1 Decolonising social work fields of practice

An introduction

Janestic Mwende Twikirize, Rugare Mugumbate and Sharlotte Tusasiirwe

Introduction

In 2020 the three global organisations for social work, namely, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council for Social Welfare (ICSW) launched a new global agenda for social work and social development for the period 2020–30. The agenda is a rallying point or guide for the work and processes of these organisations and their members for the period. The overarching theme is 'Co-building inclusive social transformation' with the first pillar stated as 'Ubuntu: Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness.' Ubuntu's ultimate placement on the radar of global social work has come as a result of decades of discourse on strengthening the relevance of social work in Africa and sharpening the profession's cutting edge as a contributor to social development. Different concepts have been used in this debate, including indigenisation, authentication, decolonisation, and reconfiguration of social work, among others. Social workers in the global south are being called upon to reflect deeply and critique the many taken for-granted assumptions of what social work is and how it operates. Specifically, there are calls to disrupt and challenge the western colonial dominance which has resulted into privileging and imposition on other contexts, a social work model that is conceptualised from white western philosophies, ways of doing, perspectives and epistemologies. The decolonisation movement has been advocating for critiquing of presumably universal and Eurocentric thinking and understanding of social work which has marginalised other traditions and knowledges, both indigenous and other non-Western traditions. Consequently, there have been calls to articulate alternatives to the Eurocentric model, which is an area that still has great need for research and theory building when it comes to social work in African contexts.

It is within this context that the ubuntu philosophy has gained traction. There is increasing consensus that Ubuntu as an African philosophy and way of life, offers a decolonising framework for social work education and practice. Theorising from Ubuntu can influence and be the foundation for our social work knowledge, social work values and ethics, social work research and policy and Ubuntu informing different fields of social work practice like social work

DOI: 10.4324/9781003330370-2

with older people, poverty alleviation, work with refugees and environmental justice, among others.

This edited book focuses on practice. Practice emanates from education and training, and there are social work practitioners in education who include lecturers, tutors, principals and administrators – hence this book deals with decolonising education as well. The book draws together social workers engaged in education, research, policy and practice, to theorise Ubuntu and how its tenets, philosophies and values, can be a foundation for a decolonised, more relevant social work education and practice in African contexts and with global relevance. Another important aspect of this book is answering the question, how to decolonise? Frameworks, tools and examples have been provided from different parts of Africa. There are tools to measure or evaluate decolonisation and to plan for it. These tools and frameworks are important to propel decolonisation, which has been talked and written about with limited action.

Decolonisation, decoloniality and indigenisation of social work

Decolonisation can only be discussed in the context of colonisation. Almost all the countries in Africa have a history of colonisation. Although majority of these countries are now politically independent, they have significant features of coloniality. Colonisation is about: "imposing a world view, a set of values and ideas about how things ought to work, and an agenda for development, on a group, community or society" (Ife, 2016: 185). As an ideological system, coloniality explains the long-standing patterns of power that resulted from European colonialism, including knowledge production and the establishment of social orders (Tamale, 2020). It also includes colonialism by Middle Eastern Asians, who are mainly Arab speaking (Mbiti, 1969). While direct colonialism through political systems ended as an event, there remains a long way in overturning or overcoming the long-term consequences not only left behind but continuously reinforced through the current global social, political and economic order. There are therefore three phases that we need to think about when we talk about decoloniality – the uncolonial phase, the colonial phase and the decolonial phase. These are self-explanatory and are dealt with in detail in Chapter 2.

Colonialism and coloniality are not limited to politics and economics but extend to religion, knowledge production, distribution and use and how these relate to diverse contexts. Western-based knowledge and culture have been promoted as superior by the elite in Africa, at the expense of their own African cultural heritage. This is because the demonisation of African culture and traditions has left a colonial legacy of a split life and identity crisis for most of African people, particularly the elite (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). Kenyan Nobel Laureate, Wangari Maathai, in her ground-breaking work, 'The Challenge for Africa' contends that foreign cultures, through their strong power of suggestion, may reinforce a sense of inadequacy and nurture an inferiority complex in those constantly exposed to them and urged to perceive them as "better". She

goes further to observe that 'as wonderful and enriching to human experience as foreign heritages are to those that subscribe to and value them, they are nevertheless aspects of other people's experiences and heritage' (Maathai 2009: 172). Therefore, claims to universal values, rights and standards must be examined considering their interpretation and appropriation in diverse practice contexts. This applies to social work theories, models and some ethical principles to some extent.

Decolonisation can be understood as a multi-pronged process of liberation from political, economic and cultural colonisation (Tamale, 2021). It involves removing the anchors of colonialism from the physical, ecological and mental processes of a nation and its people. Decoloniality is on the other hand is a state of being reflected in our everyday lives, thinking, culture and education. It is a specific type of decolonisation which advocates for the disruption of legacies of racial, gender and geopolitical inequalities and domination (Tamale, 2021). Hence, decoloniality in social work fields of practice requires a critical reflection on where practice is anchored; whether it is authentically informed by the knowledges and value systems of the local context in which practice occurs or the largely external theories and value systems imported through different structures and processes, including through a western oriented education system and the ongoing work of development partner organisations. According to Tusasiirwe (2019), decolonisation requires that the impact of colonialism is recognised, reversed and dismantled to create opportunities for local and indigenous approaches of being, knowing and helping in contemporary settings. She further argues that this process cannot proceed unless the people who want to decolonise social work education and practice (including research) understand the history of colonisation and its ongoing transformations.

A related concept of indigenisation has been extensively used in the literature to refer to the process through which traditional, indigenous and local problem-solving approaches are integrated into mainstream professional practice and elements of mainstream approaches are adjusted to fit local contexts (Twikirize, 2014). Indigenisation, just like decolonisation, is sanctioned by the need to ensure that professional values and practices are closely aligned to societal values and realities in each context. For example, ubuntu principles of collectivism, interdependence and co-operation in Africa and the need to foreground these in the models of social work practice. Ferguson (2005) proposes three pathways to indigenisation namely: ideas are received and implemented; ideas are received, modified and implemented; or ideas are newly generated within a country or culture as a product of the local political, social and economic contexts [and implemented]. There has been increasing dissatisfaction with the use of indigenisation as a concept to argue for relevance of social work in Africa, with some scholars claiming that it is inadequate to represent what is currently needed to strengthen social work's cutting edge (see for example, Tusasiirwe, 2019, Harms-Smith & Nathane, 2018). According to these arguments, there is need to move beyond the assumed unidirectional transfer of knowledge and power and the representation of the Global South as importers and consumers

of knowledge, while the global North is assumed to create and export knowledge. This results in a limited authentic exploration of indigenous ways of problem solving and local knowledge to inform theory and develop models embedded in and relevant to local cultures (Osei-Hwedie & Boateng, 2018).

The growing interest and scholarship on decolonisation and indigenisation of professions such as social work has been sanctioned by these professions' historical roots in the West and their spread through colonialism. For social work in Africa and other parts of the South, there have been protracted struggles with validity, appropriateness and relevance of professional practice models and education. Social work was introduced by the colonial governments and was seen as a new social technology for dealing with social problems in all societies; a 'superior' form of helping and problem solving; a good fit into the colonial administration infrastructure and the newly introduced formal social services as well as a response to the breakdown of the traditional systems of support and cohesion in society (Walton & Abo El Nasr, 1988; Gray, Coates & Yellow Bird, 2008; Twikirize 2014; Africa Social Work Network, 2021). It was also considered a tool to ensure law enforcement by the colonial governments (Mabeyo, 2014). Probably all the above had some rational basis but the challenge lay in the fact that the profession itself was based on western concepts and models and paid little or no attention to indigenous culture and local systems of being and of doing.

Indigenisation and decoloniality directly relate to context, be it in relation to human service professions or other practices. Context represents people's identities and everyday experiences in terms of social, economic, religious, geopolitical and cultural lives. It also encompasses people's histories and present realities. Context addresses itself to 'difference' and 'diversity' and begs a critical reflection on what is universal vis-à-vis what is relative in human experiences and realities. Hence, decolonising and indigenising social work fields of practice is a quest for relevance as aptly phrased by Mupedziswa (2001). In view of this, some authors such as Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird (2008) argue that social work have been slow to accept non-Western and Indigenous world views, local knowledge and traditional forms of healing which in turn affects their ability to develop and deliver services in an effective, acceptable and culturally appropriate manner. Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird (2008) give the example of social work's emphasis on individualisation, individual self-determination and self-reliance and therapy as frequently being out of place in communal and societies in which deference to the family and community is the priority.

Gray and Coates (2010) caution that an exclusively ethnocentric form of indigenous practice would be counterproductive to types of practice that incorporate knowledge and interventions from other cultures. Hence, we present Ubuntu as a framework for decolonising fields of practice, in a spirit of respecting indigenous knowledge systems and world views as potent and instructional rather than claiming some superiority of such world views over others.

Aims, impact and value of this publication

While Ubuntu philosophy has been popularised in social work by IASSW, IFSW and ICSW as the first theme of the new global agenda (2020–30) for social work and social development, there is still lack of in-depth engagement with the philosophy and how it informs different fields of social work practice and education in Africa and internationally. There is national, regional and international need for literature on Ubuntu that is not essentialising or paying lip service to the philosophy. This book seeks to address a recurrent gap in social work literature by examining Ubuntu as an indigenous African philosophy that informs social work beyond the largely residual and individualistic conceptualisation of social work that currently prevails in many contexts.

The aim of the book is to address the lack of social work theories, models and generally, literature that is locally and contextually relevant. Most social work lecturers based in African context, struggle to access learning materials and texts that centre local indigenous voices and worldviews, to use in the classroom. This book aims to provide social work practitioners, students and academics with local knowledge on, and conceptualisations of, social work more aligned with the African experience and in this way to also offer an alternative or rather complimentary world view of social work for diverse contexts. However, as evidenced from recent developments at the international social work scene, Ubuntu as a philosophical framework has significant relevance and potential to positively influence global development agendas, as will be expounded in Chapter 3.

Structure of the book

This book is structured in 21 chapters organised in six main parts. **Part I** provides introductory texts to give context to the rest of the contributions. In Chapter 1, key conceptual issues around decolonising social work have been provided as well as explaining the motivation and purpose of this publication. In Chapter 2, Mugumbate provides a detailed account of the Ubuntu philosophy as the overarching framework for decolonising social work in Africa. In Chapter 3, Twikirize engages with the relevance of Ubuntu at the international level, drawing on recent developments in global social work.

In **Part II**, we delve into discussions on ethics as well as social work fieldwork and how these could be authenticated from an Ubuntu perspective. Chapters Four and Five deal with decolonising social work ethics. In Chapter 4, Simbine interrogates the traditional principles of social work by Biestek (1957). The author argues that the principles of self-determination, confidentiality, non-judgemental attitude, acceptance, controlled emotional involvement, individualisation and purposeful expression of feelings while widely used in African contexts, sometimes clash with the Afrocentric worldview. It is recommended that Africans must take the initiative to contextualise Biestek's seven principles. In Chapter 5, Nabbumba, Kansiime and Tusasiirwe draw on practice experience to

present ethical dilemmas through brief case discussions and case resolutions and their implications for ubuntu and social work in research and practice. They argue that Ubuntu offers interpretation and solutions to some ethical dilemmas in social work in Africa. In Chapter 6, Bhangyi and Makoha offer an account of how social work fieldwork could be decolonised within an ubuntu framework and articulate the approaches, challenges and prospects of a decolonial social work fieldwork education in Africa. They conclude by drawing implications for social work fieldwork education rooted in the Ubuntu philosophies of community, culture, multiple/shared knowledge and continuous learning.

Part III focuses on decolonising social work practice with families, with chapters providing examples from the fields of family social work, social work with children and older persons. In Chapter 7, Muzondo and Zvomuya present a process model of ubuntu social work with individuals and families, arguing for strengthening the importance of community-based interventions and relationship building in social work theory and practice. Focus is put on substituting the western hegemony with the importance of community-based interventions and relationship building in social work theory and practice. In Chapter 8, Nwanna, Okoye and Oparaoha present a philosophical analysis of collective child rearing in Igboland as a panacea to juvenile delinquency. They recommend that Igbo parents should once again imbibe the philosophy of "I live because you live" and shun the philosophy of minding your business in child rearing. Chapter 9 focuses on gerontological social work, where Nabbumba and Tusasiirwe draw on Ubuntu principles of societal responsibility and moral obligation of society to care for each other, to suggest a community-led care model for older persons. They debate the ideologies that have suppressed Ubuntu and highlight the ways in which Ubuntu continues to prevail. This chapter contributes to the decolonising of African scholarship by developing an Ubuntu-driven and community-led model for supporting older people derived from the voices of older people in Uganda. In Chapter 10, Manyeli, Thabane and Mahao provide a related approach to the care of older persons in Africa, drawing on community solidarity and intergenerational relationships as the vehicle for the care of older persons. They propose instruments for care, support and protection of older persons in Lesotho. A third discussion on older persons' care is provided in Chapter 11 by Okoye and Nwafor who discuss the philosophies guiding the model of care for older adults in the traditional Igbo society, southeast Nigeria; arguing that social workers can leverage the philosophies behind the traditional care of older persons in the decolonisation agenda.

Part IV deal with environmental social work and sustainable development within the context of Ubuntu. presents chapters that focus on Ubuntu and environmental social work. The authors in each of the proceeding chapters draw on the longstanding generations of Ubuntu principles to argue that they offer great potential for driving the sustainable development agenda, where people co-exist harmoniously within the ecosystem and where mother earth is adequately stewarded.

In Chapter 12, Zvomuya and Mundau argue against Western hegemony in climate change control and environmental sustainability and highlight the importance of Ubuntu in promoting ecological justice throughout the world. In Chapter 13, Dudzai and Mabvurira use the Environmental Emancipatory Model to show how Ubuntu can be utilised in promoting a culture of shared community responsibility, concern and care for the natural environment. Still focusing on environmental social work, in Chapter 14 Chitereka discusses how Ubuntu can inform community social work to improve environmental conditions of slum settlement dwellers in Africa. In Chapter 15, Komboni discusses opportunities for community-based disaster risk management in Zimbabwe, underscoring the role of community, extended family and other traditional systems in mitigating the impact of disasters.

Part V focuses on other fields of practice to demonstrate how decolonised practice framed within Ubuntu might look like. These areas range from child sexual abuse to sexual practices, drug and substance abuse and social activism to improve governance at the macrolevel. Examples are drawn from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

In Chapter 16, Kasherwa, Kapalata and Twikirize propose Ubuntu-informed approaches for addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) drawing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, arguing that such approaches yield significant prospects for healing, recovery and reintegration of CRSV survivor compared to the conventional western informed approaches currently adopted.

Masuka and Nyandoro engage with the issue of drug abuse in Chapter 17 and argue that current approaches characterised by punitive legal regimes, individualism and use of Western therapies are not enough to address the problem. They suggest a reorientation towards a spiritually sensitive approach that is underpinned by the African philosophy of Ubuntu and its ideals of restoration, reintegration and social justice. In Chapter 18, Chikoko discusses sexual behaviours in Zimbabwe from an Ubuntu perspective, observing that besides assuring continuity through sexuality, Ubuntu also provides opportunities for social justice and human rights for various sexual behaviours.

Chapter 19 presents the political activist role of social workers, drawing on an example from the EndSars protests in Nigeria where community members were mobilised in social action to demand for change in governance. The authors, Makinde, Ilesanmi, Azorondu, Arogundade and Oyenuga draw heavily from the Yoruba orature and its application in social policy issues.

Part VI is the final section of this book and provides concluding remarks and furthers the debate on ubuntu philosophy as a decolonising framework for social work in Africa. In Chapter 20 Mugumbate suggests practical tools to use in decolonising social work practice (and education), recognising that we must move beyond arguments and provide practical solutions in order to progress towards the goal of decolonising social work. A major tool is the decolonisation calculator which should support educators and practitioners to evaluate their programmes and assess the extent to which they are decolonised.

In Chapter 21, the editors provide concluding remarks in view of what has been presented by different contributors. We recognise the challenges in the

decolonisation endeavours and commend African social workers on the continent and the diaspora to take up the responsibility to the present and next generation, to preserve, promote and pass on indigenous ubuntu values and philosophies through their education, research and publications, practice and through their community interactions. To further indigenising and decolonising social work requires confronting the inequality and politics of knowledge production in social work. Epistemic racism manifests where knowledges and ways of knowing and being of people that have experienced colonisation remain marginalised, invalidated, mis(under)represented while knowledges of the colonisers are established as legitimate. This project of decolonising social work fields of practice, drawing on African and indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu is only a great start towards compiling knowledge, case studies, thoughts, literature and experiences that can be used in social work education and practice in Africa and beyond.

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