

Approaches of Post-colonial and Indigenous Social Work

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Appreciation of the Pre-colonial Era

- Any discussions pertaining to *Post-colonial and Indigenous Social Work in Africa must be firmly rooted in the pre-colonial African understanding and appreciation.*
- This is because prior to colonial intrusion, there existed African polities with varying degrees of centralisation and sophistication.
- Unlike Western colonial anthropologists, philosophers, etc., who said that this continent had no history before colonialism, or early missionaries who wanted to 'civilise' Africans, Africa had civilisations and organised societies before colonialism.
- Pre-colonial Africa was diverse and complex and was not one 'country'.
- Pre-colonial Africa was not utopia but was characterised by wars of conquest like in other parts of the world, at the time.
- It also had periods of prosperity.

Images of Pre-colonial Africa

1. The Great Zimbabwe



2. Gold artefacts from the Kingdom of Mapungubwe



Queen Nzingha of the Ambundu Kingdoms of Ndongo and Matamba (present-day northern Angola and parts of present-day DRC)



Pre-colonial forms of care

- These were underpinned by the African extended family system which was markedly different to the Western notion of a family.
- Pre-colonial polities had strong bonds of solidarity which were further strengthened by kinship ties.
- Those who were vulnerable were cared for by their kin, community or society at large.
- Communal and family ties were very strong and therefore caring for those who were socially disadvantaged was defined by a strong sense of obligation.

Pre-colonial state formation

- Perhaps the best way to understand pre-colonial Africa and indigenous social work is to bring to the centre-stage the pre-colonial state.
- Two broad types of African pre-colonial political formations refer to 'Stateless' or acephalous societies and states which centralised authority (Kings / chiefs), administrative machinery and judicial institutions.
- Stateless societies included the Igbo of Nigeria, the Kung of Liberia, the Tallensi of Ghana, the Somalis, Jie of Uganda and Mbeere of Kenya, among others.
- State societies were those which incorporated several societies conquered in either war or which voluntarily submitted to another.
- Such states had a centralised authority (personified in Kings, Queens or head chiefs).

Pre-colonial state formation

- Whether in the state or stateless societies, African pre-colonial political organisations had some common important attributes:
 - ✓ First, the state was concerned with the ***welfare of all its citizens***. Some have gone ahead to label this as communalism, but the central notion was that the welfare of every member, rather than just a few within the community, mattered.
 - ✓ Second, the society was organised for political purposes on the basis of lineage: thus the lineage connected the family to the state. This ensured the state of maximum popular support, but also ascertained that state sanctions can be effectively communicated.
 - ✓ Third, there was an aversion to concentrated authority. Indeed, this is the rationale for stateless societies (Olowu, 1994).

Unpacking the Concepts

- What is Colonial? What is Colonialism?
- Anything that is colonial relates to or is a characteristic of a colony or colonies according to the Oxford Languages On-line Dictionary (n.d.).
- For example, British colonial rule, French colonies, etc.
- **Colonialism** is:

... the direct and overall domination of one country by another on the basis of state power being in the hands of a foreign power. The first objective of colonialism is political domination. Its second objective is to make possible the exploitation of the colonised country (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012).

Unpacking the Concepts

- Initially, colonialism hinged on the incorporation of Africans as cheap labour with limited rights of residence in formal enclaves, which were principally geared towards production of primary products for export (Mhone, 2001).
- When we discuss colonialism in Africa we are referring to a phenomenon which took place between 1800-1960s. It is part and parcel of another phenomenon called imperialism. In fact, colonialism is a direct form of imperialism (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012).
- Imperialism under early mercantilism was based, from 1500 to 1800, on the dominance of Spain, with its control of precious metals in Latin America, and to a lesser extent, Portugal, through its commercial points of contact, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and its trade in spices, slaves and ivory (Chilcote, 2000).

Unpacking the Concepts

- This old imperialism was replaced by the new imperialism that refers to the intense rivalry of European nations, symbolised in the scramble for Africa and the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, but more conspicuous at the turn of the twentieth century (Chilcote, 2000).
- The intense rivalry between the European nations that was generated by the surge for territories in Africa culminated ***in the Berlin Conference that was convened by Otto von Bismarck in 1884 to 'discuss the future of Africa'.***
- There were thirteen European nations in attendance that assented to the Berlin Act of 1885 which set the parameters to carve up Africa.
- The United States attended as an 'observer'.

Colonial rationale

- Colonial powers justified their conquests by asserting that they had a legal and religious obligation to take over the land and culture of indigenous peoples.
- Conquering nations cast their role as civilising 'barbaric' or 'savage' nations, and argued that they were acting in the best interests of those whose lands and peoples they exploited (Blakemore, 2019).
- ***The history of colonialism is one of brutal subjugation of indigenous peoples*** (Blakemore, 2019).

The Scramble for Africa



Anti-Colonialism

- The waves of anti-colonialism that gained momentum after the Second World War were not only intended to contest the idea of empire and the alleged European ‘civilising mission’.
- The purpose was to end the European colonial and imperial rule in Asia and Africa.
- The decolonisation of the European colonies in Asia and Africa was one of the most important historical processes of the 20th century, because it overturned the stage of contemporary world history (Santos & Baros, 2020).

Fanonian perspective to anti-colonialism

- Violence is important for Fanon as a pre-condition to liberation. Violence as pre-condition operates in two directions: internal to the colony among the colonisers and external in the formative conflict between the colonised and the coloniser.
- Violence is therefore tasked with: the elimination of the colonial system at the level of imagination (how coloniser-colonised relations are naturalised as superiority and inferiority) and of material reality (exploitative relations of subordination and extraction), as well as ***formation of cultural, social, and political identities*** (Fanon, 1963).

Decolonising the Mind *a /a* Ngugi

- In *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*, the Kenyan activist, academic and author discusses the choice of language in a post-colonial African country such as Kenya.
- He argues that Africa countries can only be totally free and have total control of their resources when they replace European languages with their own indigenous languages.
- Language as a medium of domination subordinates other languages transmits a particular world view through interpretations and nuances.

Post-Colonialism

- Refers to the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western colonialism; the term can also be used to describe the concurrent project to reclaim and rethink the history and agency of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism.
- Post-colonialism signals a possible future of overcoming colonialism, yet new forms of domination or subordination can come in the wake of such changes, including new forms of global empire.
- Post-colonialism should not be confused with the claim that the world we live in now is actually devoid of colonialism (Iverson, 2022).

Post-Colonial Theory

- Post-colonial theory (or often post-colonial theory) deals with the effects of colonisation on cultures and societies and those societies' responses.
- The study of the controlling power of representation in colonised societies began in the 1950s with the work of Frantz Fanon and reached a climax in the late 1970s with Edward Said's *Orientalism*.
- The term “post-colonial” per se was first used in literary studies by *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989 to refer to cultural interactions within colonial societies.
- Post-colonial theory accompanied the rise of globalisation theory in the 1990s, which used the language of post-colonial theory in studies of cultural globalisation in particular (Ashcroft, 2017).

Post-Colonial Theory

- ✓ An approach based on post-colonial theory can guide the decolonisation of social work practice by helping to create an awareness of the effects of colonisation and create less oppressive ways of delivering social services.
- ✓ An approach that includes the perspectives of Indigenous, non-Western people and their worldviews will help transform the field of social work co-creating more effective services with Indigenous peoples (Tamburro, 2013).

Post-Colonial Theory

- ✓ Post-colonial theory gives insights into the struggles of colonised peoples to recover from the effects of colonisation including slavery, economic exploitation, war, disease, and suppression of indigenous culture and spirituality.
- ✓ Post-colonial theory foregrounds the histories and current issues caused by colonisation, the need for self-determination, and self-governance utilising indigenous world-views (Tamburro, 2013).

Decolonising social work

- Post-colonial Social Work is also about the decolonisation of social work:

Decolonising social work entails many dimensions, which include identifying destructive beliefs and practices, reclaiming Indigenous beliefs and practices, and learning from successful decolonisation efforts to improve social work practice with Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird & Hetherington, 2013).

Indigenising social work in Africa

.... Social work must endeavour to develop its own major assumptions about personality and social life; locate the basis of the profession and its rationale; develop a process which enables refined knowledge and skill to emerge out of practice; define social work and its mission to capture the African world view; clarify the domain and expertise of social work; and identify the knowledge, philosophy and value bases of the profession (Osei-Hwedie, 1996: 224)...

Conclusion

- Approaches of Post-colonial and Indigenous Social Work must be informed by the rich traditions of care, mutual obligation and reciprocity and strong bonds of solidarity that epitomised social interaction in the pre-colonial era. Also they should:
 - ✓ Seek to debunk and deconstruct colonial rationale
 - ✓ Be informed by anti-colonial stances
 - ✓ Be guided by post-colonial thought and theoretical perspectives
 - ✓ Seek to decolonise social work education and practice as well as the minds of the key actors in this arena: **the social workers.**

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