SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES

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The Renewal of Critical Social Work

CHRISTINE MORLEY AND PHILLIP ABLETT

Social work is unfortunately not a term that most people associate with movements for social justice, human rights, environmental sustainability or significant social reforms. If the public have any abiding impressions or stereotypes about social work, they are at best ambivalent (Staniforth et al. 2014: 48) or vaguely negative (Condie et al. 1978: 47), possibly associated with misguided 'do-gooding', the removal of children (LeCroy and Stinson 2004: 164), subordinate professionals in hospital hierarchies (Viegel 2009) or impersonal bureaucrats policing declining social payments (Meagher and Parton 2004). In short, mainstream social work is often identified with the management of the poor or vulnerable; fitting 'dysfunctional' individuals into the social order rather than challenging the social conditions and policies that produce disadvantage. Perhaps there is more than a little truth to these stereotypes in mainstream social work theory and practice. As the social work and human service contributors to this edition would agree, social work has predominantly been a project of Western capitalist modernity and consequently complicit in perpetuating many of its oppressive features (Margolin 1997: 4). However, they would also protest that this is not the only story. Social work, as our first article in this edition argues, has also always been a contested project, emerging from a range of informal practices addressing and reflecting the contradictions of liberal (and now neoliberal) capitalism as it colonised the globe from the nineteenth century onwards.

In the face of the profound social inequalities and exclusions of modernity, there have always been other, more critical forms of social work. These alternatives are not homogenous, nor identifiable with any one group or perspective. They have included Marxist, radical, feminist, postmodern/poststructural, postcolonial, Indigenous, anti-racist, and more recently eco-centric approaches to practice. In many respects these alternatives represent aspirational, discursive strategies, works-in-progress and counter-hegemonic projects, but projects that have real and diverse effects. We characterise these approaches loosely as the *radical, anti-oppressive* or *critical* tradition(s) of social work, whose common aspirations seek to expose oppression and collaborate with the socially excluded to promote a more socially just and sustainable world. These approaches address the individual's needs but simultaneously strive to transform the social conditions that produce oppression (Baines 2011: 7). As our market-driven society becomes more unequal and faces severe climatic change induced by unsustainable economic and political systems, *critical social work* is changing and renewing. In Australia and elsewhere, after a period of decline in the late 1980s, critical social work has re-emerged in new and diverse forms. We believe these developments augment the broader struggles for social justice and sustainability beyond the welfare sector, and so this special edition of *Social Alternatives* is an opportunity to share samples of the diversity and dynamism of this movement with a wider audience.

Before introducing the contributions, a preliminary note on the term 'social work' is necessary because it has not always referred to a definite profession, with stable boundaries. Many of the late nineteenth century reformers and philanthropists who called for the creation of such a profession were popularly labelled 'social workers'. However, since the advent of professionalisation, these 'founders' would not gain professional accreditation today. Australian social work, as Jim Ife (1997: 7) pointed out twenty years ago, is more professionalised than its counterparts in many other countries. Elsewhere, much worthwhile and effective activism in poverty reduction, community education and social upliftment would be called 'social work'; but not here. This creates some unavoidable ambivalence or ambiguity regarding the subject matter of this edition, especially when making international comparisons.

In keeping with the critical tradition in Australia and elsewhere, we have chosen to take a broad view of 'social work' in this collection. This is contrary to what the peak professional body, the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) recognises for the purposes of professional standing and educational accreditation. In the AASW's view, a 'social worker' in Australia is required to have an AASW accredited degree. As it happens, most of the contributors to this edition meet this formal criterion but for us that is not what is most important. What is decisive in defining social work in our view is its praxis or 'mode of engagement' in combatting social exclusion and injustice in organised programs (whether institutionally or community-based). As Catherine McDonald (2003: 152) has argued, the central mission of social work involves 'extending social citizenship in different contexts' to all people. Therefore, critical social work, in this edition, may include any practitioners (social workers, community workers, human service workers, community psychologists, welfare workers, counsellors or activist social scientists) engaged in programs using critical social knowledge to bring about a more just, participatory and sustainable society. So, without wanting to colonise other practices or professions, we contend that critical social work is a very 'broad church' and nothing short of this will do in responding to the complex global problems we now face.

It is these complex problems of social division and environmental crisis that prompt such authors as Iain Ferguson, in this edition, to argue that critical forms of social work are more relevant and important than ever. Ife (in Morley et al. 2014: viii) similarly affirms the need for critical social work in responding to contemporary contexts, which he describes as:

> troubled ... characterised by runaway growth regardless of social and environmental cost, neoliberal economics, global capitalism 'on steroids', managerialism pervading social work organisations, increasing inequality, individualism, consumerism, greed, intolerance of difference, and a blatantly unsustainable social, economic and political order supported by powerful media and corporate interests.

However, it would be naïve to think that critical social work will gain ascendancy in the community and welfare sector simply because social conditions are worsening. This is especially so when neoliberal governments are actively inducing human service agencies to accept market-produced inequalities as inevitable and that their primary role is to equip clients to rejoin the market struggle (Morley et al. 2014: 266). Critical social work, however, provides a counterpoint to this dominant discourse that perpetuates inequalities along the lines of social class, gender, ethnicity and other dimensions of oppression (Allan et al. 2009; Mullaly 2010).

Many of the articles in this edition address the impacts and consequences of the dominant social forces that shape our contemporary contexts. Amongst the most urgent social issues that we face, as Carolyn Noble identifies, is human-induced climate change. Whilst some transnational corporations and conservative politicians refuse to acknowledge the massive changes in climatic conditions that are occurring, the world is coming to terms with the very real threats to life on earth, and the direct links between climate change and the social relations of global capitalism. Noble discusses the way social work has been slow to respond to climate change and its impacts, despite escalating warnings from natural and physical scientists that have been occurring for decades. She endorses 'Green social work', an emerging social and political practice that connects with environmentalists and calls for action to bring a strong ecological and political perspective into social work practice. She challenges social work to make the necessary links between social justice, eco-sustainability, grassroots activism, and new, sustainable energy sources, whilst rejecting the neoliberal politics of 'sustainable' market solutions that simply defer environmental and human destruction. She also discusses the ways in which climate change disproportionally affects the most socially disadvantaged groups in the world, thus further exacerbating the gap between the wealthy elite and the impoverished.

This widening gap is the focus of the second article by us (Christine Morley and Phillip Ablett), where we argue that burgeoning economic inequality, in Australia and overseas, should be a foundational priority for social work. Unfortunately, much social work practice with poverty is undertaken in the context of assessing eligibility for emergency housing, food parcels, and job activation schemes for 'the unemployed', (therefore managing the consequences of exclusion from the labour market, and separating the personal from the political). However, long-standing critical approaches to social work practice point to a number of alternatives aimed at structural change and equity-promoting practice. These strategies include social policy reform, critical pedagogy, critically reflective and activist practices that contest wealth and income inequality and affirm citizens' livelihood as a basic *human right*.

However, as Jim Ife and Sonia Tascón point out, adopting human rights approaches to social work is both complex and problematic. They argue that the concept of 'human rights' constitutes a two-edged sword for critical social work, as it simultaneously implies both a progressive universalism, and yet can also serve conservative interests by expunging all cultural differences in a neocolonial manner. Their paper questions the viability of Western-centric human rights frameworks that are unreflective about their historical and cultural specificity, but ultimately argue that the idea of human rights is essential for social work. However, in implementing this ideal, they insist that 'critical' social work practitioners must be dialogical, attentive to cultural difference and carefully question universal notions of human rights and their unilateral imposition.

Similar arguments about uncritical universalism can be made about community development practices. Community development is often deemed more progressive than casework because of its emphasis on social action and change, but many forms of community action can simply function to reinforce the status quo and its existing inequalities. In this edition, Athena Lathouras suggests community development must be informed by a structural analysis of society and be clear about its ethical and political orientation if it is to be emancipatory. She also suggests how community development practice, from a critical perspective, exposes the neoliberal illusion of achieving individual freedom without social justice or community wellbeing.

In many fields, social work espouses commitments to social justice and human rights, but it is often difficult to see how these goals translate into practices with the people with whom we work. Emma Tseris provides an excellent example of this disparity between theory and practice in the context of mental health. She uses a critical perspective to explore the limitations of biomedical constructions of distress that are represented as 'mental illness'. She focuses on women who have experienced gender-based violence and notes the increasing tendency for women's responses to such violence to be pathologised as a medical problem requiring psychiatric intervention. She also discusses the ascendancy of,

and limitations associated with, 'trauma-informed' practice, stressing that understanding the social context, including the intersections between gender inequality and gender-based violence is fundamental to informing ethical practice responses in this area. She asserts the importance of feminist, narrative and critical approaches to practice to provide creative alternatives to the traditional, medically dominated ways of working, which emphasise assessment and treatment of systems and dysfunction. The latter, she suggests, undermine social workers' capacities to practice in solidarity with service users around the social issues implicated in causing mental health issues and legitimates the imposition of psychiatric diagnosis.

Paralleling this, the article by Christine Morley and Joanne Dunstan on domestic and family violence discusses the ongoing importance of feminist theories and practices in understanding and responding to women impacted by this pervasive social problem. This paper rejects the clinically dominated and psychologising approaches to domestic and family violence that have been valorised in the last two decades in Australia, due to conservative politics and the backlash against feminism as a social movement. Instead, the paper argues that a critically reflective practice that interrogates hegemonic notions of gender and patriarchal assumptions is a key ingredient for revitalised feminist analyses to inform direct service, policy, and advocacy practice in this field.

Jane Thomson makes a related argument with regard to the statutory child protection system in Australia. In discussing both an increase in demand on child protection, and an increase in the complexity of child protection responses within neoliberal contexts, she suggests critical social work values and practice have been marginalised and argues for a practice response that is more cognisant of power and disadvantage as a way forward.

Closely connected to this, Bob Pease discusses the contribution of critical masculinity studies and profeminist perspectives for social work practice with men as a valuable way to challenge patriarchy and male privilege. Whilst he argues such privilege is mediated by a range of social divisions and dimensions of diversity among men, patriarchy awareness workshops are offered as an effective way to educate men about their complicity in gender inequality and women's oppression, and to challenge unearned male privilege.

Selma Macfarlane and Tina Kostecki continue to explore the themes of power, privilege and inequality through the prism of older age, discussing how critical social work might make a difference to the experience of ageing within Australian society as a Western neoliberal context. They draw on insights from critical gerontology, critical social policy analysis and critical social work theories to elucidate the ways in which Australian responses to ageing, despite existing within a society with relative wealth and prosperity, operate to create and mask social inequalities that are exacerbated in older age. They suggest critical social work has an important role in critiquing and resisting ageism and promoting practices that resist injustices enacted on the basis of older age.

Having explored inequalities related to class, gender and age, we then turn our attention to racism, exploring the ways in which this form of oppression plays out in Australian contexts, despite public discourses of multiculturalism, egalitarianism and reconciliation. Bindi Bennett, Sue Green and Sonia Betteridge critically employ the concept of 'culturally responsive practice' when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. They argue that attempts by the social work profession to develop culturally responsive practice must be coupled with a critical analysis of society, awareness of the impacts of colonisation, and critical self-reflection. Whilst culturally responsive practice is central to the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Code of Ethics and Practice Standards, many social workers are not adept at working with cultural difference in respectful ways. This article presents three auto-ethnographies from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives, demonstrating their different understanding of, and different experiences in, developing cultural competence for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Identifying another area of practice, where social work involvement has been contested and dubious, Linda Briskman and her co-author 'Jane Doe', who worked as a caseworker in Nauru, describe the horrors and human rights abuses associated with working with asylum seekers in offshore detention sites. This article explores Jane Doe's practice experiences and the ethical tensions involved in working with asylum seekers who were trying to reach Australia by boat. Discussion centres on the betrayal of key espoused social work principles such as human rights and social justice in the requirements of this role, which compromise core social work values, and in which the workers too often feel extremely disempowered. The article discusses the inability of social work to enact ethical principles such as the duty of care to people experiencing profound disadvantage and trauma, and ultimately questions whether it is possible for critical social work to make an emancipatory contribution within the bounds of the offshore detention context.

Susie Latham similarly confronts racist oppression and human rights abuses in the context of anti-Muslim bigotry, which she notes is increasing globally in Western countries as Muslims are often scapegoated in the rise of Islamist terrorism. She discusses how anti-Muslim bigotry has infiltrated mainstream nationalistic discourses and is often promoted for political purposes by national leaders; the result being unprecedented attacks on Muslims and their property. Within this context, social work is positioned as an instrument of the state to protect national security and report those suspected of radicalisation to law enforcement agencies. However,

with Muslims disproportionately targeted, such practices increase oppression and social exclusion, and defy core social work commitments to social justice and human rights. She ultimately highlights that social work values dictate the need to contest Islamophobia, not Muslims, and calls for social work action, citing the Voices Against Bigotry network as an Australian example that demonstrates how critical social workers can take action on this issue.

Much of the discussion in this edition relates to ethics or the worthiness of our social practices. Despite racist, sexist, homophobic, ageist, classist and neoliberal contexts, how might social work, and in particular critical social work advance ethical aims associated with emancipatory practice? Merlinda Weinberg explores this issue directly, discussing how the current socio-political climate exacerbates ethical dilemmas for critical social workers. She explores the challenges and practices of resistances that critical social workers engage in within the context of palliative care. She writes about euthanasia from a Canadian context when euthanasia was illegal. In presenting the emotional difficulties within this context, she explores the ethical complexities of working with people who are dying, suffering, and wanting to end their own life, within a system that prohibits euthanasia, and in a situation where the practitioner's own values contradict the person's wishes. Through exploration of this practitioner's work, she advocates structural change, being critically self-reflexive, and navigating the contextual nature of ethics as strategies to mitigate harm and practice critically.

Iain Ferguson in his paper on new forms of social work radicalism suggests that a renewal of the radical and critical social work approaches in the last decade is gaining momentum around the world. He explores social workers' general disillusionment with and rejection of hegemonic neoliberalism, the influence of broad social movements, and global economic crisis as key reasons for this re-emergence of critical approaches and presents a number of international examples. The final part of Ferguson's paper assesses the future of the critical/radical social work movement and the challenges it is likely to face. He asserts key tenets of this new radicalism include: a rejection of marketised influences in social work; a re-affirming of the centrality of social justice values in social work; a rediscovery of the importance of collective practices and community development processes; a commitment to social action; and the need for critical and radical practice to be informed by, and directly linked with, critical social theories.

Whilst always in the margins, the papers in this edition testify to evidence of the strong presence of critical theory and practice in contemporary social work. Regrettably, we could not cover every issue that is worthy of discussion in a collection like this. We are aware of, and very grateful for, the work of many like-minded scholars and practitioners who do not feature in this edition but could have made very worthwhile contributions, and who actively take part in the struggle for an emancipatory politics to have a central place in social work responses to current and future global social problems.

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Towards a History of Critical Traditions in Australian Social Work

PHILLIP ABLETT AND CHRISTINE MORLEY

This article situates the social work and human service professions in a long view of history, born of the clash between liberal-individualist and socialist-collectivist responses to the social miseries of modern, Western capitalism. In this long view, critical social work is conceived as heir to struggles for social justice that predate but are amplified in modernity. In Australia, as elsewhere, liberal-individualism was dominant in social work's beginnings but always amid currents of social reform, whose intensification significantly impacted the social welfare occupations in the early 1970s. The ensuing radicalism, sought not only to relieve people's suffering but to change the social conditions engendering it. The radical social work of the 1970s has subsequently developed in diverse ways under the successive influences of Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial, postmodern and various other approaches to constitute the diverse family of critical social work today.

Introduction

When the American economist Simon Patten, invented the term 'social work' in 1900 (Dorfman 1996: 3), anticipating a new profession to address the social problems of modern Western societies, there was already a diverse history of charitable and political attempts to do so. Most efforts were focused on adjusting individual behaviour to fit the prevailing social order without challenging its inequalities. This has been an enduring characteristic of mainstream social work until the present time. Others, however, sought to transform unjust social conditions to relieve suffering and meet people's needs, engendering various 'radical' or 'critical' social work approaches. This article sketches the historical emergence of social work and its more radical orientations in responses to the oppressive divisions of modern society and the attempts to combat these. In doing so, it situates critical social work within these much broader, longstanding and, in many instances, ongoing struggles for social justice, with particular reference to Australia.

Social work is a product of modernity, and modern societies differ markedly from their traditional forbears. In hunter-gatherer societies for instance, there were no rich or poor, and people's means were proportionate to their limited wants, (Flannery and Marcus 2012: 3-66) hence, no need for social workers. More pronounced inequalities and social problems, however, emerged in agrarian civilisations several millennia ago. Paradoxically, these inequalities were often justified on religious grounds but many of the world's religions also articulated principles of social justice that criticised inequality (Reisch 2002: 343). These principles held that society, not the individual,

was 'responsible for the undeserved suffering of its members' (Irani and Silver 1995: 4). In medieval Europe, the Christian churches took responsibility for what we might call 'social services' until the 1600s. The Tudor monarchy in Britain assumed greater control of poverty with less charitable 'Poor Laws' (1601), instituting punitive distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor (Horner 2012: 19). This was part of broader, 'modernising', social changes taking place in Europe and its colonies from the seventeenth century onwards.

Capitalist Modernity

In modernity, the basis for knowledge shifts from religion to science; governments increase their power while claiming 'democracy' as their justification rather than the 'divine right' of kings; industry replaces agriculture as the main source of wealth; and merchants or financiers rather than nobles form the most powerful elite (Van Krieken et al. 2017: 8). By the nineteenth century, industrial capitalism, based on the private ownership of productive resources and market exchanges for profit, became the dominant economic order in Europe and North America. Capitalism subsequently concentrated more material wealth for its elites than any system in history but also created more inequality and deprivation (Bodley 2011: 331). Modern societies produced modern problems, such as mass urban-based poverty and unemployment, sweat-shop factories, mechanised warfare, epidemic illnesses and unprecedented environmental destruction. These things were globalised through colonial imposition and the decimation of other cultures. The practices that became social work embodied all of these

changes, including the secular-rational (non-religious) understanding of social problems, that gave rise to notions like 'social science' and 'scientific philanthropy' (Morley et al. 2014: 83).

The problems of capitalist modernity engendered conflicting responses and by the mid-1800s, major struggles emerged between the advocates of liberal and socialist ideas. Liberals advocated individualistic solutions to social problems, arguing that poverty resulted mainly from poor choices (or 'moral failure') and that if individuals worked hard, free from state restrictions on business, everyone would prosper (Horner 2012: 14-16). Socialists, by contrast, favoured collective approaches to poverty and inequality, arguing that these resulted from unjust social structures. Consequently, they supported market regulation and public provision to promote social justice. While all socialists opposed capitalist inequality, some pursued gradual reforms, whereas others (like Karl Marx) were revolutionaries, seeking its complete replacement by a socialist society (Mullaly 2007: 115-116).

Social work is a contested project, born of the clash between the liberal-individualist and socialist-collectivist responses to the social miseries of Western industrial capitalism. However, the dominant nineteenth century response was liberal, opposing state aid (except for the infirm in 'poor-houses') and promoting charitable activities (e.g. missionaries, voluntary workers and middle-class, 'friendly visitors' to the poor) that targeted individual character rather than social reform.

Contested Origins of Social Work

By the 1870s, charities in Britain and the United States became coordinated under umbrella Charitable Organisation Societies (COS) to ration relief funds (using 'scientific' survey and assessment methods to identify the 'really poor'). The COS was transplanted to colonial Australia in 1887, where it prospered in Melbourne (but not Sydney where the older Benevolent Society had some state aid). However, the COS's liberal, self-help individualism was discredited in the 1890s depression when its leadership begged London headquarters for financial support (Peel 2008).

A noted COS leader and pioneer of professional social work in the United States, Mary Richmond (1861-1928), successfully advocated university training (with Columbia University) in what she called 'social diagnosis' to assess, categorise and treat the poor on an individual, 'case-work' basis. This model of diagnosing and treating individual problems in isolation from social context, weighs heavily on mainstream social work today (Agllias et al. 2016: 7-8) but it has always engendered critical counter-currents.

The critical currents have roots in the 'settlement movement' that split from the COS in the 1890s, because its members developed a social framework for understanding and combating poverty. Their prototype was Toynbee Hall, established in London in 1884. The idea was for university-educated visitors to live amongst the poor in their communities, and learn from them, while participating in community-based organising, education, research, cultural and livelihood projects. Breaking with COS's paternalism, it became apparent to settlement workers, including social workers and future Labour Prime-Minister, Clement Attlee, that emphasising free markets, individual morality and private charity, perpetuated rather than solved the enormous sufferings of class-division (Ferguson 2008: 91). So, the settlement workers sought social solutions to social problems, including government welfare reforms, like universal healthcare, pensions and free public schooling.

The most famous social work founder to promote the settlement model was Jane Addams (1860-1935), the first woman president of the United States Social Work Conference (1910), a feminist, anti-imperialist, labour campaigner, sociologist and Nobel Prize winning peace activist. Addams transplanted the settlement model of live-in, community-centres for education, activism, cultural and livelihood projects by founding Hull House in Chicago in 1889. Her vision of social work as a non-violent movement for social justice and democracy transcended the individualistic, charity model and remains a provocation for the possibilities of critical social work today (Weinocur and Reisch 1989: 38). The settlement movement had limited impact in Australia but former Toynbee residents propagated the model in 1891, working amongst the Sydney slums. They established a house in 1908, moving it to Darlington in 1925 and in 1928 proposed that social work be taught at Sydney University. The house continues today as a neighbourhood community centre, with a particular focus on Aboriginal rights and local empowerment (Sydney University Settlement 2008). While social work in Sydney had this broader beginning, in every other state it grew mainly out of COS-style case work in hospitals, siloed from social advocacy (Gleeson 2006: 43).

The American settlement movement and the social workers it inspired campaigned for social reform rather than revolutionary change. However, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, there arose a militant 'Rank and File movement' amongst social workers, dissatisfied with the limitations of President Roosevelt's welfare reforms. These workers fought for more radical changes, aligning with the labour movement, left-wing parties (including Communists) and the anti-racist struggles of the day. A leading rank and filer, Bertha Reynold (1887-1978), the most popularly published social worker of the 1930s, taught Marxist analysis to explain the ways personal suffering was rooted in exploitative social conditions that needed fundamental transformation (Ferguson 2008:

95). She advocated solidarity with clients as fellow-workers, reminding social workers that to be agents of progressive change necessitated coalitions with other movements and not going it alone (Reisch 2002: 38). Unfortunately, Reynold's Marxism and union-organising on campus led to her dismissal and (like other radicals) ostracism from the profession in the anti-Communist era that followed. However, Reynolds and her colleagues did inspire a later generation of radical social workers in the 1960s and beyond. This sort of activism continues in the Social Welfare Action Alliance (formerly the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society) in the United States and is akin to the various contemporary movements that Iain Ferguson (2016) refers to in his contribution to this edition of *Social Alternatives*. In Australia, the emergence of a specific, social work, radicalism (Healy 1993: 4) began later than in America because the associated struggles for social and economic justice occurred under quite different circumstances.

Social Work's Emergence in Australia (1788-1970)

Australia is the outcome of a colonial-settler invasion (1788), which dispossessed the Indigenous inhabitants, and was designed to relieve the social problems of late eighteenth century Britain. Having lost its American colonies (1783), Britain needed somewhere else to transport convicts. The situation for the first colonists was quite different from home. The Poor Laws did not operate in Australia because the convicts were already under direct state control (Hirst 1984: 85). There were no church parishes or gentry capable of sustaining charities until the early 1800s and even these required state support, as with the Sydney Benevolent Society. Catholic religious orders arrived in the 1830s, particularly nuns like Mary McKillop, founding some basic social services. These grew throughout the colonies (McMahon 2003: 86), as did social divisions between capital and labour. Unlike in Britain, the labour movement had some early successes, as did the women's movement for the vote (1895 South Australia; 1902 Commonwealth).

Free workers formed trade unions with 'friendly societies', providing members financial support in times of sickness, unemployment, disability or funerals (Nichol 1985: 20). Working-class men also benefited from chronic colonial labour shortages (unlike in America and Europe), strengthening their bargaining position with employers over pay and conditions. Consequently, Australian and New Zealand workers were among the first in the world to attain an eight-hour day. Historian Stuart McIntyre (2012: 214) claims that by the 1880s Australia's working class 'probably enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world'. Conditions hardened during the 1890s' depression when the union movement was defeated in the 'Great Strikes' but this only galvanised their political organisation in founding the Australian Labor Party (1891). Initially, Labor supported progressive Liberal administrations until it was capable of forming the world's first Labor governments (Queensland 1899; Commonwealth 1904 and 1910), instituting reforms such as the old-age pension (1909), invalid pension (1910), maternity allowance (1911) and binding arbitration for industrial disputes by an independent body (1904). The latter set a basic wage (1907) on principles of social justice, rather than market-forces, which governed wage-setting for over eighty years (Pusey 2003: 41, 48).

These principles created what Castles (1985) called a 'wage-earners' welfare state' where the profits of capitalism were in some measure redistributed through wage regulation and full employment. The downside of this egalitarianism was its racial exclusion of non-whites (with the *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901), forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples and devaluing of women's work.

As in America and Britain, nineteenth century Australia produced numerous activist forerunners to social work. Most of these were educated women, who saw charitable work as part of a broader movement for a just and democratic society, including increased wages for workers, poverty relief and equality for women. Women like Mary Gilmore (1865-1962), Vida Goldstein (1869-1949), Mary Lee (1821-1909) and Jessie Street (1889-1970) were comparable to Jane Addams as public figures and reformers. Many women activists joined the National Council of Women (NCW), the leading organisation for women's rights between the World Wars. A number of these women, including leaders of the Sydney University Settlement, advocated social work as a profession in the late 1920s (McMahon 2003: 89). One leader in the NCW network was Norma Parker (1906-2004), an American-trained social worker involved in Catholic social justice programs for welfare and workers' rights in the 1930s (McMahon 2003: 89). In 1940, Parker helped establish the first Australian course in social work at Sydney University, becoming its Associate Professor. She was also inaugural President of the Australian Social Workers Association (1946-1954) and in 1956 helped found the Australian Council for Social Services (ACOSS).

Although social work in Sydney had a broader community base, the COS methods of assessing the poor and medically supervised hospital almoning prevailed elsewhere in Australia (Gleeson 2006: 75). Professionalisation cemented the conservatism of mainstream social work in Australia. It meant greater government or institutional control, encouraging a narrow orientation on the part of social workers themselves. Australian social workers from the 1940s to the 1960s generally embraced the individualising psychological and casework approaches to social problems that had become dominant in Britain and America. Mendes (2003: 19) observes that social workers in the fifties and sixties did not want to be associated with anything 'left-wing', including the Labor Party and unions. In 1965 the

Victorian Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) rejected an approach from the Labor Party for advice in developing its social policy (Mendes 2000: 19-20).

Despite the profession's conservatism, social work, Australia and the Western world underwent major changes from the mid-1960s onwards. Globally, the Cold War intensified, with US aggression in Vietnam against communism (supported by Australia) generating a mass movement against the draft and imperialism. Old movements like socialism and feminism were reinvigorated and 'new' social movements like those for nuclear disarmament, Aboriginal land-rights, gay and lesbian rights, disability rights and environmentalism emerged in a 'New Left'. As the post-war economic boom faltered, outstanding injustices and gaps in social provision faced renewed questioning. There was a 're-discovery of poverty' by ACOSS researchers, especially for the unemployed unable to benefit from arbitration (Mendes 2003: 19). The victory of the social-democratic, Whitlam Labor Government in 1972, after 23 years of conservative rule, brought major changes in social legislation based on universal principles such as a national healthcare scheme (Medibank, resuscitated by the Hawke Government as Medicare), free tertiary education and the creation of new welfare institutions that employed social workers (Jamrozik 2009: 80-81).

Australian social work was affected by these changes and the critical consciousness they generated. Demands grew for the profession to engage in social policy advocacy, community organising and social movement activism. Consequently, by 1975, the President of the AASW, Whitlam Government advisor and Australia's first woman professor of social work, Edna Chamberlain (1921-2005) was able to declare in 1975 against the conservative view, that 'social justice … rather than social functioning' was the goal of social work (Cooper 2009: 146). Chamberlain was a moderate reformer however, compared with the radical social work that emerged.

Radical Social Work (1970s)

Australian social work radicalism was inspired by renewed Marxist critiques of capitalism in the broader political movements of the 1960-70s (Pease 2013: 22). These critiques identified class division as the underlying cause of most disadvantages experienced in housing, healthcare, the legal system and employment, despite the welfare state. The latter in fact was problematic because while conceding certain hard-won benefits to the working class, it still preserved the class inequalities of capitalism. Marxists and other socialists argued for more fundamental changes to the asymmetries of power and resources within society, advocating various reformist and revolutionary alternatives (Pritchard and Taylor 1978: 5).

Radical social work publications appeared simultaneously in Australia (Throssell 1975), Britain (Bailey and Brake 1975) and North America (Galper 1975; Moreau 1979). A group of Marxist social workers called Inside Welfare was formed in 1975 at the University of Queensland, spreading interstate, producing a bulletin and hosting a national conference on 'Marxism and Poverty' in 1976 (Mendes 2009: 20). They critiqued social injustice and the complicity of mainstream social work in reproducing it, calling for alternative forms of practice. Similar to the earlier British socialist collective, *Case Con, Inside Welfare* viewed traditional *case*work as a *con*fidence trick, misleading professionals into an exclusive focus on individual cases, consequently 'victim-blaming' their clients for personal insufficiencies rather than addressing the structural source of their problems in unemployment, poverty, or oppressive divisions (Weinstein 2011: 13-22). *Inside Welfare* criticised decontextualised casework as effectively serving the capitalist state and ruling class by requiring disadvantaged clients to adjust to unjust social conditions; thereby controlling them (Mendes 2009: 20). Instead, *Inside Welfare* promoted collective action with the disadvantaged to pursue reform.

The liberal-individualist ideology that *Inside Welfare* exposed in traditional casework was also to be found in mainstream social work's notion of 'professionalism'. Just as casework could control the poor, so too, professionalism could control social workers. Professionalism, in this view, was not about ethical or intellectual standards but a device for re-directing social workers away from political action into concerns for career advancement, status and accreditation etc. (Hennig 1975: 1). Historically, the radicals believed that professionalism with its claims to expert status and knowledge could only reinforce capitalist hierarchies and state control, alienating social workers from other welfare workers and from the people they served. More viable forms of organisation for socialists, according to *Inside Welfare*, were to be found (as Bertha Reynolds had advocated) in social movements and trade unionism (Thorpe and Petruchenia 1992: 185).

The struggle over social work's identity intensified amidst political turmoil in Australia. In 1975, the Whitlam Government, which had enlisted social workers in its reforms, was dramatically dismissed and there followed a period of regression in social policy. Amid cutbacks and rising unemployment, radical social workers sought to develop more effective organisations for pursuing progressive goals than the AASW structure allowed. Rather than pursuing professionalisation, the radicals urged social workers to acknowledge their own exploitation and unionise with fellow workers in the welfare sector. This struggle led to a split between the AASW, which thereafter dealt with professional accreditation, and the Australian Social Welfare Union (currently the Social and Community Services (SACS) section of the

Australian Services Union), which pursued 'industrial and social action' (Thorpe and Petruchenia 1992: 181) for all welfare workers. Today SACS represents 24,000 welfare workers with a history of defending social programs and improving wages for its predominantly female, community-sector, workforce (Bottomly and Judge 2012), including a record 20-41 per cent pay increase in 2012 (ASU 2012).

Unionism, social movement activism and community organising opened up new fields of collectivist practice for Australian social workers in the 1970s. However, these practices proved difficult to sustain in the 1980s and 1990s when governments embraced neoliberalism, a renewed faith in markets to optimise social outcomes and then cut progressive social programs. In Australia, unlike the United States and Britain, the onset of neoliberalism was more gradual because the Hawke-Keating Labor governments (1983-1996) attempted to combine the opening to global markets (including deregulation of the labour market and wage restraint) with an expansion of social provisions in healthcare, childcare support, gender equity and Aboriginal land-rights. This left a contradictory legacy for Labor supporters with large numbers of manufacturing jobs destroyed and the socially marginalised distrusting both major parties. The succeeding Howard Liberal-National Coalition Government (1996-2007) expanded the neoliberal deregulation and privatisation of the economy (including social services) much further and cut the social wage for the disadvantaged, under the banner of 'mutual obligation' with new testing, surveillance and disciplinary regimes for those seeking assistance. As social policy analyst Jamrozik (2009: 84) said, there was a return to 'the vision of a two tier society of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor' indicative of a 'post-welfare state'. Subsequent Australian Labor (2007-2013) and Coalition (2013) Governments have not fundamentally altered this trajectory. The institutional dynamics of welfare provision are very different today from what the original radical social workers dealt with in the 1970s and radical practice has changed to deal with these challenges.

From Radical to Critical Social Work: Renewing Emancipatory Visions

Radical social work has evolved and this is not simply due to neoliberalism. It also changed through internal criticisms of its own analysis, such as Marxism's primary focus on class oppression and how this can overlook other forms of oppression based on gender, disability, age, sexuality and racialised identity (Ferguson 2008: 101). The resurgence of feminism and the women's movement in the 1970s both challenged and broadened the radical agenda by targeting patriarchal oppression in addition to capitalism. A Radical Women's Group (RWG) was formed by Victorian social workers in 1973 (Mendes 2009: 23). Linking personal experience with political structures they questioned sexist discrimination against women within their own predominantly female profession, particularly in leadership roles, and the treatment of their largely female service users. Feminism drew attention to the patriarchal confinement of women to the domestic sphere as wives and mothers in Australian history. Key social measures like the basic wage (1907) excluded women who were legally paid half the wages of men until the 1970s, and women were often sacked for becoming pregnant or married until such practices were outlawed in the 1980s. Feminist critiques of the disparities disadvantaging women in Australian society and tackling issues of particular concern for women (discrimination against pregnancy, sexual assault, maternity leave, women's health, childcare) slowly filtered into social work (Nichols 1977: 52-54; Marchant 1985: 41-42). However, by the 1980s gender inequality was widely recognised as a major form of structural oppression in need of social reforms and a distinctly feminist practice addressing women's issues emerged (Dominelli and McLeod 1989: 13). However, this too revealed its limitations in the face of critiques from Aboriginal and migrant women for its neglect of racial and ethnic discrimination. The issues of racial oppression and anti-racist practice provide ongoing challenges for social work (Briskman 2003; Bennett et al. 2013).

The recognition of differing forms of oppression has led to renovations within the radical/critical tradition. Canadian structural social work (Mullaly 2002: 196-216) has attempted to account for these intersecting oppressions with more inclusive lists of structural divisions in society. Others, however, have insisted on making one or more of the categories of class, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or age central to their distinctive analysis. While there is a common anti-oppressive (Dalrymple and Burke 1995) and anti-discriminatory (Thompson 1992) theme in these approaches, it would be a mistake to conflate them or to attempt to solve all forms of oppression in the same manner.

In Australian social work, the radical spirit has been marginalised but never entirely abandoned. *Inside Welfare* disbanded in the late 1970s but its influence filtered into diverse struggles without any centralised organisation. In the 1990s, however, there emerged in Canada (Rossiter 1996) and Australia (Ife 1996: 127-151) a self-identified movement of 'critical social work', broadly inspired by neo-Marxist 'critical theory'. Critical theory was the term used by the unorthodox German Marxists of the 1930s known as the Frankfurt School, who sought to recover the critical core of Marx's theory in opposition to both liberal capitalism and the state-socialist regimes that claimed Marx's legacy (Bronner 2011: 2-3). Critical theory has a broader notion of oppression than orthodox Marxism's class exploitation. It exposes multiple forms of domination, not only in economic relations but also in politics, culture, knowledge, media, entertainment and everyday life. More than this, critical theory aims to be practical, not simply interpreting the world but provoking critical consciousness to transform it for human freedom and social justice (Ife 1996: 133; Salas et al. 2010: 92).

Many critical social workers, especially in Australia and Canada, also combined postmodern and poststructural critiques with critical theory, under the banner of 'critical postmodernism' (Leonard 1997: 100-107; Pease and Fook 1999: 116-117). They do this because they find postmodern analysis offers a more nuanced appreciation of the complex and constantly shifting power dynamics of particular and local social settings and problems. In such contexts, it may be the case that there is no clear cut or fixed distinction between oppressors and oppressed or rather these identities can shift with the unfolding context. In such situations, universal and grand narratives of liberation risk being imposed in a 'one-size-fits-all' solution that is not helpful. Today's critical social workers, committed to just outcomes, must also deal with the demands of diversity and multiple perspectives, which they and their clients negotiate in the construction of problems and the possibilities for addressing them.

Looking back at the history of social work through the lens of struggles for social justice, there is an enduring legacy that stems from earliest radical traditions that continues to energise a range (modernist and postmodernist) of contemporary critical social work approaches. At its base the radicals sought to fundamentally change the power relationship between social workers and service users; collaboratively engaging with them as equal, fellow citizens; addressing their problems with explicit understanding of the social context. This radical conception of social work involved both (1) a rejection of the establishment social work and (2) the construction of something new that would faithfully serve their service-users' interests both individually and as part of society. This rejection meant a refusal by social workers to accept the 'top-down' expert or social control role and to help demystify the welfare process with their clients, pointing out the social causes of their problems (Moreau 1989: 15). The construction of alternatives meant attempting to find ways to counter or change these social conditions while meeting an individual's immediate needs.

Viewed in this way, despite enormous obstacles, many social and human service workers strive to imagine how the radical social work agenda can be pursued not just in overtly political movements, unions and community work but also in more conventional fields like hospitals, nursing homes, jails and government departments (Wagner 1990: 23; Fook 1993: 20-23). This is why Bob Mullaly insists that any critical or structural social work can and must be conducted both 'outside and against' and 'within and against' the dominant system: 'using social work skills and techniques in such a way that we "demystify" it by discussing its origins, purpose ... and by encouraging service users to ask questions' (Mullaly 1993: 174).

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this historical sketch, social work is a contested tradition. Since its birth in the late nineteenth century there have always been those who have emphasised treating individuals' problems and perceived inadequacies on a case-by-case basis, where the aim is to adjust the individual to conform to social order. This remains the dominant paradigm in much mainstream social work today. But, there have also always been practitioners who emphasised the impact of various social divisions and inequalities on individuals' lives and attempted to collaboratively change those conditions to address people's needs (Drakeford 2002: 294; Mendes 2009: 17). This is the common heritage of all critical social work perspectives, which despite every attempt to marginalise them, continue to provoke diverse practices for social justice and human rights.

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Green Social Work – The Next Frontier For Action

CAROLYN NOBLE

Climate change has been described as the most pressing issue of this and future generations. Social work, as primarily a social and people focused profession, has been slow to react to what the natural and physical scientists have been telling those who will listen for decades. That is, the number of environmental catastrophes are increasing in intensity and frequency while the overuse of non-renewable natural resources for manufacturing and human consumption is creating a climate change with possible disastrous effects for all human kind. Green social work is emerging with the aim to join forces with environmental activists to bring a strong ecological, social and political perspective into social work practice.

Introduction

This article explores the growing impact of climate change on the environmental sustainability of the planet and the challenge of mounting a credible and sustainable professional response for social workers. It is heartening to see that several social work academics are taking on the challenge and positing Green social work as a possible alternative to address the current environmental challenges facing the planet (McKinnon and Alston 2016: 29-31; Dominelli 2012: 193-207; Gray et al. 2013: 13-16). Green social work is increasingly seen as a promising alternative to the current politics of denial, ignorance and inaction, as major disasters such as earthquakes, floods, droughts, bush fires, rising temperatures, rising sea levels, mass migration, and human pollution indicate a looming ecological catastrophe. Added to this list are other human activities such as overfishing, land and forest clearing, crop burning, toxic waste spills, and nuclear accidents resulting in increasing levels of air, water and soil pollution, 40-50 per cent loss of biodiversity, ocean warming and the build-up of greenhouse gases all impacting negatively on the stability of the Earth's climate on which we depend (Garnaut 2008: 24-25; Klein 2015: 186; Dimdam 2013: 1-2; Cox 2013: 1). Furthermore, the massive extraction of non-renewable resources creates waste products which are stored or buried on what was pristine land or emptied into previously uncontaminated water reserves thus adding to the ecological damage. This list of environmental changes and resulting damage, which is not exhaustive, paints a grim future for environmental sustainability and places the earth's ecosystem under huge threat for current and future generations (Garnaut 2008: 24-25; Klein 2015: 186). Besthorn argues that Western culture and its obsession with consumption, continued economic growth and ever higher standards of living has become suicidal (2013: 36).

Giroux (2006: 17) and Brand (2014: 80, 270) link the acceleration of man-made global change and this suicidal trajectory to the 'western global juggernaut' and its push to secure deregulation, privatisation and commodification across economic systems and the rampant consumerism and wastefulness linked to this activity. The neoliberal politics and economic model that promote growth in manufacturing, consumption and private wealth over individual wellbeing and health of the planet represents the biggest obstacle to any real societal and economic change (Giroux 2006: 17). It is increasingly recognised that these large scale environmental problems disproportionately impact negatively on vulnerable and marginalised peoples, especially those already living in poor circumstances and in environmentally degraded communities, thus exacerbating the wealth and wellbeing divide between the rich and the poor. The impacts on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people, the destruction of their living environment and access to safe and uncontaminated food, water and other resources as well as the increasing economic inequality resulting from neoliberal politics all have important policy and practice implications for social work (Mullaly 2007: 64-66; Dominelli 2012: 12-14). However, doubts mount as to whether any kind of political and economic change and environmental rejuvenation of the Earth's natural resources is possible. Further, questions arise around what, if any, responses are adequate to address the climate and social impacts of climate change in the local, regional and global contexts. Indeed, as we face these

challenges few people would be able to identify effective and universally agreed strategies to address them.

Climate Politics – Global

The ecological debate is not new. As early as the 1980s, international efforts attempted to address what natural and social scientists, environmentalists, philosophers and political scientists had been warning the international community about for several decades; that is the imminent human, social and environmental impact of man-made climate change and the resultant environment instability that is likely to follow (Appleby et al. 2015: 2-4). In 1988, the United Nations endorsed the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to take on the task of highlighting the effects of climate change and the need for global action to mitigate its impact across the globe (Baard 2015: 23-24). Heeding this warning, in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro participants pushed for global policies to address climate change and launched the United National Framework for Climate Change (UNFCC). This was developed to set the framework for protocols to generate action toward reducing the greenhouse gases considered the main polluter of the Earth's atmosphere (Appleby et al. 2015: 2; Dominelli 2013: 430).

Following the creation of the IPCC and UNFCC further groups were established. The International Women's Forum - Solidarity in the Greenhouse, which met in 1995, led to the establishment of the GenderCC that introduced a gender perspective and activism into this movement (Alston and Whittenbury 2012: 6). From the IPCC group, the Conference of Parties (COP) was also set up to meet annually to assess progress and work towards world agreement for action. A key development of the COP was in 1997 in Japan where the now historic Kyoto Protocol agreement was eventually signed by 192 countries committing to world action on climate change. As expected, there was initially strong resistance from Western governments, including the USA and Australia, who rely on oil, coal, uranium and gas reserves for their manufacturing and industrial products as primary drivers of their economic growth and prosperity. In 2001 the United States completely rejected the agreement set up in Kyoto (1997) and while the Australian Government eventually signed the protocol when the Labor/Rudd Government came to power in 2007, it failed to gain the support of the opposing Coalition or the full support of the population (Appleby et al. 2015: 2; Alston and Whittenbury 2012: 6).

This inaction and lukewarm commitment to tackling climate change is evident internationally as well. Despite annual COP conferences being held since Berlin in 1995, with the most current meeting held in Marrakesh in 2016, and many other international gatherings, conferences, summits and reports all purporting to strengthen the global commitment to addressing climate change, little concerted action has resulted from these gatherings. It seems nigh on impossible to have world leaders all agree on uniform action. One must hope that these leaders will soon grasp the urgency and act together in their own economic and social interests as well as for the global whole.

Climate Politics – National

For a brief period in Australia, following the signing of the Kyoto agreement in 2007, the Labor Government seemed to respond favourably to finding ways to address climate change, especially after the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared climate change as the greatest moral challenge facing the country of our generation (Rudd 2007: 1). This commitment to act was carried through after the change of leadership when the Gillard Labor Government introduced carbon pricing as a policy initiative recognising the need to reduce CO^2 emissions. Not surprisingly, this and other initiatives have been slowly dismantled after the return to more conservative politics in 2013. Policies protecting coal, oil, gas and uranium mining as sources to fuel national economic growth and support high standards of living have been implemented rather than looking to the environmental concerns and looming social problems linked to climate change. The attacks on climate change policy, characteristic of the conservative Abbott/Turnbull Government (2013-present) such as abolishing the Climate Change Commission in 2013, disbanding the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Environment Ministers forum and repealing the carbon pricing legislation in 2014, saw a step backwards for any national effort to reduce its environmental impact. Many other initiatives such as COAG's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, established in 2011, were placed on hold and severe funding cuts were directed towards reducing CSIRO's current climate change research activities as well as all future research initiatives. Gradually, the CSIRO's websites, public information of their activities, and facts and figures about the severity of the problem have been deleted (Appleby et al. 2015: 2-3). The neoliberal economic agenda was firmly re-established after the brief Labor experimentation in trying innovative environmentally directed policies to address climate change.

Climate Politics – Local

In Australia, at the community level, the planning and action to address climate change problems has been limited and intermittent. Inadequate resources, political costs and responsibility shifting have seen many State governments following the national Government's agenda by reducing spending on climate change initiatives and reducing funding for community groups that provide

resources for vulnerable people experiencing the escalating hardships associated with climate change. However one Australian state stands out as an exception. South Australia's Labor Government is aiming to develop the city of Adelaide into a 100 per cent renewable energy city by promoting investments and aiming to produce Australia's first hub for alternative energy supplies. Current and future plans include solar and wind farms and investment in geothermal energy for local use with long term plans to influence the national debate towards more sustainable energy policies and posit itself as exemplar for the Asia Pacific basin as well (Adelaidetozero 2016).

Appleby et al. (2015: 8) highlight attempts by local Councils in Melbourne and Sydney in developing a number of climate change initiatives such as climate change networks and partnerships with businesses, website information and contact numbers for emergency services to be used in response to natural disasters. One such council is quoted as stating their community plan is to 'support and increase community action for a resilient city to help people understand climate issues, the impacts and how we can adapt' (Appleby et al. 2015: 8). However, the focus on adaptation rather than pressuring for social and political change in addressing environmental impacts and promoting economic sustainability is concerning.

A wide range of NGOs and small community and citizen action groups continue to agitate and advocate for action, such as building urban sustainable communities and shopping locally (Vandenabeele et al. 2016: 78), rural community sustainable practice (Alston et al. 2016: 94) and post-disaster work (Dominelli 2012:127). However, the political and media barriers and corporate resistance to address business and manufacturing practices as well as the ongoing debate of who is the most and least global polluter has meant that local, national or global action to address the ecological crisis remains gridlocked (Jones et al. 2012: 152-154) and services remain underfunded or have been defunded leaving the social response in a vacuum.

Environmental Destruction Is A Societal Problem

Coates (2005: 25) and Besthorn (2013: 37) argue that the pressures to exploit the earth are the same pressures that result in social injustice. The quest for progress, growth and greater consumption of non-renewable resources has led to many traditional communities across the world being disintegrated, systematically exploited and impoverished by the destruction of their land and disruption to their livelihoods as a direct consequence of environmental degradation. For example, agribusinesses forcing traditional farmers off their land, and Indigenous peoples driven from ancestral lands due to mining,

crop clearing, toxic spills and pollution of air, water and soil have resulted in what is commonly recognised as environmental racism, ecocide or social injustice towards the people and communities affected by these practices. One such example can be seen in the Lenca Peoples defence against Honduran governments land grab of their traditional lands for resource extraction activities.

In addition to environmental impoverishment, people and communities experiencing the worst impact of climate change are vulnerable to social, economic and political injustices. Poverty is without doubt the first casualty followed by educational disadvantage, reduced access to adequate housing, food, social and financial services, lack of employment options, being more vulnerable to natural disasters (flooding, drought, fires) and exposure to pollutants, unsafe work practices, increased work hours and time poverty (Dominelli 2012: 105; McKinnon and Alston 2016:1-2). This results in the loss of control over access to natural resources (water, safe food) and information, means of production and political power and effective decision-making, as well as social isolation, and just as disturbingly, a low capacity for local organising and what Gray and Coates (2012: 239) and others call environmental illnesses, sensitivities and loss of personal and societal resilience (Dominelli 2012: 150, 153; Jones et al. 2012: 147). Aboriginal communities are especially affected as most of their pristine lands have been exploited for their natural resources without due recognition of its impact on their communities and natural environment locally and globally. While the poor and marginalised suffer, the richest 0.1 per cent commandeer the profits with their fortunes linked to industries that create much of the damaging climate changes and environmental vandalism listed above (Oxfam 2015: 1; Urry 2010: 191-212). Powerful environmental interest groups that cross economic and national lines pose ongoing threats to individual governments' policy responses. The impact of these events is uneven across peoples and communities. For example, in 2015 the richest 65 people globally controlled more wealth than the poorest 3.4 billion people (Oxfam 2015: 1). In Australia, a wealthy country, the wealthiest 20 per cent have 70 times more assets than the poorest 20 per cent (Oxfam 2016: 2). While the immediate impact of climate change is experienced by women, Indigenous peoples, older peoples, and minority race groups, inevitably all will be affected as the limit to growth, overuse of non-renewable resources and environmental degradation is a global problem. Indeed, the impending environmental crisis has spurred a re-imagining of a new ecological paradigm beyond capitalism; a beyond-growth-at-all-cost economic mantra. There is a gradual awareness that a new way of thinking about economics and politics is needed, especially as environmental destruction linked to capitalism continues to damage the earth and impoverish the many.

Green Social Work – The Next Frontier For Action

Social work has been slow to act. While many social workers are increasingly aware of the social problems generated by climate change, their voices are largely absent from public discourse and when awareness is discussed its translation into action is sporadic and limited (Schmitz et al. 2012: 278; Dominelli 2012: 24-25). Further, when there has been a public outcry from social workers and other professionals about the impact of climate change on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable people, their voices have been largely defeated by the politicisation of climate change, the dominance of the neoliberal agenda in the media with its support for economic growth and reliance on non-renewable energy resources, locally and globally. Under pressure from a reduced welfare state and reduced funding of social services, social work has become more adaptive and reactive than proactive in addressing the very real social, political and cultural problems resulting from climate change. This inaction needs to change and the profession needs to develop proactive environmental responses in both practice and policy that are supportive of a sustainable and socially just society. Social work's critical stance highlights the structural and political nature of climate change. It identifies the powerful vested interests and socio-economic influences that perpetuate the negative environmental impact causing harm to the wellbeing, livelihood, and in many cases survival, of people and communities (Morley et al. 2014: 2-7). Focusing more on the human and social dimension of issues and interventions, social work has been blindsided by the escalating impact of climate change on both the human and non-human condition. Structural analysis must now link environmental issues to social justice and human rights and move from an anthropocentric to ecocentric analysis (Ife 2010: 1; Besthorn 2013: 37). Social work now needs to include the natural and non-human world in its analysis as pressure is mounted on the profession to revise the radical critique of capitalism and neoliberal politics that saw the demise of the state welfare programs and the erosion of regulations and mechanisms set up to protect rampant capital and protect the social good (Gray and Webb 2013: 10-17; Morley et al. 2014: 32-36). This re-evaluation provides the basis for intense scrutiny of environmental policies, social inequalities and economic paradigms (McKinnon and Alston 2016: 5). A Green or ecologically informed social work practice attempts to articulate this vision and formulate a practice for current and future use and one that will form the basis of our engagement with the Earth and its peoples (Dominelli 2012: 7-8; McKinnon and Alston 2016: 5-6).

Green Social Work Explored

The challenge for green social work is multi-faceted. To look after the marginalised and help them have access to services and benefits that enhance their quality of life and opportunities, while at the same time preserving the Earth's largesse for future generations, is the first challenge. The second challenge is to balance the consumerist lifestyle with the development of new economic paradigms to replace the existing growth 'at all cost' paradigm, at the same time planning for a future growth in population and a burgeoning middle-class across Asia and China. The last though not exhaustive challenge is to protect the diversity and a scarcity of non-renewable energy sources and the diverse biosphere and physical landscape against the dominant neoliberal economic philosophy, which has been built on profit from extraction of the non-renewable resources that are needed for the planet's health (Dominelli 2012: 6).

Green or environmental social work is posited as the new frontier for a new environmentally informed social work practice highlighting the need to act collectively for a changed future (Dominelli 2013: 436-438; Gray et al. 2013: 6-10). Green social work identifies the many social, economic and environmental issues resulting from the natural world's increasing inability to sustain the current level of economic growth by using natural resources for manufacturing of goods and commodities for consumption at rates faster than the world can regenerate (Gray et al. 2013: 5). In brief, the aim of green social work is to

> work for the reform of the socio-political and economic forces that have a deleterious impact upon the quality of life for poor and marginalized populations, secure the policy changes and social transformation necessary for enhancing the well-being of people and the planet today and into the future and advance the duty of care for others and the right to be cared by others … Its interventions are holistic and tackle structural forms of oppression, environmental degradation and injustice to empower people (Dominelli 2013: 437).

Gray et al. (2013: 6-10) list many aspects of an environmentally conscious social work practice, such as: respect for ecological limits; sustainable practices to include the real cost of consummative products and foods; search for globally just practice linked to political philosophies and environmental social movements that advocate for reduction in growth, unfettered consumerism and exploitation of the world's natural resource for more sustainable environmental practices. Further, it is argued that the myth of unending economic growth needs challenging and its link to using up the natural resources quicker than it can regenerate needs constant reminding and highlighting. Dominelli's (2012: 194-199) environmentally just social work practice begins to address the potential destructive forces of neoliberalism's push for disposable consumerism and the use of non-

renewable sources of energy to fuel economic growth as major factors in environmental degradation and subsequent physical, social, cultural and health problems.

At this stage of development Green or environmental social work has gathered together many elements into its praxis: from citizens creating and protecting green spaces (community gardens, parks, play areas and sporting grounds) to activist work (protecting old growth forests, anti-coal seam gas extraction, and anti-mining and dam construction); to ecological health movements associated with the deep ecology movement as well as links with eco-feminism and Indigenous cultural practices and articulating a critical environmental social work as basis for a sustained and long overdue critique of modernity and capitalism (Gray et al. 2013: 3-5). The biggest challenge is to create an impetus for global action to protect the planet from environmentally related economic, social, political and cultural disasters.

Deep Ecology, Eco-Feminism and Indigenous Culture

Significantly, deep ecology (eco-spiritualism), eco-feminism, and Indigenous cultures traditionally resisted as essentialist and apolitical, or patronised and/or marginalised by the dominant Western economic system and ideologies, are now more likely to be looked upon as exemplars of sustainable livelihood and an *entrée* into a paradigmatic shift that Besthorn advocates (2011: 254). Each sees nature as encompassing all living things and seeks a harmonious relationship with the natural world, as what happens in the natural world happens to us as human beings. Deep ecological social work coalesces along three domains: environmental awareness, spiritual sensitivity and political activism that calls for a solidarity to act globally to secure an ecological balance for all (Baard 2015: 25-27). Deep ecology links spirituality with caring for the Earth and adoption of lifestyles that can be applied universally and are possible to sustain without injustice to fellow humans and other species (plants and animals) (Baard 2015: 26; Besthorn 2013: 35). Eco-feminism highlights the interconnectedness of women and nature and includes non-human animals in the moral community, arguing that contemporary environmental issues are also a feminist issue (Alston and Whittenbury 2012: 9-10; Besthorn and McMillen 2002: 224). Eco-feminism sees the repression of women by patriarchy and the offensive against nature by capitalism as interconnected. Indigenous social work highlights a profound connection and respect for the environment and everyone's responsibility to care for and nurture its diversity, and to prevent its ecological destruction (Muller 2014: 87-88; Gray et al. 2012: 9). Indigenous activism to save traditional lands and protect the environment for Indigenous sovereignty such as: protests in North Dakota (USA) by the Oglala Lakota Sioux tribe to gas pipeline; The

Caribou and Beaver Lake Cree First Nation's (Canada) opposition to Alberta tar sand mining; and the Wangan and Jagalingou peoples' (Australia) opposition to the Adani coal extraction in the Galilee basin are current examples of Indigenous activism. These land-based peoples are desperately trying to protect the natural resources on which they live, produce food, sustain community culture and their cosmovision. Indigenous practices argue for an ontological interconnectedness with nature; its deep and resonating belief in the interdependence of all living things and the sacredness of the earth and its bountiful (albeit non-renewable) offerings (Muller 2014: 233-238). Deep ecological, Eco-feminism, and Indigenous social work all argue for a reconnection of human beings with nature and for seeing all life forms as interconnected and in a delicate balance. Each approach suggests an environmental practice that is more sustainable and life affirming. A healthy environment is essential to human wellbeing. Incorporating these perspectives into an eco-centric and Green social work practice provides a way forward.

Conclusion

The challenge for social work is to continue to name the concerns and seek solutions and practice responses that effectively address the issues raised in this article. Green social work is offered as an alternative to current politics of denial and inaction. A distinguishing feature of this alternative and environmentally focused perspective is the encouragement to move away from nature for its instrumental value to protecting it from environmental destruction by man-made activities and increasing natural disasters. The question, though, is how can we overcome our seeming indifference to the Earth and the impact of climate change in a way that will secure a healthy future? There is no doubt that the threatening and escalating deterioration of the earth's climate change systems and ecological communities has personal, social and economic impact as well as potentially irreversible environmental damage on both human and non-human species. We know that the earth's absorptive capacity is limited and that severe climate change is already evident as a result. Given that scientists have been talking about these changes and the urgent need to act for several decades we can assume that relying on scientific evidence is not enough. As indispensable as they are, scientific advances and technological tools already available for renewal sources of energy and protection of the earth's ecosystems have failed to gather government support and are a long way off for large scale use in the transition to sustainability (Lysack 2011: 268). As a profession concerned with people's welfare within the domestic realm a radical, politically active social work could be primed to lead a way forward to articulate an eco-environmentally just social work practice. A politics that garnishes the collective will of the people to work towards change in

consumption, to turn away from the need for unending growth and to introduce sustainable green technologies and local community greening is needed. A concerted challenge to capitalism and its destructive environmental, social and economic practices is essential.

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A Critical Social Work Response To Wealth And Income Inequality

CHRISTINE MORLEY AND PHILLIP ABLETT

This paper will argue that wealth and income inequality are among the most pressing issues for contemporary social work. Despite this, social work as a discipline and profession has, in the main, been slow to respond to this growing problem. Critical approaches to social work, however, have always included a commitment to eliminating poverty, promoting equity and addressing both the causes and consequences of socio-economic disadvantage as a core priority. This paper will discuss the contributions critical social work can make to socially informed and ethical responses, particularly through its critical pedagogic, reflective and activist practices in contesting wealth and income inequality.

World leaders like Pope Francis and President Obama, have recently identified rising economic inequality as 'the defining challenge of our time'[1]. This article will argue that wealth and income inequality likewise constitute a definitive test for the viability of contemporary social work and human service practice in Australia. However, the responses to this resurgent and growing problem by mainstream social work, as a discipline and profession, have in the main been slow, contradictory and misdirected by the neoliberal capture of social policy. Australian social work is not alone in this respect; the President of the International Federation of Social Workers, Gary Bailey, urged social workers at a world conference in Melbourne in 2014 to 'become more political' in tackling inequality (Horton 2014). Critical approaches to social work, however, have always addressed both the structural causes and personal consequences of socio-economic inequality in a political manner. This paper will discuss the contributions critical social work is making and can make, particularly through its critical pedagogic, reflective and activist practices in contesting wealth and income inequality.

Wealth And Income Inequality: The Facts

In Australia, as in other capitalist countries, the benefits of economic prosperity are not evenly distributed; some citizens experience the wealth as enabling and opportunity-promoting, while others experience significant disadvantage as a result of social and economic inequality (Morley et al. 2014: 31). The capitalist system has created more wealth globally, at US$250 trillion, than at any other point in history (Credit Suisse 2015: 4). However, despite some improvements, the total number of the world's extreme poor (on less than US$1.90 a day) is the same as it was 200 years ago (Roser 2015) and the absolute 'gap between rich and poor [worldwide] is reaching new extremes' (Oxfam 2016: 2). This gap is growing not only between rich and poor nations but within Western countries, where the OECD (2015: 24) reports income inequality has reached its highest in 50 years.

Rapidly increasing inequality in both income (wages and investments) and wealth (assets minus liabilities) is becoming a crucial social issue for Australia, requiring the urgent attention of government, the welfare sector and social work. The past 40 years has witnessed a major decline in wage-earner's share of national income from a peak of 62.5% in 1975 to around 53.4% by 2014 (Griffith 2011: 15-16; Mitchell 2014). This loss in wages has been re-concentrated upwards into profit, particularly from the 1990s onwards. By 2014, the wealthiest 20% of Australians owned 61% of total household net worth, which is 71 times the wealth of the bottom 20%, whose share is barely 1% of national private wealth (Richardson and Denniss 2014: 10). Further research by Oxfam Australia (2014: 2) claims the top 1% of Australians own the same wealth as the bottom 60%. Researchers at the Australia Institute say 'the income share of the top 1% has doubled, and the wealth share of the top 0.0001 (the richest one-millionth) has quintupled' in recent decades (Douglas et al. 2014: 8), with the richest 7 people in Australia now owning more than the poorest 1.73 million households (the bottom 20%) (Richardson and Denniss 2014: 2). At the other end of the wealth spectrum, the bottom 20% rely on 'Newstart'[2] to survive. This is the second lowest unemployment benefit of all OECD countries, offering a level of income support that is 20% below Australia's relative poverty-line (Denniss and Baker

2012: 19). Consequently, one in every six Australian children now lives in poverty (Douglas et al. 2014: 14).

International research reports similar findings about increasing global wealth inequality. The richest 1% of the global population now have more wealth than half of the rest of the world, whereas the bottom 80% have just 6% of the world's wealth (Oxfam 2016: 9). These profound wealth disparities have exploded in the past 10 years, with the richest 10% receiving 50% of the growth in incomes, and the richest 1% monopolising 22% of these increases (Ostry et al. 2014). An earlier Oxfam (2013: 2) report shows that the richest 1% globally has increased its income by 60% over the past 20 years, with the global financial crisis (GFC) accelerating, rather than impeding, the financial concentration of wealth. Consequently, in 2016 the richest 62 people in the world possess more wealth than the poorest 3.6 billion people (Oxfam 2016: 2). Whilst international comparisons demonstrate that wealth inequality in Australia is not yet as pronounced as in some other liberal-capitalist societies, the rate at which Australia is advancing towards greater inequality is faster than in most comparable OECD countries (Douglas et al. 2014: 38).

The disadvantage associated with growing socio-economic inequality has profound and widespread impacts for all Australians. Research identifies a range of adverse consequences strongly associated with increasing inequality, including intergenerational poverty (Krueger 2012) and related social problems like increasing crime rates, higher rates of suicide, increasing morbidity and mortality rates; amplified mental health problems and rates of violence (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Douglas et al. 2014: 14); all of which are key areas for social work. However, recent calls from world leaders and multi-lateral organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Economic Forum (WEF), to investigate mechanisms to arrest wealth and income inequality, are unusual. The divisions have become so disproportionate that they risk dramatically stunting economic growth through several mechanisms including weakening progress in health and education, producing investment-reducing political and economic instability, and undermining the social consensus needed to adapt in the face of major shocks (Douglas et al. 2014: 16; see also Stiglitz 2012: 112-116; Piketty 2014: 263). Recent OECD data suggests that rising inequality reduces economic growth by 0.35 of a percentage point per year, representing a cumulative loss of 8.5% over a 25-year period (Cingano 2014: 17-18). The IMF similarly demonstrates that a global increase in inequality of 5% (measured by the Gini Coefficient[3]) causes a corresponding decrease of around 0.5% growth per annum (Ostry et al. 2014: 18). Whilst the effects of profound economic inequality are clearly identifiable for the poor, it is becoming apparent that extreme inequality also threatens the rich. Hence, we all have a stake in the redistribution of income and resources. Furthermore, as researchers at the Australia Institute warn 'The longer Australia delays efforts to restore equality of opportunity, the greater the future social, economic and health costs will be' (Douglas et al. 2014: 23).

The Social Context

In twentieth century, Western societies, inequalities in wealth and income were managed by the economic and social policies of diverse welfare-state regimes (Habibis and Walter 2015: 101-103) designed to ameliorate poverty and institute some redistributive measures to avoid internal social crises. The period from the 1920s to the late 1970s has been called the "Great Compression" (Leigh 2013: 43). whereby wealth and income inequalities were reduced in most Western nations and Australia was more egalitarian than most (Douglas et al. 2014: 38). Since the late 1970's, however, in the wake of various crises and globalisation, there has been a generalized retreat from social provision on the part of nation-states in favour of neo-liberal market 'solutions'. Today, economic policies in the OECD vary widely in terms of their regulation or liberalisation of market forces and social policy approaches are likewise varied in their targeting of disadvantage (Carson and Kerr 2014: 15).

In Australia, the reduction of economic inequality was achieved historically through a combination of labour market regulation based on industrial arbitration with strong unions securing a 'living wage' (from 1907-1990s) and government welfare provisions (funded by progressive taxation transfers). Equity promoting policies have included state education, public health outlays, pensions, anti-racial and anti-gender discrimination legislation, national disability insurance, family services and allowances, and paid parental leave (Carson and Kerr 2014: 52-65). However, the past 30 years of economic restructuring has seen a considerable diminution in industrial arbitration and public provision, whereas executive salaries and corporate profits continue to rise. This slide into inequality has been justified by liberal (now neoliberal) economic doctrine, particularly among political conservatives, imposing market-driven, private provision for social problems. Insofar as it considers inequality at all, this approach deploys Kuznet's (1955: 17-18) theory to argue that long-term economic growth alone will decrease inequality without recourse to redistributive policies.

Recent conservative governments have enacted policies that will exacerbate, rather than reduce wealth inequality in Australia (Richardson and Denniss 2014: 2). These include proposed tax cuts for the wealthy, cuts to Medicare, attempts to deregulate higher education increasing student debt and further deregulation of the labour market.

Conservative politicians, while manufacturing unfounded fears about 'out of control public spending' and budget deficits, will publicly subsidise private schooling, private health insurance and superannuation for the affluent (Richardson et al. 2014: 15).

The responsibility for developing and implementing social policies is largely born by governments, but also public/private partnerships and non-government organisations (NGOs). A range of agencies tasked with delivering equity enhancing programs and projects broadly constitute the welfare and human/community services sector, in which many social workers are employed. This (government and non-government) work force, compromising more than half a million workers (513,000 or 4.5% of all employed people in Australia) (ABS 2011) is staffed by professionally trained human/community services practitioners, including social workers. These practitioners do not control policy but neither are they powerless in policy processes or public debate. They can have an equity-promoting influence but only, as Gary Bailey suggests, if they can link their practice to the political domain.

Social Work

According to the Australian Association of Social Workers' (AASW) Education and Accreditation standards, *'The social work profession promotes social change ... and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing'* (AASW 2012: 7 quoting AASW 2010, italics in original). Social workers aim to promote social justice and human rights 'by working to address the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society ... Social workers also pursue their goals through involvement in research, policy development and analysis' (AASW 2012: 5).

Despite this long-standing commitment to social justice, Australian social work's professional association has made only the briefest public statement on rising income inequality (AASW 2014). It recommends six social policy measures to address inequality, including the raising of all benefits above the poverty line, taxing higher incomes and job creation for Indigenous Australians, the long-term unemployed and people with disabilities. Nowhere, however, does it indicate how social workers or the community services sector might promote these measures. In practice, many interventions responding to the adversities of wealth and income inequality are contradictory and confused (Davis and Wainwright 2005: 261). However, it is not the case that social workers or their professional body have simply abandoned social justice (O'Brien 2011: 143). Rather, the dominant neoliberal discourse on welfare provision, and in the education of the welfare professions, has occluded its structural and political dimension (Mullaly 2010: 12-13).

Most social workers are employed in government or government-sponsored organisations and the neoliberal colonisation of government policies since the 1980's has privileged managerial and market mechanisms for addressing social needs and emphasised 'individual responsibility' for poverty and unemployment. This has influenced service provision in ways that positions practitioners to reinforce, rather than contest, social and economic exclusion (Wallace and Pease 2011: 132). This occurs through individualised assessment and treatment practices that overlook the role of socio-economic factors in producing and maintaining inequality (Marston and McDonald 2008: 262). Therefore mainstream practice responses from the helping professions range from assisting individuals excluded from the labour market to adapt and cope with the injustices they suffer through to blaming the victims for their exclusion (Parrott 2014: 17).

The practitioners who deal most directly with the realities of economic inequality work in the fields of unemployment, income support, homelessness, job placement schemes, food relief, emergency housing, mental health, substance abuse, and so on. Mullaly (2010: 12-13) says their constant focus on the consequences, rather than the causes of inequality, separates the personal distress of poverty from the political realm. Also, as social work and the human services are increasingly privatised, many fields of practice have become commercialised industries. Unemployment, for example, is cluttered with private providers of job seeker 'activation' schemes pursuing profit. The unemployed are often 'managed' by practitioners and demonised by public narratives which blame them for failing to acquire jobs that do not exist (Mitchell 2015: np). In this context, the dominant practice becomes case management, which includes protecting the orchestrated scarcity of organisational resources, ensuring that people don't become 'too dependent' or access 'more than their fair share'. This surveying and policing of individual welfare recipients as "cases" effectively marginalises the broader issues of inequality and poverty (Marston and McDonald 2008: 262).

Unfortunately, strong currents in social work education, abet the neoliberal agenda by renewed emphasis on psychological therapies and managerial skills, at the expense of social science curricula on inequality (Morley 2016: 40-43). This deprives graduates of vital knowledge regarding the socio-economic structures impacting service-users' life-problems. Consequently and unsurprisingly, many social work graduates can demonstrate 'attitudes that could be considered ambivalent, confused, and at the extreme, hostile to service users living in poverty' (Parrott 2014: 5; see also Agllias et al. 2016: 7).

Despite this, social work and the human services continue to occupy a vital, if contested, terrain in responding to economic inequality and in promoting initiatives for a more equitable distribution of social resources.

Critical Social Work

Critical social work approaches claim not only to relieve individual suffering, but also to participate in changing unjust and oppressive structures that give rise to it. Critical practitioners do not act alone but collaboratively as part of broader, 'non-professional' networks and alliances within and beyond the welfare sector, with their fellow citizens, service users and constituent communities. Critical social work in Australia contests economic inequality through its promotion of (1) critical social analyses, (2) critical education, (3) consciousness raising and critical reflection and (4) practitioner activism for social justice.

Critical social analyses of inequality

At the heart of critical and anti-oppressive approaches to social work since the 1970s has been critical social analysis, linking privately experienced problems to wider societal structures, in all fields of practice. Originally, this was inspired by the critical theory of Karl Marx, exposing the ways that global capitalism enables powerful groups (a ruling-ownership class) to exploit labour and control others (workers and the unemployed) to their advantage (Parrott 2014: 33), generating economic inequality. Subsequent feminist and anti-racist theories extended such analyses into the way inequalities are gendered and racialised. Critical postmodern theories (Fook 2016: 12-16) recognise multiple bases of oppression without, contrary to some fears on the Left, abandoning a discourse of social justice. All of these perspectives are utilised by critical social workers to expose inequality-generating policies and practices. More recently, with the ascendancy of neoliberal discourse, new critiques are enriching critical social work discourse. The analyses of the economists, Thomas Piketty and Guy Standing, are particularly instructive in our current context.

Thomas Piketty's best-selling *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, has focused attention on the increasing wealth concentration of the upper one per cent, which he argues is due to capital returns outstripping productivity and wages (economic growth) in a way that it hasn't since the nineteenth century (2014: 571). According to Piketty, this is the fundamental, inequality-generating contradiction of capitalism, which can only be corrected by strong regulation and universal progressive taxation on wealth. Another aspect of his work shows how current wage inequality is exacerbated by excessive executive payments, while the remainder of the workforce are increasingly made insecure or casualised.

Guy Standing (2014: 1) refers to this emerging group of insecure workers and the unemployed as a 'global "precariat," consisting of many millions around the world without an anchor of stability'. A key feature of the 'precariat', according to Standing (2014: 11) is not just low income, or precarious work, 'but the lack of community support in times of need, lack of assured enterprise or state benefits, and lack of private benefits to supplement money earnings'. Standing also believes that the precariat will engender a new form of politics, one that leads to a new understanding of value beyond the capitalist market but also advocates for a universal basic income. Social work and human service educators and activists are adopting these analyses, as for example in the Basic Income Guarantee Australia (BIGA) research site at the Queensland University of Technology, promoting resources for income security and the elimination of poverty (BIGA 2013; Mays et al. 2016).

Critical education on inequality

Critical social work has always had a strong pedagogic function, both in the education of practitioners and in community education regarding many social issues, including inequality and poverty. There are clusters of critical social work researchers, educators and courses in a number of progressive university programs that further this sort of pedagogy. An online audit of publically available unit outlines shows around half the social work programs throughout Australia retain subjects like sociology, political economy, social policy, progressive community work, human rights, Indigenous and gender studies, all addressing inequality. This is bolstered by the research activities of a handful of social work, human service and social policy scholars who investigate economic inequality, its impacts and possible policy responses (ACOSS 2015; Baines and McBride 2014; Goldberg 2012; Habibis and Walter, 2015; Hosken 2016; Krumer-Nevo et al. 2009; Marston et al. 2013; Mays et al. 2016). Unfortunately, this knowledge base is under threat by moves towards a managerial and individually therapeutic-based curricula. However, progressively-oriented social work programs have also provided havens for critical social knowledge, when universities close or limit their social science offerings in pursuit of more profitable programs.

Some critical social work educators like Stuart Rees in co-founding the Sydney Peace Foundation, John Tomlinson in co-founding BIGA, Tony Vinzons in heading public inquiries on educational and rural disadvantage, and Maggie Walter's development of critical-Indigenous measures for the Closing the Gap campaign, have also played significant roles as public intellectuals in challenging inequality.

Social work educators, like other social scientists, bring knowledge of wealth and income inequality into the

classroom and sometimes reach wider publics. Unlike sociologists or economists though, critical practitioners also bring this awareness into direct conversation and practice with other professionals and those most adversely affected by inequality.

Consciousness raising and critical reflection

Most critical practitioners do not head public inquiries or research centres on inequality. They are involved in the daily lives of those who struggle for resources and recognition, often working in relief, advocacy or referral services. Their critical analysis and education is tested here in feeding the hungry, housing the homeless and helping those without money access funds, while also addressing the wider causes (O'Brien 2011: 149). It also enables them to see their service or program as part of a broader struggle that can either increase or reduce the problems of wealth and income inequality. Consequently, some will join networks agitating for change, contribute to a blog site, develop workplace bulletins assessing the impact of government policy on vulnerable people, organise anti-poverty activities, assist research efforts and attempt to influence social policy processes. More immediatey though, critical practice (whether in case-work or community development) means engaging with constituents in a way that does not reinforce victim-blaming stereotypes in a systemically unequal world.

An important element of critical practice has been referred to as 'consciousness raising' (Mullaly 2010: 237-40), challenging the dominant construction of poverty as resulting from individual failure, which is often internalised, and offering an alternative framing that includes the context of inequality. As Parrott (2014: 33) states,

> … being able to explain a service user's position as not being a consequence of deficient cultural attitudes or as a result of individual failure requires an understanding of the structural reasons for poverty… This means that these ideas should be translated at the individual level as service users may blame themselves for their poverty and social workers [who lack a structural analysis and compassion] may in turn blame services users.

This reframing process may result in a greater sense of agency for the service-user both personally and perhaps as part of a collective response to oppression (Pease 2000: 146-147). Ideally, the reframing is achieved through mutual dialogue but given disparities in power and knowledge, there is always the risk of the practitioner adopting an 'expert' role. A strategy utilised by many progressive practitioners to maintain alignment of their practice with their espoused emancipatory goals is critical self-reflection (Morley 2014: 178).

This recognises that even the most informed analysis of inequality is mediated by the practitioner's own social position and constructions, which in turn are shaped by a variety of discourses. Critical reflection encourages practitioners to constantly interrogate these in their own practice, reconstructing possibilities for action (Fook 2016: 127). New research demonstrates the promise of critically reflective practices in enabling practitioners to be more effective agents of change (Morley 2014: 169-178).

Practitioner activism

In theory, social work associations ascribe a central place to activism for social justice in their various codes of ethics and mission statements (Greenslade et al. 2014: 423) but in practice, confronting wealth and income inequality is a road less travelled (Reisch and Andrews, 2001:16). However, an activist orientation contesting neoliberal policy is maintained by critical practitioners both in community development settings (Ife 2016: 36, 215) and service providing institutions (Greenslade et al. 2014: 427). In the former, this is evident in collective organising for anti-poverty campaigns and even the development of alternative economies through such things as LETS (Local Energy Transfer System) schemes. As Ife points out, economic crises expand the informal economy and in the absence of cash, local people will develop their own community currencies (2016: 216) that can play a role in meeting people's needs. In the Sunshine Coast region, for example, a number of social work graduates (amongst others) are actively involved in the promotion of such schemes.

Inside statutory institutions, under neoliberal management, the scope for activism is much bleaker. While social workers still engage in debating policy, client advocacy, union action, lobbying or join a protest 'off-duty', a number also feel compelled to engage in covert acts of resistance to challenge injustice (Greenslade et al. 2014: 7). Greenslade's research shows this can take the form of creative 'rule bending', non-compliance, stretching professional boundaries, over-servicing and breaking the law. She argues that the profession needs to recognise this as part of what constitutes social work in neoliberal times. Gray and Webb suggest that 'counter-acts of resistance and oppositional tactics against the totality of neoliberal domination' (2013: 213) are symptomatic of a resurgent 'New Left' in social work. The resistance of social workers to austerity measures has not yet assumed the form of a political movement such as those listed by Iain Ferguson in his contribution to this edition, in Britain, Hong Kong, Hungary, Spain, Slovenia and Greece but this is just a matter of time. As we have tried to show, however, the trace elements for the formation of such a movement are present.

Conclusion

In the absence of a major shift in social policy, wealth and income inequality will continue to worsen in Australian society. In many respects the political conversation around this inequality has only just begun. However, the social and political redress of this problem is an urgent priority for any social work that makes claims to being emancipatory. Critical analysis and pedagogy, public education, conscientisation and critical reflection, and practitioner activism within community-based and institutional service settings are key ways in which anti-oppressive social work is engaging with this issue in pursuit of a more just society.

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End Notes

1. Barack Obama, Remarks on Economic Mobility, THEARC, Washington D.C. 4 December 2013.

2. The Australian unemployment benefit for a single person (with no children) is AU$263.80 per week at 12/09/16.

3. The Gini Coefficient is the main statistical measure used to plot inequality by measuring the ratio between the top and bottom brackets (Deciles or Quintiles) of income/wealth within a population. Australia's Gini stands around 0.33, above the OECD (2014) average of 0.31.

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that you cannot sincerely try to help another without helping yourself.

----- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Human Rights and Critical Social Work: Competing Epistemologies for Practice

JIM IFE AND SONIA MAGDALENA TASCÓN

The paper argues that the idea of human rights remains a 'two-edged sword' for critical social work practice. On one hand, human rights implies a progressive stance for critical social workers. However, human rights can be used to maintain conservative perspectives on critical social work reinforcing the neoliberal status quo. The paper analyses literature critiquing human rights theory as a Western-centric development perspective concluding that critical social work practice can benefit from an understanding of human rights that seeks to challenge top-down approaches to human rights implementation.

This paper examines the interaction of human rights and social work, and considers the possibilities, but also the limitations, of applying a 'human rights framework' within critical social work. Human rights can seem an attractive idea to critical social workers, implying a progressive approach to social work practice. But human rights can also be applied to social work from a more conservative perspective, which denies the possibility of creative critical practice. The idea of human rights is thus a 'two-edged sword' for progressive social work.

Conventional views of human rights, from within liberal discourse, have been dominated by legal world views (Douzinas 2000; Tascón 2012: 864; Ife 2010). Rights are understood as guaranteed through legislation, bills of rights, constitutional guarantees, and through regulations and administrative procedures. The origin of this regime is the United Nations (UN), with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the various other declarations, and the human rights conventions, which seek to ensure that signatories enshrine human rights principles into their national legal frameworks, through the idea of 'international law'. The legal approach makes lawyers the primary human rights professionals, and sees human rights as achieved and protected through legal advocacy and law reform. There is no doubt that there have been significant achievements from this approach to human rights, and the world is a better place because of the work of human rights lawyers and advocates. However, the dominance of the legal perspective disguises the limitations of such an approach to the rights of humans, and this has led to critique from Marxist, feminist, postmodern and post-colonial perspectives (Tascón and Ife 2008: 307). These critiques are important, but the significant point for present purposes is that they have often been mounted as critiques of human rights

per se, rather than critiques of the discourse. That is, as a discursive regime (Foucault 1978), it has developed through dominant knowledges, one of the most significant being legal knowledge. A second dominant feature of its discursive nature is that its contemporary form developed during modernity, a fact that has had a significant impact. If we accept that modernity arose to help explain and organise the epistemological and material needs of a particular group of people – largely those of Western European stock – then human rights also followed suit. The critique that emerges from this view is that human rights define a quite particular type of human subjectivity in the guise of 'universal', but intended for widespread and international application (Brown 2004: 241). In this paper we acknowledge the importance, indeed the necessity, of the various critiques, but wish to affirm the *idea* of human rights as an important one that attempts to help identify a kind of international human connection. We seek to do this, however, by acknowledging its current epistemological limitations and to extend it beyond the constraints of the legal paradigm, in ways that can be achieved through progressive social work practice, around ideas of collaborative transformation.

There is not space here to outline in detail the various critiques of conventional legally-based human rights (Meckled-Garcia and Cali 2006; Ife 2016: 3). They can, however, be summarised as follows:

• The legal approach to human rights devalues those rights which are not readily justiciable, i.e. that cannot be achieved or protected through the law. These include the right to be treated with dignity and respect, the right to education, the right to health care, the right to cultural expression, and many others. Inevitably a legal approach privileges civil and political rights and devalues economic, social and cultural rights, and

collective rights. For such rights to be achieved and protected we need more than the law; they require support from government policy and community attitudes, rather than from lawyers and judges (Douzinas 2000; Tascón 2012: 864).

• There is a patriarchal bias in the conventional approach to human rights. This is because those rights that are most readily justiciable tend to be human rights in the public domain: rights of free expression, free association, political participation, freedom from discrimination, etc. in civil society. These are stereotypically men's human rights. Women tend to suffer human rights violations in the private domain, where the law is much less effective in rights protection. While more extreme forms of such abuse – rape and domestic violence – can be addressed by the law (often with limited effectiveness), less extreme forms of rights violation remain unprotected in the domestic sphere. The law is inadequate in protecting freedom of expression within a family, adequate distribution of resources within a family, on-going low-level humiliation and lack of respect, and so on. These are human rights abuses typically suffered by women, children, people with disabilities and seniors, and to protect their human rights we need something more than laws and UN conventions (Ashworth 1999).

• There has been a consistent critique of human rights as essentially a Western concept, which, by assuming a position of universalism, imposes a Western view of rights on the rest of the world. Hence human rights have been seen as part of the Western colonial project (Pereira 1997). This has led to debates about the validity of universalism in human rights, and the importance of context. Given that the dominant human rights discourse emerged within the worldview of Enlightenment modernity, and incorporates a Western view of the 'human' who has the rights, this critique must be taken seriously.

• We take the view that a naïve universalism in human rights is untenable in that it contains within it an implicit assumption that the human who has the rights is a child of modernity, and hence to apply this form of human rights beyond Western societies amounts to a reinforcement of colonialism by imposing a particular worldview on others. Similarly, a naïve relativism relying entirely on context is also untenable, and renders us powerless to even comment on practices in any culture other than our own. Hence, we take the view that human rights imply a tension between universalism (or perhaps quasi-universalism) and the contextual – each understood in a more nuanced way. This tension means that human rights are never

easy or straightforward, but rather the on-going tension requires both analysis and dialogue for ideas of human rights to provide a framework for effective and progressive (i.e. counter-colonial) action (Ife 2012; Rajagopal 2003).

• The way in which human rights has been institutionalised, within the UN and legal jurisdictions, has meant that it has been an essentially top-down process. Our 'human rights' have been defined for us, by well-meaning politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats, academics and selected Non-government oranisation (NGO) activists, and are typically the result of political compromise. The vast majority of the world's population has had no say in how those rights are defined, what is included, what is excluded, and the language used to construct them. This in itself might be seen to be a violation of human rights: our right to define our rights (Ife 2010; Goodale and Merry 2007).

• Where there are 'human rights professionals' (usually lawyers), there is the problem of professional power. Professionals excel at defining people's problems for them, and prescribing what needs to be done. While professional expertise is undeniably useful, its uncritical application can effectively disempower the population, as human rights become a matter for the human rights experts, rather than the people most affected (Khor 2011: 105).

Each of these critiques deserves a paper (at least) in its own right, and all that can be undertaken here is a brief summary to indicate the complexity and significance of each issue. Taken together, they show that the field of human rights is anything but simple and straightforward. Rather, it is highly contested, and opens up debate and dialogue rather than providing simple answers.

Despite these complexities, there has been a tendency among some social workers to adopt a human rights framework in a relatively straightforward and unproblematic way (Ife 2012, 2016). This has accepted the dominant discourse of human rights, and has sought to define a social work that helps to apply human rights as conventionally understood. This usually requires the use of various human rights conventions (e.g. on the rights of the child, the rights of refugees, etc.) to provide a purpose for practice, and sees social work as helping to implement human rights as part of a broader 'human rights movement'. Almost inevitably, this has involved close collaboration with human rights lawyers, and by doing so it is all too easy for social workers to become 'handmaidens' of the lawyers, assisting them in their legal practice. This is analogous to an earlier era when social workers were the handmaidens of the medical profession, and saw their role as to assist the medical practitioner in

the social aspects of patient 'treatment' and 'care', rather than giving primacy to social work values of social justice. This is not to deny the value of such forms of social work, which have undoubtedly contributed a good deal to the wellbeing of social work clients, in a primarily medical or legal practice framework. But our argument here is that this has sold social work short. Rather than uncritically adopting a legal approach to human rights, critical social work has the capacity to use a more developmental and participatory human rights perspective, accepting the critiques of conventional human rights outlined above, but using the ideas of 'human' and 'rights' for creative, dialogical practice.

This perspective requires a broader view of human rights, which questions the tradition of Enlightenment modernity with its quest for (a particular type of) certainty, order and predictability, and its acceptance of 'top-down' wisdom, expertise, and practice. An alternative approach, which critical social work is in a good position to develop, starts with the idea of the 'human' who has the rights, recognising that in any construction of human rights there is an assumption of what constitutes 'humanity' and the 'ideal human' who has reached full human potential. Such constructions are clearly formulated through a type of relativism that recognises cultural specificities, which the conventional view of human rights largely fails to do. Modern assumptions of human rights begin from the universality of 'humanity' grounded in the European Enlightenment: the ideal human in this worldview is individual, autonomous, young, able-bodied, male, secular and disconnected from the natural world, which is seen in instrumental terms and serves only as a 'resource' for the achievement of the human ideal. Starting with this recognition enables social workers to explore with people, through dialogue, their alternative assumptions about humanity, and this can then become the basis for defining the rights that people see as important, and the corresponding duties, which may fall on family members, community, civil society, local, state and federal governments, local businesses, large corporations, media bodies, educational institutions, and so on. Human rights understood this way begin not with the Universal Declaration, but rather with a dialogical examination of culture, life experience, community norms and values, within the direct experience of the people concerned. The Universal Declaration, and other human rights instruments, might later be used as a point of reference, e.g. to look at how a community-generated charter of rights and responsibilities compares with the human rights regime of the UN, but primacy is given clearly to the local, contextual constructions of what 'humanity' and 'rights' mean.

Social work from this approach is much more than the simple application of human rights conventions. Rather,

it frees up the idea of human rights practice as being dialogical and transformational, allowing people to articulate their dreams and aspirations located in a set of relationships that can be deemed as 'local' and yet to also be imagined as recognising their relationships to those outside their local space. Because human rights inevitably imply human responsibilities, this necessitates an examination not just of what rights can be claimed, but also who bears responsibility for the realisation and protection of those rights, both in their local manifestation, but also as this extends beyond local borders. From this point of view, human rights cannot be considered in individual isolation. The term 'my rights' has no meaning unless there are others to help me meet those rights, and hence human rights can be seen as requiring people to be bound together in a community of rights and responsibilities. Human rights are therefore collective, and require collective action if they are to be met. Furthermore, human rights force us to consider the collective as needing to take into account the immediate locality. In this sense, human rights can be seen as challenging the very idea of neoliberal individualism, as well as parochial nationalism; indeed, neoliberals have sensed this in their opposition to ideas and regimes of human rights (at least beyond property rights, which neoliberals hold dear) (Kristol 1989; Moyn 2014: 147).

This approach to human rights-based social work can be described through a brief discussion of social work with Indigenous People and communities, and how different 'human rights' approaches might work. (In this discussion we will be referring mostly to the situation in Australia with Aboriginal peoples, but similar comments would likely apply elsewhere.) The conventional, legally-constructed, top-down view of human rights is seen in statements about 'Indigenous human rights' made by well-meaning white lawyers, social workers, activists and advocates. Such statements assume the validity of 'universal' human rights as stated in UN conventions, and then define Aboriginal rights to health, housing, education, safety etc. as if these are understood in the same way as they are in the mainstream white community, i.e. 'white' definitions of what counts as adequate health, education, housing, and so on. This naturally leads to 'close the gap' language, as has occurred in Australia, positing the white community as setting the standard and defining Indigenous communities as deficient in that they do not 'meet' these 'standards'. Such an approach to policy and practice, though undoubtedly well intentioned, is assimilatory, in that embedded in its meanings is an assumption that white Australians are the standard and Indigenous People need to be 'more like us'. It invalidates Indigenous understandings of what counts as 'good' housing, education, etc., and sets a standard that is based on assumptions that may be culturally quite inappropriate for Indigenous People, for example that going to school

equates with education. In effect, the definition of what counts as a right has been defined by one set of people, without the dialogical approach we mentioned above.

This can be further understood by a consideration of the 'human' part of 'human rights'. The discourse of human rights emerged with the Enlightenment, and hence it is an Enlightenment 'human' who has the rights, and who is at the heart of the Western human rights discourse. As suggested above, the ideal Enlightenment human is individual, autonomous, young, able-bodied, male, secular and disconnected from the natural world (Tascón and Ife 2008: 307). But this definition of the ideal human is far removed from Indigenous understandings of humanity, which are typically collective, inter-dependent, valuing the wisdom of elders, imbued with a sense of the sacred, and intimately connected to land and to the natural world. Thus, to speak simply of 'Indigenous human rights' from a white Western perspective is to impose a construction of humanity that is at odds with Indigenous cultures and worldviews. It is a simple perpetuation of colonisation, denying to Indigenous People the very foundation of their humanity. Such an approach to human rights is clearly not a good basis for progressive practice.

Instead, a critical social work approach to human rights would not start with UN declarations and conventions, or with Western ideas of 'closing the gap'. Instead, it would seek to allow space for Indigenous People to explore ideas of rights and responsibilities, both individual and collective, from within their own cultural experiences and worldviews. Such social work would avoid conventional 'human rights education', where people are 'taught' their rights, and instead would seek to enable Indigenous People to define human rights in their own way, from their own constructions of 'humanity'. It would also seek to have those voices heard, acknowledged and validated, so that human rights can become a powerful tool for Indigenous People to assert their identity and to claim the resources needed for their defined rights to be achieved. In this form of practice, social workers would see themselves as working in solidarity with Indigenous People and communities, walking alongside them and supporting them in their struggles, while steadfastly refusing to define 'needs' or 'rights' for them. This approach begins with Indigenous understandings of what it means to be human, and what rights and duties flow from that (Turner 2010, Sveiby and Skuthorpe 2006).

From this kind of social work, it is then possible to develop genuine dialogue about human rights, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, from different cultural backgrounds, can discuss together, and tell stories together, about different ways of being human and of achieving humanity. This would promote diversity and cross-cultural understanding, and enable Indigenous

People to define human rights in ways that resonate with their own experience, and to have others appreciate the richness and the potential of those traditions. While this approach takes place in differing cultural and geographical contexts, it is important to differentiate it from the kind of naïve cultural relativism that has been used by some non-Western political leaders as a way of justifying their ignoring international human rights standards, for example in the treatment of political opponents. The approach described here requires deep listening and dialogical reflection, and is far removed from such political expediency.

Another example that can be used here to illustrate 'another' set of epistemologies to help us understand and express human rights is through the arts; indeed, many non-Western peoples have used this as a primary means in furthering their human rights. This has largely to do with the story-telling potential of the arts, and so our use of the term 'the arts' here is not in their exclusivist, elitist, manifestations, but where the arts are used to help us confront other peoples' realities, and our complicity in the development of such issues and continuing dispossessions, in more immediate and embodied ways. The arts have an experiential dimension that enables social issues to be illuminated in powerfully 'felt' ways. They have been used in conjunction with other forms of activism most effectively, as can be seen particularly in the growing phenomenon of human rights film festivals around the world (Human Rights Film Network 2016). The use of the arts and visual images to portray human rights violations and possible ways towards social change, has begun to break down the legal domination of the human rights discourse and introduced a more inclusive and phenomenological understanding of human rights (Tascón 2012).

As well as the critiques of human rights outlined earlier, a new and potentially more radical critique must now be considered. Human rights need to adopt and embody a diverse set of epistemologies to recognise the different ways of understanding 'human subjectivity, human inter-subjectivity, as well as human-to-other-beings relationships. To talk about human rights is, inevitably, to be anthropocentric, yet we live at a time when such anthropocentrism is destroying the future not only for humanity but for other species as well. Ideas of rights need to be extended beyond the human, to include animal rights and the rights of 'nature' or of 'mother earth'. This has been perhaps best articulated in the idea of Pachamama as described in Bolivia and Ecuador, where the earth itself is seen as having fundamental rights, and humans have responsibilities to respect those rights (Pachamama Alliance 2016). Such a change of consciousness is a major step for Enlightenment modernity, based on the separation of 'man' and 'nature', but for Indigenous

People in many parts of the world, such an idea is much more familiar and far more natural than this. We will need to embrace such worldviews if human 'civilisation' is to survive on this planet, and we would suggest that the idea of human rights needs to be reconfigured to include ecocentric rather than anthropocentric thinking. Critical social work can play a part in helping to achieve this, by rejecting the top-down approach to human rights practice, and instead by helping to explore and validate other worldviews. Integrating such ecocentric understandings not only into our ideas of human rights, but also into the day-to-day reality of social work practice may be a challenging task, but it is surely a task that is not only important, but ultimately essential.

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Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope… and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

----- *Robert F. Kennedy*

A Critical Approach To Citizen-Led Social Work: Putting the political back into community development practice

ATHENA LATHOURAS

If critical social work is to be committed to the pursuit of social justice and human rights, then collective approaches to practice – those that attempt to make substantive difference to the lives of community members and their communities – are imperative. A critical approach to community development is one that is community-led, develops a collective analysis about the drivers that create and perpetuate poverty, exclusion and disadvantage, and then organises and structures its processes beyond the local level to effect social change.

A case study is presented on The Coalition of Community Boards, which is a network of 'People's Organisations' in Queensland, Australia who are working to better understand neoliberal trends and impacts for their communities. Employing community organising methods, they are advocating inclusion of a civil society agenda with social policy makers and resisting neoliberal trends that are negatively impacting on vulnerable citizens in their communities. Their acts of resistance are a good example of a critical approach to community development.

Introduction

The context for social work practice is ensconced in neoliberalism, the current political ideology overshadowing all predecessors or alternatives. This dominant trend, with its emphasis on individualism, creates a kind of 'amnesia' regarding the social sources of oppression. This means, for example, that if prominent individuals from disadvantaged groups have surmounted barriers, such as racism, there is often a celebration of their individual achievement rather than any appreciation of how unjust barriers still need to change. This is reflected in a tendency for practitioners to overlook that social justice is about changing the life chances of large numbers of people and elevating and empowering whole communities (Ife 2013: 63).

Critical social work takes a politically progressive stance and makes a commitment to questioning our current society, seeking to identify harmful divisions and unequal power relations, and to pursue social justice and human rights (Morley et al. 2014: 2-4). This approach can be contrasted with a politically conservative practice, a stance that seeks to uphold traditional values and social order in spite of inequities and injustice (Edwards 2013: 33-37). The question about how critical practitioners can meaningfully engage in processes that will make a substantive difference to whole communities is salient. This article argues that a critical approach to social work needs to include collective approaches to practice, such as critical community development, if unjust social structures are to change. This approach includes a structural analysis about drivers that create and perpetuate poverty, exclusion and disadvantage, and a commitment to collective practice that takes its processes beyond the local geographical level. By putting progressive politics back into community development (CD) practice, critical practitioners can meaningfully engage with these drivers and increase the potential of outcomes that are not only personally transformative for those involved, but are also socially transformative.

The article begins with an overview of theoretical epochs of CD, and shows that the practice has both politically conservative and progressive orientations. This review highlights why critical approaches to CD are important for social transformation. This literature can be supplemented with theorising from recent research (Lathouras 2012a) that sought to understand propositional knowledge about the capacity of CD as a vehicle to alleviate structural disadvantage, and how this knowledge is being used or re-theorised in everyday practice. A triletic framework for critical CD is presented – *Structural Connecting, Structural Shaping and Structural Politicking*. This approach is illustrated through a case study.

The Coalition of Community Boards (CoCB) can be described as a type of citizen-led social movement comprising people representing locally situated community infrastructure across Queensland. The CoCB has been organising to resist trends resulting from neoliberal drivers in the social services sector that can negatively affect the most vulnerable citizens in their communities, that is, those who lack power and a voice. This citizen-led project is showing that small, place-based organisations are collaborating and innovating as they advocate for a civil-society agenda with makers of social policy. This agenda enables the voice of citizens, families, communities and voluntary associations, those that are independent from government and business.

Theoretical Epochs For CD And Why Critical Approaches Are Important

Theoretical phases and political debates in relation to achieving social change are pertinent to CD practice over time. Popple (1995: 32-39) categorises these as 'pluralist' community work theories; 'radical' and 'socialist' community work theories; 'feminist' and 'anti-racist' community work theories; and also, from wider cultural politics, what has come to be understood as the politics of 'identity and difference' (Shaw and Martin 2000: 405). Each new theory arose out of the critiques of earlier theoretical standpoints. In contemporary times, new theorising has seen the rise of 'social capital', 'critical CD', 'networking' and postmodern approaches.

In the 1960s, 'consensus' approaches stimulated 'self-help' amongst the 'deprived' as governments developed social policy responses to urban decay and many forms of deprivation (Thorpe 1992: 22). The pluralist model followed; this theory views social problems as arising from the 'imbalances in democratic and bureaucratic systems' (Thorpe 1992: 23). The role of CD in this paradigm is to help various groups overcome the problems they face in their neighbourhoods by mutual support, by sharing activities and by attempting to secure better services for their members (Popple 1995: 33). Although pluralist approaches acknowledge the structural nature of deprivation and recognise the political dimension of community work, with their focus on micro-change, they are primarily concerned with social consensus and only offer marginal improvements (Popple 1995: 33).

Contemporary community work in democratic societies has seen the rise and ascendance of social capital as a concept associated with sustainable CD. De Filippis (2008: 35) refers to social capital as forms of 'neo-liberal communitarianism'. With a focus on consensus-building and 'win-win' relations, these concepts are based on a core belief that society is conflict-free, which has structurally disconnected communitarianism from political and economic capital (De Filippis 2001: 793) and has thus de-politicised the practice (De Filippis 2008: 36).

Ledwith's (2011) *Critical Community Development* and Gilchrist's (2009) *Networking* approaches to CD both align with the structuralist paradigm. This paradigm understands that poverty is perpetuated by economic, political and social structures. An unequal distribution of resources and power throughout society is created, which results in various oppressive forces and structures subordinating less powerful groups (Popple and Quinney 2002: 77). Ledwith's and Gilchrist's theorising highlights the need for micro–macro structural connections, whereby communities engage in meta-networking to work for structural change.

Postmodern approaches to CD respond to the diversity and heterogeneity that are part of our cultural and social experiences (Kenny 2011: 119). The relevance and challenge of this type of thinking for contemporary CD practice involves the acknowledgement that communities and societies are continually changing, an awareness that many sites of power and sources of oppression exist and that struggles occur on all levels. It encourages a plurality of viewpoints and practices in response to these factors (Kenny 2011: 104). In contrast, a negative appraisal of postmodern approaches, which emphasises fragmentation and multiple truths, may lead people to abandon political principles, goals and strategies for a better society, thus creating a political vacuum that can be filled by those seeking power (Kenny 2011: 120).

Powell and Geoghegan (2006: 134) argue that, historically, CD processes that enable active citizens to have a voice about the kinds of societies in which they wish to live have been underpinned by various political ideologies. Shaw (2007: 34) refers to the 'ideological elasticity' of contemporary CD. This concept considers that ideas of community have been appropriated to legitimise or justify a wide range of political positions, and is known as the politics of community (Shaw 2007: 24). Progressive approaches to CD present a number of challenges for us today: the complexity resulting from the various contexts in which the work takes place; the multifaceted scope of social issues facing community members because of globalisation (Pyles 2009: 5); dominant neoliberal discourses; and the number of people involved with alliance-building and collective approaches to practice.

Despite these challenges, when CD has explicit structural and systemic analyses, it is considered radical and progressive (Mendes 2009: 249). Group formation within CD can be seen as taking a politically progressive stance if it places emphasis on consciousness-raising about

oppressive structures and develops strategies for social change that enable participation and effective collective action (Ife 2013: 321). Recent research on the capacity of CD as a vehicle to alleviate structural disadvantage (Lathouras 2012a) highlights that a structural analysis is one that looks for the public elements within either an individual person's private story or a community's localised story. The triletic framework to engage in critical CD practice, introduced earlier, includes Structural Connecting, which seeks to form developmental relationships and create a community analysis that leads to collective action; Structural Shaping, which develops a nuanced understanding of power and looks for incremental change across systems; and Structural Politicking, in which citizens participate in processes for democratic equality (Lathouras 2012a). The next section of this article shows how this progressive theory can be applied to a case study.

The Coalition of Community Boards

The CoCB is demonstrating a critical approach to CD with its ability to undertake a structural analysis that looks for the root causes of oppression and disadvantage and seeks to address them at their source (Ledwith 2011: 11).

The network formed in response to two main structural trends in the community services sector. The first trend involves recent Australian governments' neoliberal 'reform' agendas to reduce their role in community-level activity. The result is over one billion dollars of funding cuts to the community service sector and a dramatically reduced workforce, leaving vulnerable citizens without support (ACOSS 2015a). At the same time, wealth inequality and poverty are rising (ACOSS 2015b: 8).

The second related trend involves greater centralisation of services: large, national and more corporately operated (so-called community) non-government organisations contract and partner with government to deliver generic services across the sector. Small community service organisations are being bypassed or overlooked for such partnerships (ICAC 2012: 4). The effect of both trends is to deny the voice of local differentiated responses that emerged historically and are specific to community needs.

Structural Connecting

Practice situated within the framework Structural Connecting seeks to form developmental relationships and create a community analysis that leads to collective action. Developmental practice privileges 'bottom-up' work (Lathouras 2010: 18). With this approach, practitioners share power and work with community members, constituents or citizens who set the agenda, the way the work will be undertaken, and any other decision-making

about issues that affect them and their communities (Lathouras 2012b; Pyles 2009: 11).

The CoCB has observed a trend relating to a lack of citizen participation in the running of small community associations. CoCB members believe members of their community association should set priorities for action based on members' perceived needs and hopes for their community. An over-reliance on paid workers to lead organisations, as is often the case with organisations that employ a CEO with a high degree of delegated authority, risks the loss of what are known as 'people's organisations' (Alinsky 1969: 133). These groups are associations for, and are operated by, local people with long-term commitments to, and vested interests in, their communities (Lathouras 2013: 2). Because of this analysis, the CoCB has been focused on building and strengthening the relationships between members to provide peer support around their roles as board members and to develop a collective analysis of trends and issues for them and others in their network.

Together, these groups have found commonalities and developed a vision to sustain their ability to provide locally appropriate services with more robust governance functions. Further, these critical practitioners are demonstrating an engaged network of boards that sees the need for community-owned governance structures to hold a mandate for local work that pursues social justice and human rights. Through this central analysis and to advance their work they foreground the mutuality of their relationships and their ability to gain a shared analysis, which leads to a commitment to collective action.

Structural Shaping

Drawing from critical theories and the framework Structural Shaping, the CoCB holds a structural analysis about power and neoliberal drivers that are leaving small community organisations and the vulnerable community members they support at risk. The coalition holds this analysis in tension with more postmodern understandings of power, for example, that there is more than one way of understanding power because its meanings are diverse and contentious (Gaventa 2011: 6). Powerful structures can be viewed as constructs that can be both deconstructed and reconstructed. This coalition understands that dynamic sets of relationships exist across a system, and that through webs of relations participants co-create new realities.

For example, a recent forum held with 50 network members shared an analysis of the bigger picture trends for government reform and subsequent resource allocation for local communities. Small groups then explored ideas about making stronger links across systems, such as

with local government and business, and particularly sought creative and innovative initiatives to shape the kinds of realities they want for their communities. Small, and larger, community associations subsequently engaged in dialectical processes with local government representatives, business owners and community artists, who led processes to stimulate creative thinking. They are breaking down barriers across a range of historical divides by establishing webs of relationships and spaces for dialogue across an interconnected system(s) (Wheatley 2006: 183). What is significant about this work is that there is little acquiescing to the notion of inevitability, that is, the idea that the 'small' will eventually be wiped out and replaced with the 'large'. The CoCB has created a regional structure to hold a collective analysis and engage in action over time, and they look for incremental change across systems with which they engage. Whilst holding a critical awareness of limit situations (Freire 1970: 83), which are barriers that serve to oppress, the CoCB is generating a sense of agency to shape its context and create 'the world as it could be' (Shaw 2007: 34).

Structural Politicking

In contemporary times, CD can be regarded as an expression of 'the political and politicised assembly of an active citizenry in civil society' (Geoghegan and Powell 2009: 444). Taking a progressive view of CD and drawing from the framework's Structural Politicking, in which citizens participate in processes for democratic equality, the CoCB wants to influence decisions that affect its members' lives, communities, livelihoods and workplaces. The coalition is placing a strong emphasis on the progressive ideals of active citizenship (Mathie and Cunningham 2003: 475) as the key to social transformation.

Explicitly linked to its structural analysis and attempts to effect broadscale change, the CoCB is increasing its influence and structuring its processes beyond the local level. Three regional networks are meta-networking; they band together to regularly share analysis and to look for patterns, synergies and divergences in their contexts. Through regular teleconferences and an active website, they have gained an understanding of the wider picture about issues for small community organisations and the local communities in which they operate across Queensland. A Position Paper was recently used to advocate to every Member of Parliament in Queensland that community organisations are kept on the political agenda (CoCB and Volunteering Queensland 2015). These kinds of actions are akin to the various social movements involving citizen advocacy about a broad range of issues in society (Ife 2013: 136).

Significantly, because of the CoCB's emphasis on relationships and connected structures, an argument can be made that the coalition is more effective in achieving its goals than are many contemporary social movements. Zeynep Tufekci (2014a) researches online activism through social media and new technologies. Digital infrastructure has been shown to empower protest movements, to evade censorship and to raise consciousness about a range of issues on a global scale. These outcomes are exemplified by the 'Arab Spring' in 2011 – recent democratic uprisings that spread across Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Jordan – and the 'Occupy' movement. However, Tufekci's critique is that the hopes that these movements raise are not proportional to the end results. She argues that weak policy impacts threaten the sustainability of these movements (Tufekci 2014a: 3). Thus, mobilising should be commensurate with organisational capacity to respond to the long-term requirements for exerting leverage and effecting change (Tufekci 2014a: 12).

Tufekci (2014b) points to pre-internet social action campaigns such as the civil rights and women's liberation movements, which innovated tacitly over time and performed the kind of slow and sustained work that makes a difference. These successful movements have achieved social change by creating organisations that support people's capacity to think together, make hard decisions together, create consensus and innovate, and, most importantly, keep going together (Tufekci 2014b).

Conclusion

The CoCB network is putting the political back into CD practice. The network is proving to be a vehicle through which people can share analysis about the neoliberal drivers affecting their sector. Member organisations are looking for the upstream causes of disadvantage and working to ameliorate the effects of these factors. They are innovating tacitly as the network foregrounds the importance of local governance structures for responsiveness to local conditions. Significantly, the CoCB structures its work beyond the local geographical level to create networks of relations making micro–macro connections; it also develops collective analyses and commitments to social action for the long haul. The power of the economic liberal agenda is stacked against the coalition at every turn, but members remain committed to each other and to their acts of resistance. The CoCB is a good example of a critical approach to CD practice.

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> **Ignoring your passion is like dying a slow death...Passion whispers to you through your feelings, beckoning you toward your highest good. Pay attention to what makes you feel energized, connected, stimulated – what gives you your juice. Do what you love, give it back in the form of service, and you will do more than succeed.**
> **You will triumph.**
>
> **----- *Oprah Winfrey***

Thinking Critically About 'Mental Health Issues' Affecting Women During/After Violence

EMMA TSERIS

This article commences with a discussion about the need for social workers to challenge a biomedical conceptualisation of emotional distress (often called 'mental illness'). It then critiques the increasing focus on the 'mental health' impacts of women's experiences of gender-based violence. Although it is vital to acknowledge the immense distress caused by abuse and oppression, it is argued that a sole focus on women's emotional worlds ultimately invites complacency relating to broader political questions about male privilege and gendered power relations. In contrast, a contextualised analysis of women's distress allows social workers to participate in more expansive considerations of how aspects of the social world function to condone and perpetuate gender inequality. This broader view opens up practice opportunities that extend beyond treating 'dysfunction' and 'symptoms'. Social workers who adopt a critical mental health lens are able to reconceptualise their work with women who have been labelled with psychiatric diagnoses in a range of creative ways. These include both micro-activist practices, which occur at the level of meaning-making, as well as more explicit engagements in alternative community practices.

Introduction

This article will explore the intersection between gender-based violence and mental distress, discussing opportunities for critical social work practice in this area. It is difficult to consider the possibilities for critical mental health practices with women who have experienced violence without first critiquing the notion of 'mental illness' itself. The concept of 'mental illness' is now a widely accepted descriptor for emotional distress and 'dysfunction', used to denote a *brain disease*, located within *individuals*, requiring an intervention by *expert* professionals, with treatment being primarily composed of pharmacological and cognitive-behavioural solutions (Whitaker and Cosgrove 2015; Pilgrim 2011: 120). Within Western contexts, mental illness is thought to be at epidemic levels, with close to half of all Australians reportedly at risk of developing a mental illness at some point during their lifetime (Black Dog Institute 2012: 1). Within a global context, depression is understood to be the leading cause of disability, affecting 350 million people worldwide (World Health Organisation 2015).

Recommended responses to these diagnostic trends cluster around calls for substantial increases in mental health research aimed at discovering genetic markers, biomedical cures and standardised therapy protocols (Bentall 2009: 69; Moloney 2013: 2). In contemporary times, it can be difficult to conceptualise distress outside of an illness framework, or to broaden an analysis beyond the level of 'unwell individuals' towards a consideration of the community components of distress, including social marginalisation, discrimination and inequality (Allen et al. 2014: 392). Furthermore, the dominance of psychiatric discourses is so immense that it can be difficult to question their legitimacy without being accused of having an uncaring attitude towards people who are experiencing emotional distress (Cohen 2013: 4).

Despite the hostile environment for biomedical critique, there is a rigorous body of research that does question the understanding that distress is chiefly a problem contained within the minds of individuals, instead emphasising the socio-political contexts in which mental suffering arises, the unequal distribution of mental illness diagnosis throughout society, and the link between the ever-expanding diagnostic manual of disorders and the aggressive marketing tactics of pharmaceutical companies (Midlands Psychology Group 2012: 93; Ussher 2013). Social work has also played a role in this critique (Macfarlane 2009; Morley 2003). In addition, the mental health consumer movement has persistently advocated for the voices of people who have endured the effects of a disappointing and harmful mental health service system to be listened to and considered (Chamberlin 1978; Hall 2016).

Within an Australian context, however, social workers have at times been reluctant to adopt a critical perspective on mental illness. Morley and Macfarlane (2010: 50)

note evidence of the 'medical colonisation' of social work's mental health agenda present within documents written by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), which focus on psychiatric diagnosis, mental status examinations, and 'contemporary treatment modalities, including the use of psychotropic medication' (AASW, cited in Morley and Macfarlane 2010: 50). The AASW's advocacy efforts in mental health have been strongly focused on private practice contexts (AASW 2016), which has arguably impacted upon the capacity of social workers to work in solidarity around issues of social justice and mental health. As the profession becomes increasingly reliant upon and comfortable with a psychiatric diagnosis framework, critical perspectives are being forced into the peripheries of contemporary social work (Lacasse and Gomory 2003; Martin 2013).

Nevertheless, there are several components to critical social work practice in mental health. The first of these relates to the importance of acknowledging the effects of social inequality on the capacity for people to experience wellbeing (Freidli 2009: iii). This theorisation of mental health as socially determined stands in direct contrast to a medical perspective on the primacy of biological vulnerability, as well as the perspective often portrayed within anti-stigma campaigns that asserts that mental illness emerges independent of social circumstances and backgrounds. While it is, strictly speaking, the case that mental distress can arise in unexpected places, the claim that 'mental illness does not discriminate' (Division of Behavioral Health Services 2016) ignores the importance of material and social resources on the experience of emotional wellbeing. For example, there are strong correlations between experiences of poverty, violence, racism and homophobia and the development of mental distress, which are usually understated in mainstream mental health literature (Karban 2011: 42). It has also been argued that mental health diagnosis has been used to pathologise people who do not conform to the normative expectations of patriarchal and neoliberal societies, leading to an over-representation of women, disruptive children, and people struggling within workforce contexts, seeking support within mental health services (Cohen 2013: 12-13).

Therefore, critical social workers argue that notions of 'mental illness' ultimately act as distractions from a number of broader social and political issues about the legitimacy of psychiatric diagnosis. From a critical social work perspective, it is necessary to ask questions about how decisions are made relating to whether a person is deemed unwell, to consider which groups within society gain benefits from a medical understanding of distress, and to uncover the invisible relations of power that underpin a psychiatric paradigm of distress (Gambrill 2014). As well, critical social workers are interested in

reconsidering taken-for-granted ideas about mental illness and lack of capacity, and how these assumptions have underpinned a culture of undue forced treatment and coercive service provision, to the detriment of mental health service users (Watson et al. 2014). They are interested in de-centering professional knowledge and expertise (Mann 2006) – in particular, the focus on generating *theorisations about* people experiencing distress, without the input of service users (Wade 2015). Instead, there is a concerted attempt to privilege the marginalised perspectives of service users and to value the expertise that they have gained from their lived experiences of service systems (Happel et al. 2014: 3).

Women, Trauma, and Gender Politics

This article will now turn to the issue of 'trauma-informed' mental health practices. In a contemporary context of mental health issues in women who have experienced abuse being increasingly detected (Ellsberg et al. 2008: 1140), how are we as critical social workers to understand this trend? There is a strong theme within feminist mental health literature that the acknowledgement of the psychological trauma of abuse paves the way for human services to treat women with more respect and compassion (Covington 2008: 378). In contrast to the idea that women are 'more mad than men' (Ussher 2013), trauma theory draws on the critical mental health notion that emotional distress is socially determined – in this case, deeply connected to women's exposure to violence. Additionally, the recognition of the long-term and severe effects of women's experiences of violence and abuse addresses the long-standing cultural myths that violence against women and children is rare, and that when it does occur, it is not very harmful (Dragiewicz 2013: 76). It is, without doubt, a step forward to understand that women's mental health presentations do not arise in a social vacuum, instead often arising in the context of gender inequality.

However, I want to put forward some concerns for critical social work about the political consequences of focusing predominantly on women's traumatic emotional wounds after violence. In doing so, I join with other feminist writers who have tentatively put forward similar apprehensions (Gavey and Schmidt 2011; Humphreys and Joseph 2004). Discourses about 'traumatised' women are deficit-focused, emphasising internal pathology and containing assumptions about the expected negative psychological outcomes that occur in women who have lived through violence and abuse (Gomez et al. 2015). Trauma theory assumes that women are affected in a uniformly predictable way, and does not account for women's resilience within abusive situations and the various ways in which women resist violence (Wade 1997). There is a risk that in the detection of traumatic harm we might

become too preoccupied with detailing the symptoms that appear in women who have experienced violence, lending all of our attention to how therapeutic strategies can work to support individual victims out of these responses. The consequences of this level of intervention are subtle and yet important. A focus on the symptoms of individual victims can act as a distraction from broader conversations about patterns of gender-based violence, stifling consciousness-raising efforts aimed at empowering individuals and communities to discuss what might be done to reduce and prevent violence (Burstow 2003: 1293). Additionally, a trauma-focused interpretation of violence and its effects leads to the notion that medical and individual therapeutic solutions are always the most essential responses (Gilfus 1999: 1238).

Consequently, it can be seen that a 'trauma informed' response to affected women may, in subtle ways, invite complacency relating to broader political questions about male privilege and gendered power relations. This is because it can be difficult for these broad, social justice issues to be discussed, when the primary focus is on symptoms, brain damage, and pharmaceutical and therapeutic solutions (Tseris 2013). In some ways, the trauma-informed approach mirrors the biomedical approach to mental health care, in terms of its emphasis on the need for increased psychiatric support, the emergence of trauma 'experts', and the focus on individual clients (albeit, with some recognition of social context).

Critical Social Work Making a Difference

It could be easy for social workers to become disheartened when considering the limitations of conventional psychiatric services, given that this is so often the context in which they are employed as mental health social workers. In neoliberal times, agency contexts often offer very limited support for a macro-level approach to social work activism, and opportunities for advocacy may seem minimal (Strier and Breshtling 2016: 5). This raises important questions about the opportunities for micro-level activism that are available to social workers. Greenslade et al. (2014: 422) argue that the covert activist activities that social workers participate in should be acknowledged. They contend that while agency barriers prevent social workers from some forms of political action, covert and yet radical practice methods such as rule-bending, over-servicing and non-compliance, are possible. Similarly, O'Brien (2010: 174) argues that the 'micro practice' of social justice is often missing from social work literature, which emphasises too heavily the need for macro-level political engagement. This absence can leave social workers without the necessary strategies and support to consider what can be done to change mental health services 'from the inside'.

An important finding from some recent research that I conducted with women who had experiences of mental health services following violence (Tseris 2014) was that there was often a disconnection between the mental health support provided to women and a broader, politicised worldview. For example, one participant noted that:

> My therapist at that time, you know – I think there wasn't that feminist framework. And so there was still … an assumption in a way of the abused person being flawed in some way. I've since done a course at the Women's Information and Referral Exchange. I did their course and that was transformative for me as well because that feminist perspective was so nourishing. And so affirming. And I think if I'd had that approach, a therapist with that approach, then I think I would have probably made more gains. It just makes sense of the situation. You know, as a situation instead of as one person who's not coping.

Narrative, feminist and critical approaches to counselling are very useful when considering the possibilities for transformative social work practice within agency contexts that focus on the provision of one-on-one support (Cohen 2008; McLellan 1995; White 1995). These approaches make radical critiques of the apolitical nature of conventional mental health treatment responses, while also accepting that a large portion of social work practice occurs on an individual level. Rather than an outright rejection of casework, these traditions insist upon conducting a politically astute form of counselling, which makes links between individual distress and socio-cultural analyses of women's position within patriarchal relations. In this way, the gap between socio-political activism and counselling, while not being completely resolved, is narrowed. Nevertheless, it is also important not to overstate the role of subversive meaning-making practices conducted on the level of casework and counselling with individual clients, and to see it as one pathway among many (Bottrell 2009: 326). This links into an additional finding in the research study, which was that therapy is ultimately unable to develop a community around an individual following violence. It is a 'one-to-one space', in which stories are told in private. As described by one participant:

> Every single session I would walk out feeling worse than when I walked in. I decided I don't care whether this is going to have a useful end or not, I can't stick this out. This is not helping me at all. I cancelled out.

The language used by the participant to describe her counselling as 'walking in' and 'walking out' shows

that therapy can be experienced as a separate and decontextualised component of women's lives. This is important because this separation reflects the critique of psychiatric diagnosis, which separates distress from its social origins. Although some participants described their conversations in counselling as enabling them to understand themselves in relation to other survivors of child abuse, this realisation often occurred only on an intellectual level. Conversely, in contrast to the confines of traditional counselling, one participant spoke of a counsellor who disrupted the isolation of therapy by introducing her to a group in which she could meet others who had experienced similar situations, and this was very helpful:

> The [woman] from the counselling thought, maybe to see other women in similar situations to yourself, been through abuse as well, I mean the [women] never really spoke much, it was more just painting and talking about general things and I liked it.

Another participant also described the importance of actually meeting other women with whom she could share her experiences:

> Because you so feel alone, and so it still comes as a surprise to me when I'm talking to other women ... like I can say something that I might feel a certain way and they will feel exactly the same way. And it makes me feel OK. It's OK. I'm normal. It's OK to feel this way.

These innovative forms of support enhanced a number of the participants' social, emotional and material resources above and beyond what could have been achieved through counselling or normative mental health support. This reflects Jureidini's (in Sheean 2012: 45) assertion that positive wellbeing cannot be achieved by simply increasing the number of therapists – rather, changes to clients' social contexts are also required.

Collective Community Action

Pressman et al. (1989: vii) state that *social change* around issues of violence are vital responses above and beyond mental health treatment: 'Unless we challenge the social structures, there are not enough therapists in the world to treat the abusers and victims who will seek our help'. Although social work has been 'therapeutised', in that its primary emphasis is often on meeting personal needs and effecting individual 'treatment' (Kam 2014: 723), there is significant scope for the social work profession to offer alternatives to 'one-to-one' interventions. Pertinent possibilities include community activism and political engagement (Weldon and Htun 2013), policy

and interventions across the social ecology (Michau et al. 2014), groupwork education and prevention (Ball et al. 2012), and strengthening peer support (Tajima et al. 2011).

An emerging theme in critical mental health literature is a concern about the dangers of activist mental health concepts being appropriated and co-opted into traditional medical approaches. For example, the notion of 'recovery' has been widely adopted within policy and practice contexts as a principle that workers can aspire to achieve – this is a drastically watered down version of the original notion of 'recovery' as a radical critique of conventional service provision (Harper and Speed 2012: 9). Other activist concepts that have been co-opted by the medical model include 'empowerment' and 'hope' (McWade et al. 2015: 307). It is therefore the case that grassroots collective attempts to understand distress outside of the limitations of psychiatric services offer exciting opportunities for social work practice. While it is important to not ignore the role of activist social workers within the conventional mental health service system in their role as advocates for change 'from within', it is useful to think about the role that social workers can play in the support of alternative spaces for people to collaborate and make sense of their experiences without resorting to the limitations of medical discourses. Examples include – but are not limited to – the 'Hearing Voices Network' (2016) 'Madness Radio' (2016) and 'The Icarus Project' (2016).

The role of social workers within these contexts differs from a traditional mental health role, where the enactment of professional expertise and training is primary, to a commitment to openness and professional humility. For example, in these spaces, social workers can draw on the contributions of Indigenous approaches of deep listening (Bennett et al. 2011: 33), as well as the intentional peer support principle of shifting 'from helping to learning' (Intentional Peer Support 2016). Social workers must be open to hearing uncomfortable stories about the inadequate and harmful system responses that people have experienced, but also to step back from a position of trying to 'fix' things. This is complex work as it requires social workers to actively resist taking on mainstream roles, to undo strongly held assumptions, and to genuinely engage with alternative narratives and ideas.

Concluding Reflections

This article has provided an exploration into the limitations of individualised understandings of mental illness, including 'trauma informed' work with women, but has extended this critique by offering examples of the activist work in which social workers might participate. Following in the steps of Foucault, I have attempted to make visible the alternative and subjugated knowledges

and practices of both people who become mental health 'service users' as well as the workers who provide mental health services (Chambon 1999: 51). If we view the mental health field as a contested arena of competing ideas, where some voices are almost always privileged and other less powerful groups must sing out from the margins, then it is necessary to view mental health work as political work. There are exciting practice opportunities for social workers who are looking for possibilities for 'non-compliance' with biomedical understandings and 'treatments'. An ethical commitment to social justice puts critical social workers in a good position to engage in subversive conversations with clients about the origins of distress. As well, it is important to consider how social workers can learn from the contributions of grassroots, alternative community action that does not rely on the conventions of professional expertise or the language of 'mental illness'. In summary, critical social work in mental health is about making a social theory of distress intelligible.

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AS THE SAYING GOES AROUND THAT

COMES AROUND

Fortune favours the bold and the
beautiful is in the eye of the
beholder unto you
make my heart sing
a song of sixpence and pocketful of rye
must you keep my hanging
on and on
ward Christian soldiers marching
to the beat of a different drummer
boy
will be boys
on the avenue
of honour
thy mother and father
why hast thou forsaken
all others as long as you both shall live
and let die

JANE DOWNING,
ALBURY, NSW

Putting Gender Back On The Agenda In Domestic And Family Violence Policy And Service Responses: Using critical reflection to create cultural change

CHRISTINE MORLEY AND JOANNE DUNSTAN

Social work has a key role not only in responding to domestic and family violence through the provision of direct services, but also in promoting cultural change through education and policy development to redress the social conditions that create violence. Such practices can result in shifting the consciousness of individuals and communities, ultimately affecting societal and structural changes. These changes begin with the practice of critical reflection, which aims to unearth and challenge dominant assumptions about gender, power and violence. 'Best practice' responses to domestic and family violence are widely contested and therefore highly political. Within neoliberal contexts, conservative governments have sought to de-gender and de-politicise domestic and family violence by attacking and de-funding feminist services and reducing domestic and family violence to a relationship problem, rather than acknowledging it as a gendered human rights issue. However, critical and progressive forms of social work have always advocated a research-informed and critically reflective approach to practice that champions women's and children's rights, whilst simultaneously holding perpetrators accountable and seeking to change the societal structures implicated in producing violence. This paper will highlight the importance of structural analytical approaches that explicitly link gender and power, to making informed, effective and relevant responses to domestic and family violence. It will also highlight the need for critical reflection as the first step in redressing violence against women.

Introduction

Social work has historically played a key role in responding to domestic and family violence in Australia. This role includes direct service practices such as responding to the social, emotional and immediate safety needs of victims/survivors; participating in education and consciousness raising campaigns to raise awareness about the devastating impact of domestic and family violence; and engaging in movements to reform social policies that contribute to gender inequality. Social work practice in this field also includes influencing social policy to be more responsive to the needs of those experiencing and perpetrating the violence, and campaigning for social and cultural change. Feminism has strongly influenced the practice of social work in the field of domestic violence, since feminists identified their personal experiences of violence being embedded in social and political structures (Fawcett and Waugh 2008; Morley 2014: 32). The hard-fought consciousness raising feminist campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the establishment of women's refuges, and placed policing and criminal sanctions as a response to domestic violence firmly on the social and political agenda (Murray

2002). This led to the introduction of the first stand-alone domestic violence legislation in Queensland, the *Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Act 1989*, which challenged the traditionally held views that women were the property of their husbands and established the need for governments to act in order to more effectively protect victims from further abuse (Page 2015).

Since that time, neo-conservative governments have sought to de-gender and de-politicise domestic and family violence, resulting in the de-funding of feminist services and the reducing of domestic violence to a relationship problem rather than a gendered human rights abuse (Phillips 2006: 192). 'Best practice' responses are therefore widely contested and highly political and partly because of this, the helping professions, including social work, cannot necessarily claim a proud history of supporting women and children's safety and autonomy (Laing and Humphreys 2013: 2). However, critical and progressive forms of social work have always advocated a research-informed and critically reflective approach to practice that champions women's and children's rights, whilst simultaneously holding perpetrators accountable.

Recent media coverage and renewed government interest in family violence prevention with related injections of funding have placed this issue at the forefront of discussion and debate, and have served to reinvigorate community responses which seek to change the societal structures implicated in producing the violence. This paper will highlight the importance of structural analytical approaches to understanding domestic and family violence, in order to review existing responses and strengthen their effectiveness. It is argued that critical reflection, which unearths and challenges dominant assumptions about gender, power and violence can foster shifts in individual and community awareness, ultimately contributing to social change.

Patriarchy In Neoliberal Contexts

Neoliberal contexts emphasise individual responsibility and valorise economic solutions over all other reasoning (Wallace and Pease 2011: 132). Within these contexts, structural/feminist understandings of domestic violence that explicitly link gender and power, have been displaced by understandings that cast domestic violence as a private trouble. This apportions responsibility (and blame) to individual families, and privileges individualised (and psychologised) practice responses to domestic violence (Featherstone 2004: 7; Morley and Macfarlane 2008: 31). Indeed, 'feminist backlash,' which suggests that feminist analysis has become redundant in responding to domestic violence, has been prevalent in popular culture and social media over the last two decades (Phillips 2006: 194).

However, the role of feminism in redressing gender inequality is far from over. Recent research undertaken by the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence (STDFV 2015) suggests that the majority of domestic and family violence continues to involve violence perpetrated by men against women and children in their homes. Domestic and family violence persists as a significant social issue: the number of reported incidents continues to increase with police responding to over 180 incidents of domestic and family violence every day across Queensland. In addition, 58 per cent of all homicides are domestic homicides (STDFV 2015: 6). The annual cost of domestic and family violence to the Queensland economy alone is estimated to be between $2.7 billion to $3.2 billion (STDFV 2015: 6). Given these figures, family and domestic violence remains a significant social issue.

Recent changes in social awareness emerging from government-initiated research appear to have promoted greater consensus that the elimination of domestic violence involves changes to our 'culture and attitude' as well as the reform of legislative and individualised responses (STDFV 2015: 2). Critical social work, which privileges an analysis of power and examines the interface

between person and environment, highlights the ways in which gender and particularly feminist analysis of gender continues to be of central importance in understanding and responding to domestic and family violence (Fraser and Craik 2009: 228). Cultural change requires a critical examination of the impact of social and political structures, in order to identify discursive practices, such as patriarchy, rooted in those structures. Patriarchy is a general term referring to societies organised on the basis of male domination, where men benefit from institutional power in ways that disadvantage women (Orme 2013). Whilst patriarchy accords economic, social and political privileges to men, the unequal distribution of power harms both men and women. Hence, it is in the interests of both men and women to challenge the harmful effects of patriarchy (Pease 2000: 129-130).

Domestic And Family Violence In Global Contexts

All known societies are patriarchal to some extent, albeit to varying degrees (Ciccodicola 2012: 160). Violence against women is therefore global and shaped by different cultural contexts (Fontes and McCloskey 2011: 151). If we take a macroscopic look at our world, the United National Development Program (UNDP) shows the impact of patriarchy on women in a global sense is profound. It estimates that 60 per cent of the world's chronically hungry people are women and girls; 800 women die each day from preventable causes in pregnancy and childbirth; and in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, 80 per cent of all jobs for women are in the informal economy (UNDP 2014).

This economic disparity, reinforcing unequal power relations between men and women (the same unequal power relations implicated in producing domestic and family violence), is also reflected in politics. Women hold only 21 per cent of the world's parliamentary seats (UNDP 2014). Women continue to be under-represented in ministerial positions, with only five countries having ever achieved gender equality at Cabinet level (Caramani et al. 2011: 873). Such under-representation in political systems globally correlates with women's over-representation in violence statistics: three out of every ten women report having experienced physical violence and/or sexual assault by an intimate partner, despite significant cultural barriers to such reportage (UNDP 2014).

Gendered health differentials have also been widely described. Approximately 68,000 women die from unsafe abortions each year, comprising one in seven of all maternal deaths worldwide (UN Women 2011). In 2009, women represented 53 per cent in developing countries and 21 per cent of developed countries of the 33.3 million people living with HIV. Most HIV-positive women were infected by husbands or long-term partners, and in India, 90 per cent of women with HIV contracted the disease

in a long-term relationship, indicating that women's lack of decision-making power in relationships may further increase their risk of infection (UN Women 2015).

Whilst domestic violence has now been made illegal, 603 million women live in 125 nations where domestic violence is still not regarded as a crime (UN Women 2011). Rape in marriage is criminalised in 52 countries, however 2.6 billion women live in countries where marital rape is still not illegal (UN Women 2011). Women's structural position of disadvantage, or gender inequality, has been recently identified across a wide range of cross-cultural studies as a causative factor of domestic violence. That is 'societies with stronger belief systems about male dominance' are positively correlated with a higher incidence of violence against women (Wall 2014: 7). Gender inequalities also lead to beliefs and attitudes of male sexual authority over women. This promotes a sense of male entitlement, which enables and legitimises demonstrations of power against women (Jewkes 2012: 24). Most significantly, the report found that these 'beliefs are also more likely to be reflected at a societal level such as in political and economic systems' (Wall 2014: 7), confirming that violence against women is not just about the oppression of individual women but a much broader human rights abuse issue.

Domestic And Family Violence In The Australian Context

If we take a look closer to home, Australian women continue to have low representation in the legal system and even lower representation in the political system. For example, the new Turnbull Government has announced that just six out of 21 members of Cabinet at the Federal level will be women. However, this is a significant improvement from the previous experience under the Abbott Government in which Afghanistan had more female representatives in Cabinet than our single, token, white middle class female (Kenny 2013). We still, however, have some way to go to meet Canada's standard, that has now achieved an equal number of women including one Muslim woman (Murphy 2015).

Discrimination, exploitation and abuses against women are enshrined in legislation and underwritten by social policy (Morley et al. 2014: 49). These are both a cause and a consequence of the impact of patriarchy. For example, underemployment and poverty are both simultaneously risk factors for domestic violence as well as consequences of it. Certainly, domestic and family violence is the primary cause of homelessness for women and children in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014: 7). It is also well known that some women will stay in violent relationships to avoid the poverty that often accompanies a decision to leave (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014: 7).

Social policies from both major parties in the last few decades have largely reflected a commitment to keeping women in the home, content to exploit the unpaid domestic and childcare work in the private sphere. Those that do return to work, do so on a part-time or a casual basis, to workplaces that are mostly not 'family-friendly', which results in greater pressure on family roles, and increased likelihood of psychological distress for women (Homelessness Australia 2013). The blocking of paid maternity leave, and then the overt attack, constructing women as 'double dippers' for accessing both employer and government contributions to paid parental leave, resulted in nearly 50 per cent of all mothers losing some or all of their 18-week government paid parental leave (Ireland and Wade 2015). Despite the existing legislation making men's rates of pay the same as women's for equivalent work, women are consistently paid 17.6 per cent less than men which over an average working lifetime would mean the woman worker earns more than one million dollars less than her male counterpart (Cassells et al. 2009: 24-34). This also has major implications for superannuation, which means many working women will face living in poverty during retirement. Older women are often forced out of the workforce early, have insufficient superannuation to fund the cost of living and as a result are much more vulnerable to homelessness (Homelessness Australia 2013).

These represent just a few examples of how Federal Government policy has restricted and controlled women, relegating them to a secondary position in society in relation to men: the same secondary position which sanctions and reinforces the conditions, values, and beliefs that allow violence against women and children to occur. Recognising the direct links between the socially and politically disadvantaged position of women, and women's personal experiences of violence points to the need for structural changes. Progressive forms of practice have always advocated a research-informed and critically reflective approach to practice that champions women's and children's rights, whilst simultaneously holding perpetrators accountable and seeking to change the societal structures implicated in producing violence (see for example, Laing and Humphreys, 2013: 12; Fraser and Craik 2009: 236-238). As such, our focus can never just be the victim/survivor, or perpetrator we are working with; our interventions must also focus on transforming the social structures implicated in causing domestic and family violence.

In acknowledging domestic violence as a gendered social issue, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull recently announced a $100 million funding package to 'stop violence against women'. This is a welcome initiative in an area that has been profoundly underfunded for decades with Turnbull stating, 'Violence against women is one of

the great shames of Australia. It is a national disgrace' (Ireland 2015). He also commented ' ... violence against women begins with disrespecting women. And so this is a big cultural shift' (Ireland 2015).

Indeed. the Prime Minister's acknowledgement of domestic and family violence as a gendered issue represents a profound ideological shift from previous conservative governments that have sought to de-gender and de-politicise domestic and family violence. It also allows the nature of the problem to be properly characterised and responses, which focus on systemic support and intervention as well as cultural change, to be discussed (STDFV 2015: 7).

A Critical And Reflective Approach To Domestic and Family Violence

This policy platform has been further endorsed in Queensland with the recent release of the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence (STDFV) Report *Not now, not ever*, identifying that domestic and family violence is a 'violation of basic human rights' that disproportionally affects women (2015: 7). This is not to say that men cannot be victims, and all forms of domestic and family violence are unacceptable. However, when we take into account the severity of the violence, the frequency of the violence and those who are losing their lives or are living with a permanent disability because of the violence, overwhelmingly women are the victims of male perpetrated violence (STDFV 2015: 7). Adopting a critical approach to domestic and family violence includes the understanding of intersectionality, which identifies other social divisions determining differential distribution of social, economic and political power contributing to inequalities. These divisions such as social class, ethnicity or race, sexuality and gender identity, ability and age, compound the oppression due to gender inequality, and influence the way women experience the violence (Webster and Flood 2015: 16). For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised for domestic violence than the general female population (STDFV 2015: 50). Understanding intersectionality therefore, means acknowledging that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to responding to domestic and family violence is limited and may exacerbate the oppression experienced by those in need of assistance.

Critical social work approaches also acknowledge a direct link between the continued prevalence of domestic and family violence and community attitudes and beliefs that create, as a leading Government commissioned report refers to, 'a culture that justifies, excuses, perhaps trivialises or even condones or encourages domestic violence' (STDFV 2015: 8). The report further asserts that as a result, 'attitudes in our society about women

require fundamental change' (STDFV 2015: 10). The 'how' we go about this cultural change has been the topic of ongoing debate. A progressive way of understanding the 'how' in cultural change goes much deeper than a traditional response such as designing a state-funded communication strategy or education campaign. While the state may play a role in leading cultural change, we need to first make visible – through critical reflection – the harmful attitudes and constructions of gender so that we can challenge them.

Critical reflection uncovers the ways in which our values, beliefs and assumptions have become infused by dominant ideologies including patriarchy. As such, critical reflection enables us to understand how the internalisation of dominant/subordinate gendered power relationships operate to reproduce oppression. By uncovering the ways we participate in and reproduce those dominant ideas and practices that reinforce hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity, we are connected with a sense of agency, both personal and collective, that can be used to challenge and resist them in ways that become a vehicle for social transformation (Fook and Gardner 2007: 51). In this way, social change begins in people's everyday lives, including for example family roles and workplaces, and while social structures will influence people's circumstances, knowledge of social structures, and how to negotiate them can assist people to change oppressive social conditions (Mullaly 2010: 63).

Ken Lay (2015: np), the Chair of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children, believes that the current research demonstrates that 'we develop male privilege early' and that we confuse 'cultural values with biological ones' in order to justify male violence and encourage 'girls to feel complicit in their own abuse'. Therefore, in order to participate in cultural change, leaders must critically reflect in order to identify the way their assumptions shape values and attitudes in relation to domestic and family violence. In his previous role as Commissioner of Victoria Police, Lay worked hard to improve the culture of policing in relation to domestic and family violence. He cites critical reflection as a useful tool to help identify what needs to change so that there is consistency between their public statements and private behaviour in order to mentor young people in cultural change. Lay (2015: np) suggests that critical reflection is both 'vital and in short supply' and is the necessary first step towards building the cultural change needed to eliminate domestic and family violence.

Critical reflection provides an opportunity for us all, including community leaders and decision makers, to acknowledge the ways in which resistance to engage

with feminist understandings and responses to domestic and family violence results in maintaining the *status quo*, and its associated patriarchal inequalities (Phillips 2015: np). Critical reflection and analysis can assist us to work towards arresting the ever-increasing rates of violence against women, by elucidating the ways in which society sanctions women's inequality in relation to men. By exposing the deeply entrenched patriarchal perspectives and discursive practices that benefit men and oppress women, we have the ability to change them. The power in discourses that reinforce patriarchal and establishment understandings of domestic and family violence is the extent to which they remain unchallenged (Fook 2012: 75). Critical reflection provides us with the opportunity to expose and challenge the cultural constructions of gender power relationships that are harmful to both men and women in order to reconstruct a gender relationship based on equality.

When critically reflective processes aimed at challenging patriarchy are enacted at both personal and political levels, the potential to create social change and reduce the causes and consequences of domestic and family violence become more possible. It is pleasing to see this kind of change now occurring at the structural level with the recent Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence making recommendations to include a staged process for the introduction of mandatory social work (or equivalent) qualifications for all family violence practitioners by the end of 2020 (Royal Commission into Family Violence 2016). This makes a strong statement about the need for practitioners to link the personal with the political, reaffirming a feminist structural analysis of domestic violence, involving critical reflection on both the ways direct services are offered, and on how broader commitments to promoting social and cultural change through education and policy development are practised.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the importance of using structural approaches and critical reflection to understand and inform critical social work responses to domestic and family violence. This critical approach explicitly links gender and power in making effective and relevant responses to the issues of domestic and family violence. Reflecting on the centrality of feminist thinking in understanding and responding to domestic and family violence is vital if our practices are to remain relevant and potentially socially and politically transformative. This is particularly important to acknowledge, given that in recent years there has been a shift away from feminist principles in the human service sector due to privileging social policies and practices that are individualised, clinical and apolitical (Morley and Macfarlane 2008; Morley 2014). This anti-feminist approach to social policy

has effectively dismantled much of the infrastructure that feminists have fought to establish. Disturbingly, this has the capacity to effectively ignore the social, political, historical and gendered causes and consequences of domestic violence, and recast it as a private, individual problem – instead of a community problem (Morley 2014: 202-203). Critical reflection provides an opportunity to explore and enter into dialogue about alternative ways of responding to domestic and family violence, holding feminist perspectives core to our understandings, with a commitment to changing the social conditions that support and sanction violence against women.

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prelude

Apples

falling far from failed trees

on forgotten orchards

make bitter cider.

LINDA ADAIR
SYDNEY, NSW

Critical Social Work With Men: Challenging men's complicity in the reproduction of patriarchy and male privilege

BOB PEASE

This article explores the contribution of critical masculinity studies for profeminist practice with men in social work. It specifically focuses on the implications of this critical theoretical work for understanding patriarchy and male privilege. It argues that critical social work practice with men must be located within the context of patriarchy and the social divisions between men. The paper outlines six key pillars of patriarchy and argues that men need to understand patriarchy as a precursor for acknowledging their complicity within it. Patriarchy Awareness Workshops for men are advocated as a practice for educating men about their complicity in women's oppression and encouraging them to take responsibility for challenging their unearned advantages.

Introduction

In the last twenty years of literature on radical and critical social work, notwithstanding the important contribution of feminist social work during this time, there have been only six key texts focusing on engaging men from a critical gender perspective (Pringle 1995; Cavanagh and Cree 1996; Christie 2001; Scourfield 2003; Featherstone et al. 2007). This limited attention to profeminist practice by men in social work is surprising, given the extensive literature on critical masculinity and gender studies. The social work texts cited above are informed by this wider critical scholarship and are contrasted with the more traditional therapeutic approaches to engaging men in the human services (Rowan 1997; Brooks and Good 2001; Glicken 2005; Wexler 2009). In this article, I identify some of the implications of this critical theoretical work for understanding patriarchy and male privilege and outline one approach for engaging men about their complicity in the reproduction of gender inequality.

Critical masculinity and gender studies is differentiated from the wider men's studies literature which draws upon socio-biological, psychoanalytical, Jungian and sex role theories (Pease 2000: 19-22). It is informed by both materialist and discursive approaches and is concerned with the multiple levels of men's dominance manifested through the structural relations of patriarchal gender regimes, patriarchal ideologies, male peer group culture, men's sexism and coercive control, and patriarchal subjectivities of men (Pease 2014: 31-33). It also recognises the importance of the intersection of gender with class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, able-bodiedness and geo-political location as it plays out in specific contexts and with specific groups of men.

Drawing upon this critical literature, for some years now, I have been making a case for the importance of developing profeminist practice with men in social work (Pease 2001, 2003, 2009a), engaging men in men's violence prevention (Pease 1995, 2011, 2014) and locating critical practice with men in the context of male privilege and its intersections with geo-political, class, race, sexuality and ability/disability regimes (Pease 2004, 2009b, 2010a). I thus argue that critical social work practice with men must be situated within the context of patriarchy and the divisions of class, race, sexuality and other forms of inequality, while at the same time exploring ways in which patriarchal belief systems become embedded in men's subjectivities. In this article, I outline the key pillars of patriarchy, as I argue that men need to understand patriarchy before they can find ways of acknowledging their complicity within it.

The Structural Relations of Patriarchy

Over twenty-five years ago, Walby (1990) identified six sites of patriarchy for analysing different forms of gender inequality: household (where women's household labour is exploited by husbands and male partners); paid work (where women are excluded from high status jobs, receive less pay and are often employed in segregated sections of the labour force); the state (where there is a systematic bias in favour of men's interests); male violence (which is legitimated by the state); sexuality (where compulsory heterosexuality and sexual double standards reign) and

cultural institutions (which represent women in negative ways in the media, religion and education).

More recently, DeKeseredy and Schwatz (2013: 54) differentiate between social patriarchy involving men's domination at the societal level and familial patriarchy which refers to men's control of women in domestic settings. These two levels of patriarchy are interconnected and the interpersonal dynamics of men and women need to be considered in the macro-level gender order. Much interrogation of gender power at the family level focuses on the interpersonal dynamics of men in relation to women, ignoring the patriarchal power structures in the wider society within which men and women are located (Yllo 1984: 308).

Hunnicutt (2009: 553) advances a nuanced conceptualisation of patriarchy that accounts for a variety of patriarchal structures; understands how men are also situated in hierarchies with other men; acknowledges that patriarchal ideologies may continue even when greater gender equality has been achieved; and recognises other forms of hierarchy. She identifies patriarchy as operating at multiple levels including the macro level of structures of government, law and the market, the micro level of family and intimate relations and the subjective level within individual men. These multiple levels are in symbiotic relation to each other. Dragiewicz (2011: 108-109) similarly identifies the cultural level where patriarchal ideologies define dominant gender norms, the community level reflected in discriminatory laws, the interpersonal level of family and the division of labour in the home and friendship relations between men where there is often peer support for men's violence against women.

Patriarchy And Intersectional Gender Structures

Gender is always interconnected with other social divisions of inequality. Hearn (2012: 160) talks about intersectional gender structures as a way of noting the links between gender and other social divisions. Acker (2006: 441) similarly uses the notion of inequality regimes to describe the intersectional gender barriers that produce patterns of inequality. For her, inequality regimes capture the intersections of gender, class and race that inhibit women's advancement towards gender equality. The concept of inequality regimes analyses the ways in which class, race and ethnicity intersect with gender to create inequalities at the level of institutions and organisations.

The importance of understanding these intersections is to acknowledge that men do not benefit equally from the structures of gender domination. Consequently, profeminist practice with men must address men's marginalisation on the basis of their class, ethnicity, race,

sexuality and level of able-bodiedness, as well as their privileged gender positioning.

Patriarchal Ideology And Men's Domination

Yodanis (2004: 656) differentiates between the structural dimensions of inequality involving women's access to institutional positions of power and authority and ideological beliefs about the status of women. Hunnicutt (2009: 554) also discusses the differences between the structural conditions of patriarchy and patriarchal ideologies, which she notes can often continue after gender equality has been achieved. The matrix of domination is such that structural changes toward gender equality may not necessarily lead to a lessening of patriarchal ideologies among men. Structural inequality is thus only one feature of patriarchy and attention must be directed at patriarchal ideologies as well. This means that social change movements must address both structural and ideological dimensions of patriarchy simultaneously. While changing structural relations will modify patriarchal beliefs about gender and gender inequality, the core structure of beliefs may remain intact even in the context of increasing gender equality at the structural level (Ridgeway and Correll 2004: 528).

Patriarchal Peer Support And Men's Collusion

Hegemonic and dominant forms of masculinity that are linked with gender inequality and men's violence against women are generated through men's relations with other men (Hearn and Whitehead 2006: 38). This means that patriarchy also subordinates men to other men. This is evident through studies of homosocial bonding (Flood 2008); fratriarchy (Remy 1990), mateship in Australia (Pease 2001) and male peer support that encourages and legitimates the abuse of women (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013).

Hearn and Whitehead (2006: 44) apply these insights to men's violence against women. They argue that violence against women is a vehicle by which men locate themselves in relation to other men. Violence against women is thus a way in which men reproduce through their practices a particular form of masculine self. Men demonstrate their manhood in relation to other men more than in relation to women. This also explains men's violence towards other men as well as violence towards women (Whitehead 2005: 413).

Towns and Terry (2012) in New Zealand undertook focus groups with men to explore the extent to which men would challenge their best male friend if they knew he was being violent to his female partner. All of the men participating in the groups spoke about the difficulty they experienced in challenging their male friends within the context of their mateship. As one man commented, it would 'wreck

the system of male bonding' (Towns and Terry 2012: 13). The discomfort the men talked about in potentially challenging their male friend was seen as a sufficient reason to discourage them from interfering in what they regarded as a private matter. Thus, the requirements and expectations of mateship discouraged the men from challenging their male friends and the consequences of this inaction was collusion with the violence their male friends were perpetrating (Pease 2015: 62).

The preceding analysis indicates that male peer group cultures need to be targeted to demonstrate to men how their complicity in some forms of homosocial bonding reproduces a culture that allows men's violence and abuse of women to flourish.

Men's Sexism And Coercive Control

It is important to differentiate between the institutionalised patriarchal system, which refers to the structural advantages and privileges that men enjoy, and the personal patriarchal system which involves men's face-to-face interactions with women both at home and in the public sphere. Because all men are socialised within patriarchy, they will have all received cultural messages that they have a right to make normative claims upon women. These claims include deferential treatment, unpaid domestic labour and child care, sexual services and emotional support (Pease 2010b: 16).

Many men thus come to believe that they deserve something from women which they then experience as an entitlement. The totality of these entitlements and claims are what constitute male privilege. This sense of entitlement may not necessarily be conscious and it may only come into their awareness when they are deprived of this unreciprocated service (Pease 2010a: 100-101). On such occasions, it may result in physical violence as a form of control.

While some men have learnt to see the oppression of women, far fewer men have learned to see male privilege (Pease 2010a: 100). I argue that belief in male superiority and male authority are deeply embedded in most men, as all men are exposed to socialisation experiences that promote a sense of male entitlement in relation to women. Men are thus under pressure to internalise beliefs and feelings which naturalise their commitment to the subordination of women.

One of the key features of patriarchy is control. Some men engage in control over women in response to their own experience of being controlled by other men at work. Coercive control is often enacted by abusive men without resorting to physical assault. As Stark's text demonstrates

(2007: 9), as societies move towards greater levels of equality, men resort to forms of coercion and control (which may or may not include physical assault) to regulate and dominate their female partners in the home. In contexts of greater levels of gender inequality at the political level, in terms of income levels, labour force participation, gender ratios of executives and managers and levels of educational attainment, there may be less need for men to exert strategies of coercive control in the private realm because male power is consolidated by religious, cultural and political forms of inequality in the public realm.

Thus, coercive control is more common in countries where patriarchal, legal, religious and cultural customs have been challenged and greater levels of equality for women have been achieved (Stark 2009: 1513). Consequently, coercive control is both shaped by women's equality at the public level but sustained by gender inequalities at the private level. Stark (2007: 9) identifies this as a paradox. The gains made by women to live independently are also the basis of men's incentive to engage in coercive control.

For many men, being in control is an essential part of what it is to be a man (Pease 2010a: 96). To challenge men's coercive control of women will be even more difficult than preventing men's violence because it involves challenging the normative foundations of men's privilege and their sense of entitlement to make claims upon women (Stark 2007: 363). Challenging the legitimacy of men's power over women takes us to the heart of men's sense of entitlement.

Patriarchal Male Subjectivities

Patriarchy is embedded in men's subjectivities. It involves intra-psychic processes that give meaning to men. Thus, this 'psychological patriarchy' must be challenged alongside the material and discursive levels of patriarchy in the wider world.

Numerous studies demonstrate that men will use violence to bolster their masculinity when other sources of confirmation are not available to them (Whitehead 2005; Stark 2007; DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013). This means that men need to construct their sense of self outside of frameworks of dominant masculinity so that violence is not equated with masculinity or manhood (Yllo 1984: 315). The key question is whether masculinity can be reconstructed to allow for a democratic and egalitarian subjectivity or whether such a subjectivity needs to break with notions of masculinity or manhood altogether (Pease 2014).

As I have argued elsewhere (Pease 2015: 66), all men who are raised within a patriarchal society will be exposed

to pressures about what it means to be a man and how men are expected to behave. Invariably, these pressures will be internalised and will shape men's attitudes and practices in relation to women. While some men may come to resist such pressures and seek to establish respectful and equal relationships with women, this will involve them 'going against the grain'. For many men, however, they may not be conscious of the extent to which the expectations of patriarchy have been internalised within their subjectivities. It is thus necessary for men to understand patriarchy and its influence on their lives if they are to find a way of challenging it.

This means that educative programs and workshops need to be developed that target men in workplaces, community groups and sporting organisations that raise men's awareness about the consequences of patriarchy for the lives of men, women and children.

Patriarchy Awareness Workshops For Men

Since the 1990s, I have facilitated hundreds of anti-sexism workshops for men as both part of gender awareness and gender equality training within workplaces (including local councils, church-based organisations, schools, universities and the corporate sector) and as interventions in community-based and social movement organisations and political parties (Pease 2012: 135).

The aim of these workshops is to address the problem of patriarchy and its impact on the lives of women, children and men. The workshops use presentations, small group discussions and simulation exercises to explore issues such as men's personal journeys in relation to gender issues, analyses of patriarchal culture informed by the ideas discussed earlier, men's experiences of power and domination, alternatives to patriarchal power, the impact of men's privilege on women, social and personal blocks to men's ability to listen to women and visions, obstacles and potential for men to change (Pease 2012: 135-136).

In all cases, the participants are recruited from the ranks of the organisations sponsoring the workshops. Often, the workshops are required by the workplace as part of professional development and hence sometimes men are resistant to being there, as they do not see gender and men's violence as being relevant to them. So while some men may be motivated and interested in becoming more aware of their male privilege, other men are initially resistant to the intervention. Even the latter group of men, however, often shift their perspective as a result of the workshops.

In evaluations I have conducted, and from feedback received from participants and female colleagues of the participants, emotional responses by men to the impact on women of patriarchy, male privilege and men's violence against women seems to shatter some of the complacency previously held by the men about men's dominance and privilege. As a man facilitating these workshops, I always gain new knowledge about forms of discrimination and violence against women and, although I have run these workshops many times, I never fail to be emotionally affected myself by the participants' observations and experiences of patriarchy, male privilege and men's violence against women.

My experience is that emotions can be a very important catalyst in disrupting the processes of men's defensiveness and avoidance when being presented with ideas about patriarchy and male privilege (Pease 2012: 137). The workshops have demonstrated to me how men's emotional investments in privilege can be disrupted, even if only momentarily. If men are to be engaged in promoting gender equality, they need to recognise the role that emotions play in sustaining their privilege and address the barriers that inhibit them from experiencing compassion, empathy and sadness in response to the suffering of others. When men are emotionally engaged in the injustices experienced by women, they are more likely to interrogate their own complicity in women's oppression and are more able to recognise their responsibility to challenge their own unearned advantages (Pease 2012: 138).

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Farm Study

Nothing much ever happens.

a muteness that lies down in darkness

cleanly parted before the drive of rain

settling behind the mountains

the sculpted gums have long been fixed to the grasses.

before the breath can transcend the body

the shape of the sun multiplying behind the clouds

what does happen carves into memory

with unparalleled significance.

a horse attempting to break free of its paddock,

and flailing its head madly upon becoming tangled,

skin taut across the wire.

ROBBIE COBURN,
MELBOURNE, VIC

Growing Old in the Lucky Country[1]

SELMA MACFARLANE AND TINA KOSTECKI

In this article, we consider what critical social work might have to offer in responding to the experience of ageing and older age in Australia. We provide an outline of what we mean by 'critical social work' and then discuss how this orientation provides a particular lens through which we might understand and act. Although Australia is indeed a lucky country with resources and levels of wellbeing far exceeding those of other parts of the world, we argue that a critical approach can help us explore what social justice, human rights and empowerment might look like in relation to ageing in Western neoliberal contexts.

Introduction

The word 'critical' can and does mean many things; as this special edition will attest to, the term 'critical social work' has diverse meanings as well. We see critical social work as having an emphasis on:

- Questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and being open to diverse sources of knowledge

- Contributing to social change and concern with the political nature of our everyday actions

- Connecting personal experience to broad social structures and inequalities

- Acknowledging the power of language and discourse

- Promoting respectful relationships and privileging subjective/lived experience

- Reflexivity and the use of critical reflection to examine assumptions implicit in social work practice (Morley et al. 2014: 6-7).

We use this outline to organise the rest of this paper and to develop an overview of the ageing experience in Australia and issues facing older Australians, drawing on critical gerontological social policy, social work and other relevant literature. We argue that despite Australia's – and other Western nations' – relative wealth and historical provision of social welfare, a critical social work perspective serves well to highlight and respond to ways in which social inequalities may persist and be exacerbated in older age.

Questioning Taken-For-Granted Assumptions and Being Open to Diverse Sources of Knowledge

Practice and research in age studies, including gerontology, has privileged perspectives from functional health paradigms which focus on accepted role-based norms for ageing rather than question the 'existential and social challenges of adult ageing' (Biggs 2008: 116). Thus, there is less emphasis on the implications of social discourse, the role of agency, systems of governmentality including the ordering of 'bodies', narratives of later life lived experiences, or the intersections of race, sexuality and gender (Katz 2000). Critical engagement with aspects of ageism including the cultural and social constructs of ageing or social policy mostly emerges from the fields of sociology, gender studies and critical gerontology (Bernard et al. 2000; Calasanti and King 2011; Aberdeen and Bye 2013). However, more recently, several works have considered the epistemological and cultural aspects of contemporary social changes and trends, producing theory in the areas of identity and subjectivity, the body and embodiment, and the representation of age (Twigg and Martin 2015).

Critical theory frameworks that can provide scope for the development of a politics of ageing in everyday life (Twigg and Martin 2015), should include perspectives which explore, ' …both the personal experience of older adults and their relationship to social and structural inequality' (Biggs 2008: 115). Theories such as critical gerontology and similar perspectives are an important part of age studies because they seek to interrogate the status quo (Ray 2008) and focus on exploring the dominance of biomedical models in research, and the ways in which race, gender, sexual identity and class can construct experiences of ageing. Research that includes the perspectives of older people can reveal the nature and impact of ageism, and contribute to greater self-reflection in the academy (Ray 2008). Critical perspectives are also concerned with the identification of dominant ideologies

that contribute to age oppressive narratives or practices (Allen and Walker 2006: 156) and this is an important inclusion for social work theory, practice and research.

Specifically, feminist theory provides a framework that can contribute to developing critical perspectives on ageing. Exploring the social experience of ageing by using a 'gender lens', assists in understanding the nature of gender inequality in later life, for example, the impact of women's ongoing care-giving responsibilities and more generally, their lower financial status (Calasanti 2010: 731). Hooyman et al. (2002) encourage feminist gerontologists to work toward improving the image of older women; in many social contexts, older women tend to be invisible and their concerns understudied (Cruikshank 2009). More recently, Carr et al. (2015) have canvassed a range of models for thinking about later life that consider not only how gender impacts experiences of ageing, but also aspects of diversity such as ethnicity, nationality and religion. In order to develop a range of understandings about ageing that reflects lived experience, we must question assumptions about growing older and begin to explore models and experiences that focus on social and cultural meanings. This critical lens is important, not only in one-to-one social work practice and service delivery, but also in challenging powerful social and economic policies that shape lived experience.

Contributing To Social Change and Concern with the Political Nature of Our Everyday Actions

Social policy affects personal experience in subtle and profound ways; in the social work domain, policies shape the lives of those we work with and the services we deliver. Social policy can be a major vehicle of social change given that it is about 'the allocation of resources to meet social needs' (Fawcett et al. 2010: 3). Older people are specifically affected by policies around retirement, superannuation and pensions, as well as more general policies around healthcare, housing, transport, taxation, and so on. Social policies in most Western nations are currently based on neoliberal ideology promoting individual responsibility, the primacy of the market and tightening of 'welfare' provisions (Asquith 2009; Rozanova 2010; Walker 2012).

With slowing birthrates, increasing longevity and global economic volatility, attention and debate has increasingly focused on how Western societies can cope with the 'ageing burden'. Walker (2012: 812) observes that older people are 'being transferred from the safe political haven of the deserving to the radically more exposed position of being one of the main threats to [the] economy'. The 'responsibilization agendas' that frame neoliberalist policy render ageing as a problem to be managed primarily by individuals and their families (Asquith 2009: 255),

as starkly evidenced in Australia's current Treasurer's comment that an aged pension should no longer be considered an entitlement (Rose 2015).

Critical social work has a multi-faceted role to play within this context. At the one-to-one practice level, the very real pressures and fears that older individuals may confront in the current socio-political context must be acknowledged and responded to. This requires skills in consciousness raising, information sharing, respectful relationship building and advocacy. At the organisational or service delivery level, the task may include addressing inequalities and gaps in service provision, being particularly mindful of how organisational policies may perpetuate oppression and ignore diversity, and resisting disempowering neoliberal-managerialist agendas wherever possible.

Individual workers, their clients and community members can join with other groups to lobby for more equitable retirement, taxation, housing and income support for older Australians. Hankivsky (2014: 261) suggests building stronger alliances across diverse social justice organisations, women's organisations, disability activists, Indigenous organisations and immigrant advocacy groups – forging 'counterintuitive associations' to grapple with broad structural inequalities. To engage effectively in these efforts, we need to generate research that documents, in the words and experiences of diverse older Australians, how social and economic policies impact directly and indirectly on the material and psychological experience of daily life, wellbeing, dignity and empowerment in older age.

Connecting Personal Experience with Broad Social Structures and Inequalities

While ageing may have commonalities across individuals, not everyone experiences growing older and being old in the same way. Structural factors such as gender, class, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, geographical location, (dis)ability and sexual orientation create patterns of inequality that carry through into older age (Hooyman et al. 2002; Asquith 2009; Ranzijn 2010; Lui et al. 2011). These inequalities coalesce to produce economic deprivation (or privilege), social exclusion (or inclusion), and cultural and social recognition (or lack thereof). At the same time, intersectionality theorists caution against over-generalising the experience, for example of 'women', as doing so may deny diverse experiences of vulnerability and autonomy, power and powerlessness within that group (Hankivsky 2014).

Still, a focus on class, gender and race reveals disturbing inequalities. Approximately 20 per cent of Australians over 65 and living alone currently exist on a low income, with most retirement renters or other non-home owners

likely to live in poverty (CEDA 2015). On the whole, women, often due to caring responsibilities throughout their lifetime, retire with just half the payout that men do in superannuation savings, with 63 per cent of Australian women unlikely to retire comfortably even by 2055 (Your Life Choices 2015). Ranzijn (2010) draws on the voices and experiences of Australian Aboriginal elders to demonstrate how a lifetime of inadequate healthcare and health-sustaining resources, few educational and employment opportunities, exploitation and racism make achievement of individualised Western notions of 'active ageing' not only difficult, but irrelevant.

Given that social inequalities are likely to continue into and possibly be exacerbated by older age, how might critical social workers respond? At the level of one-to-one interaction, recognition of and respect for diversity and the very real ways gender, class, ethnicity, ability and other structural factors come together to shape individual lives is crucial. This may involve empowerment work at the individual, group or community level with women socialised into oppressive gender norms, or listening and responding to the very real fear that they will not be able to keep a roof over their head in older age. At the service delivery level, Ranzijn (2010) discusses the development of community-based services derived from 'authentic ageing' – aimed at meeting cultural and social needs as defined by individuals in relation to their own lives. At the service delivery level, the LGBTIQ community provides a good example of organisational responses to diversity, providing training to aged care service providers on the specific needs of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender individuals, including vulnerability associated with 'coming out' in institutional settings (see for example Meyer and Johnston 2014). At the heart of all this work is an analysis of the subtle and more overt exercise of power in the creation of inequality, oppression and privilege, and how it plays out in everyday life.

Acknowledging the Power of Language and Discourse

Language and discourse create powerful cultural norms that construct age identities. Thus, an analysis of their impact on the nature of social experience and policy is a key feature of a critical social work approach to ageing. Irving (2006: 21-3) identifies three discourses of age that have come to represent the category of 'old'. First, there is the development of essentialist binary categories such as young/old. Contingent upon these definitions is an 'industry' of social practices and bodies of professional knowledge that manage the boundaries of 'old age'. Secondly, there is a discernible array of imagery associating old age with decay and decline. And finally, these constructs of age become cultural measurement systems aimed at 'ordering' and responding to the 'old body'. The governance, management and regulatory systems that prescribe the nature of later life identity have been variously described (see for example, Freixas et al. 2012; Aberdeen and Bye 2013). Largely, entrenched discourses of ageing have been premised on the idea of older people as dependent, frail and vulnerable.

Perhaps more complex than a dependency narrative is a recent story of later life variously described as 'ageing positively' (Katz 2000; Biggs 2001; Holstein and Minkler 2003; Aberdeen and Bye 2013). This discourse is seemingly a counterpoint to the narrative of decline, and stems from economic concerns regarding the potential future fiscal dependence of ageing populations. Thus, policy responses currently aim to increase work participation of older citizens and restructure superannuation and age pension arrangements. Certainly, due to the greater possibilities offered by medical advancement and improved economic conditions (for some), the prospect of maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle into older age is more realistic than in the past.

Problematically however, this discourse is underscored by a range of assumptions and values about what constitutes 'successful ageing'. For instance, governments may draw on the language of 'social inclusion' (Biggs 2001) to legitimate neoliberal increases in retirement ages, incentives for unpaid labour such as volunteering, and promotion of fiscal 'independence' in later life. Concurrently, new markets are being created focusing on the 'grey' consumer (Biggs 2001). The meaning of ageing well becomes a prescriptive moral account premised largely on economic imperatives. Social policies have the capacity to shape social problems from the perspectives of dominant groups and the potential to exclude older people who do not fit the normative ideal. For critical social workers, stories of ageing need to evolve in ways that acknowledge diversity and challenge, at the practice level, prescriptive and disempowering discourses of ageing.

Promoting Respectful Relationships and Privileging Subjective/Lived Experience

Valuing lived experience contributes to a nuanced representation and awareness of the nature and possibilities in later life without essentialising experience. For critical social workers, having awareness of difference, discontinuity, incongruity and contradiction is part of anti-oppressive practice and aims to acknowledge the construction of knowledge beyond dichotomies and stereotypes. For instance, older people are often constructed in polarised and stereotypical ways, such as being 'passive recipients of care and dependent on resources or as overly productive and active' (Wiles and Jayasinha 2013: 93).

In addressing material and social experiences, having recourse to knowledge based on lived experiences helps us understand the nature of human existence beyond dualisms. This idea is not new; Code (1991: 29) critiqued the use of dichotomous categories on the basis that thinking in this way contributes to processes that exclude the possibility of complementarities, interdependence and continuity. Stories from older people about their lives and experiences provide critical insights on the experience of ageing, providing nuanced and complex information on the influence of social and political contexts including the intersections of gender, race, religion, sexuality, dis/ability, class, and ethnicity.

Although social forces and structures configure individual life experiences for older people, agency is variously expressed in specific contexts and assists to understand multiple and dynamic later life identities. Primary accounts and sources from the lived experiences of older people are a way to produce qualitative research that 'is shaped by their perceptions and concerns' (Cruikshank 2009: 184). These perceptions and concerns may fall outside of the parameters of existing, narrowly defined functional health paradigms. In documenting the complexities of older peoples' lived experience, research from a critical perspective aims to contribute to 'emancipatory social change' (Freixas et al. 2012: 46) and opportunities for the expression of agency, diversity and complexity. Theorising age in this way provides opportunities to disrupt fixed constructions of age that can be oppressive and instead, move toward 'a world not of finding but of making' (Irving 2006: 20).

Privileging personal stories is an important way to address the normative invisibility of older lives. The use of critical paradigms that question assumed social constructions about ageing and re-evaluate that which is taken for granted contribute to 'help transform social reality' (Freixas et al. 2012: 44).

Reflexivity and Using Critical Reflection to Examine Assumptions Implicit in Social Work Practice

Put simply, reflexivity is one's capacity to 'put oneself in the picture'. Reflexivity is necessary for critical reflection: a process of uncovering firstly how our own – often invisible – assumptions guide understanding and actions, and secondly, emancipatory alternatives. By turning the spotlight on our practice, critical social workers attempt to see how – individually or organisationally – we may uncritically accept ageist stereotypes and neoliberal mantras, and enact them in our work.

Social policies and institutions, and the ideologies behind them, implicitly or explicitly define what is considered desirable or acceptable behaviour; normative prescriptions about how one should age and be old abound (Rozanova 2010; Walker 2012; Rudman 2015). Dominant narratives of ageing contain assumptions about what constitutes 'right choices', 'responsibility' and 'active ageing' with their attendant though less explicit narratives of moral failure, irresponsibility and dependence. To challenge oppressive and disempowering neoliberal regimes of truth, workers and organisations need to see how these discourses are embedded in their assumptions around ageing and being old, and how we might unwittingly reflect narrow expectations and understandings in our work.

Critically reflective social workers aim to support people in defining their own needs and what is meaningful to them as they get older (Aronson 1992; Mitchell and Bruns 2010; Rudman 2015). This requires suspension of taken-for-granted assumptions and skills in deep, active listening; not just by individual workers but as an organisational ethos. It requires workers and services to interrogate the power dynamics inherent in worker-client relationships and across structural categories that construct some as more powerful and deserving than others. Furthermore, as we have discussed, some 'choices' made by adults throughout their lifetime, which continue into older age, are the result of complex structural factors engendering both privilege and oppression. Critically reflective social workers will challenge not only their own ageist assumptions and biases, but also the policies and discourses that give rise to inequality in older age.

On a more existential level, older people may confront us with our potential future self, bringing out our own fears, anxieties, hopes and/or dreams (Hitchcock 2015). Working through our own fears of ageing and being interested in and concerned about issues and narratives surrounding ageing, no matter what our current age, may be a step in challenging and changing ageist practices (Ray and Philips 2002; Mitchell and Bruns 2010). Lessening a sense of 'us and them' may also alleviate intergenerational tensions, if they exist, between younger taxpayers and older recipients of public spending, exacerbated by current discourses around the ageing burden and the primacy of individual responsibility (Walker 2012).

Conclusion

As the aged population increases in Western societies like Australia, heated debates will undoubtedly continue amongst politicians, policy makers, service delivery sectors and around kitchen tables. These debates are important: they are political and ideological, and importantly, generate very real personal and material consequences. Critical social workers and others who are concerned with social justice have an opportunity to question taken-for-granted assumptions and disempowering discourses around ageing and old age, acknowledge the social inequalities

that follow us into older age, and have a voice in ensuring that all members of society are valued.

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End Notes
1. Australian author, Donald Horne, published a book in 1964 with the title *The Lucky Country*; while it was intended as a wake-up call for this country Horne considered it unprogressive and not terribly clever, it has often been used as an affirmation of the Australian way of life (Australian Government).

The Mission of Critical Social Work and the Statutory Child Protection System in Australia: Resisting neoliberal encroachment

JANE THOMSON

The statutory child protection system (SCP) in Western countries including Australia has been characterised by neoliberal values and practices in the last several decades. This has led to SCP being punitive and blaming of parents in poverty, offering little in the way of meaningful and substantial family support to assist parents to address problems in their care of their children and damaging to children and young people who are often precipitously removed and lose contact with their kin.

This paper explores the way neoliberal approaches have often co-opted social work which has been unable to develop a more emancipatory approach to working with children and families in severe crisis in the formal child protection system. The paper calls for critical social work values and knowledge to be adopted and promoted as part of the mandate of statutory child protection.

Introduction

In Australia and many other Western countries, statutory child protection (SCP) services have struggled to cope in the last two decades with a sustained rise in the numbers of children and young people entering and remaining in the system (Kojan and Lonne 2012: 96). At the same time, political and economic systems in Australia and elsewhere have been characterised by the rise of neoliberalism. Social work as a professional project arose out of the social democratic milieu of the 1970s and 1980s. While its role in the SCP system has endured under recent neoliberal understandings, social work's knowledge, skills and values have often been sidelined. This paper focuses on the SCP system as a field of practice. It draws on recent literature to analyse issues. Critical social work with its understanding of power and disadvantage is identified as the way forward in statutory child protection work.

Understanding Neoliberalism

Like many other countries, Australia has embraced neoliberalism. This philosophy, promoted by conservative economists, arose in opposition to the post-World War II expansion of more collective public provision for citizens in Western democracies. According to Manne (2014-15: 64), neoliberalism had totally displaced the Keynesian social democratic model by the 1980s. The gap between income groups has grown wider with Oxfam International (2016: 2) identifying that today, the wealthiest 62 people in the world own as much as the poorest 3.6

billion (half of the world's population). This polarisation has increased even since 2010 (Oxfam International 2016: 2). Neoliberalism advocates the central role of a deregulated market and henceforth, a small residual role for government in resource provision to citizens. There is a focus on individual self-reliance and an increased role for families in the privatised care of the vulnerable (Rogowski 2013: 36-40).

The contraction of a role for the state in public welfare also led, in the name of efficiency and effectiveness, to the introduction of new public management (NPM) techniques in human service organisations (Healy 2009: 402; Pithouse et al. 2012: 163). Frontline workers have moved from resourcing and support towards an uncomfortable role of often policing disadvantaged people. Very large, often unwieldy SCP bureaucracies have been devised, with a strong focus on the policing of vulnerable families (Pelton 2015: 32). Such an approach sits in contrast to a public framework of comprehensive family support. Gray and Webb (2013: 7-10) present a wide number of informative perspectives on neoliberalism and its effects on social work, and the reader is directed to this work for a fuller account where they identify the control and surveillance aspects of social work in many areas of contemporary practice.

Standing (2011: 227) refers to the neoliberal state's 'disquieting tendency to turn strugglers into misfits and villains, to be penalised, locked up or locked out'. The

relevance of this exclusion will be further explored in this paper corresponding to the parents and families subject to state intervention in relation to care of their children.

In order to illuminate the struggles between social work and neoliberalism, I first examine social work's stated mission before moving to discuss the specific field of practice known as SCP.

Social Work's Mission and the Power of Critical Social Work

There is no singular definition of social work (Hugman 2009: 1151); however, there are some broad unifying principles. Endorsed by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), the national regulatory body for social work, the following global definition of social work, adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in July 2014, leads the reader to an understanding of the breadth of social work's mission:

> 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 knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (IFWS 2014).

Lee (2014: 2135) further describes social work as being 'associated with a transformative yearning, an urge to change both individuals and society in the interests of equality'. Asking why social work has struggled to maintain its transformative yearning brings into consideration basic questions about the nature of social work under neoliberalism. Morley (2014: 185-188), however, reminds us that even in very difficult circumstances, envisioning change is possible and indeed necessary. She writes of the power of critical reflection to equip social workers to engage in emancipatory practice within a paradigm of critical postmodern social work. Critical social work focuses on the material conditions that have given rise to massive inequality as identified in the first paragraph of this paper. Postmodernism requires us to resist a uniform analysis of power and to harness the agency and respect the voices of social work's service users.

With the dominance of neoliberalism, establishment or conservative social work, rather than critical social work approaches have become normative (Rogowski, 2013: 35). Useful critiques have been provided of the rise of a market approach, the contraction in state provision and their impacts on social work (Wallace and Pease 2011: 132-142).

Hugman (2009: 1142) notes that along with other professions (and perhaps to a greater extent than other professions), social work's authority 'to speak about matters of structural inequality has been severely challenged, unless … called on to speak technically in advising others who hold the roles of managers and policy makers'. Marston and McDonald (2012: 1023) have made a powerful contribution to our understanding of the ways neoliberalism has affected social work. Specifically, they explore the difficulties social work currently has in reconciling its mandate for social change with the reductionist and technical approach of NPM.

Given the hegemonic power of neoliberalism in political, social and economic life in current times, the nature of social work and the possibilities for critical social work warrants more direct consideration in the SCP field of practice (Rogowski 2014: 45). Social work has often struggled to maintain its mission, with staff morale low and turnover high (Lonne et al. 2009: 2).

Accordingly, it is in the intersection of SCP, social work and neoliberalism where this paper seeks to make a contribution.

The Australian Context for Practice in Statutory Child Protection

This paper does not seek to attack those working in the SCP system. The vast majority of staff work long hours and extremely hard in a stressful and contested environment to do their very best for children and young people. The focus of the paper is on the systemic problems, not the people. Serious challenge is needed to the framing of family problems. The individualist, punitive and blaming approach to families caught in the SCP system does not serve children and young people in either the short or long terms. This paper argues that what is needed is to resist the focus on 'bad' and 'mad' parents and to instead shine the spotlight on the way family failings in the care of vulnerable children and young people are exacerbated by our economic and social systems (Pelton 2015: 37).

Australia has a hybrid model of human services that can be confusing to international audiences. The hybrid model holds true for the workforce composition of the state-based systems. In these systems, staff come from a range of backgrounds including social work, psychology, generalist social science and humanities. For this reason, in most states within Australia's system of Federalism, even though many social workers work in child protection, social work in SCP does not have a distinct and definitive professional identity and leadership role (Healy and Meagher 2007: 333). The focus in social work education is on critical reflection regarding one's own values and practice, a commitment to social justice and the redress of societal disadvantage, and an ethical

framework (McDonald 2007: 84). However, this set of understandings is frequently not shared by SCP workers from other backgrounds, alongside whom social workers operate in the statutory system. If social work's values are not promoted, these differences can also impact negatively on decision-making about children and families and more dominantly negative discourses about parents can prevail.

In many Anglophone countries including Australia, the inflated and very expensive SCP system has involved little differentiation in the management of children's needs from the most minor concerns to the major suffering experienced by some children at the hands of parents and other caregivers. This lack of differentiation and lack of capacity to actually manage the system has been criticised by Lonne et al. (2009: 5-8) as characteristic of a SCP system which is:

- over-loaded with notifications and investigations;

- risk averse and consequently inclined to remove children in large numbers based on risk or perception of risk;

- managerialist and valuing technical knowledge over practice knowledge;

- demonstrating punitive attitudes towards parents;

- inclined to 'scapegoat' individual workers when serious problems arise;

- crisis, audit and inquiry driven;

- offering poor quality out of home care services to children removed from caregivers;

- subject to the afore-mentioned low staff morale and high turnover; and

- politicised and reactive to media coverage which covets sensationalised but rare accounts of harm to children.

Burdened by the problems outlined above, SCP is a field of practice in which critical social work values, knowledge and skills are often swimming against the discursive tide. Workers in this system with a values-based approach have often been unable to resist powerfully negative discourses about vulnerable people, particularly parents of children and young people in the SCP system. Often in response to the clash between their values and the expectations of SCP, many social workers have found the demands of the work overwhelming and stressful (Dumbrill 2003: 103).

Threats to the autonomy and legitimacy of decision making in social work in the SCP system have been difficult to resist in the context of neoliberalism's NPM (Healy 2009: 401- 402). As a result, social work has often struggled to stand apart from disabling discourses around children and families. In systems that are punitive and judgmental of parents, many children are subject to precipitous removal from family and placement into alternative care before more sustained practice engagement and resourcing approaches have been exhausted (Rogowski 2013: 59-60).

There has also been positive resistance to the eroding of social work's influence in SCP from organised social work itself (through the AASW), which has worked tirelessly to ensure that child protection knowledge is covered thoroughly in social work courses (AASW, 2008). Leaders of the profession have sought to ensure that it is social work that maintains a lead role, or at least some considerable influence in the knowledge base of the SCP system (Healy and Meagher 2007: 333). Professional leaders have done this from a conviction that social work has the breadth of knowledge, skills and values to make a difference in outcomes for children, young people and families.

What are the Issues in the System?

Three major issues continue to beset statutory child protection systems enmeshed within neoliberalism's inequalities. These issues are societal disadvantage, child-alone practice rather than child-centred practice, and issues in the care system itself. The paper now turns to an examination of these.

Societal disadvantage

In the opening sentence of a recent paper, McDonald (2013: 3) states that 'While Australia is undoubtedly a wealthy, resource-rich, and developed economy, it is not a particularly fair country'. She further notes that our government payments system is tightly targeted and minimal. Many adults who are parenting children and subject to the interventions of the SCP system are on government benefits. Many live in poverty.

In recent decades, income inequality has grown in Australia (Fletcher and Guttman 2013: 36) and, as stated previously in the paper, in most other countries under globalised capitalism (Piketty 2014: 59- 69). The connection between family socio-economic circumstances and children's vulnerability to harm has usually been well understood by frontline child protection workers. However, at a systemic level, this has often been overlooked as neoliberalism's mantra of decontextualised individual responsibility has persisted and grown.

Social workers in the SCP system operate within a highly proceduralised system that often focuses on the

removal of children from family poverty and its attendant disadvantages rather than amelioration of family poverty and disadvantage. Such an approach often misguidedly sees the SCP alternative care system as offering better possibilities for such children. Bywaters (2015: 7) draws attention to the little-researched reality of social inequality as a driver for the involvement of children and young people as subjects within the SCP system. He describes child welfare inequalities in the United Kingdom as seen, but not acted upon in empirical research. In the Australian context, Costello (2009: 119) also flags the family locational and income-based variables for SCP intervention. Poor families are disproportionately targeted and scrutinised, largely because family disadvantage can predispose children and young people to harm.

Writing about the problematic surveillance and control aspects of statutory early intervention and advocating for a family support approach, Featherstone et al. (2012: 625) argue for an understanding of socio-economic deprivation as a key element of SCP intervention in an unequal society. Pre-service social work academic programs deal thoroughly with the theory, policy and practice underpinning contemporary inequality and deprivation in Australia and graduates emerge with solid knowledge in this area. Yet social workers often struggle to tangibly use this knowledge within a social work framework to understand and respond to the circumstances of families caught up in the SCP system. McDonald (2013: 10) writes that while social workers work with people in poverty, it is within fields of practice that social workers mostly work, so poverty alleviation is not their key focus. However, the question must be posed: where more pressing is the need to alleviate poverty than in the context of nurturing children? Yet the tenet of self-reliance in the economic sphere, unachievable for many in an unequal society, is a grossly unfair test of the motivation of parents in first preventing their children from going into care, or second, if already in care, ensuring that their children are returned to them.

What might happen if the SCP system was able to tolerate the ambiguities, uncertainties and difficulties of engaging in child-centred protective and nurturing work with parents (Tobis 2013: 211)? This would involve resourcing poor families financially through practical means (in essence supplementing the Federal income support system) to ensure more high quality safety and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people in the long-term. If poverty and its attendant deficits are often central reasons for children and young people entering the SCP system, it would be less expensive for the state to leave children and young people with their families rather than removing so many into the out-of-home care system, however parsimoniously this alternative care system is run.

In reprising and extending his 1994 publication and in the above vein, Pelton (2015: 35) asserts:

> … if children are removed from parents due to homelessness or inadequate housing causing endangerment to children, then improvement of the housing or housing the homeless will eliminate such endangerment and may allow the children to remain with the parents … Yet it is still not unusual for children to be placed in foster care because of a family's inadequate housing or outright homelessness, lack of adequate food and clothing, or inability to obtain day care, problems which child welfare agencies have been unable or unwilling to address.

Child-alone not child-centred practice

In the current SCP system in which neoliberal notions of individualism are embedded, an atomised view of children can exist where a 'language of child protection situates the idealised child separately from his/her family' (Featherstone et al. 2014: 1742). With the tag of child-centred practice, SCP strives to represent itself from a children's rights perspective. Children's connection with primary care-giving kin has been downplayed as the system has seen parents as perpetrators rather than people who need help. Terms like 'the paramount needs' and 'best interests of child' contained in all Australian legislation can be paralysing to critical analysis of the SCP system's propensity for child-alone practice. They can silence those seeking to explore better ways than long-term removal from kin. Handled sensitively, short-term removal of children and young people from situations of harm and risk of harm can be beneficial and is sometimes clearly necessary. However, this requires workers with relationship skills (Munro 2011: 14) to ensure genuinely child- and young people-centred, family-focused, long-term outcomes.

Bessant (2011: 258) alerts us to the unexamined assumptions which govern notions about the SCP care system and the ways in which children and young people can be cast adrift from any meaningful connections. With a flawed *in loco parentis* system (Bessant 2011: 259) and contact with kin often severed (the subject of the following section) many children and young people are indeed alone.

As stated earlier, the forcible removal of children and young people from their kin has occurred throughout history in Australia. As such practices were a feature of past failed policies, we could have confidence that we are developing policy that listens to the needs of children and young people first and foremost. However, this optimism is not borne out by the fact, especially in relation to Indigenous families (Bennett et al. 2013).

Issues in the care system itself and overall poor outcomes

> Most children in 'the care system' are already disadvantaged. Many have experienced poverty, been exposed to domestic violence, to serious parental substance abuse, and parental mental health problems (Bessant 2011: 259).

With the disadvantages of poverty and other deprivations, children and young people become further disadvantaged, marginalised and stigmatised through their experiences in care. There has often been greater willingness by policy-makers and practitioners to focus on the issues that brought children and young people into care than the secondary abuse caused by the experiences of children and young people in the alternative care system. Many children and young people are abused and neglected in state care (Tobis 2013: 185). Those seeking to ensure high quality outcomes for children and young people have difficulty in bringing to public awareness the abuse and neglect of children and young people in the state's own system which has the purpose of nurturing them (Bessant 2011: 261).

Links are often made between the original parental issues that led children to enter care and poor adult outcomes for the young adults who leave the SCP system. These outcomes include criminality, inter-generational disadvantage, poor mental health, drug and alcohol problems, ongoing problems with violence, lack of education and decent employment and of course, parenting difficulties (Johnson et al. 2010: n.p.). What if more critical scrutiny was paid to the experiences of children and young people in the care system as a sign-post to the adult problems that often permanently and significantly blight their lives?

Where To From Here?

The areas discussed in this paper can be seen as cascading factors that combine to explain the present parlous state of outcomes for many children, young people and their families when the state becomes the parent (Bessant 2011: 256). The following section discusses approaches to incorporate critical social work ideas more centrally into SCP in Australia. The sort of emancipatory project discussed by Morley (2014: 170) in the context of work in the sexual assault field is needed in relation to SCP if we are to overcome the frequently poor outcomes for children and young people subjected to its intervention. A changed approach 'is of vital importance in contemporary practice contexts where injustices are deeply ingrained' (Morley 2014: 215).

Addressing disadvantage

Material deprivation in families is as relevant to the removal of children and young people as it ever was in the history of modern child welfare (Pelton 2015: 38). Bywaters (2015: 17-18) calls for deprivation to be tackled locally and with the clear aim of reducing the factors precipitating vulnerability and harm to children and young people within their families. SCP needs to take a more active and humane position in relation to poverty alleviation in families caught up in its system. Providing the means for parents and other family members to care for their children rather than lose them to the care system becomes part of the work to be undertaken to ensure the safety and wellbeing for vulnerable children and young people (Pelton 2015: 38). Critical social work has an analysis and practice commitment to combating poverty. Social workers are well-placed to lead the organisational response to material disadvantage in families caught up in the statutory child protection system.

Professional social work as an ally

The AASW has done a considerable amount to address the problems in statutory child protection in Australia (http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/2215) and is a staunch ally in understanding and responding to the entrenched problems that affect social work's effectiveness in reforming the SCP system. This paper calls for this AASW work to be built upon within an alliance of support for social work in SCP from the academic leaders of the profession through the peak body, the Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work (ACHSSW). It is important that the social work academy stands with front line workers (MacKinnon, 2009: 527). Gray and Webb (2009: 115) write of the place of professional courage in confronting assaults on social work's alliance with the marginalised. SCP is one of the most contested fields of practice for social workers and, as discussed in this paper, a high stakes field for social workers concerned to address the disadvantage evident in the lives of SCP service users. There is a precedent for the ACHSSW taking up a major social change issue with its previous commissioning of the *People's Inquiry into Detention* into the conditions of asylum seekers and refugees (ACHSSW 2006). The clout of the ACHSSW would bring considerable impetus for change in the SCP area if concerted and persistent.

I endorse Pelton's (2015: 39) call for child and family welfare stakeholders including children and young people, parents, direct service workers, policy makers and academics to unite in a fundamental challenge to the current dysfunctional system, which needs a 'root and branch' re-structuring.

Social work practitioners in the SCP system have frequently experienced isolation and lack of support from the broad community. The support of such allies as discussed above could fundamentally challenge policy

and practice in a SCP system underscored by harsh neoliberal approaches to children, young people and families. The ideas for change presented in this paper require considerably more discussion and development.

Conclusion

Statutory child protection needs social work of a critical bent. The mission of critical social work has clashed with a statutory child protection system bound up with neoliberal understandings of the causes and consequences of social problems affecting children, young people and their families. Social workers have often felt powerless to resist these understandings. They have often felt constrained in arguing for practice more consistent with critical social work's mission. An SCP system informed by critical social work principles would distinguish between the small minority of children and young people who need long-term, out-of-home care, and the majority of families, that could function, with real material and other support, in the long-term interests of children's and young people's safety and wellbeing. This paper has considered some issues and recommendations that need much further consideration and theoretical discussion.

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IT'S IN THE DETAIL

She tells me bees make two teaspoons of honey in their lifetime elsewhere I read just one twelfth and that bats have stretchy wing skin far more elastic than birds' So that gangly image of adolescents who don't know how long their arms are one morning to the next is extra articulation providing extra wing lift and speed And if your pet python is pressing up against you he is not being affectionate he is sizing you up you need to re-home him preferably in a jungle Tarantulas whistle hum and moult they eat frogs but rarely birds in spite of what they say There is the falcon that bites its prey on the spine an instant kill and another that plucks away half the fur before tucking in The osprey can pivot its wing bones to shield its eyes so it can fly directly into the sun if and as needed (other birds can't do this) I think of such exquisite details every home trip driving into the sun without my sunglasses.

LIZZ MURPHY,
BINALONG, NSW

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tiny workshop

Vinegar chips
on the beach
salted with sand
burns on finger tips
gullets seared
squabbling like gulls
mine

Burns on shoulders
and nose tips
hats mushrooming
around castles
mother's warnings
forgotten in the hurry
of tide

and time rushing
last chips
hard nuggets
of burnt oil
shake and rattle
in the paper cup
bottom

Vinyl burning
backs of thighs
Not squabbling
to climb up front
Mum's seat empty
all the ride
home

Vinegar on the lips

JANE DOWNING,
ALBURY, NSW

Cultural Responsiveness and Social Work – a Discussion

SUE GREEN, BINDI BENNETT AND SONIA BETTERIDGE

This paper uses a critical framework to discuss the importance of culturally responsive practice when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. Critical social work aims to critique and dismantle the societal structures that create oppression and inequalities for powerless groups of people within society. The social work profession will be used to illustrate the importance of culturally responsive practice, as it attempts to ensure that its practice is culturally safe with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. This article explores cultural responsiveness through three auto-ethnographies from both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal perspectives that are highly applicable to a range of professions.

Introduction

Australia, as a colonised nation, has witnessed a destructive journey of dispossession, displacement and trans-generational trauma for Australia's First Nations People; the impacts of which continue to this day (Bennett 2013). The social work profession has played a significant and catastrophic part in this journey through its implementation of policies of cultural genocide (Gilbert 2005). One of the ways that social workers have been involved in implementing policies of cultural genocide is through their role in the removal of Aboriginal children, known as The Stolen Generations, which has been acknowledged through an apology given by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). The profound grief, loss and trauma these policies inflicted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is still clearly visible today.

In 2004, the AASW formally apologised to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for the profession's role in the creation of the Stolen Generation and for the implementation of assimilation policies that 'contravened core values of social work such as human dignity and worth, social justice and self-determination' (AASW 2004, pp 1-2). This validation of the trauma caused by the aggressive imposition of the colonising culture, acting as the 'expert' in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, was an important first step towards healing what has understandably been a contentious relationship between social work and Australia's First Nation Peoples (Briskman 2007: 80-98).

Today, Australian social workers are guided by the AASW Code of Ethics (2010: 17), which clearly outlines the profession's commitment to valuing 'the unique cultural knowledge and skills, different knowledge systems, history, lived experience and community relationships of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content must now form a core component of AASW accredited social work programs. This clear statement that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges are now core to the knowing, being and doing of social work' encourages the development of culturally responsive social work practices across the profession, in both education and practice (Zubrzycki et al. 2014: 100). But for this to be enacted, there must first be a clear understanding of what it means to practice in culturally responsive ways.

Critical Social Work

Critical social work outlines the need to recognise the social structures that impact upon the life experiences of members of society and also directs social workers to work with the most vulnerable and oppressed within society in order to create social change and social justice (Payne 2014: 22). Furthermore, critical theory provides the basis upon which not only to examine but also to challenge the social structures that create oppression. Australia has a particular set of views and beliefs around issues of race that have been created through the process of colonisation and have (Quinn 2009: 92) been used to oppress and discriminate against Aboriginal Australians. This oppression also limits the opportunity of Aboriginal people to have a voice in determining the issues affecting their lives. A critical approach opens space for Aboriginal people and other 'minority' groups

to claim their knowledge and expertise. This paper provides an example of this in that the authors are not from the dominant culture grouping in Australia and two are Aboriginal Australians.

Culturally Responsive Social Work

The AASW's Code of Ethics (2010: 17) refers to cultural responsiveness within social work as 'culturally competent, safe and sensitive practice'; a definition extended by the AASW's Practice Standards (2013: 11) to include 'culturally responsive and inclusive practice'. According to Zubrycki et al. (2014: 21), culturally responsive practice refers to the development of 'collaborative and respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in order to respond to the issues and needs of communities in ways that promote social justice and uphold human rights'. The journey towards cultural responsiveness necessitates awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing; and then critical awareness in applying this information to social work practice. Cultural responsiveness, if practised effectively, works towards improved outcomes through the integration of culture in service delivery (Centre for Cultural Competence Australia, 2013).

Importantly, cultural responsiveness goes beyond mere competence and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As Dean (2001: 629) explains:

> Once we presume to 'know' about another we have appropriated that person's culture and reinforced our own dominant, egocentric position. I am proposing that we distrust the experience of 'competence' and replace it with a state of mind in which we are interested, and open but always tentative about what we understand.

Unlike cultural competency, cultural responsiveness is an ongoing process that requires thinking of the self in relation to others and the systems in which they interact. Critical reflection is a crucial element in culturally responsive practice.

Components of Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is a multi-faceted process. Not only should it focus on teaching students Aboriginal content; it should, as outlined by Gay (2000: 20), necessitate using 'cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them'. It requires the acknowledgement of the 'legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both

as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning'. In this sense, culturally responsive teaching can be seen as a bridge 'between that which is familiar in a student's real world and that which is taught in the classroom' (Collins and O'Brien 2011: 120).

Effective teaching requires more than a pedagogical framework and the sharing of content knowledge with students. The manner in which content is delivered is crucial to student engagement and responsive learning (Rajagopal 2011). Modelling is a tool commonly used in teaching practice and is based on the notion that effective teaching should ideally model and mirror the behaviour and application of critical reflection (Loughran 2002). When modelling culturally responsive teaching practice, 'lecturers are required to give explicit, concrete examples and demonstrate their own ability to be culturally responsive' (Shevalier and McKenzie 2012: 1087) by interweaving their students' cultural identities and perspectives into the content of their lessons.

Dialogue is another way that lecturers can approach teaching cultural responsiveness. 'Dialog is the means through which we learn what the other wants and needs, and it is also the means by which we monitor the effect of our acts. We ask, "What are you going through?" before we act, as we act, and after we act' (Noddings 2002: 19). Dialogue, by definition, necessitates an open conversation – a sharing of meanings, thoughts and perspectives between willing participants. In culturally responsive teaching, dialogue is important as it demonstrates to students that 'rather than the voice of one authority, meaning is made as a product of dialogue between and among individuals' (Ladson-Billings 1995: 473) – allowing students to witness and participate in culturally reflective and responsive thought and practice.

Culturally responsive teaching necessitates paying attention to students and listening to what they have to contribute in order to build strong respectful relationships (Shevalier and McKenzie 2012). Effective lecturers can then respond to their students and teach them how to develop connections not just with each other; but also with those that are diverse from themselves. Culturally responsive teaching is the 'what', 'how' and 'why' and at its core, it is about ethics (Shevalier and McKenzie 2012: 1100). It reflects a moral stance where the goal is to value human worth, while paying attention to each other's thoughts, beliefs and perspectives is part of the journey towards opening hearts and minds.

When applying these three strategies – modelling, dialogue and attention – the culturally responsive lecturer remains mindful of the fact that cultural responsiveness

opens the student to critical reflection and being able to leave themselves vulnerably open to new ideas that may go against what their culture has always taught is the 'only' right way. This journey is non-linear, which is important to consider when planning courses in cultural responsiveness. Culturally responsive practice is a continuous learning experience that involves a change in perspective and in the way social work is approached and practised. As noted by Semchison (2001: 10):

> All of the students, myself included, felt that the most powerful times in these classes were when we were allowed to engage in immersive learning ... Sharing on a social, personal level is the only true way to understanding and communication. What became evident for all of us is that anyone given the responsibility of making decisions affecting lives should first experience at least some aspects of those lives.

The final challenge to consider in social work education is to teach culturally responsive practice without assuming expert knowledge over others. It requires Aboriginal people to:

> be able to live our lives free from assumptions by others about what is best for us. It requires recognition of our values, culture and traditions so that they can co-exist with those of mainstream society. It requires respecting our difference and celebrating it within the diversity of the nation (Human Rights Commission n.d.).

Implications for Critical Social Work

Culturally responsive practice is, above all, an affirmation of diversity, valuing all groups, identities and cultures within Australia. It integrates respect for this diversity in organisations' programs and policies and in the very teachings of social work (Perso 2012). It offers a way to be truly sensitive to another's culture, customs, beliefs, values and behaviours (Williams 2007). Awareness of one's own culture, values, beliefs, traditions, context and history is central to culturally responsive practice.

For Bennett et al. (2011: 27), 'the process of reflecting on the self in practice, especially at the beginning of a social worker's practice with Aboriginal people, is complex and multifaceted and transcends cultural boundaries and identities'. Becoming aware of one's own culture enables social workers to address stereotypes, and 'their own assumptions and biases in order to reduce barriers' (Mason et al. cited in Heflinger and Nixon 1996: 70). In this way, it contributes to socio-cultural consciousness and social workers' ability to engage in critical reflection.

There is a movement from professional bodies (such as the AASW) directing practitioners to be culturally responsive. However, many practitioners have had limited training in the area and many have limited understanding of what cultural responsiveness means. Despite the work done to date, education programs are still struggling to implement AASW Practice Standards due to the lack of formal education for educators, and a limited number of Aboriginal Social Work academics.

Auto-Ethnographies

These ethnographies represent three varied experiences. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives are presented to highlight different journeys and different perspectives of cultural responsiveness. Sue is an Aboriginal social work academic who has taught for fifteen years. Bindi is an Aboriginal academic who has been teaching for five years. At the time of writing this article, Sonia was a first-year Masters of Social Work student on practicum with Bindi.

Sue

I am a Galari woman of the Wiradjuri nation, a mother and grandmother. I hold a Bachelor of Social Work (Hons) and a PhD. I have been employed in the university sector for over 20 years; 15 years as an academic. My earliest days of developing cultural awareness training to non-Aboriginal people started when my own children were in primary school. I was asked to speak to the teaching staff about the needs of Aboriginal children as well as Aboriginal history and how teachers could be culturally aware when working with Aboriginal people. This usually involved telling my own story as this helped participants to engage with cultural awareness and to be less personally challenged. Over time I became more unsettled during these sessions and started to question the outcomes, including whether I was entertaining the participants – though at times it was distressing for some of them to hear my story – rather than bringing about any real change in how non-Aboriginal people interacted with Aboriginal people.

I believe I was being asked to help non-Aboriginal people find a way to understand us, so that they could enable us to achieve and be just like them. The focus of the story was always Aboriginal people and what was preventing us from being just like them, rather than what non-Aboriginal people could do to change the way they were and to change the structures within which they lived and operated. Today I believe the focus of cultural awareness needs to be on non-Aboriginal people, and non-Aboriginal people being able to see how their ways of thinking, being and knowing have impacted upon themselves and their relationship with Aboriginal people.

Over the past two decades the terminology and the concept of cultural awareness has been changing. The most recent concept within the Australian context has been cultural responsiveness. I came across cultural responsiveness whilst trying to work out how to teach students to be culturally competent. When cultural competency first appeared, I thought at last we had something that was more than just someone doing a session or two, hearing stories and believing that they were either sensitive or aware of someone else's culture. I thought we were moving from a passive state of *knowing* into an active state of *doing* something.

Cultural competency seemed the next step to cultural safety. We had been talking about ensuring services and professional practices were culturally safe, but the focus was still on the 'other', on Aboriginal people, and was based on non-Aboriginal people and services being aware and sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal people. I thought cultural competency would require people to show they were competent to work with Aboriginal people. To this end, I thought about the social work course on working with Aboriginal people I was teaching and to redevelop it to build the cultural competency of the students.

It was a time-consuming and frustrating task; no matter what I did I could not find the answer as to how to tell if someone was culturally competent. At this point I had to accept that whilst being culturally competent might be a great aspiration, it is also unachievable. Firstly, I recognised that cultures are ever evolving and changing, as are people. Secondly, there are so many different cultures and ways of experiencing cultures, just within Aboriginal communities, let alone the general society. It is my belief, therefore, that it is not possible to ever be culturally competent.

I then came across a model of cultural responsiveness. This model had been developed by Williams (2007) for those providing domestic violence services to African American communities in the United States. The model focused on different stages of cultural responsiveness and encouraged practitioners to understand their own culture and accept other's cultural practices as equals even when they were different or in conflict with their own. At the same time, I found a policy from the Victorian Department of Health on Cultural Responsive Practice (Department of Health 2007) for multi-cultural clients. Although both models were focused on groups other than Aboriginal Australians, each offered important concepts for non-Aboriginal people working with Aboriginal people. Shortly afterwards I became involved in a project 'Getting It Right', which focused on social work curriculum regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. During this project, the project team discussed the

place of culturally competent practice. I offered this new concept – cultural responsiveness – and started to teach it to social work students. I discussed my issues with competency and it was eventually decided to proceed with the concept of cultural responsiveness. A couple of other members of the group and I decided to adapt the American model for the Australian context. The model we developed based on stage theory[1], although not perfect, provided an important start.

Since that time, I have continued to develop the model. In considering the model as it stands, a key danger is evident. Whilst it is important to reflect the gaze back onto non-Aboriginal people and their ways of thinking, knowing and doing, there is danger in their continued power and ownership of knowledge over Aboriginal people. In short, non-Aboriginal people become the experts and Aboriginal people are the objects of their knowledge and practice. Developing a way of shifting the gaze onto non-Aboriginal people and their culture whilst ensuring Aboriginal people are recognised as the experts of their knowledge and lived experiences is essential.

Bindi

I am a Gamilaroi woman and have been a social worker for 16 years; five as an academic, recently graduating with my PhD. This professional history has given me a lot of practical knowledge and experience. My story has been one of change. When I first started social work I thought my job was that of a conduit – the plug that put Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples together, with the goal of improving Aboriginal peoples' socio-economic situation and general wellbeing. I was partially successful at this in the mental health arena in which I worked. Then I came to university and found myself in what I considered to be the dark ages.

Academia is preoccupied with experts and expertise and often has non-Aboriginal people in the role of Aboriginal 'expert' (they suffer from 'expertitis'[2]). These experts are held up as people who know all about working with Aboriginal people. Usually this position is given kudos, pay and power. Often Aboriginal people are overlooked as experts in their own culture; with academics seemingly more comfortable with a non-Aboriginal expert. It is not uncommon for an Aboriginal person to be offered the 'in-house' expert role, only to experience a reality where they get all the Aboriginal jobs and little of the recognition that comes with being a specialist in the area. The Aboriginal academic's cultural ideas and knowledge are appropriated into the system and the individual is overlooked and undervalued in the broader process. This is the epitome of colonisation practices.

Cultural teaching seems to be treated like acquiring a driver's licence: all you do is read the information, take the test, pass and *voilà*, you have an Aboriginal expert. Cultural responsiveness, however, changes the rules. It takes the focus off the experts and places the responsibility and accountability with the social worker themselves. None of us will ever be experts, even in our own culture. We acknowledge our own individual knowledge but are aware of the diversity and ever changing landscape of culture (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). Cultural responsiveness invites us to step back from 'expertitis' and to privilege and empower the knowledge holders and keepers – the Aboriginal people themselves. Until social work and social work educators give the power, control and kudos to Aboriginal people wholly and solely, and give the message to non-Aboriginal students that they are the ones that must be aware of their own culture, values and worldviews, then we cannot move forward.

I ask non-Indigenous people that are already in this space. Are you being truly collaborative? Are you setting yourself up as an expert? Are you teaching someone to replace you (and are they Aboriginal)? Being a true ally means fighting with someone, and not for them or instead of them. It is being prepared to be humble and grateful and to help someone obtain a publication or grant without having to put your name on it. It is everything against the 'game' of academia but everything for real life social justice.

The aim of cultural responsiveness is to question Western 'experts' and expertise and to aim for epistemological equality. That is, the opening up of creating space for Aboriginal peoples' lived experiences, knowledge and position. Through the telling of our stories, of not only allowing space but also privileging the voices of Aboriginal people we ensure that Aboriginal people are acknowledged as the 'experts' of their own lived experiences. This recognises the importance, value and status of Aboriginal people's knowledge and culture and sees it not as an *alternate* position but as an *equal* position. It is also important that the academy does not give all of the Aboriginal work to the Aboriginal academics but sees it as everyone's responsibility. Sue Green says, 'if you can work with us (Aboriginal people) you can work with anyone'. The emphasis is on the *with* us, not *for* us, *to* us or *at* us. That is the challenge of cultural responsiveness.

Sonia

As a first-year Master of Social Work student, I entered into my research placement with one goal in mind – to learn as much as possible about how I could work in a culturally responsive manner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Whilst I was aware that

this would require a personal, emotional and academic investment on my behalf, I did not expect this placement to take me on such a personal journey of self-discovery and self-reflection.

I soon realised that many of the worldviews of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – the importance of extended families and kin, for example – were perspectives that my culture of birth, the Chilean culture, shared. It quickly became clear to me that if I were to understand a culture other than my own, I would first have to understand my own cultural beliefs.

This stage of the learning journey was the most difficult for me. My focus had been on learning about others, different ways of being, doing and knowing, and having to turn that focus on myself was both confronting and essential. The first step was accepting that I had been in denial of my own culture and cultural beliefs for a long time. As a Chilean-born Australian, I had turned my back on my Chilean heritage in my teenage years in an attempt to 'not stand out' – to blend in and become invisible amongst my predominantly white, Anglo friends. I felt shame about my cultural background and had made a conscious decision to assimilate as much as I possibly could to disappear into 'white' society. Facing these feelings during this placement was a powerful experience. Accepting that I have a culture that is different to the dominant, Eurocentric culture was difficult, as I had convinced myself that 'blending' and assimilating was the only way to be truly accepted according to our unspoken rules.

It was difficult to accept that I had my own culture, set of beliefs and worldviews that had shaped who I was, how I thought and what I felt – that was different to the dominant, white, Eurocentric Australian culture. I became aware of my differences and found myself feeling defensive. If someone looked at me on the street, my immediate thought became 'it's because I'm not white'. This was a short-lived stage and I think it was just a part of coming to terms with my own identity. I also realised that I had been trying hard to belong and be part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as I felt so connected to it. Upon weeks of reflection, I realised it was the similarities with my own Chilean heritage that drew me to Aboriginal culture. Understanding who I am, where I come from and what has shaped my thoughts, beliefs, prejudices and actions was crucial to beginning to understand, and be open to, aspects of other cultures.

Whiteness theory and discussions of power and privilege were particularly enlightening at this point. As an educated woman, I realise that I am positioned with both power and privilege, especially in regards to my future clients. Understanding this was important, but of greater importance was understanding that with this level of

privilege comes immense responsibility and the need to employ a level of cultural humility. It offers me knowledge of how to consider and make changes at a broader level – such as in policy – to challenge oppression and rectify situations that are negatively affecting the people with whom I work.

Conclusion

The debate about cultural responsiveness in social work is only just beginning. Understanding our own identity is integral to cultural responsiveness. Social workers need to critically reflect on what they have learnt about Aboriginal peoples, whether this has changed any pre-existing views they may have had, and if they themselves have been able to individually change and grow fromdue to the information presented.

Cultural responsiveness is not a short course or module. A real commitment requires it to be ongoing and evolving, just like culture. The process should be encouraging and inspire the continual reflective learning process that is so important to social work practice and development. Social workers need to embed cultural responsiveness whilst ensuring Aboriginal people remain the teachers, mentors and guides in this process. Non-Aboriginal social workers can value Aboriginal people's knowledge and show them respect and humbleness.

Our experiences highlight how the process of how we teach can be more important than what we teach; echoing the Indigenous perspective that the learning is more important than the result. How we learn and who we learn it from is important, but it is the decision to learn in an ongoing, open, and sustainable way that makes a great social worker. Cultural responsiveness is a model for social workers to aim towards. In the end, it takes a willing, humble and vulnerable participant to embark on the culturally responsive path. To end colonisation and white privilege, however, and to be true to our social justice values, cultural responsiveness seems a necessary response for our students, our profession and ourselves. Cultural responsiveness can be seen as empowering and transforming for the student. It approaches the individual's growth as multi-dimensional, active and a true personal and social process. Cultural responsiveness is emancipatory; it teaches there is no 'magic pill', no 'one answer' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues or peoples, but that better connectedness and relationships hold the key to real and sustainable change.

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End Notes

1. Stage Theories generally tend to say something starts at stage 1, then through development move to stage 2, then stage 3 and so on.
2. Phrase borrowed from Peter Humphries – friend, colleague and mentor in social work.

Never, never be afraid to do what's right, especially if the well-being of a person or animal is at stake. Society's punishments are small compared to the wounds that we inflict on our soul when we look the other way.

----- MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

Travel Solo

I am here without you

this time, crossing passport checks

without pause

for the visitor side.

Your time is better spent

in service, university bound

while I pad down streets

with shifting hands

in pockets.

I stop along the fringe

of wary banyans, perch a moment

and take note.

Joggers watch

under foam peaks,

wide lenses

from the windows

in Harbour City.

I struggle with camera

and consternation.

To pause,

stark and staring, in the flow

is to flirt

with tourist ancestry.

Anachronistic affectation,

but when I tell you

of the scene later on,

all I feel is joy.

SIOBHAN HODGE,
PERTH, WA

Social Work in Dark Places: Clash of values in offshore immigration detention

LINDA BRISKMAN AND JANE DOE

Social work practice in offshore detention sites is a contested area in Australia. From first-hand experience, this article examines the dilemmas facing a caseworker during the time she was employed by a non-government organisation in Nauru, where Australia had transferred asylum seekers trying to reach Australia by boat. Discussion centres on the betrayal of social work principles in the course of employment including the tension between confidentiality and silencing; power differentials and empowerment; and lack of preparation for practice with vulnerable and traumatised asylum seekers. The article further examines social work inability to enact a duty of care to people experiencing mental illnesses. Presented are ideas for an ethical role for social work engagement.

Introduction

In his seminal work *Under the Cover of Kindness* Margolin (1997: 43) spoke of how with the advent of social work, people became vulnerable to judgment. This resonates to the present with the state of play of social work in neoliberal and increasingly punitive environments where core values may be severely compromised and social workers, as agents of the state, are required to collude. Despite enshrinement of tenets of social justice and human rights in social work ethics, both globally and nationally, the much-discussed contradiction of care and control survives. As Davis and Garret note (2004: 30), social workers are exhorted to demonstrate through their practice that society is concerned to protect those unable to participate fully as citizens, while simultaneously enforcing controlling responses toward those deemed to have failed to act as 'responsible'.

This conundrum plays out in a variety of settings but is no clearer than social work in 'closed environments'. The paper discusses this phenomenon in relation to asylum seeker detention in Nauru and Manus Island (Papua New Guinea), referred to in this paper as offshore sites, established at the behest of the Australian Government as a major plank of its harsh asylum policies. Through a discourse of illegality and criminality, asylum seeker boat arrivals are apprehended, transported and contained, equating to what Welch (2012: 324) refers to as 'crimmigration'.

The authors have complementary interest and expertise in this topic. 'Jane Doe'[1] was employed in 'social care' roles by agencies contracted by the Australian Government to work on Nauru and to a lesser extent on Manus Island. Her witness accounts in diary musings from Nauru are incorporated in this paper. Briskman is an academic activist who conducts research and writes about the ways in which asylum seeker detention violates normative policies and practices (for example Briskman et al. 2008). The emphasis of the paper is on a worker's experiential account of daily work. It is not a study of detained asylum seekers but a critical reflection of how social work is perceived and enacted in offshore detention and the ethical dilemmas confronting a social worker.

We first set the scene by providing a brief sketch of Australia's asylum seeker policies, immigration detention and offshore sites.

The Scourge of Immigration Detention

For more than two decades, policies have been put in place to prevent people arriving in Australia without valid documentation.[2] Anchored in mandatory detention legislation of 1992 that was aimed at deterring Indochinese boat arrivals, asylum seeker boat arrivals – men, women and children – have been held in immigration detention facilities in metropolitan, rural and remote locations and on the isolated Indian Ocean territory of Christmas Island, a four hour flight from the nearest Australian mainland city of Perth.

Concerns about inconsistency of detention policies and practices with Australia's human rights obligations

have received attention from international and domestic human rights bodies, including the prohibition of arbitrary detention enshrined in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the imposition of practices that violate the *Convention Against Torture* and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Penovic 2014: 9-10).

Offshore sites of detention were established in 2001, ceased in 2008 and reinstated in 2012. It began with what is known as the 'Tampa affair'[3], was suspended with a change from a Coalition to a Labor Government and then reinstated by Labor in response to an increase in boat arrivals. The contributing rhetoric is what Rothfield (2014) refers to in his book *The Drownings Argument* as prevention of deaths at sea. Like Rothfield, many commentators argue that this is flawed logic, including academic William Maley (2013) who posits that those fleeing the Taliban will still die, but will do so by drowning in the Mediterranean or by suffocation in overcrowded trucks.

Sites of Offshore Detention

Nauru is a country of ten thousand people, economically disadvantaged and reliant on overseas aid, including from Australia. Its landscape has been denuded by international exploitation of its phosphate reserves. It was also bankrupt and hence was open to hosting immigration detention facilities for economic gain. Papua New Guinea (PNG), under colonial rule by Australia until 1975, has also been beset by poverty and social problems. As a former colonial master, Australia was able to convince PNG of mutual benefits in opening a centre on Manus Island – economic gain for PNG and a border control measure for Australia.

Offshore detention in both sites has been subject to rebuke not only from human rights bodies but also refugee advocates, lawyers, faith groups and professional organisations and individuals. Among the criticisms are issues of mental health, minimal provision of bare necessities and excessive control, each of which is explored in this paper through the narrative of Jane Doe.

Protest has been a feature of immigration detention for people denied agency, becoming a discursive struggle for reinstatement as rights-bearing human beings (Fiske 2012: 107). Both offshore sites have been beset by protest, including fires on Nauru in 2013 and riots on Manus Island in 2014 during which Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati was brutally murdered and others seriously injured. Despite the problems, criticism and cost of offshore detention, estimated to be at around one billion Australian dollars (Anderson 2015), exile and containment of asylum seekers offshore remains bipartisan policy.

Enter Health and Welfare Professionals

An array of health and welfare professionals have been employed in offshore sites, with sub-contracted providers including the non-government organisations of the Salvation Army and Save the Children. Alongside the private security companies tasked with securing 'good order' of the sites, professionals have been employed to provide a range of health, welfare and educational services to detained men, women and children. Although in mainland detention social workers were not generally part of the detention workforce, they have been increasingly employed by NGOs, lured by high incomes, a belief they are 'doing good' and a sense of overseas adventure. Jane Doe saw the job advertisement online and in December 2012 began a six-week rotation (four weeks on/two weeks off). From the moment of recruitment and first impressions it soon became obvious that all was not well.

Organisations that employ social workers and other professionals, generally have well documented policies and practices for recruitment orientation and working conditions. By way of contrast, Jane Doe recounts what happened in Nauru.

> I was collected from the airport and taken to the local hotel where I shared a bedroom with eleven people – I slept on the floor on a small mattress (Note: big cockroaches). Some of us slept on army-type stretcher beds, the same as the clients had in their tents. Some male staff had to stay on the edge of the detention centre in tents because there wasn't enough room at the hotel.

> I recall my first day – an hour or so briefing in 'The Mess'. All I remember from that briefing was being told to not wear dangly earrings because one of the asylum seekers might rip it from my ear. The demographics of the detained asylum seekers were outlined, but nothing was said about our role expectations. We were not provided with vital information or training such as trauma-informed care and suicide risk-assessment training, which as incidents outlined below reveal, ought to have been transmitted as essential knowledge.

> Our office was a shack-like building. It had air conditioning, flip up plastic white tables like at sports carnivals and plastic chairs. We were often required to use our personal laptops as there were insufficient computers. We had not developed a proper psychosocial assessment methodology at this time. We were more or less 'winging' it, reacting to client requests and crises as they occurred. I remember staying in the office sometimes until

1am to get all of my work done. There was no direct line-manager at that time so there was no-one to tell us to go home.

I was originally employed as a 'support worker'. For the first week or so, I would undertake shifts in the computer room, help organise board games, craft and other activities, work in the canteen and at the laundry and razor exchange. The rest of the time I just walked around and spoke to the men. There was no purpose to the role that I was ever aware of. We were not provided with a position description. EVER. After about a week or so, the management team asked if anyone had qualifications or experience in welfare/case management/social work/psychology. I had a Bachelor of Psychology and was in the process of completing a social work qualification. Once this was known, I was promoted to a case manager.

I made it clear that I didn't have any experience. Not many of us did. We were mostly new graduates. We did not have a team leader or anyone to turn to for practical advice, for supervision, for skills development or for debriefing after a crisis situation.

Support was non-existent. During my time, the organisation's general manager changed three times. We were compelled to 'debrief' when leaving the island after a rotation. Incongruously this took place in a group setting in the hotel restaurant while eating breakfast. Upon completion of my final rotation there was no debriefing and no follow up.

Betrayal of Social Work

We outline three social work practice tenets to illustrate the disjuncture between these tenets and social work practice in offshore detention centres. They are: confidentiality, empowerment and trauma based practice, each of which inform social work with vulnerable and marginalised peoples.

In order to protect the privacy of individuals *confidentiality* is considered sacrosanct. But in offshore sites, the notion of confidentiality has been misappropriated to include unprecedented levels of secrecy that are unrelated to client confidentiality. To ensure compliance, new measures have been added to the already stringent confidentiality provisions that workers need to sign up to before commencing employment. In 2015, the *Border Force Act* made it a crime, punishable by two years imprisonment, for anyone who engages in work for the Department of Immigration to disclose any information obtained by them while doing that work (Bradley 2015). Such laws appear to contradict the Australian Association

of Social Workers Code of Ethics, that calls on social workers to bring about social or systemic change to reduce social barriers, inequality and injustice (AASW 2010: 8). This is a requirement that is impossible to comply with in offshore detention places of employment.

Empowerment is a concept that social workers privilege in their practice. From a critical social work perspective derives the principle that the role of a social worker is to help people to empower themselves. For Allan (2003: 59-60), discourse is central, as there needs to be an openness to alternative interpretations of situations and an understanding of the impact of power relations. But for a cohort with uncertain futures located in a site of despair, the sense of powerlessness makes it nigh impossible to overcome asylum seeker helplessness and also worker helplessness. State bureaucracy discourse was the only perspective permitted, creating fear for both asylum seekers and care professionals of stepping outside what became normalised.

Much social work practice with asylum seekers and refugees is *trauma-based practice*. For asylum seekers, trauma follows a convergence of factors including home country situation, flight, journey, detention, worry about families left behind and uncertainty. Being contained and restricted with no end in sight for release was trauma-producing and no matter how compassionate workers were, they were unable to relieve anxiety and depression that manifest in the suffocating environments. The only form of relief for physical pain was medication (Boochani 2016) – usually paracetamol – and for emotional pain, anti-depressant medication and sleeping tablets.

In the following section we provide examples of social work in offshore detention from the perspective of Jane Doe, focusing on some of the key areas of human rights criticism in order to juxtapose detention practices with what is deemed to be 'best practice' social work. These are the lack of minimal provision of mental health bare necessities and excessive control. To provide context, we first present Jane Doe's reflections on the working environment.

Around twelve hours of each day was spent inside the centre with clients. Sometimes less, sometimes more. Then it's 'home' – which was the old detention centre that existed when only single male asylum seekers were detained on the island. Home was constructed similarly to the detention centre itself – the main difference was that staff were in building blocks and clients were in tents.

The ground was glary white gravel. Surrounded by high fencing and barbed wire, there were CCTV cameras on most corners. Photo ID was required to enter one's

'home', and there was a long list of prohibited items considered contraband. Security guards could check belongings at random as a condition of entry and we were powerless to refuse. On one occasion workers' bags were searched to make sure we complied with the 'one banana from the dining room' rule.

In addition to proximity to security personnel and Immigration Department staff, some clients even shared our living area at times. They stayed in smaller, encaged areas when they were ill. I have walked in my pyjamas to brush my teeth in the communal basin or to go to the toilet when a client gestures at me from inside of the cage to come and to help.

Social workers and other professionals become invested in clients' situations, acutely aware that what was taking place was wrong, inhumane, and worst of all, avoidable and unnecessary. Many of us felt an acute sense of moral obligation to all of Australia, to all of humanity, to share what was happening when we returned to the Australian mainland.

But this was not possible. At least not openly. And not without risk. Not without fear and certainly not if we wanted to keep our jobs.

This is an untenable position after witnessing ongoing abuses of human rights as documented below by Jane Doe.

Mental health

Psychological breakdowns were in front of us. In the middle of the mess area, my colleagues witnessed a client collapsing to the floor, eating dirt and defecating. I witnessed self-harm, including the cutting of wrists with razor blades, smashing a head against a brick wall, lip-sewing and cutting body parts including the face, followed by profuse bleeding. One client stabbed himself in the abdomen with a broken bottle during the evening running group. Others attempted suicide (hanging from tent frames, jumping from scaffolding). All these acts directly resulted from condemnation of already traumatised people to a lifetime of perpetual uncertainty. Our utter helplessness mirrored theirs.

Minimal provision

Poor allocation of life essentials rendered asylum seekers to 'bare life', a term coined by Giorgio Agamben (1998). In this section I focus on food, which was a source of distress for those on the receiving end. The nutritional quality of the food that the families and children were eating was poor. It could only be described as metal trays of slop such as unidentifiable processed meat. The only item that

resembled a vegetable was pickles. Every day it was the same. Much of the food was covered in flies. The only snacks available from the canteen for children were chocolate bars, chips, two-minute noodles, and soft drinks. We raised our concerns repeatedly at case management meetings, as the food in the staff mess was of a much higher quality, usually a choice of gourmet-style salads, roast meat, roasted vegetable, yellow-fin tuna, cheese cake. We were told that 'Transfield[4] has a different budget for that area of the site, there's nothing we can do'.

Loss of control

Internet usage was controlled, eating times regulated and queuing to be seated required. Food could not be taken back to tents. The amount of washing powder allocated to each person was restricted, showers were only allowed for a few minutes and shower blocks were patrolled. Many asylum seekers endured such conditions for lengthy periods of time. I observed some who had reached 700 days. Now there are some who have been detained for significantly longer.

Control extended to all elements of asylum seeker lives, with autonomy totally stripped away. Consider for example the simple incident of breaking a shoe. A formal request in writing for an appointment was required for replacement. That appointment might be scheduled for weeks or even longer than a month (it changed all the time). The incorrect size may be all that was available as not enough stock was ordered. It was not only shoes. Socks, underwear – all with restrictions. I remember I was working with a woman aged more than sixty. It took days to get her a pair of socks and after excessive bureaucratic processes she was given a fluffy black pair, totally inappropriate in the heat and humidity of Nauru. Helping pregnant women to find clothes that could fit their growing abdomens was problematic. One Somalian woman told me that she only had one dress and one pair of underwear, so in order to wash her clothes she would wrap herself in a sheet from her bed to walk to the communal laundry area.

Reflections On Power

Critical reflection is fundamental to social work practice (Morley 2015: 281) but opportunities are not only curtailed in offshore detention, but also strongly discouraged. Jane Doe now looks back on her own sense of powerlessness.

Secrecy and layer upon layer of control, administered by the Australian government, affects the work that social workers are able to undertake. This is demoralising, draining and eventually one runs out of fight. And it drains clients until they too can fight no

more. As a social worker, the contest is against other stakeholders, our employing organisation, the system. At times I felt I was fighting against myself for, no matter how much and what form the struggle, I realised I had absolutely no power. My own organisation left me feeling expendable and worthless. I became paranoid and so did others. We started to monitor our own behaviour, and our behaviour changed to comply with the rules.

Duty of care was not taken seriously. We spent around seven hours of a working day office bound, creating care plans for clients who we had not met. Not only was ticking boxes for government the end goal, but we were also encouraged to copy and paste care plans to save time. On one occasion when we complained that we had not had the opportunity to assess a new group transferred from Christmas Island, we were asked to reconsider if we were suitable for the job.

We were under pressure to conduct assessments within specified time frames. As there were not enough interpreters on the island, we were told to use children. The instruction was that if a client gave the 'thumbs up' when they were asked in English if they were okay, we could record them as having good wellbeing/mental health. Eventually, the practice of using children as interpreters was deemed inappropriate and forbidden.

There is an incident that stands out. My client expressed concerns about being ill when in the small, encaged area near our residence. Her friend flagged me over and I spoke to security personnel. The female security guard was very helpful and asked the other guard stationed at the medical block to come over as the client was in pain and having difficulty breathing. She had an infection and was pregnant. The response of this security guard was: 'I've already talked to her and she has to wait to see the doctor! Don't call me back here again ... unless she has a cardiac arrest or something'. Regrettably, such experiences were normalised.

If we stood ground when experiencing these kinds of conflicts, we were perceived as outspoken by line managers, treated as a liability and, as became apparent over time, we realised that any one of us was expendable. If we were believed to be jeopardising the organisation's possibility of contract-renewal, our jobs would be lost and we were returned home without explanation. This was highly distressing, especially as there was no opportunity to refute a complaint, comment or rumour. We were led to believe that we were being watched. We were told at one stage that our actions were being documented and sometimes

filmed without our knowledge. Naturally, as workers we became paranoid, but also conditioned to the level of control to the extent that our own behaviour changed.

Yet we tried to find our way around the system. Being 'subversive' had risks. I remember thinking as I walked the gravel path with a booklet of English resources for a client, [and] about to enter the centre and be meticulously scanned by a guard with a wand: 'Hmmmm. There's quite a big paperclip holding all of this together. What if someone takes it off and turns it into something sharp. [What if] They cut their wrists or inflict other harm on themselves with it?' I threw the paperclip on the ground.

When clients became disengaged and despondent and refused to participate in anything, I would meet with them outside their tents. My role for months (something social work education did not equip me for) would just be to listen while they cried for hours. It was heartbreaking. We would put them on the waiting list for torture and trauma counselling, but sometimes to get an appointment would take months. And the counsellors changed so often that it was upsetting for clients to share their trauma and have their counsellor disappear.

One of my clients had breast cancer. It was impossible to liaise with the medical provider. We were told that case managers were not permitted to liaise with their staff directly. If we wished to enquire about client health on their behalf, we had to write a formal request to our manager who would then relay this in a weekly meeting with the manager of the health organisation, [and was] totally antithetical to principles of collaboration. At one point in time we were also banned from making referrals to torture and trauma counselling and this became the sole domain of the medical service provider.

Pathways Through Ethical Dilemmas

One way of interrogating the paradox of care and control raised at the beginning of this paper is through the dual loyalty framework, currently under-used in social work theorising. Dual loyalty conflicts have been well documented in relation to medical personnel working in apartheid South Africa (International Dual Loyalty Working Group 2002). The essence of the conflict is the question of duty and priority: to the employing organisation and the state or to the person that the worker has professional obligations toward. Analysing the South African situation, Moodley and Kling (2015) suggest that the duty of doctors might be clear, but performing that duty was difficult. In the Australian context, this has been explored in relation to health personnel in mainland immigration

detention facilities where interviews were conducted to determine how dual loyalty issues were confronted in everyday practice (see for example Briskman et al. 2012). Responses varied from doing one's job as expected by the organisation, engaging in minor acts of subversion, and leaving quietly or speaking out publicly upon resignation. The question arises as to what is the most ethical response and if, or how, it can be ensured that practice in constrained settings is ethical practice.

In their practice, social workers and other professional groups may witness human rights violations. They may at times be expected to participate in a range of practices that cause them distress, as shown by Jane Doe's narrative. When such observations and practices can be shown to be not merely idiosyncratic but systematic, political and a violation of core practice ethics, there is space for social workers to contemplate actions which should follow, often requiring a balancing act between the right of the public to know and personal risk.

There are some leads from the medical profession. Steel and Silove have expressed long-standing concerns about adverse mental health impacts of prolonged detention. Although relating to research resonates in their response, they argue that a legitimate moral imperative is to breach 'the walls of enforced silence' (Steel and Silove 2004: 93). As we write, there has been an announcement that doctors are to launch a High Court challenge against laws that prevent them from speaking out over child abuse and other threats to asylum seekers in immigration detention facilities (Hasham 2016b: 6).

An over-arching consideration for social work with asylum seekers is the chasm between what is expected in offshore detention and work with asylum seekers in the community. By way of contrast to offshore detention, practice expectations with asylum seekers in community settings in Australia are premised on fostering independence, self-sufficiency and integration. It is expected that counselling is provided and people referred to services they require. The provision of information and resources is the norm. Empowerment principles are evident in practice through such measures as assisting people for job-readiness through, for example, workshops and volunteering. Advocacy, connection and maximising choice are important in a community social work role as these aid recovery. In these roles social workers are supported and recruited because of their ability to enact 'best practice'.

Conclusion

With approximately eighty per cent of the population believing that asylum seeker policy is acceptable, the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission,

Gillian Triggs, (2014-15: 76) points to the need to work harder in order to build a community culture that creates human rights understanding. Arguably, social work can play an important role through political and social justice responsibility as human rights defenders and monitors and lobbyists for change. Our documented obligation is clear in our Code of Ethics: 'Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work' (AASW 2010: 7).

Given the clarity of the Code's position, it is surely obligatory for the profession to provide guidance to social workers encountering 'wicked policies'. It is also necessary to ask social workers to critically reflect on the belief that 'doing good' might perpetuate inequalities and injustices. Collective action can be effective in mitigating sole responsibility for individual social workers confronting what we call a 'zone of confusion'.

Williams and Briskman (2015) propose that contemporary social work in Western liberal democracies has lost touch with the moral imperative, and that moral outrage is a way in which we can move forward through an emotional connection with the nature of injustice. Medical practitioners are a professional grouping that have turned outrage into action through those who have called for a boycott on working in detention centres, with such employment considered contrary to medical ethics (for example Sanggaran 2016). Médecins Sans Frontières has withdrawn from a Greek refugee camp in protest over a European Union plan to force refugees who land in Greece to return to Turkey (Hasham 2016).

Retreat and withdrawal is one tactic for ethical engagement. Highlighted in this paper is the imperative to speak out about injustices witnessed. Even though 'whistleblowing' can have repercussions for social workers (Greene and Latting 2004: 221), the time is long overdue for social work to be having a conversation about ethical responses. It is our view that social workers cannot be passive bystanders when directly confronted with human rights violations.

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Jane Doe has worked as a caseworker in an offshore detention centre and wishes to remain anonymous.

End Notes
1. For anonymity, this author is referred to as Jane Doe.
2. For more details see: http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/fact-sheets/ australias-refugee-and- humanitarian-program/timeline/.
3. See Marr, D. and Wilkinson, M. 2004 *Dark Victory*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
4. The private contractor at the time.

Anorexia

The skin can be controlled

as any landscape can be altered.

greed swarming the belly.

   wake. needlessly hungry. fat swelling around the jaw

and expanding the navel. the continuous growth of the mind-

the process of thought that breathes and contorts.

the other side of morning

entrenched in a stark vision of discipline.

   the weight of meals is essential to measure.

the flesh sustained

without unnecessary interference.

the dream of starving.   of disappearing

responding to each movement

overridden by

the drive of ambition.

   you stand

lifeless

shrinking in the abandoned daylight.

ROBBIE COBURN,
MELBOURNE, VIC

The Global Rise of Islamophobia: Whose side is social work on?

SUSIE LATHAM

Social workers in Western countries are increasingly being called on to play a role in the prevention of terrorism. This paper argues that this role casts social workers as agents of the state policing Muslim communities, urges resistance and provides an example of transformative activism informed by a critical anti-racist framework.

The idea of taking sides in the political discourse surrounding terrorism has long been pushed by Western leaders, exemplified by George Bush's September 2001 declaration 'Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists' (Bush 2001). But acknowledging the context of rising Islamophobia, Stanley and Guru (2015: 360) raise Moreau's question 'Whose side are we on?' for social workers.

The year 2015 saw an unparalleled level of organised activity against Muslims living in Western countries. In Australia, dozens of rallies against Islam were held, tens of thousands of Australians 'liked' the social media pages of anti-Muslim groups and at least six political parties with an anti-Islam platform declared their intention to contest the 2016 federal election.

While some groups and individuals had been organising against Muslims for many years, the fear generated by Islamic State's (IS) declaration of a caliphate in June 2014 and the grotesque acts of violence committed by its adherents strengthened their hand. Western media coverage of IS and anti-Muslim groups and in-depth 'analysis' of the Muslim community's 'problems' have combined to create an overwhelmingly negative picture of Muslims in the imagination of the Western public.

The widely promoted notion that all Muslims are somehow responsible for, or for putting a stop to, terrorism (Rajan-Rankin 2015: 210) has taken hold. This is despite Muslims being more likely to fall victim to terror globally, and just as likely to die in Western attacks, Muslims having died in terrorist acts in New York, Madrid, London and Paris. Alarmingly, this perception of Muslims is a global phenomenon. As Poynting (2015: 1) writes:

> … an imagined 'other' is seen to be subversively spreading Muslim 'extremism' and exhorting anti-Western violence from within these societies, supporting global terrorism abroad and at home … The 'Muslim other' has become the folk demon of our time in a racialising ideology that circulates internationally and has strikingly similar effects in quite different local contexts.

One major effect has been a dramatic rise in physical and verbal attacks on Muslims, particularly veiled women. Australian Muslim community leader Saara Sabbagh told a community forum recently, 'You can ask any Muslim woman with a headscarf and she'll tell you a story' (Flitton 2015). In 2015 in London, incidents of Islamophobia recorded by the police increased by seventy per cent (Khan 2015) and Council on American Islamic Relations spokesman Ibrahim Hooper called the level of attacks 'unprecedented' adding, ' … the other thing that's unprecedented is the anti-Muslim bigotry has moved into the mainstream' (Dizard 2015).

In Australia, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott can take much of the credit for that bigotry. Two weeks after he survived an internal leadership vote, he signalled in a national security speech that this would become his new focus, declaring, 'I've often heard Western leaders describe Islam as a "religion of peace". I wish more Muslim leaders would say that more often, and mean it' (Hartcher 2015). In the US, President Donald Trump has implemented a ban on entry to the country for citizens of seven Muslim majority nations, a move widely characterised as a 'Muslim ban'. In Europe, anti-Muslim parties in 'the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Austria, France and Italy … are supported by millions [and] already poll in the 20 per cent bracket' (Latham 2015).

As someone who was raised in a white, middle class family but converted to Islam when I married into a loving Muslim family over a decade ago, as someone who has many Muslim friends and two young boys being raised as Muslims in Australia, these developments have been extremely distressing. I have found the injustice of people I love so dearly, including my children, having their life potential affected by baseless prejudice difficult to cope with. This has led me to believe that social workers need to be aware of and challenge the surveillance, risk-management and discipline role, already expected of it across a range of fields including child protection, (Rogowski 2015; McDonald 2006) in relation to the Muslim community.

Social Work as an Instrument of the State

Western governments are increasingly looking to social workers and other community care professionals as part of their security response to terrorism. In Canada, social workers are part of a police team aimed at 'preventing violent behaviour … before it occurs' (Robertson 2015) while in Australia education ministers have agreed that education officials can work with law enforcement 'to prevent Australian schoolchildren from being radicalised' (Sydney Morning Herald 2015).

While a similar strategy has been pursued in the UK for many years, in July 2015, this was formalised to obligate those working for schools, prisons, local councils and health services to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (Shiraz 2016), including by reporting them to authorities. A leaflet targeted to public sector workers states that the aim of this program is to 'support and protect people who might be susceptible to radicalisation at a very early stage so that they are not drawn into criminal activity which may affect their prospects in later life' (Preventforschools 2014). Social workers have been told this is 'exactly the same' as other safeguarding work (Stevenson 2015) and debate among social workers on the UK website *Community Care* shows that this argument is accepted by some (Stanley 2015).

However, concern for the welfare of would-be terrorists is not the primary reason these programs are being funded. In reality, they are national security programmes trying to stop terrorist attacks – an impossible task that national security professionals have failed at.

In a debate on the UK's Community Care website, one social worker who had undergone anti-terrorist 'safeguarding' training stated, 'There was no stereotyping or profiling suggested … Nor was there the suggestion that terrorism or other politically motivated criminal acts were confined to any one religious, social or ethnic group' (Stanley 2015). Despite this, the program does not operate in a political vacuum – a key understanding of critical social work. As another social worker commented on the page, 'they don't have to make it explicit. It is implicit, you know who you're meant to look for/at' (Stanley 2015).

A January 2016 open letter to *The Guardian* newspaper signed by 380 academics, lawyers, student and community activists referred to UK human rights organisation Liberty's characterisation of the terrorism reporting legislation as 'the biggest spying operation of all times' and urged that it be repealed. It stated, 'Despite the fact that Muslims make up just 5% of the population, data from the National Police Chiefs Council shows that 67% of those referred for suspected "radicalisation" between 2007-2010 were Muslim, the figure was 56% between 2012-13' (*The Guardian* 2016).

Assuming that on average sixty per cent of those referred were Muslim, according to National Police Chiefs Council figures, around 2,360 Muslims would have been referred between April 2007 and March 2014. However the police figures also show that only 777, or twenty per cent of all those referred, were deemed in need of intervention. Therefore, even if every single referral that was found to be appropriate was that of a Muslim, more than twice as many Muslims were referred inappropriately.

When, as Stanley and Guru (2015: 356) outline, child removal is a very real possibility for those deemed 'at risk' of radicalisation, not to mention the shame and humiliation of being associated with one of the most reviled groups in Western society, Muslim families are justifiably frightened and angry about these program. This is especially the case when reports reflect misunderstandings about Islam and a lack of political sophistication. For example, children have been reported for activities such as pro-Palestinian activism, donning the hijab and using the very common Arabic word *Alhamdulillah*, which is used in the way English speakers use the phrase *Thank God!* (Khaleeli 2015).

Case studies that have come to public attention illustrate how devastating an inappropriate referral can be. During a school discussion about the use of violence to protect the planet, a 14-year-old Muslim boy in the UK mentioned eco-terrorism, which he had learnt through his involvement in debating. A few days later he was questioned alone by two strangers. He said, 'The lady behind the desk told me that she was a child protection officer ... She then asked me: "Do you have any affiliation with Isis?" … I immediately felt alarmed and extremely scared … I knew that they behead and kill people. I could not think why she was asking me this … ' (Dodd 2015). According to

the boy's parents, who are taking legal action, he is now reluctant to take part in class discussions.

In March 2015, Mohammed Umar Farooq, a 33-year-old masters student undertaking counter-terrorism studies at Staffordshire University was questioned ' ... about his views on Islam, al-Qaida and the news that Isis fighters were throwing homosexuals out of tall buildings' when he was seen reading a course textbook in the library. After a three month investigation, the University apologised, but, 'Farooq said he had been "looking over his shoulder" ever since, and so unsettled by the incident that he chose not to return to the course' (Ramesh and Halliday 2015).

The father of a 10-year-old UK boy who was questioned by police after he wrote at school that he lived in a terrorist house when he had meant to write a terraced house said, 'After the incident he was so ill that he had to go to an emergency appointment with the doctors. He's really worried about going to school. He eats less. It's shocking. It makes me very angry.' His cousin said, 'They shouldn't be putting a child through this. He's now scared of writing, using his imagination' (Barrett and Jamieson 2016).

Even in countries where reporting suspicions of extremism is not a statutory obligation, the climate is such that in the US, 14-year-old schoolboy Ahmed Mohamed was reported to authorities because his teacher thought the clock he had built and brought to show her resembled a bomb. He was questioned by police, handcuffed, taken to a juvenile detention facility, fingerprinted and photographed before being released to his parents and suspended from school. The family later left the country.

Social injustices like these compound economic injustices also faced by Muslim populations. In Australia, adult Muslim men are two to four times more likely to be unemployed depending on age (Hassan 2009: 1) despite being more likely to be tertiary qualified, and people with Middle Eastern-Muslim names are most discriminated against when applying for entry level jobs (Hassan 2015). Muslim individuals and households earn less and the proportion of Muslim children living in poverty is almost twice the national average (UNISA 2015: 45).

These same inequalities are replicated on a global scale. Although some Muslim majority countries are wealthy and many non-Muslim countries are poor, about a third of Muslim countries have a low level of human development compared to eight per cent of non-Muslim countries, while about twenty per cent of Muslim countries have a high level of human development compared to over half of non-Muslim countries. The average income for people living in Muslim countries is less than half of non-Muslim countries, while the rate of deaths under five years of age is almost double (Stewart 2010: 278). Moreover, Muslims

are also significantly less likely to wield political power, as measured by 'membership of the UN Security Council, voting rights at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and military expenditure' (Stewart 2010: 278-9).

An open letter signed by 280 academics, lawyers and Muslim community leaders published in *The Independent* shortly after reporting became mandatory in the UK argues *(The Independent* 2015):

> Academic research suggests that social, economic and political factors, as well as social exclusion, play a more central role in driving political violence than ideology. Indeed, ideology only becomes appealing when social, economic and political grievances give it legitimacy. Therefore, addressing these issues would lessen the appeal of ideology.

Addressing such grievances is supposed to be core social work business. Penketh (2014: 151) summarises the International Federation of Social Work's definition of the social work profession as being 'committed to the values of social justice, human rights, poverty alleviation and anti-oppression.' As McKendrick and Finch (2016) argue:

> ... traditional social work parameters ... emphasise a thorough examination of the internal and external factors in the lives of the individual, their families and their community ... locating the issue purely within individuals is reductive, and fosters a culture of individual responsibility that could increase rather than decrease the possibilities for radicalisation.

A Critical Social Work Response

Rajan-Rankin says that since 9/11, Muslims living in Western countries have been subject to exceptional racism and argues 'One of the central tasks of critical and anti-racist social work is ... to expose and draw attention to inequality, oppression and discrimination' (2015: 2). Given the very clear ethics of the social work profession, Briskman questions why it has been relatively silent on Islamophobia (2015: 18).

The argument that social workers should reject institutionalised anti-Muslim bigotry and instead problematise Islamophobia particularly applies to social workers in positions of relative privilege and autonomy such as academics and officers of peak social work bodies. These social workers can speak with relative impunity, lead others in political action and, as Guru advocates, 'engage more directly in the 'war on terror' discourses by being critical of government policies and engaging community-based approaches reflecting radical social work principles' (2010: 273). As Morley (2016: 39)

argues, these principles include criticising 'the dominant social structures and power relations that cause broad social divisions'.

However, every social worker also has the option of acting as an individual community member on this issue. Dominelli's approach to tackling racism can be applied to Islamophobia; it too is 'a socially constructed and reproduced historically specific phenomenon whose form changes' (1988: 11) and she argues for awareness raising of its effects to bolster support for tackling it. Mullaly (2002) suggests critical social work practice can include raising awareness and forging alliances. Burke and Harrison (1998) suggest challenging inequalities by identifying their nature and addressing them in creative ways.

All of these reflect approaches taken by the Voices against Bigotry network, which was set up in mid-2015 by two social workers, Linda Briskman and myself, in response to news that a sophisticated new anti-Muslim political party, the Australian Liberty Alliance, would contest the next federal election. Having professional and personal interests in this issue, we felt that an intervention needed to be made at a structural level. Our main aim was to try and raise an opposing voice in a public debate which seemed increasingly one-sided, and to encourage non-Muslims, particularly community leaders, to take a stand against Islamophobia. It is heartening to see that similar, but much larger scale activities, such as the 'We are better than this' campaign and comedian Michael Moore's 'We are all Muslim' letter in the US have recently taken up the same challenge.

But as just two friends and colleagues in Australia, we set up a website asking people to endorse the statement, 'Voices against Bigotry condemns the vilification of Muslims. Australian society has greatly benefitted from a diversity of cultures and religions. We oppose bigotry directed against one part of our community for political ends'. Before doing so, we discussed our idea with a number of groups and individuals, including a group of social workers committed to promoting social justice principles and members of the Muslim community. Once we had established the website we asked our friends and colleagues to endorse it and contacted a range of Muslim groups, faith groups, ethnic communities, local councils and journalists.

We found that most people who did not know us were initially fairly wary, so we concentrated on writing articles for the media and academic journals, making public comment and acting as a clearing house for anti-Muslim bigotry, advertising events and centralising research and information. In seven months, we were mentioned in three articles published in local newspapers, two in large circulation newspapers, did two interviews with major radio stations, two with community radio stations and one for a social work podcast, had two articles published in major circulation newspapers and one on a political news website, published one academic article and two articles for a social work magazine, presented at two conferences and organised a community forum on racism.

Through this activity we have made stronger connections with a number of Muslim and non-Muslim groups and individuals. We now have a small group of people willing to work with us on Voices against Bigotry activities, a mailing list of several hundred people and the potential to contact everyone who has endorsed our statement, including the social workers who were encouraged to do so by the Australian Association of Social Workers' support for our campaign.

The current wave of Islamophobia affects all Muslims living in the West: rich or poor; secular or religious; visibly Muslim or not. I am not identifiably Muslim either by name or dress. But friends of mine who wear the hijab have been verbally abused in public places, including one undergoing chemotherapy and one pregnant with her first child. When I am in an unfamiliar area I hesitate to say my son's proudly chosen Muslim name out loud.

I worry that as my boys grow older they will be physically attacked, put under surveillance at school for expressing political opinions similar to my own and, like my friends' older sons, find it hard to obtain employment. I have had to explain to my seven-year-old, watching news coverage of the constant anti-Muslim rallies, about bigotry, and how we respond to it by standing against it with people of all backgrounds. When I think about the qualification I chose because it emphasised social justice, I hope that more social workers will stand up against Islamophobia.

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Critical Approaches to Ethics in Social Work: Kaleidoscope not bleach[1]

MERLINDA **W**EINBERG

This paper explores what constitutes ethics from a critical perspective in an environment of neoliberalism and managerialism. Starting with an explanation of the current socio-political climate and how it exacerbates the dilemmas of operating ethically, the components of a critical ethics are outlined. These include being situated and political, relational and processual, questioning authority, and recognising the potential to unintentionally harm. An argument is put forward to show how this approach to ethics differs from the traditional approach used in the helping professions.

The challenges and resistances of operating under current circumstances are addressed using illustrations from one social worker that worked in palliative care and was part of a Canadian empirical study. The worker's practice was a complex blend of emotional support, critical challenge and instrumental assistance; maintaining her own personal and professional values whilst finding common ground with her clients. Advocating for structural change, being personally self-reflexive, and perceiving ethics in a contextual fashion were steps taken to both mitigate harm and practice critically.

Introduction

In the current neoliberal environment for most of the Euro-Western world, the values of the marketplace have become the *sine qua non* not just in the private sector, but for non-profit organisations as well (Clarke 2004: 128; Banks 2011: 11). The bottom line and efficiencies have trumped concerns about social inequality and the needs of the most vulnerable. This dominant orientation is antithetical to many of social work's values, which put the wellbeing of service users as a primary principle informing the profession. For *critical* social workers, the dissonance in values is even more pronounced. Critical social work is grounded in a worldview (Campbell and Baikie 2012) that starts from the premise that our current society is unjust, that all practice is political, and therefore practitioners must incorporate action to critique and transform society to bring greater equity towards the marginalised (Finn and Jacobson 2003: 58).

Resource inadequacies, standardised work practices, and extensive documentation of neoliberalism leave professionals struggling with how to behave competently and ethically for their clients. The traditional perspective on ethics focuses on linear processes, using codes of ethics and decision-making models; assuming that universal principles and clear thinking can avoid ethical lapses. But a critical approach posits that being ethical is not about 'eliminating moral uncertainty' (Kendall and Hugman 2013: 315). It is about trying to make the best choice amongst an array of options that may fail to avoid unintended harms (Weinberg and Campbell 2014). It is a process rather than an end point; requiring broadening what should be part of ethical consideration, querying the taken-for-granted, taking into account multiple perspectives, recognising the centrality of power and the potential of social work to be oppressive.

Despite the challenges to practising ethically in this environment, research indicates that resistance is possible (e.g. Wallace and Pease 2011: 139). We will look at the practice of Celeste (a pseudonym), a senior social worker in the health field in Canada, who was a participant in a research study on ethics in practice. Her work illustrates both her perception of the difficulties in the present climate and her attempts to conduct herself ethically from a critical framework.

Challenges

The underlying primary value of neoliberalism is profit. However, according to Celeste, while 'we might be efficient … I don't think we're being as effective'. In part that is because the emphasis is on working faster, seeing more clients for shorter periods of time, and with an

emphasis on assessment and plugging people into pre-packaged programs (Harlow 2003: 33). On-going help has been attenuated to a residual model of welfare that provides support only as a last resort (Chappell 2014: 22) while resources have been severely cut.

Concomitant with that ideology is a focus on *managerialism*, namely, that better management will occur by bringing in the methods and procedures of the for-profit sector into non-profit organisations (Clarke 2004: 117). Social workers are more subject to controls, with performance indicators and excessive documentation. As a consequence, workers may become technicians with limited autonomy whose functions non-professionals can perform (Rogowski 2011: 159). According to Celeste this trend 'deskills the social workers' away from being 'autonomous agents'. According to her, it is the 'bleaching' of social work. Instead of an emphasis on social justice and the needed transformation of society, social work's voice has been 'diminished' due to the 'willingness to play ball with … the big funders, [which has] compromised [the profession] ... And that in turn compromises families, individuals, communities'.

Additionally, there is an emphasis on individualised accountability; what Celeste described as the system 'not taking the responsibility of the burden'. This problem is coupled with the constant threat of liability or censure from licensing bodies that imply, 'we're going to punish you if you make a mistake'. At the same time, workers are increasingly isolated. She argued, there are 'no mechanisms that allow for the professions to sit down like in the old days. We would sit down and we'd say … we've got a dilemma … None of that [happens now], because we're so stripped down'.

Critical Ethics

Situated and political

The outcomes of neoliberalism and managerialism have ethical implications. 'Neo-liberal economic ideology is based upon the belief that exchange within the market economy offers an ethical basis for all action' (Ellison 2007: 332). Critical social workers recognise that this is a very troubling perspective on the type of society they wish to create, since critical ethics includes an understanding of the significance of *context* as the very ground upon which one must consider what is right and good. Ethics is about the 'the kind of lives people ought to live' (Code 2002: 168). And politics are about the 'kinds of societies or communities that ought to exist' (Code 2002: 168). How society is constructed directly influences the kind of lives that are available to people, particularly those who are most at risk.

Power is at the heart of political belief and action that shape particular societies. Power relations influence what is taken as 'truth,' including dominant values; contribute to the creation of societal structures that effect the distribution of resources; and confer identities on individuals, such as 'mentally ill' (Foucault 1984). Critical ethics involves examining unequal power arrangements and the consequences of difference. It means taking an expanded view of the nature of the problems, seeing socio-economic and political components as fundamental to the construction of problems, and therefore to the ethical resolution of those difficulties.

Questioning authority and taken-for-granted discourses

Because the current dominant discourses are based on values that diverge from many social work ideals, social workers need to question and upend those discourses and practices that keep unfair systems in place. Conventional forms of ethics have tended to narrow the range of what is considered 'ethics', ironically, encouraging a compliant following of principles, rather than oppositional questioning of those values and norms (Weinberg and Campbell 2014: 39). Additionally, what individuals take to be ethical concerns usually *precedes* their use of codes and is influenced by workers' notions of help, the client, their responsibilities, agency expectations, their own personal values and history, as just some discursive factors considered. Thus, interrogating those discourses is essential.

The constitution of binaries at the heart of Euro-Western discourses is a problematic component that can be contested. One such binary is to view social workers as victims of neoliberalism. But the profession participates in and contributes to the construction of neoliberal values. Focusing on linear methods for determining ethics; professional colleges as primarily being sites of discipline for 'unethical' practitioners rather than bodies to help instruct and support; and accepting the methods of managerialism rather than fighting them are part of that bleaching process.

Social work has always struggled with its status and legitimacy as a profession (Weinberg 2010: 35), which contributes to the impulse to go with majority perspectives. Celeste contended, 'our voices have gone quiet, [in order] to become part of the mainstream'. For example, Celeste's hospital's priorities were in sync with the dominant neoliberal orientation towards economies and outputs as the criteria for determining services. She believed it was an 'illusion' that the services social workers were providing in her setting were 'costing too much'. She maintained that this position needed to be 'challenged'. Celeste articulated, 'We have to be prepared to … speak

truth to power, ask for certain things and advocate for certain things'.

Relational and Processual

Critical ethics is a *process* of dialogue and negotiation between worker, clients and institutional representatives. It is not a product with the 'correct' answer that can be ascertained by a cognitive, top-down approach. Rather, it is bottom-up, involving multiple players and hearing their voices. Celeste referred to this social work as a 'kaleidoscope', suggesting, 'every time you turn it, it changes into a different picture and we're constantly looking at all the components of that picture'. Taking into account multiple perspectives, especially those most silenced, is an important element since knowledge is always partial, and connected to one's historical and social location (Harding 2004: 3). Thus, one's view is always limited. Coming from positions in the centre, social workers are less likely to understand the standpoint of those who are not. Celeste elaborated, 'We have to have a perspective from the margins to … see the whole view'.

Recognising the possibility of doing harm/ Need for self-reflexivity

Part of the power that workers exercise is the societal mandate to make judgements about clients' capacities and to determine the distribution of resources. Despite one's best intentions, a social worker may be inaccurate in those evaluations. But even when accurate, those judgements have consequences beyond the individuals involved. Partly that is because what may be good for one person may be harmful for another. For instance, while a worker might believe it is better to support a partner's wish to keep a patient alive, that may be injurious for the patient in excruciating pain with a dismal prognosis. Furthermore, those evaluations reinforce norms of what is taken as 'healthy', 'acceptable', or 'deserving'. And social workers can never know the full consequences of their actions. This is the concept of ethical trespass, namely, 'the harmful effects ... that inevitably follow not from our intentions and malevolence but from our participation in social processes and identities' (Orlie 1997: 5). Ethical practice necessitates being aware of the possibility of iatrogenic effects with clients and our contribution to the problematic values of neoliberalism. 'We could be part and parcel of what induces harm', suggested Celeste.

Consequently, critical ethics involves self-reflexive processes and an attitude of humility. It requires problematising the power of the professional and continually asking:

- What am I missing? Whose voices are absent?
- Whose 'truth' is being believed? Who benefits from this?

- Can I look at what is viewed as 'problematic' or 'pathological' as someone's unique ways of trying to cope? How do those behaviours serve him/her?
- What is the connection between those behaviours and broader structural inequalities?
- Is my approach consistent with my preferred self (Weinberg 2007: 215)? If not, what is interfering and are there ways for me to overcome these blocks?
- Am I stuck in binaries? Can I conceive of a both/ and approach to this situation?
- How am I using my power to benefit those most in need? Are there damaging effects to my exercise of power?

Critical Stances in Response to Challenges

Despite the hurdles, some workers continue to respond with anti-oppressive approaches to practice. Celeste believed that rather than the health care system being as oriented towards a 'disease model', it should work to 'humanise systems'. The following examples from Celeste illustrate attempts to do this.

Situated and political

Celeste was 'trying to bring reform into the centre of healthcare', seeing the interconnection between the personal and political. In times of austerity, a major hospital concern is that of very ill patients 'blocking' beds, since hospital stays are expensive. Early on in Celeste's setting, an interdisciplinary approach was less normative, and pain management was poor. Because she was not allowed to assess and treat for pain, she developed links to staff in the hospital by arguing, 'give me somebody who knows pain management … and I'll get this person out of this bed very quickly with a good discharge plan so they won't come back'. Due to her interventions, the standard was changed, because now her hospital 'consistently [attempts] to do pain management as … pre-surgical planning for cancer patients.' It was win-win: patients had better pain management and were able to be discharged sooner.

Harm and self-reflexivity

Regarding another problem, Celeste held that 'eighty five percent of the health care budget' was being used to extend people's lives 'unnaturally', but 'not their quality of life'. This development has led to an ethical dispute arising in the Global North about euthanasia and doctor-assisted death. At the time of the interview with Celeste, doctor-assisted death was unlawful in Canada and it was 'illegal for any healthcare professional to talk to a client about euthanasia or suicide'. Nonetheless, according

to Celeste, 'all [her clients had] a wish to die'. While this subject is too complex (Cholbi and Varelius 2015; Rehmann-Sutter et al. 2015) to address here, Celeste's ethical struggle will be highlighted.

Celeste was clear on her principles 'against euthanasia'. Nevertheless, she had a patient who admitted that he had 'already started trying to kill' himself through 'not taking treatment' and by the 'withdrawal of fluids'. Celeste said, 'I don't want to support [him] in that decision but I don't want to abandon [him]'. However, she also expressed, 'my values don't matter in this, my values are that "I'm going to stay with you and abide by you"'. How does one resolve values differences when one's personal ethics, professional values, and clients' needs and desires collide? In part, Celeste did this by normalising the client's wish to die, while educating him about legal issues and the suffering of passive suicide (see below). Her key goals were to reduce harm whilst maintaining her own values.

Relational and processual

Celeste's work centred on respectful dialogue, and involved the family and broader systems. There had been a previous death of a younger family member and the patient said, 'I don't want to live like this anymore, I'm draining my family'. Celeste asked the patient, 'how is your family going to manage that if you ask for a cessation of fluids'? Celeste's concern was that he would 'get into a terrible state and put the family in a terrible state', including by going into 'delirium'. She believed passive euthanasia was 'not a pleasant experience'.

Without her participation, Celeste heard that a pro-euthanasia group had covertly given the patient 'misinformation' that encouraged his actions. This group kept its 'identity … hidden'. While Celeste worried about the accuracy of information being provided by the pro-euthanasia group, she personally was unable to counsel clients about assisted death. Celeste believed, given the illegality of assisted suicide, some social workers would cease involvement with a family due to workers' fears of supporting illegal activity and their resolve to distance themselves from a pro-euthanasia group. Instead, her position was, 'try and open up the system and say … these are my boundaries'. Consequently, Celeste engaged in a complicated tightrope walk to both protect the client and herself. She stated, 'I would have to get them [the family] to ask the questions of [the pro-euthanasia group] so they'd be fully informed. There was no way that I was talking to them [the family] about suicide, but I was helping them negotiate a way from harm'.

Furthermore, she said, that clients 'feel very alone because they know if they involve a family member … that person can then be investigated for assisted suicide'. She

worked with clients and their families around 'consensus', 'transparency, open communication, [and] … hypotheses' regarding 'what would happen' if the patient went the route of passive euthanasia. For instance, she posed hypothetical questions such as, 'how is your family going to manage that if you ask for water or fluids'?

Questioning authority and employing advocacy

In her hospital, it was an 'automatic referral' to the psychiatry unit if someone was suicidal. But she resisted that recommendation. She believed that these patients' needs were better met in a palliative care unit. However, her contention was that these patients 'fell between the cracks'. She reasoned that the patient was 'not going to get into a psych unit because they [were] dying' and the psychiatry unit could not meet their medical needs. But … they [were] also not going to get into a palliative care unit because … they [had been] diagnosed with a psych history'.

Her solution included not accepting the institutional policy that created an unworkable binary regarding patients that sought euthanasia. For example, in a different case from the one discussed above, Celeste advocated first by going to the bioethics department for support and then back to hospital personnel. She was able to convince staff to provide a bed in palliative care while that patient attempted suicide even though she was 'not actively dying', since the hospital had not been able to manage her pain and she was 'suffering terribly'. Ultimately, 'it was the very first case' where the hospital 'continued to provide care, not assisting her in her death, but not prolonging her life'.

Conclusion

The pressures of neoliberalism make it difficult to practice from a position of critical ethics. Examples from Celeste illustrate that despite these challenges, it is feasible to maintain the connection between personal troubles and broader structural constraints, continuing to move towards a more equitable society. Her practice was a complex blend of emotional support, critical challenge and instrumental assistance; maintaining her own personal and professional values whilst finding common ground with her clients. Questioning authority; advocating for structural change; being self-reflexive; attempting to mitigate harm; and viewing practice and ethics as contextual, political, and processual are all steps that support social justice while maintaining one's critical ethical stance.

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Blinding Narcissusn

"During a warm winter rain ... the basins
...............of her collarbones collected water."
— Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides*

Days move only as flesh
in an unending game of controlled skin.

you travel with weight against the temples,
pressing the eyes into focus —

death is inevitable at this point
in love with an unrecognisable figure whose
glamour is not terrible, truly.

you do look quite ill, of course.

a spectre surveying rooms of strangers wherever you go
once the vulnerability of breath is
transfixed.

there is no need to worry.

the same voice that is nowhere and follows
will whisper that everything will be fine
that life is best understood
beneath the drive of catastrophe —

when you faint this time
you can hold yourself
and let the water break against your eyes.

there was always safety in a reflection

the river of mirrors
fasting the blood in false cycles.

ROBBIE COBURN,
MELBOURNE, VIC

The New Social Work Radicalism: Results and prospects

IAIN FERGUSON

The last decade has witnessed a renewal of the radical social work tradition in different parts of the world. The first part of the paper will explore some of the factors that have contributed to the emergence of this new social work radicalism. The next part of the paper will look at four examples: the Social Work Action Network in Britain and internationally; the New Approach group in Hungary; the Progressive Social Work Movement in Hong Kong; and the Orange Tide in Spain. The final part of the paper will attempt to assess the future of the movement and the challenges it is likely to face.

Introduction

In April 2006, an historic conference took place at Liverpool University in England. The conference, attended by almost three hundred delegates, was convened in the first instance to mark the retirement of Chris Jones, Professor of Social Work at Liverpool and a leading critic of neoliberalism in social work. The conference also provided a major opportunity, however, for social work practitioners, academics and service users from across the UK to discuss how best to challenge the processes of managerialism and marketisation that were increasingly shaping social work practice. It proved to be the launching pad for a campaigning organisation, the Social Work Action Network, based on a vision of a new radical social work.

This paper will describe some of the developments within radical social work that have taken place since 2006, not just in the UK but globally, and attempt to assess their significance. Such a task is not without its dangers. One is reminded of the Chinese leader Zhou en Lai's comment in the early 1970s when asked to evaluate the impact of the French Revolution of 1789: 'It's too early to say'. Ten years is indeed rather a short period on the basis of which to assess whether a current within social work widely believed to have disappeared in the early 1980s is back to stay, or whether it's re-appearance will prove to be a flash in the pan. What is undoubtedly true is that radical social work theory, and even more so radical practice, is still very much a minority approach within professional social work, and the forces ranged against it are very powerful indeed. Despite this, I shall argue below that in a global context of wars, revolutions, economic crisis and austerity, the need for a more radical social work profession has never been greater.

The first part of the paper will explore some of the factors that have contributed to the emergence of what I will call

'the new social work radicalism'. The next part of the paper will look at four examples of this new radicalism: the Social Work Action Network in Britain and internationally; the New Approach group in Hungary; the Progressive Social Work Movement in Hong Kong; and the Orange Tide in Spain. The final part of the paper will attempt to assess the future of the movement and the challenges it is likely to face.

The New Radicalism: Contributory Factors

The emergence of a radical social work movement in the early 1970s marked a decisive moment in the history of social work. It constituted a serious challenge not only to the individualistic/remedial approaches that had dominated the profession in many countries until then but also to a conservative, elitist model of professionalism which was hostile to trade unionism and often guilty of putting the narrow interests of the social work profession above the requirements of social justice and the needs of service users. In essence, in the words of the eponymous text, radical social work involved 'understanding the position of the oppressed in the context of the social and economic structure they live in' (Bailey and Brake 1975: 9). While different factors contributed to the decline of that movement in the 1980s, one important factor was what the late Marxist writer Ellen Meiksins Wood called 'the retreat from class' that took place almost everywhere in that decade (1986). This did not mean of course that there was no resistance to that retreat, whether within professional social work or in the wider society. In Britain, for example, struggles continued during the 1990s to promote anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, particularly in the field of social work education (Thompson 2016: 15; Singh 1996). In Canada and Australia, forms of critical and structural social work

continued to be developed, albeit in some cases shaped by a less than radical identity politics or postmodernism (Mullally 1997: 111-115; Pease and Fook 1999: 1-17). In reality, however, by the late 1990s neoliberalism had become, in Gramsci's term, hegemonic, the 'common sense' of the global elites (Forgacs 2000; Harman 2005) if not always of the populations they governed: the annual British Attitude Surveys during most of the past thirty years, for example, showed opposition to privatisation and a continuing commitment to publicly provided services, especially in the area of health (BSA 2016). It is with the dominance of neoliberalism therefore, and resistance to that dominance, that we need to start to understand the emergence of the new radical social work.

Three factors have been particularly important in contributing to the rise of a new mood of resistance within social work since the beginning of the new millennium. First is the deep-seated and growing dissatisfaction with the ways in which neoliberal policies have re-shaped social work. In Britain that re-shaping was based on the creation by government in the early 1990s of a market in social care based on a purchaser/provider split which reduced the social work role to one of assessment and care management (Harris 2003: 69-71). An influential study by Chris Jones in 2000 captured the mood of demoralisation and despair amongst many experienced workers regarding the new forms of social work resulting from these policy changes:

> I feel so deskilled because there are so many restrictions over what I can do. Yes, I go out and do assessments, draw up care plans, but then we aren't allowed to do anything … I just wonder why I am doing this. It's not social work (cited in Jones 2005: 102).

Adding to that demoralisation and frustration of workers, especially under the New Labour governments of 1997-2010, was the increasing dominance of IT-based assessment systems, which as research showed, meant that children and families' social workers in England were often spending up to 80 per cent of each day completing computerised assessments with less and less time available for direct work with individuals and families (White et al. 2009: 1213-1215).

Such developments were not limited to the UK. Neoliberal capitalism is a global system and ideology and while it is correct to point to local differences in the way in which neoliberal policies have been implemented (McDonald et al. 2003), there are also strong commonalities in terms of their impact on welfare systems in different countries. These are summarised by Catherine McDonald as involving:

> A shift from passive to active policies towards people receiving public welfare payments, an emphasis on the responsibilities of these people rather than their rights, and a re-definition of the objectives of welfare from social support to social inclusion (McDonald 2006: 11).

Not surprisingly, an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) funded seminar series in 2010 into the impact of New Public Management policies on professional social work in Britain and Japan found remarkable similarities between the two countries in terms, for example, of the dominance of care management approaches (Ferguson et al. 2012).

The dissonance between such policies and what many practitioners continue to regard as the core values of social work is the first factor which has given rise to dissatisfaction amongst many social workers. The fact that several influential official reports and enquiries have expressed similar concerns adds legitimacy to workers' grievances and increases their confidence to resist [Scottish Executive 2006; Social Work Task Force 2009; Munro 2011).

The second factor fuelling the new radicalism has been the influence of wider social movements. These have included the anti-capitalist movement that emerged out of the protests against the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in 1999; the movement against wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s; the Occupy movement of 2011; and since 2008, movements against the effects of austerity policies (on which more below). There is of course an important precedent here. The emergence of radical social work in the 1970s owed much to the influence of the great social movements of the 1960s, notably the black civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay movement and also smaller movements such as those challenging the biomedical domination of mental health (Thompson 2002). In Britain especially, the huge trade union struggles of these years were also important in shaping the politics of radical social work. The movements of the last decade, notably the anti-capitalist movement with its message that 'the world is not a commodity' and 'another world is possible', have given sustenance and confidence to those who have similarly wished to argue that another social work, very different from the currently dominant managerialist model, is also possible (Callinicos 2003; Ferguson and Lavalette 2005).

The third element contributing to the emergence of a new radical social work is one which few attending that first conference in Liverpool could have envisaged. In 2006, the dominant view amongst economists, including Nobel-prize winning economists, was that the era of 'depression

economics' was over and that the market fundamentalist policies of the previous two decades meant that the 'boom and bust' cycle which had characterised capitalism since its infancy was a thing of the past (Krugman 2008). As late as 2007 in a speech to the City of London, the then British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown felt able to congratulate the assembled audience of bankers and stockbrokers on their 'remarkable achievements, an era that history will record as the beginning of a new golden age for the City of London' (Brown 2007).

In fact, within less than a year, the British economy and much of the world economy was in the grip of what Mervin King, then Governor of the Bank of England, was to call 'the most serious financial crisis we've seen at least since the 1930s, if not ever' (BBC 2011). Some eight years into what has been termed 'the long depression', two points are worthy of note (Roberts 2016: 235). Firstly, there is no evidence that any of the fundamental problems which gave rise to that crisis in 2008 have been solved; in fact, many economists are now predicting a similar or even greater crash within the next year or two. Secondly, the costs of that crisis of global capitalism have been paid not by the bankers or financiers whose reckless behaviours were a major contributory factor to that crisis, but by the poorest sections of society, above all disabled people and those on welfare benefits (Slorach 2015: 1-30). Witnessing the effects of such austerity policies (and in countries such as Greece, often being victims of it themselves (Ioakimidis and Teloni 2013: 42-46), many social workers have sought to develop more radical responses, four of which will now be considered.

The Social Work Action Network (SWAN)

Since the founding conference referred to above, SWAN's activities in the UK have taken four main forms. Firstly, as one recent mainstream historian of social work has noted: 'SWAN has held some very successful annual conferences, attracting numbers far beyond the reach of the British Association of Social Workers or the College of Social Work' (Bamford 2015). These conferences, held each year in different universities across the UK, have provided the main forum for discussing and debating national policy responses to issues affecting social work such as austerity, privatisation and racism. They are typically attended by between three and four hundred people, with a key feature being the role played by service users, both as platform speakers and as delegates. The conference also hosts the SWAN AGM, which elects a national steering committee to co-ordinate activities between conferences.

Secondly, SWAN has been involved in a number of campaigns in the UK at both national and local level. Nationally, these have included challenging the

scapegoating in 2008 of social workers involved in the case of Baby P (Peter Connolly), a small child who died at the hands of his carers (Ferguson and Lavalette 2009; Jones 2014). More recently, SWAN has played an important role in critiquing the proposed 'reforms' of social work education by the current Conservative Government – reforms which would undermine both the academic and ethical basis of the profession and would lead to the creation of a social work elite, an 'officer corps' more well-disposed to privatisation (SWAN 2013). Locally, SWAN groups have engaged in a range of campaigns including the defence of asylum seekers, opposition to the privatisation of children's services and challenging cuts to mental health services.

Thirdly, 2013 saw the launch of *Critical and Radical Social Work*: *an International Journal*, published by an academic publisher. Although not formally linked to SWAN, the fact that the two co-editors were also founder members of SWAN and that many members of the editorial board are leading SWAN activists means that in practice the links are close. The journal has now established a wide readership and is providing a forum for the development of new thinking in critical and radical social work with contributions from every continent including Latin America.

Finally, one of the most exciting developments since 2006 has been the creation of SWAN groups in several countries other than the UK. There are now active SWAN groups in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Greece, Japan, and most recently Denmark. Members of the Greek Group have played a very active role in Patras and other islands supporting refugees during the current crisis, while in 2015 SWAN Ireland members successfully challenged government attempts to reduce pay and conditions for newly-qualified workers.

As well as these specifically SWAN groups, links have also been established with groups of social workers and academics across the globe who explicitly locate themselves with the radical tradition, including for example the Boston Liberation Health Group, the Direct Social Work Group in Slovenia, and radical social work academics in Brazil. Here we shall briefly consider three other examples of such groups: the New Approach Group, Hungary; the Progressive Social Work Network, Hong Kong; and the Orange Tide, Spain.

The New Approach Group, Hungary

On Friday 4th November 2011, Hungarian social worker Norbert Ferencz was sentenced to three years' probation for charges of 'incitement against the public peace and a call for general dissent'. His 'crime' was to participate

in a demonstration of social workers aimed specifically against a Budapest municipal ordinance that classified taking food from rubbish bins ('dumpster diving') as a misdemeanour.

Ferencz's defence was that he was simply following the Hungarian social work Code of Ethics, which stipulates that social workers have a responsibility, right and a duty to call to the attention of decision makers and general public the emergence of poverty and any obstruction of the alleviation thereof. The judge did consider this as a mitigating circumstance in the case.

What emerged during the campaign was that Ferencz was also a member of a group called New Approach whose aims and objectives are remarkably similar to those of SWAN. According to the group's Manifesto:

> The New Approach to community work and radical social work is based on the idea of combining workshops and action groups, and also the renewal of social work codes of ethics.
>
> This dual function is located in a long-term goal:
>
> Workshops: we want to provide space for discussing issues concerning the social sphere, development of action strategies.
>
> As an action group we are committed to the profession and the public's attention is drawn to the situation of those excluded. We seek to be a professional community that is not afraid to stand up for those in need (New Approach 2011).

A European-wide campaign both by SWAN and the European Federation of Social Workers in defence of Ferencz succeeded in averting a custodial sentence and also led to links being established between New Approach and radical social work organisations elsewhere in Europe.

The Progressive Welfare Network, Hong Kong

Another group of frontline workers who have been particularly active in social movements in recent years and have played an important role in developing more radical forms of practice is located in Hong Kong and linked to the Progressive Social Work Network. These workers played an important role both in the Occupy Hong Kong movement in 2011 and an even more central role in the Umbrella democracy movement of 2014-15. In 2010 they organised a well-attended Progressive Social Welfare Conference, which was addressed by SWAN activists, and in 2014 the first-ever South East Asian Progressive Social Work Conference with delegates from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China and Japan. Once

again, the flavour of their approach is captured in their manifesto for a progressive social welfare, published in 2014:

> For a decade, social welfare in Hong Kong has been severely challenged. The government's neoliberal approach to welfare has led it to adopt a residualist welfare system, thereby undermining social welfare as a powerful tool for securing human rights and justice. Without long-term planning, welfare spending has been steadily decreasing. The so-called flexible planning and funding mechanism has rendered social welfare to a sporadic, ad hoc services. As a result, there is a widening rich-poor gap, intensifying social stratification, and worsening of quality of life for the grassroots. As the important role of Hong Kong's social welfare system is undermined, autonomy of social services, the core values of promoting social justice in social work have also been challenged to an unprecedented degree (SWAN 2011).

The Orange Tide, Spain

Better known, in part because of its active support by IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) General Secretary Rory Truell, and the fact that its leaders have won international awards, is the Orange Tide, a movement in Spain combining social workers and the people who use services. Across Spain they regularly gather in orange T-shirts on the streets with music and dance to the message of 'No Cuts to Social Services'. Spanish newspapers and television have widely reported this social action and the Orange Tide has become a part of mainstream media. While the government clearly has a programme of cutting social services, at a time when they are needed, arguably the cuts are not as drastic as would otherwise have been because of the visibility of the Orange Tide (Truell 2014).

Discussion

These are just a few examples of the types of radical social work initiatives that have developed over the past decade. Many more examples, from the US, Latin America and Europe could have been given. What then are some of the common features of this new radicalism?

Firstly, a rejection of the market in social work. From Japan to Scotland much of the discontent with current models of social work relates to the way in which these have been reshaped to sit more easily with neoliberal values and objectives. Harris has identified *marketisation*, *managerialisation* and *consumerisation* as the key mechanisms involved in this process (Harris 2014). They have been responsible for the decline of relationship-

based work, the almost total disappearance in many countries of community development approaches, the subordination of social work practice to budgetary and market considerations and an erosion of social work's value base, particularly the value of social justice. None of this is to suggest that prior to the 1980s everything was wonderful. Nor is it to see more paternalistic state social work as the solution. Instead we need to argue for democratically-controlled social work services with much greater involvement by the two groups whose voices have historically been least heard: namely service users and front-line workers.

Secondly, common to all these groups is a re-assertion and development of social justice as a core value in social work. As long ago as 1993, Jones and Novak warned that social work was in danger of becoming simply a technical occupation as opposed to an ethical profession (Jones and Novak 1993). Two decades on, that process has gone very far indeed. A central feature of the new radicalism is a rejection of models of social work that present social work as a neutral project, concerned only with 'what works', with means rather than ends, and symptoms rather than causes. Instead an insistence that social justice needs to be at the heart of everything that social workers do is a central feature of the new radicalism.

Thirdly, against the selfish individualism which is the central plank of neoliberalism, these currents seek to promote and assert a new individualism and a new collectivism, based on a recognition that individual human flourishing cannot take place in a vacuum but only in a context of supportive relationships and services. That involves asserting the value of collectively provided services and of community development approaches which bring people together to assert their interests.

Fourthly, something which characterises all of the groups referred to in this paper is a commitment to social action, usually undertaken outside working hours. Sometimes this involves groups of social workers acting by themselves to raise a particular issue but more commonly it means involvement in alliances, coalitions or wider social movements around a wide range of issues, from defence of asylum seekers to opposition to cuts to services.

Fifthly, radical practice requires radical theory. Journals such as *Critical and Radical Social Work Journal* plus a growing literature by activists and academics involved in the movement in different parts of the world seek to clarify the key theoretical issues facing the movement (see *inter alia* Ferguson and Woodward 2009: 13-32; Lavalette 2011: 1-10; Gray and Webb 2013: 1-31; Garrett 2013; Turbett 2014: 1-22).

Finally, to a far greater extent than the radical social work movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, this is a *global* movement and as we have seen above, one not confined to English-speaking countries. One consequence of this is that it is now possible to initiate continent-wide, or occasionally even global responses, around issues such as supporting colleagues facing repression in particular countries, defending asylum seekers and refugees, or contributing to debates around global definitions of social work.

Conclusion

In a paper written at the turn of this century, James Midgley identified the three main traditions within international social work as being the *remedial*, the *developmental* and the *activist* traditions (Midgley 2001: 21). As he correctly argued, for most of social work's history the remedial tradition, based on one-to-one problem-solving casework has been the dominant tradition. By contrast, the activist or radical tradition has been a minority tradition. This should not surprise us. As Marx argued some time ago, the dominant ideas in any age are the ideas of the ruling class. An approach which locates the problems poor people experience in their individual psyches or dysfunctional family relationships will always be more acceptable to the powers that be than one which locates these problems within the economic and political structures of capitalism. As I have attempted to show in this paper, however, there are signs that, after a long sojourn in the professional wilderness, radical approaches are now enjoying something of a resurgence. Given current levels of inequality, poverty and racism and a seemingly never-ending economic crisis for which the poorest sections of the community are being made to pay, many of us feel that that resurgence is long overdue.

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The Late Afternoon Lies Languid

The late afternoon lies languid on its beach of clouds.

There is honey in the breeze, a rumour of rain,
and the ocean of night has not yet found its harbour.

I think of bees by their absence, of what will happen

when they find secret homes for their hives,
their honeycombs, when their buzz departs the world.

I remember walking through a cornfield in Myanmar,

captivated by the ancient temples of Pagan,
not hearing the buzz around my ears

until the sting, the sting, the sting,

and how I ran, screaming, my hands and arms aflame,
running in fear from the bees I wish to hear again

as the late afternoon lies languid on its beach of clouds.

DAVID ADÈS,
SYDNEY, NSW

David L. Altheide 2016 *The Media Syndrome*, Routledge, New York. ISBN: 978-1-62958-147-7

The media's seemingly increasing role in our daily life has been the subject of much scrutiny. The media is no longer just thrown into our front yard wrapped in plastic or something switched on at 6pm, it now lives in our pockets, constantly accessible and begging for our attention. While many newspaper columnists and bloggers make their money by bemoaning or gushing over this new age of media access, the impact of the media on a broader, global and political level has been less examined. David L. Altheide, a prolific and respected writer in the field, has addressed this gap in his latest offering, The Media Syndrome. Part discourse and text analysis, part longitudinal study, Altheide's analysis of the media's role in key political events, what he terms 'the media syndrome', is eye-opening, the full extent of which will give even the most cynical student of media cause for thought.

The Media Syndrome traces the impact of the media on social life through key historical media events from Watergate through to the Charlie Hebdo shootings in 2015. Altheide approaches this substantial task from the perspective of ecologies of communication, which involves considering the communicative environment and contextual details surrounding these key media events. A key example of this is the book's comparison between the heavily controlled media coverage of the Vietnam War to the made-for-TV visuals that accompanied the Gulf War and the subsequent impacts on public opinion.

For a reference that spans more than 50 years of world history, Altheide has maintained impressive attention to detail throughout each case study. However, this can be wearing on the reader at times, particularly during chapters with a specific focus on the US. While the author makes it clear he has selected events pertinent to American history, the details can be slightly isolating for global readers lacking at least a moderate familiarity with the US political climate and the social challenges the country faces.

The chapters covering major historical events, even those focussing on the more media-centric cases such as the sensationalism surrounding the "Missing Children Problem" in the US, are well-researched and supplemented with secondary data and interviews. The more recent case studies towards the end of the book are welcome modern examples, but they lack the depth of some of the older events. While this is understandable considering the comparable amounts of literature, the more recent examples, specifically Wikileaks, the coverage of Ebola, and the rise of ISIS, were all crowded into the final chapter. This gives the impression of the book ending rather abruptly after just touching on some interesting recent examples. A more in-depth look at the modern case studies would have certainly been a welcome addition to The Media Syndrome.

This book provides a thorough, yet US-oriented, overview of the media's role in major geo-political events of the last five decades which would prove equally useful to those new to media studies and those seeking a succinct, yet comprehensive reference.

Ideally, The Media Syndrome would be required reading for those regularly exposed to the media. The current climate of sensationalism and fear-mongering draws alarming parallels with many of Altheide's historical observations. The importance of casting a sceptical eye over everything we see, hear, and read increases alongside the accessibility and pervasiveness of the media in our daily lives. The Media Syndrome is a timely reminder of why.

Author: Bridget Backhaus, RMIT

Broken

I find myself broken
spitting blood and lies
dry retching at thoughts
of inhumane error
my chest bone
cracked under a bullet proof vest

I try finding that which we thought lost
the pavement shattered, smeared
with pieces of me
the breath of decay
steeped in panic
and a putrid stench

I still my mind
the taste of blood
and the faint sense
of distance
appearing without warning
quiet and self-assured

ZALEHAH TURNER,
SYDNEY, NSW

Waiting

ALEXANDER FORBES

Such a pretty sky.

Want to be a pilot. Jabber on, pretending, zooming through the backyard. "You'll get dirty," mama says. "Come inside." Can't have that, can't get my dresses dirty. Mama makes sure I'm pretty. Pretty like the sky. But Johnny stays outside. I watch. And when mama doesn't watch, we play. As long as I stay clean, so mama doesn't know. Zoom around, we're pilots. Johnny has no dress to keep clean.

I let Ashy get hers dirty.

Don't like it when Brett keeps me waiting. Always worried. Could get hurt. I'll see the car, he won't be there. "I'm sorry", they'll say. Scares me. Have to stop worrying, not good to worry. He'll be home soon. He should have been a pilot. Could have been pilots together. No, can't complain. I'm a good mum. I am. Like mama was.

I think?

I don't know.

Please hurry. Pretty sky's getting darker. Should be home by now.

"Mum?"

"Ashy!"

"Mum, are you gonna come inside? It's getting dark".

Such a pretty voice, nice and soft. Good girl. "Your father's on his way. You should play. Play with Peter before the sun goes away."

Ashy wants to say something, it's painted on her face, but goes inside instead. Wish she'd be more confident. Need confidence to be a pilot.

"Don't be silly," mama says. "Now help me hang these up". Groans as she bends, she's in pain. My fault, I shouldn't play. I should help more, like she says. Like daddy says. Help while Johnny plays. Smile like mama, make things happy. So daddy's happy. So he's not angry.

Not like Brett. I'm very lucky. Where is he? Such a pretty sky.

"Mum?" says Johnny, "Come have some dinner."

Dinner's not for ages. "Mama said I can't get dirty." I look up. But his face… so young.

"Mum?"

"I said I can't play, Johnny!"

Getting dark. Daddy will be home soon. Should help mama get things ready. No time to play. Help and wait. Always waiting. When I'm old, I'll play when I want.

"Johnny!" When did he get here?

Sits next to me. "Ashy's worried, mum."

"You have a new girlfriend? Have I met her?"

"You liked her, remember?"

"Your father will be home soon."

"Mum? Why don't you come have some dinner?"

"I'm waiting for your father, Peter. We don't start without

him. I hope you've done your homework."

"I have, mum."

"Good boy".

So proud. He could be a pilot. Brett says I'm too old. And I'm a good mother. Ashy needs me. Peter needs me. Don't want anyone to say I'm selfish. Daddy says I'm selfish, won't wait my turn. Johnny goes first, that's the way it is.

"But I'm older!"

Daddy looks at me. Mama's quiet.

Pain.

Smack, smack, smack.

"You have to say you're sorry". Mama knows what's best. "Don't be ungrateful. You're a very lucky girl, not like I was'. Mama knows what's best. Do what mama says. Say the words and do the things. Make daddy happy again. Be a pilot.

Don't like making him happy.

Such a pretty sky.

Daddy stands, makes me scared, walks inside. Better when he ignores.

I wish Johnny still were here. So unfair.

"You don't understand." Mama's voice inside. "She's not getting better. You can't stop it." Is that Johnny's girlfriend? "Just cause you're too scared, Peter!"

"What are we supposed to do? Stick her in that place you found? So you don't have to deal with it anymore?"

"Grow up, Peter!" So angry. My fault mama's angry. "You think this is easy? You think I want to put her in there? Why don't you take her and see how you go? Tell me what it's like waiting around watching her die".

Sad, funerals. Poor Johnny. Pretty sky for Johnny, getting dark. Still a bit of time to play. Zoom around the backyard. Not long. Maybe Johnny's waiting.

"Ashley! Keep your voice down." Don't listen, Ashy. Be a pilot. "It's just a rough patch. She's just waiting there, that's all".

"Don't you get it, Peter? It's the same night, every time. She's not just waiting for him. She's waiting for him *that night*".

Waiting, waiting, waiting. She'll be home soon. High school. No more dirty backyard dresses. Have to say it's still ok, so she knows. Wish she'd play outside again, like she did when she was young, with Peter. Mama's wrong. I want to play with Johnny, I like getting dirty. It's just a dress.

Daddy likes pretty dresses.

"Mum?" Ashy sits beside me.

"You can't keep waiting, Ashy. Have to make a choice."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't play dumb, Ashley, this is serious."

"I know, mum."

"You should study, Ashy, I want you to study."

"What?"

"Don't be scared."

"I'm not scared."

"Good."

"Mum?" Might not come home. Hate the force, wish he'd leave. Always worried. "Mum, I finished, remember? Remember my grad?"

"I'm proud of you. Wait until your father hears."

"Mum, why are you waiting? Come inside. Please."

"You're so impatient. Need to learn to wait."

"Are you sure? That sounds like something grandma would say."

"No, I don't want to be a grandma for a long time, Ashy. You should wait."

Quiet. Old car turns down street, goes towards pretty sky. Fades away. New one passes, headlights on, comes closer bit by bit.

"I start next week."

"I know, sweetie. Proud of you. Have you told uncle Johnny yet? He'll be so happy. He thinks I should go study, I don't think mama would like that."

"But…" And she sighs. "I'm sure he would be. Mum, my job. The hospital, remember?"

"I don't like them. When's your graduation?"

Ashy's face is angry. Don't like her when she's angry. Not right. Need to smile, make people happy. "What's wrong, sweetie?"

Looks away, towards the sky. "Why don't you come inside, mum?"

Is that him? No. Should be home, soon. All those uniforms. Sad faces. Wish he'd leave the force. Always makes me worried. "Have you done your homework, Ashy? Your father will be home soon."

"Mum, he's not… come inside. Please."

Wish Johnny still were here.

"When are you getting married, Ashy?"

"What?"

"You need to settle down."

Such a worried face. I know why mama's worried. Mama knows.

"Mum, what are you talking about?"

"A man, Ashy, you can't keep waiting, you're getting older".

"Are you ok, mum?" Still sore. Mama says I shouldn't fight. Waiting's better. Wait and dream, be a pilot. "Mum? What's wrong?"

"Waiting for your father, Ashy."

Warm hands, always warm, Ashy's hands. "Mum, come inside."

"He won't be too much longer."

"I made plum chicken. Come have some."

"Daddy's not home yet."

"It's ok, we can start without him."

"No, we have to wait."

"Come on, mum." Grabs my hand. Ow. "Come inside."

Pull away. "Stop it. Don't touch me."

"Mum!"

Nurse yanks, such a disapproving face. Judging. Knows what I've been up to. Sorry, mama. Can't keep waiting, don't want to stay, get up, get up, try to get up. Struggle. Hear the door. Men.

"Help me!" nurse yells. "Get her inside."

Struggle. Rough hands, power, pressing down, a man, a stranger, strange faces, won't let me stand. Scream.

Help me, mama.

Waiting. Just wait. Dream. Be a pilot.

Zoom around the backyard.

Such a pretty sky.

_____

There's a woman in the next seat. Moaning. One of those long, drawn out sounds that could be happy memory, or desolation, or pain. Who knows? I see her every time, always in that chair. Always moaning, always ignored. I saw her eyes, once, and I wondered if there was something still there, something inside. But I try not to see the eyes. I can look at mum, but not her eyes. It's too hard.

Try to connect. Try not to at the same time.

"Pilot", mum says. She always liked the sky. Even now, every time I visit, there she is, in her spot right next to the window. "Pilot," she repeats. It's one of the few words she has anymore. I wish I knew why.

Sun's beginning to set. "Did you like the sky today?"

And she looks at me. But not really at me. You can't ever tell what she sees. "Johnny."

"Oh yeah? What about Johnny?" I wait, and I wait, but no response will come. She just looks back at the sky, sadness spreading over her face. It would have been nice to see him again. Such a long time ago, all that was.

"Are you ready for dinner, mum?"

Wheel her to the dining table, tuck her under, just the right height. Here they come, one by one – the evening rush. The sticks and wheels and walkers. You need some cruel humour in a place like this. I touch her hand. I'll never know what's going on inside.

"Ashy."

The word sends a thrill down my spine. Like always, a jolt, a momentary hope of recognition, but the moment fades to disappointed realisation. She doesn't really know.

"Pilot."

"That's right, mum. I'm a pilot. Just like you wanted".

No smile, nothing. I just touch her hand again. There's a movement, ever so tiny, her own finger barely moving against my own. Like it's resting.

No, it means nothing. The mind plays tricks on you, here. Creates things that don't exist. Except that they did, once, a long time ago. All the years and memories this place would hold if those memories still existed. Surrounded by arched backs and sagging faces, and by my side is mum, the youngest face in the room. Sitting at the table. Waiting for her turn.

Always waiting.

Author

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