity; upholding human rights and social justice; co-existence of human rights and collective responsibility; and interdependence. In relation to knowledge, the commentary deals with the meaning of science, with emphases on critical, post-colonial social work theories that are applied and emancipatory; the co-construction of knowledge; and on indigenous knowledges. Regarding practice, the commentary details the importance of working *with*, rather than for people, and also the system-stabilizing and system-destabilizing functions of social work, emphasizing that social workers engage on a continuum from direct work with individuals to political level interventions, and that social work challenges personal-political and micro-macro dichotomies.

The Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004), in several of their core purposes, reiterate a human rights and social justice approach. The core purposes elucidate both

the system-stabilizing and system-destabilizing functions of social work. Recognizing that the cultural emphasis on stability, harmony, and continuity might be used to oppress some groups of persons, the GSWSEP (as does the Global Standards) adds the qualifier, “insofar as these do not conflict with the fundamental rights of people” (IASSW, 2018), Section 2). The qualifier is reiterated in the 2014 Global Definition (IASSW/IFSW, 2014)).

In this chapter we discuss the tensions between universal and relativist discourses in social work, and we call for the reclaiming of Afrocentric values, with *Ubuntu* as their core, in challenging neoliberal capitalism and violations that occur in the name of culture. Each chapter in this book gives examples of human rights violations and the social worker’s roles in addressing these violations. In this chapter, we challenge social workers to be informed by an emancipatory framework that embraces the values of Afrocentricity and human rights.

Culture and Social Work: The Universal–Relativist Debates

The juxtapositioning of respect for diversity and the promotion of human rights might at times seem paradoxical, as specific cultural traditions threaten people’s rights to dignity, well-being, bodily integrity, security, and life itself. But respect for peoples in all their diversity with regard to, for example, religious affiliation; music, dance, dress, and food preferences; the ways people eat and sleep; language; modes of speech; and non-discriminatory marriage, death, and coming-of-age rituals, must not be confused with acceptance of beliefs, values, and practices that are malicious. Hallen (2002) characterizes the tension between the universal and the relative in two chapters titled “Rationality as culturally universal” (p. 19) and “Rationality as culturally relative” (p. 35).

Logical-positivist rationality, which originated in the West and has come to be universalized, has significant impact on social work’s ontologies, epistemologies, and practices, including its formulations of codes of ethics and codes of practices. Thus, we have the taken-for-granted education, research, and practice frameworks, rooted in the natural sciences and transposed into the social sciences, that support researcher/practitioner non-involvement, detachment, neutrality, generalization, replication,

separation of the professional from the personal, technical-bureaucratic models in social work, and the demand to prove one's truth according to positivist empiricism's all too often linear reductionist reasoning (Dominelli, 1996; Henrickson & Fouché, 2017; Metz, 2014; Sewpaul, 2010; Sewpaul & Hölscher, 2004). Such emphases have derided alternative and different ways of knowing and doing that are embedded in emancipatory and indigenous epistemologies (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019).

A critique of logical-positivist rationality, that presupposes the Kantian autonomous, rational being, and which minimizes the centring of people as social beings in an interdependent world, does not mean an eschewing of the importance of reason. Hallen (2002) discusses the West's characterization of the indigenous African intellect as "a-critical, non-reflective, and therefore . . . non-rational" (p. 47). Reason is not exclusively the purview of the West. Countering Eurocentric representations of African thought, Sogolo (1993) contended that "there are certain universals which cut across all human cultures. . . . Pre-eminent among these . . . is the ability for self-reflection and rational thought" (p. xv), but cautions that such reasoning "has its own local colour and particular mode of manifestation depending on the contingencies of the intervening culture" (p. xv). In response to the illogicality of Eurocentric assumptions of African (ir)rationality, Makinde (1988) asserted that "logic is either universal in all thought or it is relative to different thought systems. So, in neither case can we deny logic in the thought systems of others" (p. 43). Rationality is thus both universal, cutting across all cultures, and relative within cultures.

Adopting a postmodern lens in understanding the relationship between the universal and the particular, Williams and Sewpaul (2004) concluded that "the presence of a multiplicity of incommensurable contexts and identities does not render reference to universal values obsolete, ethnocentric and totalitarian" (p. 559). Even within cultures there are competing and conflicting discourses, for example reconciling religious and scientific discourses, and questions around God, the supernatural, destiny, causality, free will, science, ethics, and morality (Hallen, 2002; Sogolo, 1993), so no culture must be reduced to an essentialized, monolithic construction. Appiah (1992) balances the culturally universal and the culturally relative debate thusly: "We will only solve our problems if we see them as *human problems* arising out of a *special situation*, and we

shall not solve them as African problems, generated somehow by *our being unlike others*” (pp. 135–136, emphasis added).

Such arguments bear salience in an intensely globalizing, interdependent world, where solutions for the particular must be sought in the universal, and where local solutions feed into global discourses and practices. The relationship between the universal and the particular must be thought of in dialectical terms, to “prevent the reduction of the particular to the universal as well as the reduction of the universal to the particular” (Torfing, as cited in Williams & Sewpaul, p. 560). On the universal-particular culture debate, Donnelly (2006) concluded:

If cultural relativism is to function as a guarantee of local self-determination, rather than a cloak for despotism, we must insist on a strong, authentic cultural basis, as well as the presence of alternative mechanisms guaranteeing basic human dignity, before we justify derogations from ‘universal’ human rights. (p. 103)

Afrocentricity, inscribed with *Ubuntu* and *being for the other* (Bauman, 1993; Levinas, 1985; IASSW, 2018; Sewpaul, 2015a), we argue, is that *authentic cultural basis* that has universal appeal. Levinas (1985) and Bauman (1993) assert that the moral self accords the unique *Other* that priority assigned to the self. For Levinas (1985), to be responsible means to make oneself available for service of the *Other* in such a way that one’s own life is intrinsically linked with that of others.

The latest GSWSEP (IASSW, 2018) attempts a balance between culture and human rights, and thus the tensions between universal and the relative, by calling on social workers to not stretch the boundaries of moral relativism to the point where the rights of some groups of persons are violated (Principle 3.2b) and for social workers to adopt the role of cultural mediators (Principle 2.3). Managing the tensions between the universal and the particular does not depend on formulaic answers. In recognition of the fact that no code can *make* social workers ethical, the IASSW (2018) calls for social workers to uphold ethical practices through “processes of constant debate, self-reflection, willingness to deal with ambiguities, and to engage in ethically acceptable processes of decision-making” (p. 1). In

making explicit social workers’ commitment to the core values and principles of the profession, the GSWSEP is designed to ensure multiple levels of accountability—most importantly accountability toward the people social workers engage with.

Reclaiming Ubuntu and Afrocentric ideals: Toward Alternative Socio-Political and Economic Governance

Cultural norms and traditions do not occur in a vacuum. They have antecedents, rooted in Africa’s devastating colonial history. Serequebehan (2000) asserted that “we are . . . at a point in time when the dominance of the *universe* of European singularity is being encompassed or engulfed by the *multiverse* of our shared humanity. The colonizer, self-deified imperial Europe, is dead!” (pp. 52–53, emphasis in original). There is cogency in the former part of this assertion but, unfortunately, colonial Europe is not dead! Neocolonial imperialism, with other colonial powers such as the United States and China, continues to keep people in the Global South in poor, marginalized, and excluded positions, and there are contemporary socio-political and neoliberal economic factors that violate human dignity and human rights (Annan, 2006; Dominelli, 2008; Hahn, 2008; Sewpaul, 2014, 2015a; Shai, 2018).

In contrast with neoliberalism, which has exacerbated poverty and inequality and has disproportionately disadvantaged women and children (Bond, 2005; Hahn, 2008; Sewpaul, 2005; 2015b; Shai, 2018), Afrocentric ideals embrace non-discrimination, communitarian values, cooperation, generosity, interdependence, equality, respect, and the recognition of the inherent dignity of all of persons. Aligned with the views of Sewpaul and Henrickson (2019), our conceptualization of the person is not limited to Kantian, liberal notions of individual persons; it includes families, tribes, and communities, and ultimately the unity of self with that of the universe—the interdependence of the self with the whole. Thus, acknowledging the dignity of humanity means opposing the legal and cultural subjugation of women and girls, as individuals and as groups, as much as it means opposing colonialism, capital punishment, mob lynching, genocide, and working toward environmental and climate justice.

Race and location constitute the centres of identity in Afrocentric theorizing and methodology. If Afrocentricity is to make meaningful contributions to policy developments, it must integrate into its framework, far more than it currently does, key social criteria such as class, (dis)ability, sexuality, gender, and distributive justice, as emancipatory social work does. Many cultural traditions that constitute sources of human rights violations, such as child marriages, harmful traditional practices in the face of physical and mental ill-health, female genital mutilation/cutting, and bride wealth, have as much to do with values and beliefs of groups of persons as they do with socio-economic exigencies. These are brought out in the various chapters of this book, with Abukari, for example, paying particular attention to how socio-cultural constructions of childhood intersect with socio-economic realities to render children vulnerable to child labour. Women who perform the acts of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), as discussed in Bukuluki's and Boateng and Sottie's chapters, are indicted for being the torchbearers (Opoku, 2017) of such practices, and they are, indeed, complicit in reproducing harm, within patriarchal societies that condone harm. But patriarchy, and stereotypical gender roles, manifest differently in different contexts, with both women and men being involved in their disruption and/or continuity (Sewpaul, 2013), are often linked to socio-economic circumstances.

What must be examined are the socio-economic and political structural constraints within which women operate, particularly the constraints of alternative forms of gainful employment. For example, educating women about how FGM/C violates female rights to dignity and bodily integrity, and on the dangers and consequences of FGM/C, is likely to produce small gains if participation in this is the only viable source of income for those women. Similarly, the problem of child marriages is unlikely to dissipate without expanding socio-economic opportunities and civil liberties of families. Under conditions of extreme deprivation, marrying one's child early means having one less person to feed, clothe, and educate, and perhaps reflects the hope that by being married, one's child would be better provided for. In this text, Muchacha, Matsika, and Nhapi discuss how child marriages are significantly shaped by poverty in the Global South, and they call for, in addition to other measures, prioritizing the eradication of poverty. Likewise, if we are to prevent or

minimize the consequences of harmful traditional practices related to health, as Mugumbate and Gray examine in relation to how poverty, stigma, and misrecognition contribute to the gross violation of the rights of persons with epilepsy, people must have access to education, employment, and free or affordable quality health services.

We look to Africa's history for some lessons that might be carried into contemporary Africa and draw on Nyerere's (1967) conceptualization of African socialism—*Ujamaa*, which embraces the principles of Kwanzaa discussed in the Introduction. Nyerere's dictatorship (constructed by some as authoritarian and by others as benevolent [see, e.g., Fouéré, 2014]), his failed policy choices, the demoralizing consequences of his enforced villagization program, and the extraneous influences of the West on Tanzania and other African countries' post-colonial statuses, do “not deny the legitimate intentions and aspirations that informed *Ujamaa* as a developmental strategy” (Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003, p. 60). *Ujamaa* emphasized people participation, communitarianism, non-exploitative development, national self-reliance, freedom, equality, and national unity. Nyerere (1967) was intensely opposed to foreign aid and the neoliberal impositions of the IMF and the World Bank, and while he encouraged and supported national self-sufficiency, he rejected isolationism.

Nyerere's ideas cohere with those of Keynesian economics, which played a key role in establishing the welfare states of the West (Leonard, 1997). Keynesian egalitarianism involved state intervention, regulation of the market, the involvement of organized labour to promote full employment and economic growth, and some state ownership of crucial national enterprises like railroads, public utilities, and energy (Keynes, 1933). Keynes (1933) argued that

ideas, knowledge, science, hospitality, travel . . . should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible, and above all, let finance be primarily national. . . . National self-sufficiency . . . though it costs something, may be a luxury, which we can afford, if we happen to want it. (unpaged)

Therein lay the crunch—if *we happen to want it*—as states, across Africa and the world submit to neoliberal free markets, trade liberalization, privatization, and deregulation (Hahn, 2008; Sewpaul, 2015a; Shai, 2018). Despite the vast body of research that reflects its pernicious consequences, “capitalism succeeds through ideological control of consciousness, designed to make us believe that neoliberalism is in our interests and is inevitable” (Sewpaul, 2015b, p. 463).

Sadly, Nyerere’s ideals gave way to “state bureaucratic capitalism—the use of state capital by a managerial elite” (Shijvi, cited in Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003, p. 85). Nyerere’s single-party state leadership reflected the dangers of post-colonialism, commanded by the new emergent national elite, that Fanon (1963) so strongly warned about. These patterns have seen replication across post-independent African states, including post-apartheid South Africa (Bond, 2005). Fanon (1963), in his theses on colonialism, post-colonialism, capitalism, and culture, concluded that “the poverty of the people, national oppression and the inhibition of culture are one and the same thing” (p. 191).

If African states have to live up to Afrocentric ideals they must make policy choices that counter neoliberal capitalism. Within the Afrocentric paradigm, the well-being of the individual is aligned with the well-being of the society, with an attempt to maintain a “delicate balance between the concepts of community and individuality” (Gyekye, 1995, p. 132), and it is humanistic ethics—not ethics founded on capitalism—that must underpin approaches to dealing with the various contemporary problems confronting Africa. Gaining economic freedom and expanding opportunities and choices are just as important as civil and political freedoms (Sen, 1999), with social solidarity and deepened democracies being the essence of societies. There are arguments that Afrocentricity is a poor fit with neoliberal capitalism, which places primacy on the individual, and profit above people. Hallen (2002) contended that socialism “in its democratic forms appear[s] to be more compatible with the humanitarian values definitive of Africa’s ‘communitarian’ societies” (p. 34). Nyerere’s (1967) rejection of neoliberal austerity measures imposed by the IMF and World Bank, and his bringing together development, empowerment, freedom, and people participation, bear much relevance for contemporary Africa.

Ibhawoh and Dibua (2003) point out that *Ujamaa* failed as an economic project, as measured by GDP, which should not be the sole criterion of its success. The role of the West, particularly Europe and the United States, in undermining socialism in Africa and other parts of the world must not be underestimated. Indeed, to ensure that other African countries did not follow suit, Western countries and international financial institutions did everything possible to ensure the failure of the pursuit of any socialist forms of governance (Hahn, 2008; Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003; Shai, 2018; Sewpaul, 2014). According to Annan (2006), “across Africa, undemocratic and oppressive regimes were supported and sustained by the competing super-powers in the name of their broader goals” (p. 241)—the broader goals being primarily the disavowal of socialism, the propagation of neoliberal ideology and securing domestic trade and profit. The *Ujamaa* experiment produced greater national unity and literacy (Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003; Parmar, 1975; Samoff, 1990), and it was the “harbinger of social welfare development” (Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003. p. 71). For social justice and human rights to flourish, a pursuit of socialist forms of democracy that encourage social solidarity and distributive justice, rather than the forms of liberalism that characterize capitalistic democracies, or autocracies disguised as democracies, must be supported.

Afrocentricity and Emancipatory Social Work

Afrocentricity places, in its centre, the location, cultures, histories, knowledges, and experiences of African peoples, both within Africa and across the Diaspora, without the reduction of Africans to a single, fossilized identity (Asante, 2014; Sewpaul, 2007). Such centring in Afrocentricity is grounded on awareness of the annihilation of African heritages and ways of being through the long histories of slavery and colonialism, contemporary forms of neocolonialism, and the archetypal representations of Africa and Africans. For the colonizer the logic of colonizing peoples—controlling their bodies, minds, and spirits; dispossessing them of their lands; and extracting their labour—rested on benevolence through their civilization and the Christianization missions. In many ways it was relegating Africans to a subhuman species that granted the colonizer justification for the atrocious treatment of Africans, as so cogently described

by Fanon (1963; 1967) and Cesaire (1972). Cesaire (1972, p. 43) wrote of “societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out” and about “millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkys.”

At the heart of Afrocentricity is the transformative agenda, and the goal of liberating African peoples from the constraints of their own thinking—a goal that emancipatory social work shares. While it is constructed as a non-hegemonic alternative to Eurocentrism, as we caution in the Introduction, some African scholars do construct Afrocentricity as superior to Eurocentricity and call for a replacement of the Eurocentric with the Afrocentric. This, we argue, is to fall into the same trap as the colonizers and neocolonizers and is a negation of the more unifying goals of emancipatory social work. Sewpaul (2007, 2016) challenged the views of authors such as Cobbah (1987) and Makgoba and Seepe (2004) who saw respect, restraint, responsibility, reciprocity, and emancipatory ideals as distinguishing features of African society, and thus antithetical to the values of Western societies. Rejecting dichotomous depictions of the West and the Rest, she called for unity in diversity and “dialogue; tuning into the life worlds of people; responsiveness; reasoned debate; recognizing the power of care, interdependence, reciprocity and validation” (Sewpaul, 2016, p. 37). Furthermore, while Afrocentricity calls for the cognitive independence and the redefinition of African identities (Asante, 2014; Kumah-Abiwa, 2016), we, like emancipatory thinkers such as Biko (1978), Fanon (1963), and Mandela (1995), argue that both the oppressor and the oppressed need to be liberated from colonial and racist forms of thinking for true transformation to occur at individual and societal levels—thus the emancipatory social work goal to critically interrogate and undo sources of both oppression and privilege (Sewpaul, 2013, 2016).

Deconstructing Archetypes: The Classroom as Context

We concur with Mazama (2001) that the appeal of Afrocentricity “lies both in the disturbing conditions of African people and the remedy that Afrocentricity suggests” (p. 387). Afrocentricity is an antidote to the devastating archetypes induced by colonialism. But the danger is not just the construction of Africans by the West; the real dangers lie in the naturalization and internalization of these archetypes by Africans (Asante, 2014; Fanon, 1963, 1967; Sewpaul, 2007, 2013). Sewpaul (2007) wrote about the incongruous worlds of students who associate Africa and African with all that is negative, reflecting the debilitating and shameful effects of colonization, racism, and race thinking. Ongoing exercises with both Western and non-Western students, within and outside of Africa, reflect a continuous reproduction of such representations, which are reinforced by the media and some political figures, the most recent being Donald Trump, who despite his geographic ineptitude, referred to Africans belonging to “shithole” countries (Vitali et al., 2018).

Students who are African *live* in a world of denim jeans (often designer ones), cellphones, TVs, computers, and concrete buildings in developed urban settings, yet *carry* an archetypical Africa in all its negativity, with dominant images of poverty, disease, underdevelopment, threats, and danger (Sewpaul, 2007). When students are engaged in reflective dialogue and are asked “where is the Africa that you live in?” they react with surprise, and sometimes with disdain at themselves for their naiveté in buying into dominant constructions. Hall (1985) asserted that

ideological struggle actually consists of attempting to win some new set of meanings for an existing term or category, or of dis-articulating it from its place in a signifying structure. For example, it is precisely because ‘black’ is the term which connotes the most despised, the dispossessed, the unenlightened, the uncivilized, the uncultured, the scheming, the incompetent, that it can be contested, transformed and invested with a positive ideological value. (p. 112)

It is toward such ideological contestation, deconstruction, and redefinition that advocates of Afrocentricity and emancipatory social work direct their efforts. This is important, as we know from labelling theory that people come to identify themselves and often behave according to dominant constructs. People might hold onto outmoded and superstitious beliefs and practices if this is what is expected of them. Also, holding onto primordial values is erroneously seen as agency, and as an authentic anti-colonial response, as discussed by Sewpaul, Mdamba, and Seepamore in this book. Yet, paradoxically given the archetypal representations, it is no wonder that education in the Global South is infused with Western ideologies. There is a desire to be seen as being on par with Europeans, and to be European (Kreitzer, 2012). The internalized self-loathing of blackness and the aspiration toward whiteness is cogently described by Fanon (1963, 1967; see also Toni Morrison's poignant novel *The Bluest Eye*). If students have to enter communities with humility enough to engage people in changing cultural traditions that violate human rights and social work values, they need to be well grounded in their own values, identities, and positive conceptualization of self.

Adopting an emancipatory lens to social work, Sewpaul (2007) questioned the pedagogical implications of students' negative constructions of self and of Africa and called for alternative experiences so that such dominant thinking can be disrupted. Deconstruction of dominant ideologies is critical if we are to achieve the kinds of emancipatory goals that Afrocentricity calls for. Educators must use the opportunities provided in the classrooms and create safe spaces to engage students in reflective activities and dialogue that facilitate the inscription of positive values.

Deconstructing Neoliberal Thinking

Each of the chapters in this book proposes ways forward in dealing with human rights violations, including expanding opportunities for education and employment, challenging and changing patriarchy and the hegemonic power of entrenched traditions and values, lobbying for policy and legislative changes, broad-based community education to engender attitudinal and behavioral changes, advocacy, and strategies for reducing poverty. Yet one of the main contributors to poverty and

inequality—neoliberal capitalism, as discussed above—is not specifically interrogated. Emancipatory social work calls for all human beings to ask critical questions about the construction of self in the face of the overwhelming legitimating power of neoliberal consumerism. Nyerere (1967) understood this, and while envisioning political, economic, and cultural goals, he emphasized that *Ujamaa* needed to be entrenched in *attitude*; it requires alterations in our conception of humanity, to embrace interdependence and intersubjectivity as does emancipatory social work (IASSW, 2018; Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). Given the manufacture of consent and of desire (Leonard, 1997), the market seduces people into believing that their moral worth is determined by their purchasing choices and power (Bauman, 1993; Leonard, 1997). Drawing on the work of Larner (2000) and Steger and Roy (2010), Sewpaul (2015b) conceived of neoliberalism as ideology, as a form of governmentality, and as a policy paradigm—overlapping and mutually reinforcing dimensions, which “penetrate daily consciousness so much so that it is normalized and naturalized, and it is considered necessary for the social order despite the inequality and poverty that it engenders” (p. 463). She points to all our complicity in reproducing neoliberalism, and hierarchies of class, race, and gender. We are also complicit in reproducing hierarchies of language, age, marital status, ethnicity, culture, nationality, sexuality, and mental and physical (dis)abilities.

Yet, as Sewpaul (2014, 2015a) asserted, there is hope, through the use of critically reflexive, consciousness-raising strategies, in people becoming aware of the legitimating power of neoliberal capitalism. Such awareness and its transformative potential rests on critically questioning, challenging, and changing taken-for-granted, commonsense assumptions (Gramsci, 1977; Hahn, 2008; Sewpaul, 2013, 2015b). This is at the heart of emancipatory social work. Social work educators must bring these discourses into the classrooms, and use locally relevant case studies, drama and art, and engage students in exercises such as journal writing and writing of their biographies so that they recognize the impacts of structural determinants, including the ideological control of consciousness by the media and state apparatuses, on their thinking and material conditions of life (Sewpaul, 2013).

Raising critical consciousness, which characterizes emancipatory social work, means examining how intersectional criteria like race, caste, class, gender, language, ethnicity, nationality, (dis)ability, and sexuality combine to constitute sources of advantage and/or disadvantage on our lives (as social work students, educators, researchers, and practitioners) and the lives of people we engage with. In doing so we might be able to better understand and respond to the life circumstances and ideological positioning of the people we work with. But the social work profession is not going to do this alone. The problems facing humankind in the face of the onslaughts of neoliberalism and far-right politics call for far more concerted efforts on a much broader scale. Social workers need to build alliances and bridges across similarities and differences and connect with progressive people's movements on national, regional, and global levels in the ongoing struggle to uphold human dignity and the rights of all peoples of this world (Sewpaul, 2014). But social activism is not going to occur if it is not preceded by developing critical awareness of the legitimating power of societal discourses and practices.

Culture, Education, and Practice

Sometimes law and culture coalesce to violate human rights, as discussed in the case of corporal punishment by Ntshwarang and Sewpaul in chapter 12, but it is applicable to other issues such as sexual orientation. Homophobia, which spans the globe, is defended in the name of religion and culture, punished in some countries by draconian laws that violate human rights. When violating laws and cultures merge, it makes the advocacy efforts of social workers, other professionals, and the citizenry at large more challenging, for change must be directed at both the law and community attitudes and choices. In some instances, there are conflicts between national legislation and customary laws, as in the case of child marriages in some countries. Muchacha, Matsika, and Nhapi in this volume and Werft (2016) cite the cases of Zimbabwe and Malawi respectively, where national law bans the marriage of persons under 18 years of age, but with customary law and/or religious sanction such marriages occur widely.

Having laws that promote and protect human rights does help, but legislation alone is insufficient to protect people against human rights violations that occur in the name of culture. Social workers in Africa, and across the globe, in their role as cultural mediators (IASSW, 2018; Sewpaul, 2014, 2015b) can play important roles in facilitating intercultural dialogue, debate, and constructive confrontation. One of the standards in the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004) reads: “Ensuring that social work students are schooled in a basic human rights approach” (p. 501), with the following explanatory note:

Such an approach might facilitate constructive confrontation and change where certain cultural beliefs, values and traditions violate peoples’ basic human rights. As culture is socially constructed and dynamic, it is subject to deconstruction and change. Such constructive confrontation, deconstruction and change may be facilitated through a tuning into, and an understanding of particular cultural values, beliefs and traditions and via critical and reflective dialogue with members of the cultural group *vis-à-vis* broader human rights issues. (p. 510)

While it is written in the context of social work education and training, the implications of this for practice are self-evident. Students become practitioners, and they are expected to transfer the knowledge, skills, values, and principles of the profession into the practice context. Social work practitioners, through ongoing professional development, must be consistently aware of the human rights provisions and their applications, or lack thereof, to local contexts, and engage in the same forms of praxis that we engage students in. Furthermore, given the “concealing function of common sense” (Sewpaul, 2013, p. 122), and that we (educators, researchers, and practitioners) are products and producers of our socio-political and cultural worlds, the GSWSEP, which applies to teaching, research, and practice contexts, has specific principles related to this. Principles 4.7 and 4.8 call for the development of awareness of entrapments of one’s thinking by dominant socio-political and cultural discourses, which may manifest

in a range of prejudices, discriminations, and human rights violations, and for social workers to heighten their own consciousness as well of that of the people they engage with.

Informed by an emancipatory theoretical approach, social work educators, practitioners, and researcher-practitioners can adopt strategies of consciousness raising to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions that are inscribed through dominant socialization and culture (Freire, 1973; Gramsci, 1977; Sewpaul, 2013, 2015b). Social work education and training is generally designed to equip graduates with the requisite skills in empathy, active listening, facilitation, mediation, and interpersonal relationships. These skills can be used to build bridges across cultures and to engage people in ways that ensure the harmful aspects of culture are confronted, while retaining those that are positive and that allow for intergenerational cultural continuity and human development (Sewpaul, 2014). Social workers must also be courageous to adopt constructive confrontational strategies when necessary, especially when culture threatens people's security, bodily integrity, and life. In this respect it is heartening to note that there are pockets of resistance by social work educators and practitioners in Africa (Sewpaul, 2014), and as writing is a form of resistance, the authors of this text contribute to such resistance.

Practice-Based Research and Learning from Practice

While the classroom constitutes an ideal space to introduce students to critical, post-colonial, and emancipatory theories and research paradigms, and to deconstruct and reconstruct thinking around self and society, it is equally important to learn from practice, through practice-based research, as is so fully discussed in the edited book by Twikirize and Spitzer (2019), reflecting locally specific interventions in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. The most compelling examples come from Rwanda, which after the genocide saw an *interventionist state* that, through national dialogues, launched local programs directed at “facilitating people to do things by themselves” (Rutikanga, 2019, p. 73), and the promotion of unity, participatory democracy, and reconciliation on a nation-wide basis (Uwihangana et al., 2019). The role of a facilitative state

is critical for sustainable community development, and for wide-scale, national rollouts of programs that have been proven to work. Sewpaul and Hölscher (2007) discuss local interventions in South Africa, in respect of children in very difficult circumstances, where the gains remained constrained on account of lack of government investment in their expansion and continuity.

Through the voices of several authors, the book (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019) describes various local, culturally relevant approaches based on values such as social cohesion, interdependence, and collective means of dealing with a range of individual and socio-economic problems, drawing on the lived experiences and tacit knowledges of communities, building resilience and self-sufficiency, and respect, unity, and reconciliation—all of which reflect the ethos of *Ubuntu* and *Ujamaa*. Bukuluki and colleagues in this book discuss how practices grounded in positive African values might contribute to the prevention of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. Conjoining the voices of a “service user/giver” and of a university professor, Sewpaul and Nkosi Ndlovu (2020) describe the transformative and sustaining potential of emancipatory social work and *Ubuntu*, and how HIV+ women shifted from being trapped in trauma, guilt, and secrecy to becoming HIV/AIDS outreach workers, educators, and activists.

One of the identified limitations of the application of indigenous approaches is the reliance on males as the arbiters and leaders in cultural discourse and problem solving. While the exclusion of women, in itself, constitutes a violation of rights, it also perpetuates patriarchal cultures, which are sources of many human rights violations. This is a common theme in all the chapters in this book. Furthermore, the exclusion of women from chieftainship and other leadership positions neglects an enormous resource base that Africa so desperately needs. Werft (2016) highlights the atypical appointment of Theresa Kachindamoto as chief in Malawi. In her position, Kachindamoto annulled over 850 child marriages, suspended chiefs who failed to make this commitment, championed girls’ rights to education, and put a ban on sexual initiation rites, where girls as young as seven years of age are taught how to please future husbands, thus exposing them to HIV/AIDS. Reclaiming indigenous approaches in social work education, research, and practice on the African continent does not mean reverting to traditional values and practices that are harmful.

Conclusion

It is difficult to separate the effects of cultural ideological constraints, for example the claims to a primordial essence and an essentialized cultural identity that underlie human rights violations, socio-economic deprivation, and the consumerist ideology engendered by neoliberalism, as each overlaps and constrains the other. Thus, emancipatory social work goals must be directed at developing critical consciousness around the legitimating and normalizing powers of both cultural and neoliberal discourses and practices. The virtues of the we-centred, communitarian ethos, *Ubuntu*, and the distributive justice goals of Afrocentricity must be used in the interests of all people. There is no place in the Afrocentric paradigm, which embraces human dignity, mutuality, reciprocity and respect, for the inferior construction and treatment of women and children, people who do not fit the norms of heterosexuality, and those with mental and physical disabilities, who are often subject to human rights violations.

We concede the power of historical and/or perceived historical continuity in retaining harmful cultural practices, and the deep interconnections made between cultural values and identities. But there are also discontinuities and disruptions; cultural norms and practices wax and wane, take different shapes and forms, and the nature and extent of practices change over time. To conceive of African traditions, values, and beliefs as timeless and primordial is to deny African peoples the capacity for reflexivity, rational thought, and agency—a reinscribing of colonial constructions that Afrocentricity repudiates. Afrocentricity is a transformative project, not the sedimentation of traditions; it is directed at granting agency to African peoples, and is fully aligned with emancipatory social work theory and practice. The core values of Afrocentricity must be used to challenge and change those traditions and customs that violate human rights and human dignity; this is both a privilege and a challenge for the social work profession in Africa. It is human dignity that both social work and Afrocentricity hold as sacrosanct.

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