SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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EDITOR

Conclusion

PROSPECTS FOR SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Introduction

The need to have indigenous scholarly work on the origins and evolution of social welfare and social work in Southern Africa informed this book's rationale. It is based on the contributions of authors from different universities and organisations in Southern Africa; thus, the chapters examine many issues, but all of them primarily centre on the genesis and progression of social welfare and social work or allied areas of social security/protection in the region. In this regard, the book's chapters present a panoramic view of both the historical context and contemporary trends of social welfare and social work in Southern Africa. It can be discerned from the authors' discussions that colonialism left its imprints on Southern Africa's social welfare and social work approaches, and continuing to reinforce and replicate themselves several decades after countries in the region became independent. In this regard, colonialism bequeathed these countries a legacy of different administrative and governance systems, still defining the way they arrive at policy choices and development strategies. The former influenced how different political systems run and manage social welfare systems. Therefore, in examining social welfare and social work in Southern Africa, it is important not to lose sight of these historical tangents. Part of Africa's history, that Western scholars have not given much

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prominence to and for centuries presented from their perspectives and continue to do so, is the pre-colonial era. Mostly, Africa's pre-colonial period that even some African academics and scholars scantily mention or perfunctorily refer to in their works, especially in social welfare and social work texts, is a crucial missing link that needs to be reified in African academic discourse. Critically, academics even in Africa seldom highlight and explore pre-colonial Africa's links to social welfare and social work.

Despite pre-colonial Africa's crucial part in the continent's past and present standing, some scholars spend less time to understand it scrupulously. For instance, a corollary of this endeavour would be to ascertain why systems and organisations in contemporary Africa, imported from Europe and imposed on Africans' structures by the colonialists, continue to be so stark in determining the development trajectory of Africa and the wellbeing of Africans. In effect, although the imported systems are hegemonic, they continue to be in dissonance with the value systems and aspirations of most African people, even though African governments in the post-colonial era have for decades unwittingly, and at times overtly, reinforced colonial systems in responding to their citizens' needs as well as to govern them. Indeed, human needs and the way societies are addressed are dependent on the mechanisms that they created. However, for Africa, what is missing in this equation are indigenous social welfare and social protection systems. Hence, social welfare and social work in this region cannot be examined without delving into this historical past.

Southern Africa's Indigenous Past

It is worthy to note that chapters in this book refer to the pre-colonial era in their discussions, as a way of appreciating the origins of social welfare and social work systems in this part of Africa. Southern Africa's indigenous past is located in its pre-colonial era, whereby everything that was done in this part of Africa resonated with the aspirations of the people, and all aspects of life were organic, intrinsic, as well as local in content and outlook. The type of political authorities in existence at the time mainly legitimised the former. Indeed, Southern Africa's pre-colonial history shows distinct features of existence, resting on two forms of socio-political state formation, namely stateless and nomadic communities and strong, organised polities; forms of pre-colonial states that predominated most parts of Southern Africa. In colonising these polities, European

powers did not always use force, in the first instance, but they had initially disarmed and beguiled Africans through the 'signing' of so-called treaties of 'cooperation' and 'trade' before they resorted to force, armed invasion and conquest. On the eve of colonial incursion, Southern Africa had huge swathes under the rule of powerful rulers and kingdoms, for instance:

- Queen Nzinga of the Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms of the Mbundu people in present-day Angola;
- the Bamangwato kingdom in Botswana;
- the Undi kingdom in present-day Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique;
- the Gaza kingdom in Mozambique;
- Barotseland or Bulozhi, Lunda, Ngoni and Bemba kingdoms in present-day Zambia;
- Mwenemutapa, Rozwi and Ndebele kingdoms in present-day Zimbabwe;
- Shaka and the Zulu nation, King Sekhukune of the ba Pedi nation, Mapungubwe, in South Africa;
- the Basuto kingdom in present-day Lesotho, and
- Sobhuza of Eswatini (Swaziland), among others.

Emerging Trends from Chapters

Even though different issues are examined in the chapters, there are common emerging trends that anchor this book. For starters, the ubiquitous Eurocentric interventions or knowledge bases, symptomatic of post-colonial welfare systems of countries in Southern Africa, and social work seem to be the common denominator for all social welfare and social work endeavours in the region. These are inextricably bound up with the colonisation of Africa and Southern Africa. Therefore, the colonial ethos still holds sway in the way social welfare systems and the profession of social work are constituted not only in Southern Africa but across Africa. Thus, an outcome of this anomalous situation is the ill-equipped nature of social workers to respond to the realities and other challenges of Africa. This colonial legacy is the one issue cross-cutting all the countries examined in this book. Authors of this book have not just cited this issue, but other

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scholars have highlighted it and questioned Eurocentric models of social welfare and social work interventions' efficacy to respond to Africans' needs.¹

Another key issue that emerges from the chapters' discussions is the paucity of both financial and human resources in almost all the region's countries, with Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa, probably an exception, even though they also face challenges. It is easy to decipher that social welfare, and social work, do not operate independently of the political and economic structures of the countries in the region. The politics and economies of the region influence and inform the social welfare systems and social work responses. In most cases, the region's economic downturn, that saw the downward spiral of ordinary people's living conditions, eroded the capacities of social welfare systems to perform their requisite roles in these countries. In the same vein, the deteriorating economic situation in the region negatively impacted social workers. It is important to note that poor economic performance directly resulted from political challenges typified by authoritarian rule and malevolent leadership, corruption, lack of transparency and accountability. Politics plays a crucial role in the way some regional governments support, strengthen or even neglect social welfare systems. Therefore, socio-economic challenges and human deprivation exemplify the post-colonial era, despite countries in the region attaining Independence in the 1960s-1990s.

In the same vein, the deplorable economic situation led to the migration of skilled human resources to other countries in Southern Africa or other parts of the world. This scenario has not changed for the better. Thus, the state of social welfare and social work in some of the countries of the region remains quite woeful.

Decolonisation of Social Welfare Systems and Social Work Practice

It can thus be noted that social welfare and social work still have colonial trappings and need to be decolonised in Southern Africa and Africa; work to be undertaken on both government policy and academic levels. In this regard, social welfare systems and social work practice must be in sync to search for consistent practice in Africa, arguably, one way to begin the decolonisation process in earnest. In this regard, the drive for relevant practice should be embedded with Indigenous Knowledge Systems, amplifying the need

1 Nyirenda, 1975; Lifanu, 1978; Ankrah, 1984.

to imbue social welfare and social work practice with these systems.² Social welfare and social work are development vehicles. Therefore, African development initiatives cannot be treated in isolation but must be linked to the total emancipation of Africa's peoples from the vestiges of colonial domination; neo-colonialism; post-colonial dictatorships; ethnicity, ethnic-based politics; and single-party rule. In this way, Southern Africa and Africa, in general, can begin to propel an autonomous development process, free from borrowed development formulae continuously defining African people's lives since the 1950s.³

Future considerations

This book is an attempt to bring to light the origins and evolution of social welfare and social work in Southern Africa. What the authors of the chapters managed to do is to lay a basis for future work and research on social welfare systems and social work practice initiatives in the Southern African region and broadly Africa. There is already work in Southern Africa from various academics, in the aforementioned areas, and these will be helpful and useful in advancing education and practice initiatives. However, this text is one of the few efforts to bring a collection of chapters together from authors of different Southern African countries. It is hoped that such endeavours will result in much deepened and sustainable indigenous forms of social welfare and social work education and practice in the region.

2 Noyoo, 2019a.

3 Noyoo, 2019b.

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