DISRUPTING WHITENESS IN SOCIAL WORK

Edited by
Sonia M. Tascón and Jim Ife

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Focussing on the epistemic – the way in which knowledge is understood, constructed, transmitted and used – this book shows the way social work knowledge has been constructed from within a white western paradigm, and the need for a critique of whiteness within social work at this epistemic level. Social work, emerging from the western Enlightenment world, has privileged white western knowledge in ways that have been, until recently, largely unexamined within its professional discourse. This imposition of white western ways of knowing has led to a corresponding marginalisation of other forms of knowledge. Drawing on views from social workers from Asia, the Pacific region, Africa, Australia and Latin America, this book also includes a glossary of over 40 commonly used social work terms, which are listed with their epistemological assumptions identified. Opening up a debate about the received wisdom of much social work language as well as challenging the epistemological assumptions behind conventional social work practice, this book will be of interest to all scholars and students of social work as well as practitioners seeking to develop genuinely decolonised forms of practice.

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Contents

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Introduction

Sonia Tascón and Jim Ife

> *We don't have a word for [knowledge] … our land is our knowledge, we walk on the knowledge, we dwell in the knowledge, we live in our thesaurus, we walk in our Bible every day of our lives. Everything is knowledge.*
>
> (Sveiby & Skuthorpe, *Treading Lightly*, 2006, p. xv)

This quote, from Tex Skuthorpe, a respected Australian Indigenous artist, educator and custodian of traditional law and stories, whose life and work has profoundly influenced both of us, is a good starting point for this book. It demonstrates how the very idea of 'knowledge' is culturally constructed. For this *Nhunggabarra* man, knowledge is not something to set apart or define, yet social workers talk confidently, and unreflectively, about the 'body of knowledge', 'knowledge for practice', 'professional knowledge', 'knowledge transfer' and so on. Knowledge becomes commodified and packaged for consumption. It exists, in its own right, and is there to be 'used'. Such language reflects the dominant Western world view, and also reflects the assumptions of the universities in which social work is taught, where terms such as those above are largely non-problematic. The contrast between this view of 'knowledge' and the Indigenous understanding conveyed in the quote is vast. Yet if we are to take seriously ideas of indigenising and decolonising social work, we have to address this epistemological ravine. Social work, as taught in universities and as practised in many countries, is overwhelmingly influenced by Western Enlightenment understandings of knowledge, of what it is, of how it is acquired, of how it is communicated and of how it is used. It is our contention that this represents a major blockage to the indigenisation and the decolonisation of social work. The focus of this book, therefore, is on social work knowledge.

But why 'whiteness'? We are using the idea of whiteness deliberately, to emphasise that the dominance of Western knowledge systems is inherently racialised. The colonialist project, from the 18th century onwards, has resulted in the colonial privileging of white people, and the subjugation and exploitation of people of colour. And with this privileging of white people goes the privileging of white world views and white knowledge systems. This colonial

imbalance is perpetuated in the 21st century through a range of dominant institutions and discourses, and is at the heart of many of the wars, conflicts and terrorist attacks of the present day. That racism is alive and thriving is hardly news for social workers, who confront it daily in the experience of the people and communities with whom they work. But for the purposes of this book we are concerned with the way that white colonialism has carried with it the privileging of white ways of knowing and understanding the world, and this has inevitably influenced social work, and what has counted as legitimate social work knowledge.

The whiteness of social work is a consequence of the whiteness of its knowledge. White social workers may be well-meaning, inclusive and even consciously anti-racist, but if they are not able to address the whiteness of the knowledge they bring to their practice, they will perpetuate colonial and racist oppression and disadvantage. By applying only white social work knowledge, social workers force their non-white 'clients', and their non-white colleagues, to assimilate into the white world, and deny the alternative knowledge systems that may be more significant for the lived experience of the people with whom they work. The dominance of white Western knowledge, and the consequent devaluing and invalidation of other knowledge systems, has been termed *epistemicide*, by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in an important book, *Epistemologies of the South*, which is referred to by a number of the authors of the following chapters. White social work, we argue, has been guilty of epistemicide, in that it has defined 'social work' uncritically from a privileged white Western perspective. This is hardly surprising. Modern social work, as will be argued by Sonia Tascón in Chapter 1, is a child of the Western Enlightenment, and has carried with it the epistemological assumptions of that highly influential historical intellectual movement. It has been located in the institutions of Western Modernity – universities, government bureaucracies, professional journals, research institutes, NGOs and the English language – and these have served to reinforce social work's epistemological whiteness, leaving it largely unexamined. Even many of the explorations of 'cross-cultural social work' are undertaken while leaving the epistemological assumptions of white social work unexamined and accepted as given.

To challenge this whiteness within social work, and to take seriously alternative knowledge forms that will be more relevant for a multicultural, cosmopolitan world facing serious existential crises, is not an easy task. It requires honest and rigorous self-examination and critical reflection on the part of white social workers, strong and assertive articulation of alternatives by social workers from and in other cultural contexts, genuine dialogue and a willingness to critique many of the assumptions of what social work is and how it operates. As a simple example, applying the quote at the beginning of this introduction to social work knowledge, and seriously exploring the implications of such a fundamental shift in what counts as 'knowledge', has the potential to turn a white social worker's 'professional identity' upside down.

This book seeks to open up the possibilities of such a critique and re-evaluation. It addresses the white Western basis of social work knowledge and explores some other ways of thinking about social work – and the knowledges that social workers draw on – that enable us to move beyond the world of white Western colonial dominance. That world, in any case, is dying. It has become clear that it is blatantly unsustainable and in the coming decades is headed for multiple crises, if not catastrophes: ecological, economic, social, cultural and political. In confronting the future, one thing we can be sure of is that it will not be a simple linear extension of the present. The social workers of the future will need to break out of the constraints of the white Western world view, not just because it is so clearly unjust and counter to the social justice values at the heart of social work, but also because the crises of the future will require creative, imaginative and courageous approaches beyond the limited imagination of Western Modernity. Much of the inspiration for such creativity can be found in Indigenous and other non-Western knowledge traditions. These traditions have been marginalised in mainstream social work thinking but must now take centre stage if social work is to become relevant for the challenges of the 21st century.

If whiteness is what we are disrupting in this book, how do we think of a social work that is epistemologically decolonised? This is an interesting question because whiteness has already begun to be disrupted, and decolonisation is already underway; the various contributors in this book have been part of that for some time. What we are doing with this book is foregrounding that work and building on it; we are asking the reader to grow this field of work and acutely attune ears, eyes, pulse and instincts to pay it attention. We simply need to look to the myriad of ways social work scholars, Indigenous, non-Anglophone and Anglophone are beginning to reimagine us, and listen and help grow it. There are enough, if not many. For example, Indigenous writers in Australia and the Pacific have already been developing ways to incorporate Indigenous knowledges in social work (Bennett et al. 2013; Bennett, Redfern & Zubryzycki 2018; Green & Baldry 2008; Bennett 2014; Meo-Sewabu 2014; Mafile'o et al. 2019). Similarly, there are a growing and significant number of Indigenous writers' allies who are supporting this work (Gray et al. 2013; Hendrick & Young 2017; Zuchowski et al. 2013; Al-Natour & Mears 2016). And there are others writing within the decolonisation banner (Mathebane & Sekudu 2018; Mabvurira 2018) inviting social work to consider new ideas. For example, Hong-Jae Park uses a particular Korean idea that he calls *filial piety* (2017), as an exploration of the veneration of ancestors, a concept that can help us connect the past to the present and the future. This has the potential to change linear ideas of time, collapsing past, present and future, and undoing the linear future-obsessed epistemologies of the West. A circular notion of time can help to make us accountable to the future because we will, soon, become the ancestors, as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond are recognised as the ancestors of social work. This recognition of the past and carrying the dead

in our lives in very tangible ceremonial ways also does away with the neurosis about death (Park 2017), as it allows us to imagine ourselves continuing into the future. Another example is Litea Meo-Sewabu (2014), a Fijian academic whose work on ethics as a process of discernment that needs to be deeply situated and aware of the network of responsibilities bound by cultural norms in Fiji, forces us to rethink ethics and research as more encompassing than simply researcher-participant. Her work demands much of us in the creation of knowledge, accountable to communities far beyond the universities that fund these projects.

And finally, but most definitely not least, comes Tracie Mafile'o, another contributor in this book, whose writing represents that third, hybrid space that undoes the binary not merely because she embodies it, but also because her writing evokes as well as tells. Her work on cultural humility (Mafile'o et al. 2019; Mafile'o 2017, 2009) provides a clear pathway for those who have, until now, benefitted from being on the right side of modernity, white social workers from the Western world, to consider the effort that creating a social work no longer bound to the epistemic violences wrought by modernity will entail. It will be hard work.

Decolonisation takes place as a relationship, one of the many sides of which is the acknowledgement by white Anglophone social workers that they benefit from a system that was established for them and is founded on their own [hi]stories. But it is also more than this: it is to recognise and to imagine, to story and create, to think and act differently. Social work will grow from these struggles, and we will be able to profoundly think-practice. This is what this book sets out to explore and invites the reader to consider. The book contains knowledge and wisdoms from many parts of the globe – Africa, Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Latin America and Europe – and from a diverse range of experiences. There are yet more, and we invite you to please open your minds, souls, bodies and feelings to these Other ways and welcome them in.

This book is of relevance both for white social workers and for those who identify as non-white. The latter include Indigenous social workers, immigrant social workers in Western societies, and social workers in non-Western countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific: a diversity that is reflected in the backgrounds of the contributors to the book. The chapters in the book address these different audiences; some are written primarily with a white Western audience in mind, while others are written more specifically for social workers from other cultures, but we believe that social workers from all cultural and epistemological backgrounds will find something of relevance in all the chapters.

One of the features of this book is that we have encouraged the various contributors to write reactions to the chapters of others, in a spirit of dialogue. All chapters therefore are followed by two additional comments from other authors, meant to take the ideas further and encourage additional exploration. In that way, we have made a small gesture towards challenging conventional

practice, and have sought to encourage dialogue rather than independent, autonomous stand-alone chapters (the very words 'independent' and 'autonomous' represent the Western way of doing things that we wish to question).

The first two chapters set the scene. In Chapter 1, Sonia Tascón explores the idea of whiteness and the influence of binary thinking at the heart of Western Modernity, arguing for 'profound thinking' that allows more creative epistemologies to emerge. In Chapter 2, Jim Ife explores whiteness in social work knowledge from the perspective of the privileged white male and identifies some aspects of conventional social work that can be challenged and critiqued. In the remaining chapters, authors from a range of cultural and epistemological backgrounds explore various aspects of the topic. The authors differ in their approaches. Many are written as personal accounts; some are more conventionally 'academic' while others are a mixture of the two. The dominance of the personal is hardly surprising: the subject is for all the authors represented here a personally challenging one, and the journey of decolonisation is both personal and professional, wherever one may be positioned in relation to the dominant cultural and epistemological tradition.

In Chapter 3, Bindi Bennett explores some of the challenges confronting knowledge-making as power is inserted into supposed collaborative relationships; her chapter asks social work scholars to consider how appropriation of knowledge occurs, as well as the need to more than simply [ac]knowledge Indigenous partners as junior partners. In Chapter 4, Kathomi Gatwiri reflects on her own education in colonial white social work in Kenya, her moving beyond this limitation, and her ideas about how African knowledges can contribute to social work. Sharlotte Tusasiirwe, in Chapter 5, recounts a similar experience of colonised social work in Uganda, and then describes the ways traditional knowledges and community self-organising practices among older women in villages represent alternative and culturally valid ways of doing social work. Chapter 6 explores a Muslim framework that positions aspects such as love, food, hospitality, family and community at the heart of practices that begin to undo white epistemologies. Through an eight-point framework that foregrounds Muslim knowledges, and then an example where institutional social work whiteness has silenced them, Lobna Yassine highlights the tensions involved. Jioji Ravulo, in Chapter 7, describes his extensive career in seeking to decolonise Pacific social work, and the ways he has found to navigate between two cultures and epistemological traditions to create 'third spaces' for dialogue. The Pacific context continues in Chapter 8, where Tracie Mafile'o again brings out the theme of love and community to describe how Pacific social work differs from other traditions. Food, love, community and embodied human responses remain constants in these chapters, and disrupt the coldness of modernity's distant, 'objective', abstracted knowledges within which social work was born and developed. In Chapter 9, Iris Silva Brito and Goertz Ottmann examine alternative and marginal social work practices in Brazil, particularly Indigenous movements, and their potential to

disrupt whiteness, and in Chapter 10 Siew Fang Law reflects on her experience as a Chinese Malaysian teaching community development, and draws on traditional Chinese ways of thinking and doing as ways of understanding community. In Chapter 11, Larry Alicea-Rodriguez discusses the importance of intersectionality and decolonial thought in developing a decolonising social work in a Latin American and Caribbean context.

Throughout these chapters, various authors describe words which convey important concepts for social work, but which cannot be readily translated into English, and need to be understood from within alternative epistemological paradigms. Examples include *ubuntu/obuntu* (Kathomi Gatwiri and Sharlotte Tusiirwe), *sancofa* (Kathomi Gatwiri), *solesolevaki* (Jioji Ravulo), *guanxi* (Siew Fang Law), *aragwaksã* (Iris Silva Brito and Goetz Ottmann), and *tā-vā* (Tracie Mafile'o). Language is important, and it constructs and delimits our understanding of 'knowledge'. For this reason, Western social work terminology needs to be examined for its epistemological assumptions, and so the book concludes, in Chapter 12, with a list of over 40 terms commonly used by social workers, which we argue require critique from a decolonising perspective. We have indicated for each, in a few sentences, some of the questions that need to be asked, though this is necessarily a superficial indication; each term would deserve a chapter in itself. The purpose of this chapter is both to highlight the extent to which white Western Modernity dominates mainstream social work vocabulary, and to stimulate discussion and further exploration around alternative knowledges; we hope it may prove to be useful for work with students or in professional development contexts.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge all the chapter authors, who have been committed and enthusiastic about the project; we thank them for their chapters and comments, and their patience in the inevitably difficult process of bringing contributions together in a book. We also acknowledge Claire Jarvis and Georgia Priestly at Routledge, for their enthusiasm for the project. Ben Joseph has played an important role as research assistant for both of us. There are, of course, many other people whose ideas and support have contributed to this book: students, academic and professional colleagues, friends and family, who are too numerous to mention by name.

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1 Disrupting white epistemologies

De-binarising social work

Sonia Tascón

Prolegomenon

In 1994 I began my journey as a social worker. I did not realise then how white social work is, although I was possibly one of the very few persons of colour in the student group; in the staff group there were none (well, one, but he was not a social worker). In 2001, I returned to university to do a PhD, and the situation had changed little, although there were a number of international students doing higher degrees while paying full fees for the privilege. I left social work for a long while, and I returned to a social work Lecturer position in 2015 because I did not find elsewhere the concern for social justice that had first drawn me to the discipline/profession. In 2017 I then found myself in a university established in the largest, most diverse region of Australia, and yet very few of the permanent staff were non-Anglo-Australians, while over 80% of the students (domestic and international) were. I had written about whiteness from the research I carried out in 2001–2006 because some of the treatment of refugees I had studied reflected my own experience as a migrant to a country that was still operating on a policy of assimilation when we arrived in 1971. I asked myself in 2019: had things changed much in social work, after various social work scholars had written about whiteness throughout the 2000s (Bessarab 2000; Bennett & Zubrzycki 2003; Green & Baldry 2008; Bennett, Zubrzycki & Bacon 2011; Bennett et al. 2013; Zubrzycki et al. 2014)? And as I then turned back to critical race and whiteness as a framework for my thinking, I noticed that it was not now so much used by social work scholars. Why, when it raises important questions about who benefits the most from the way things are? Why was white privilege left off the agenda? I think it has to do with the binary nature of the way much of the framework presented its work, and so its explanatory power was lost. That binary, created by the powerful white Western-North[1] to control Others, was being turned around to attack *their* power, but did so in a divisive manner. The problem lies in the way the

1 I realise I am conflating different frameworks in the use of these terms, but I do so purposely because they each attempt to arrive at a similar racialised analysis, but from different perspectives.

binary got configured in Western modernity, not as a yin-yang of complementarity, but to mimic a warlike stance of radical opposition between conflicting parties, where only one side could be victorious; social work scholars possibly found it too divisive as a result. So, is whiteness still a useful idea to discuss for the purpose of decolonisation? If we are to decolonise epistemologically, do we not need to ask what/whose ideas we are decolonising from? And, if whiteness can be uncoupled from its binary nature, could we not return to use it to decolonise because it does enable us to turn the gaze around and ask: who/what are we decolonising from? More importantly, who benefits the most, so that they should be required to do the heavy lifting of the changes required? In what follows, I will not be focusing specifically on the whiteness question but leave that as an open question as to its ongoing usefulness for social work should its frame be de-binarised. I will, instead, turn my attention to the foundational, organising principle that has made whiteness divisive – to the logic of modernity's binary – as well as making modern European colonialism as epistemically violent as it has been. Modernity's binary, as other authors in this volume mention, is at the very heart of Western European colonisation, and therefore, in order for us to truly decolonise, this remains a central, seminal, way of thinking that has to be disrupted and *rethought*.

Introduction

Social work was born white. It emerged in the Anglosphere – UK and US – from deep within the European Enlightenment. This was its origin story. That place and time comprised both seed and soil for that which we now know as the profession of social work. Although most, if not all, cultural traditions have an ethic of care, which involves communal or familial bonds of obligation, this was the context for the emergence of a professionalised set of activities that centred on *distant* caring; that is, the care of strangers in a nonreciprocal relational arrangement bound by values and techniques of *distance*. The relationship that distant caring presumes was made necessary by its time and place, due to a set of material circumstances that were shaped by, and in turn developed, ideas, principles, and ideologies that had been debated in Western Europe over centuries, and culminated in what has been called the episteme of Western modernity[2] (Foucault 1970; Ife 2012, 2016, 2018; Ablett & Morley 2016).

I want to pay close attention to one of the most profoundly foundational principles upon which modernity established itself. This principle has not only organised relationships differently; it has also enabled the inequalities that were created, internal and external, to be perpetuated and reproduced seamlessly. It is a principle so foundational that it is, possibly, the hardest to notice, and yet, epistemologically, most significant. That epistemic principle is *the binary*. Its work is so insidious that even in the areas in which we are moving in

2 I will not capitalise either of these terms from here on, as they are well enough known and understood without that.

this book, colonisation and whiteness, we have to rely on its precepts to disseminate these operations: white vs black, colonised vs coloniser[3]. This way of thinking constructed the notion of individualised subjectivity for the first time and imagined intersubjectivity as autonomous beings in incommensurate and separate, even distant while parallel, existences. This is but one way of viewing human being, and as such I consider Western modernity to be but another cultural framework, and not universal, even if in many aspects of our lives, personal and political, professional, and in geopolitics (and I include human rights in this), it is disseminated as such. And as such, the binary is but a contextualised epistemological principle that was born of the needs and cataclysmic changes of its place and times. Yet it has gone on to shape the profession itself, and until we acknowledge its work and free ourselves from *its* work, we will continue to perpetuate and reproduce (as ways of doing) knowledges (as ways of knowing) that have become hidden to us as a result, including other knowledges outside the cultural group within which social work was formed. This, because the binary shaped social work from its inceptionary origins as shaped largely through practice (or doing) and not thinking. There is a profoundly justified reason why this occurred, and I will cover this more fully below. What I propose is that we need to bring in, or back, *profound thinking*, not as the disembodied, abstract thinking that social work rejected, but the kind that the poets, bards, performers and artists do: a type of thinking that imagines, dreams, explores, yearns, wonders, unfolds, unpacks, eats, sings, draws and photographs, sits in silence and contemplates, creates and, most importantly, *loves* (familial-ly, communal-ly, sexual-ly, romantical-ly, friend-ly …), all from a place where the body and mind travel together.

The binary and whiteness

The binary is not new or exclusive to the Enlightenment and Western modernity. As I mentioned above, the idea of Yin and Yang entered Chinese thinking in the 3rd century and was a belief that 'all things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites' (Cartwright 2018). Conceiving of the world as separated dualities was seen, even there and then, as a useful way to organise, explain and understand the world. In relation specifically to that which concerns me in this chapter, namely knowledge and action (or practice), the Stanford Encyclopedia describes Chinese thought as undergoing rigorous disputes:

> as to which of the elements forming the binary categorical pair of knowledge and action (*zhi*, *xing*) had priority, [this] constituted one of the crucial debates in traditional, as well as modern Chinese epistemology.
>
> (Rošker 2018)

3 I realise that post-modern scholarship has carried out a great deal of analysis in this area, and I am not seeking to explore all of that work. I am solely interested in the ways in which the binary has operated in shaping our professional discourses about who we are and what we know and do.

The difference with that Chinese tradition, however, and the way in which the binary gets configured in Western modernity, is that the dual contrasts operate as inseparable and necessary aspects of each other. Thus, the same Stanford Encyclopedia (Rošker 2018) goes on to name Chinese philosophies as founded on 'relational epistemologies'. In the realm of knowledge and action, Chinese thought held that:

> Knowledge (*zhi*) was … necessarily and inextricably linked to human activities and the implementation of social practice (*xing*): any separation of knowledge and (social) practice was equated with the separation of human beings from the world in which they have found themselves. The close proximity between knowledge and action was seen as the close proximity between an individual and the world, because action was a means for his/her self-transformation and the transformation of the world in the world. Hence, the unity or non-unity of knowledge and action was always a measure of the unity or non-unity of humanity and the world.
>
> (Cheng 1989, p. 207 cited in Rošker 2018)

In that binary thinking, the sides are complementary and in need one of the other to understand the entirety. As it comes to be conceived during the European Enlightenment and the episteme of modernity, however, the binary adopts the thinking of war. This is where the world is explained and understood as contesting binary oppositions, one of which will be victorious. It is from the ancient Greeks that we get this conception of the binary, and particularly from Plato. As I have covered elsewhere (Tascón 2019), Platonic philosophy was wide-ranging, but a most seminal and influential doctrine centred on the belief that existence is composed of shadows and pure forms. Platonic forms are ideal and pure knowledge, are so abstracted from our physical world that they can only be grasped through pure intellectual activity, while our material reality is but a shadow image of the pure forms. Pure forms are not of the material world; indeed, they would be tarnished by its ever-changing nature, as forms are universal and eternal in nature, if they have a 'nature' per se (Saitta & Zucker 2013). Plato, and then modernity, manifest this way of dividing knowledge from experience, as incommensurable from the world of everyday life, or what Edmund Husserl went on to call *the lifeworld* (Husserl 1954). That way of thinking divides knowledge from everyday knowing and becomes abstracted from the very life that social workers deal with in their everyday practices. Epistemically, there is nothing more powerful than eternal-ness and universality: that an idea, person or object can be ever-present and all-encompassing, forever and permanently existing. In this way of thinking, on that side is pure knowledge and truth, while on the other lie shadows, uncertainty and non-truth. There is nothing in between. In later modernity, when Science and its methods almost completely invade our ways of knowing, eternality and universality become possible through a further disconnection from experience and embodied

being, via the achievement of 'objectivity'. For social workers who deal with everyday life and the messiness of everyday people, that schism became a problem.

The dual nature of knowledge that began with the Greeks goes on to be shaped more fully and rigidly in Western modernity, and this is where social work enters the scene as a profession. The separation of knowledge from everyday life also shaped our understanding of the godly, as singular and abstracted from our lives. Where religious traditions until that moment had created beings that were tied to our lives in various ways (for example, gods or spirit beings become rocks and mountains in some traditions; in others, the gods engaged in sexual activity with humans and conceived demigods), this way of thinking was a radical break and made possible the incommensurability of modernity's binary, as oppositions.

Modernity's binary became a war zone instead of an explanatory frame for harmony and wholeness. Foucault writes of this epistemic shift as a radical break from thinking through *similitudes* to imagining life through individuations and separations (Foucault 1970). Similitudes imagined all life as being connected, so that each part, while distinct and classifiable, contains other parts in some measure. So, in this world view the sky is a distinct entity, while also indistinguishable from the sea as they merge in the horizon; the dawn and the sunset but a breath away from each other; and a person may be likened to a tiger, or a bear, or a gazelle, depending on the feature used to make the comparison. In a world of similitudes, metaphor forms the communicative bridge for the connections, where the similarities are created to connect. It is interesting that metaphorical language is almost completely lost in modernity, as scientific language imposes itself on all activities, including (especially) the professions, and metaphor is relegated to the artistic and both are marginalised. Indigenous peoples around the world, but also many other traditions, have retained this inclination towards similitudes and metaphor. I remember hearing a Colombian song some years ago that brought this into relief for me. The song, called *Décimas* by Carlos Vives and Martin Madera (2001), centres on the ways in which New Orleans is like Barranquilla (a city in Colombia[4]), and then goes through a long list of things that are familiar, including fruits, vegetables, animals, cities, an iguana like a dinosaur, afternoons like mornings, the sea like the sky, and:

> If you pay attention
> And analyse well
> You will realise
> That we are all alike[5]
>
> (Carlos Vives, *Décimas*)

4 And, how telling is it that I felt the need to tell you this?

5 My own translation from the Spanish original.

The binary in modernity loses the ability to create wholeness, and instead centres on divisions, to force us to imagine things, and people, as separate and apart. Not all traditions imagine themselves, and their relationship to other beings and non-beings, this way. As I write this, I begin to think about isolation and loneliness, and wonder: is this thinking what has led to the epidemic of loneliness? One of my favourite writers is Japanese author Haruki Murakami, and a central theme in his writing is modern isolation, separateness and loneliness. Chilean filmmaker Sebastián Lelio won international acclaim with his film *Gloria* in 2013, which was remade in English in 2019. Centring on an older woman, it is a beautiful and tragic story of many aspects. Its focal point, however, is loneliness, age and woman. Although the English-language version deals with this issue differently, the Chilean-version includes derogatory references to modern practices that have entered traditional Chilean society, like yoga and mindfulness, to mitigate an epidemic of loneliness created by the excision of communal and familial bonds from traditional society. In my Chilean-Mapuche (Indigenous of Chile) tradition, there is a strong belief that no one is to be left alone. After many years of living in Australia I befriended a Chilean woman. I had become very used to the idea of being self-reliant as I grew up in Australia, but every time my children went to their father's house for the weekend, she would invite me over to her house, or invite me out. She would always invite herself when she knew I was doing something on my own. I initially found this odd, and then I recognised that it was what my family practised but I had moved away from slowly. She returned this practice to me and I liked it. As another example, when I left the city where all my family lived, as an adult and willingly, searching for adventures, the wrenching I felt was so intense, immense and extreme that I grieved and cried over this separation for months. I recognise now that I had been instilled with the idea that to be with my people, surrounded by those who know me and accept me in my entirety, warts and all, is important.

But it is not just a matter of traditions. This binary has created schisms that are not just the way we imagine the world; it is how we live it. The modern focus on mental health, in which social work is now caught up, is a very real phenomenon. It is real and we need to wonder how much of this has been created by modern separation, from our very being, not to mention social separations and isolations that have become standard. James Barnes explores the impact of this binary as it became manifest in Descartes' schism between body and mind, and its impact on mental health in modern times:

> In the face of an indifferent and unresponsive world that neglects to render our experience meaningful outside of our own minds … our minds have been left fixated on empty representations of a world that was once its source and being. All we have, if we are lucky to have them, are therapists and parents who try to take on what is, in reality, and given the magnitude of the loss, an impossible task.
>
> (Barnes 2019)

As a result of this binary, we have become foreigners in our own bodies, living in minds that are to be separate from our bodies, or in a relationship of mind to body that is primarily instrumental – to obliterate us from the excessive mind-focus (binge drinking), in pure hedonistic pleasure (the modern focus on food and cooking programmes), or to practise the world virtually (social media, computer games) with few perceived social consequences.

Modernity's binary is not just an epistemological system of imaginings. It is a war zone, in which only certain people are to be victors, not all. Boaventura de Sousa Santos goes further than the idea of this binary creating separation; he says that this binary produces a side that is an abyss. That abyss is where reside the forgotten people, those who many do not wish to notice, step over, reject, snub or eliminate; those that, in Santos' terms, are 'produced as nonexistent' (Santos 2007). This binary, he says, operates through a play of visible/invisible distinctions to 'divide our social reality into two realms' and to construct that reality so that one side disappears from view. It does so invisibly, to produce invisibility, and the result is *abyssal thinking*, or the acceptance that the obliteration or invisibility is correct in order to sustain the order. This binary, therefore, creates and relies on the existence of one side as truth, and the other, well, as the Other, whose existence is simply to make truth possible by becoming its counterpoint, while in the shadows, invisible. Those on the Other side are not-truth (Santos et al. 2007). Diverse knowledges disappear.

Social work and the binary

Modernity's binary has had profound consequences for a profession born to *deal with* the excesses, but also *born of* Western modernity. The primary way in which this has occurred is in its own divided self. That is, in the almost incommensurable and irreparable separation between theory and practice. Much of the profession's discourses centre on the idea of *practice*. Search any text written for social workers and it is the word with possibly the highest incidence. Words do not equate with discourse, of course, but they begin to indicate what is important for a group and that which formulates its discursive frames. Action, intervention and doing, rather than imagining, dreaming, yearning or thinking, are suggested with this linguistic emphasis, which may well be an epistemological foundation, and therefore discursively significant. Carlos Montaño (2012), Latin American social work scholar, makes this explicit when discussing the theory/practice divide: "the social work profession [has been] developed as part of a socio-psychological field mainly geared toward action, practice, and immediate intervention" (2012, p. 308). Further, while exploring the theory/practice divide in social work, he describes the binarised manner in which the dominant Western order of capitalism has formulated our knowing in social work as a radical "separation between knowledge and action, knowing and doing, theory and practice" (p. 308). The kind of knowledge produced, he says, "must be fragmentary" (p. 308), by which he is not entirely referring to post-modern fragmentation, but that the knowledge created cannot hold the

necessary pieces together to allow us a holistic view of reality. Jim Ife, another author in this volume, has expressed elsewhere the problematic relationship between theory and practice in Anglophone social work, its members referring to each as opposites that need to be integrated, or each related to the other in uncertain ways (Ife 2018). Montaño (2012) takes the discussion more broadly and points to the widely held view by social workers that theory (as scientific knowledge) is to be of direct 'use' to their specific practice; this is reductionist, and compresses theory to a mere instrumental imperative. The divide, sustained even when knowledge is included as mere instrument, has the effect of sustaining and reproducing that which it has set out to change.

Social change has been a central element of social work. I want to propose that social work sustained this binary, not because as a profession it is wedded to its divisionary formulations, but as a result of the decisions this binary forced on it. As I have written elsewhere (Tascón 2019), if we consider that social work was born from modernity's excesses, from the inequalities and victims that were born of it – those whom Zygmunt Bauman called 'the weeds' of modernity (1989) – then social work as a profession was born to assist those who are 'othered' by modernity. This positioned it to make decisions as to what would enable this best. Knowledge had become the realm of abstracted, objective, specialist knowledge-makers in modernity, removed from the concerns of everyday life. Everyday quotidian concerns, lives that were being lived in poverty, disaffection, marginalisation, rejection and little hope, were not truth or knowledge. Thus, social work became the action/practice arm of modernity, in order to align with those people who suffered in their everyday lives. And yet the binary went unquestioned, was applied via the action/theory schism, and our profession took up the former, in order to clean up the mess of modernity and return its rightful order. I remember when I was a hospital social worker in the late 1990s in a children's hospital. Back then I remember feeling that our work was so subsidiary to the central work of the medical professions that we were simply mopping up the doctors' and nurses' mess, to deal with what was not central to *their* work which they could not be bothered to work on. Their work was to diagnose (analyse abstractly) and prescribe solutions that others would act on, and anything that they did *do* was so valuable that only a small number of people could ever receive their attention (as surgeons). The rest was done by us *Allied Health* professionals. Even that word, *allied*, said much to me about the relationship we held in that institution and discourse.

In this subsidiary relationship to the dominant side of the binary, we certainly align with the Others of modernity, with the abyss; but do we then not also replicate that which we set out to change? Because in that decision to action and practice, we also decided not to radically disrupt the binaries, but have simply acquiesced to modernity's precepts. Furthermore, this separation is what has enabled, and continues to enable, the horrors of coloniality. This is because in the cleaving of our way of knowing from our way of doing into oppositional categories, ethical responsibility is lost in the space

between the two categories. Knowledge becomes only that which can be articulated in particular ways, through scientific positivistic evidentiary processes, and all other ways of understanding our world are not-knowledge (or truth). Thinking becomes abstraction from daily life, and the specialist work of only certain groups of people: academics, philosophers and decision-makers who are deemed to operate at an abstract level of decision-making. Abstract knowing is then exonerated from responsibility because it is 'objective' and thereby apparently impartial, producing knowledge in such reified spaces of knowing that it cannot be held responsible for what it produces. Action, on the other hand, is that which is NOT abstract knowing, and becomes a category that exists simply to apply that which knowledge created. This separation produces action-based foot soldiers who follow orders unquestioningly and can be exonerated from responsibility for their actions by this fact. In effect, the separation exonerates from responsibility both thinkers and actors, as they operate in their distinct spheres without connection to the other or to those they proclaim to help. The creation of discrete roles and tasks, reaching its peak of perfect-ability in modern bureaucracies, and reduced responsibility was indeed the basis for claims of mitigated blame in the Nuremberg trials when Nazi officers were accused of crimes against humanity (Arendt 1976; Breton & Wintrobe 1986).

The work of coloniality, as a relationship of power founded by colonialism (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2007), takes place in the umbral spaces between these two worlds: where thought and action do not meet, and where responsibility is disavowed. The continuing work of coloniality is therefore hidden. Abstract knowing creates understandings that were/are 'objective', positivistic-ally producing quantifiable measurements of skulls and bones, blackness/Aboriginality, 'intelligence', 'mental health' or criminal activity. The actioners move in to reduce or eradicate those thus measured, each reliant on the other but disavowedly and radically separate. In this divided way of knowing, as separate from doing, and in this way of doing, separate from knowing, we could begin to think ourselves into being in ways that disavowed what we actually did; indeed, we could disregard what we did as mere technical, instrumental applications of knowledge and truth. We could imagine ourselves as 'being good' while also being part of a system that 'did harm'. In social work we do not need to go too far in history to recognise ourselves in this. In Australia, social workers removed children from First Nations' families for reasons of racialised measurements until the 1970s; the children continue to be removed from their families today at alarming rates for a different set of measurements, criminality and other 'deficiencies' (Briskman 2014; Ife 2012; Garkawe et al. 2001). As another contributor to this volume describes with the recent Countering Violent Extremism training programmes carried out by the AASW (Australian Association of Social Workers), are we reproducing Orientalism unquestioningly? Are we thereby perpetrating epistemic violence through this training, targeting then silencing Muslim youth, albeit in hidden, sub-textual, ways?

Whiteness

How does the binary act in relation to our analysis of social work as white? As I have written elsewhere, whiteness asks questions about racialised privilege (Tascón 2004), about who benefits. In a reversal of the gaze that continues to point a finger at those who 'suffer', in order to represent their weakness and their deficiencies, this framework points to the ways in which we are all racialised, and benefit differently from this racialisation:

> White people *and* people of color live racially structured lives … any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses.
>
> (Frankenberg 1993, p. 1)

This framework sees that to notice who benefits from a social, political, economic and cultural system, tells us clearly something about the source of that suffering; it does so primarily through race. The framework has brought into relief race and privilege, and yet much of its analysis has occurred through a – perceived, or real – binary, that of white vs. black. Dharman Jeyasingham (2012) has carried out an excellent overview of social work literature in this area and concludes that, on the whole, 'whiteness is constructed through a binary opposition of black and white, where black people are understood to have insight into racism that white people lack' (p. 678). This then fails to nuance the analysis and either reifies whiteness, permits liberal whiteness to opt out through acknowledgement and remorse and no more, or to not include non-white people to be implicated in the power and privilege system.

Decoloniality, profound thinking and social work

Epistemic decolonisation is not an easy task. It is the dismantling of a kind of colonisation that goes to the very heart of colonialism's life, and for that reason is the most difficult to define and shift, even more so to eradicate. As Santos et al. (2007) suggest, it is asking of the dominant group to commit epistemological suicide, and that cannot be simple. I propose that to decolonise we need to eradicate the very epistemic heart of the means of producing epistemic violence and epistemicide (Santos 2014): modernity's binary. This is largely because epistemicide occurs through the binary, through abyssal thinking, by making Other knowledges invisible, and is "a type of violence that attempts to eliminate knowledge possessed by marginal subjects" (Dotson 2011, p. 236). That requires us to interrogate and disrupt this binary because it is what makes impossible the complexity, wholeness and diversity engaged with locality involved in the analysis of racialised privilege, of coloniality, and, indeed, any form of interconnected relationality that expands our understanding in this area. In social work, we need to decolonise through the rejection of this binary as it has defined us primarily through practice. Rather, we need to reintroduce

thinking as an integral aspect of what we 'do'. But, in order to avert another binary, this type of thinking needs to be one that is not abstracted and distant, universal and eternal. This means including thinking that is bounded to our very being: thinking that is dreaming, imagining, embodied and experiential; thinking that is deeply creative and metaphorical, that connects and reconnects. I call this profound thinking.

Profound thinking

Profound thinking has to include thinking that is critical[6] but is not simply critical thinking because that remains in the binary, in the critiques that the mind produces. *Profound thinking* is of the world of lived experience, and of the body, *and* of the world of ideas. Profound thinking needs to 'thought' of as more than abstracted thinking and that which has been made available in late modernity to the needs of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy (Santos 2014). What we need is "knowledge that flies at low altitude because it is stuck to the body. We [need to] feel-think and feel-act" (Santos 2014, p. 12), reconnect deep thought, deep imagining, deep feeling, deep grounding and deep critical thought, without the epistemological beheading that took place in modernity. To do that we need to return profound thinking to practice. I am proposing that profound thinking is philosophical and creative but is always of the body and to the body, of the world it comes from and to which it returns; it flies and dreams to gather anew, but always comes from and returns to that which gave it life: that life we live with others. We need to radically bring back that which was radically ruptured, thought and action, which in social work becomes theory and practice. We need to heal them in order for us to take notice of all the many other kinds of knowledges in the world, knowledges that are "looking for people eager to know them… [and which can] help us in our struggle to live well" (Santos 2014, p. 12). Without both a redefinition of theory and a radical healing of the rupture with practice we, in social work, will continue to reproduce all manner of epistemic violences on Others. The continuing excessive focus on 'practice' (or doing), on skills and on individual casework are practices and norms that have Othered dreaming, profundity, creativity and necessary collectivities; these are ways of operating that are foreign to many people in the non-white Western world.

We need to reimagine theory as profound thinking, as creative thinking and as critical thinking all at once. Profound thinking IS imaginative because it takes profound imagination to rage to the depths and heights of our being, expose truths unseen and imagine anew; poets and artists know this well. Norah Bateson alludes to this when, in speaking of a broken epistemological

6 This is because it forces us to include power in the analytical frame, but yet decolonisation is not equivalent with critical theory.

system that needs re-interconnecting, she uses the child's rhyme for Humpty Dumpty: 'all the king's horses, and all the king's men … couldn't put Humpty together again'. Her next line is … 'But probably the poets could' (Bateson 2019).

Comment by Kathomi Gatwiri

Profound thinking and implications to the 'African Subject'

Sonia Tascón's chapter explores the ontological and epistemological tensions that are summoned through the binarisation of theory and practice in social work discourse. She problematises the emphasis on *praxis* and instead introduces the concept of *profound thinking*, which she argues "is not simply critical thinking" but a way of knowing that reconnects us to "deep thought, deep imagining, deep feeling, deep grounding, [and] deep critical thought". Profound thinking is a form of *deep* thinking that pushes social workers to be philosophical, creative and abstract thinkers, and to develop a curiosity of knowledges that are not just of the mind but 'of the body to the body' – knowledges that spill over the epistemological boundaries of 'theory and practice'. For epistemic decolonisation to occur, Tascón argues that we must, despite the coloniser's implied absence, pay attention to the continuing epistemic and semiotic violence lingering in our institutions, workplaces, schools and where there is forced delegitimisation, sanctioning and silencing of marginalised knowledges. This violence, exerted through knowledge, is central to the continuum of the colonial process of exploitation and domination, which through asymmetrical obliteration of the *Other*, constructs Western knowledge as 'universal', 'standard' and 'objectively true'. The process of legitimising certain knowledges and deligitimising others, creates *prescription* – which Freire (1970) states is the adaptation into our psyches, of the oppressors' ways of knowing and being rendering us hosts of epistemic violence. The embodiment of coloniality through our psyches and our bodies makes the process of decolonisation much more complex than just the simplistic 'knowing better and doing better', which is often the focus of the theory and practice binarisation. As such, profound thinking as argued by Tascón allows us not just to 'heal' from the violence in our psyches but to also 'return to wholeness' and to 'bring mind and body back together'.

The argument of profound thinking which seeks to humanise knowledge resonates with Paulo Freire's (1970) theorisation of *conscientização*, which calls for the understanding of social, structural and political realities that inform people's lives from both critical epistemological and ontological perspectives. The concept of *conscientização* supports decolonisation through profound thinking by encouraging people to question dominant discourses and narratives that attempt to silence marginal knowledges. It moves beyond critical pedagogy and critical literacy to deep engagement with knowledges of the body and not just of the mind. Just like profound thinking, *conscientização* embraces many

'truths', many ways of knowing, of interacting with the world and the reimagining of an alternative episteme.

Profound thinking in social work is a form of decolonisation because it is not just about *thinking with purpose*. It requires significant effort and a problematisation of our potentially epistemologically violent actions and silences and their impact on the *Other*. This entails an examination of the prescribed self and a deliberate centring of knowledges that have been marginalised by discourse and silenced by white and Western modernities. Profound thinkers in social work must continue the longstanding decolonisation agenda that is continually pacified and silenced by coloniality by dismantling knowledges that perpetuate white power, white universalism and white homogeneity. As a profession that encourages practitioners to view clients through a 'person in the environment' lens, social work must engage deeply with the ontological embodied realities of people's lives which are informed by the broad social political structures surrounding them. Part of this deep ontological disentanglement with the colonial space means the profession's refusal to assume a neutral stance in a world that is politically unneutral. Speaking to the issue of neutrality, Kenyan professor Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2012, p. 28) emphasised that African thinkers championing epistemic decolonisation have a very clear choice: to be on "the side of the people or the side of the social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What [they] cannot do is to remain neutral". Everyone is political: the only question is 'what and whose politics?'

In an African context, profound thinking in the decolonising agenda is imperative as it enables Africans to "unmask [Eurocentric] deceit" and to pay attention to how epistemological violence and epistemic coloniality reproduces the deficit and dehumanising narrative that views "African subjectivity as that of deficient and lacking beings – lacking souls, lacking history, lacking civilization, lacking development, lacking democracy, lacking human rights and lacking knowledge" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, p. 47). The singularised discourse that disappears African knowledge controls who speaks and who is heard and is an attempt to preserve the 'subject of the West, or the West as Subject'. As Spivak (1988) and Fanon (1961) suggest, the 'African subject' is discursively positioned as the 'wretched of the Earth' and the 'subaltern who cannot speak'. The routined silencing of the African ontology reproduces a colonised identity which prompts looking at oneself only from the lens of a white stranger. The height of epistemic colonisation is achieved when blackness is conflated with wrongness, and where proximity to whiteness is subconsciously desired to dissipate the black psychopathology. Essentially black Africans must wear a 'white mask' to achieve any worthwhile humanity. Profound thinking as with *conscientização* brings to the fore the implications and consequences of epistemic colonisation where the colonised 'first ambition' "is to become equal to the white coloniser or to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, p. 47). William Du Bois referred to this as a 'double consciousness', where colonised peoples suffer a crisis of

identity due to the alienation from the self while living through a compromised existence that requires assimilating into the Western modernity. The power of the violence enacted through this assimilatory adaptation, perpetuates a 'crisis of legitimacy', 'crisis of relevance', 'crisis of appropriate epistemology', 'crisis of historical representation' and 'crisis of identity' for the colonised body (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, p. 50). In most black African countries, for example, we confront a discursive anti-blackness that is so deeply entrenched in the African psyche due to the internalised violence of racism provoked by epistemic colonisation.

Profound thinking is required to rescue both the history and the future, not just through 'epistemic breaks' that do not adequately disrupt Eurocentric epistemologies, but as Tascón suggests, through 'profound imagination' that scales the 'depths and heights of our being, [to] expose truths unseen and [to] imagine a new'. Epistemological decolonisation, therefore, is about resurrecting subjugated knowledges and reimagining knowledge that invokes the wholeness of the mind and the body by bringing back 'dreaming into thinking'. Thinking deeply and profoundly about the imperialisation of knowledge and the way it produces violent and precarious subjectivities of the *Other*. To do this, Tascón suggests moving beyond *just* theory and practice, ridding away binaries in our thinking and embracing other ways of knowing that involve and include the many people in the non-white western world.

Comment by Iris Silva Brito and Goetz Ottmann

Sonia Tascón's chapter outlines in a gentle, playful but nevertheless forceful way how certain tenets of Western modernity and particularly its technologies of social control and domination were part and parcel of the European colonial enterprise that ravaged the South. Its ferocious lust for power and wealth left countries and people raped and bleeding. The annihilation of local traditions, knowledges and customs was so complete that only fragments survive – predominantly in museums or annals of anthropology. Latin American modernity emerged from this unspeakable cruelty, violence and exploitation. While its mestizo population set out to reimagine traditions and customs, elites were busy to refine colonial technologies of domination in order to cement power and privilege. One of the cornerstones of scholarly Latin American modernity was the re-reading of the colonial experience, turning tragedy into something that could be celebrated (e.g., sexual violence became *mestizaje*). Popular culture contributed to this project by producing a large number of works that eulogised the new modern national identity. While 'independence' brought a new set of rulers, some of them democratically elected, the structures of domination persisted. And whereas new brigades of local civil servants, trained in Western epistemologies and ideals, took office to be replaced with consecutive iterations of government, the directors of protective, surveillance and secret services often survived several administrations before receiving

amnesties delivering them from the burden of having to answer for atrocities committed while in office. Social work was often complicit in post-colonial oppression, and its more recent role in assisting totalitarian regimes has been barely investigated.

Tascón, drawing on a wide range of post-structuralist, post-modern and post-colonialist thinkers, leaves no doubt that the epistemicide (Santos) that underpins colonial and post-colonial globalisation needs to be problematised and, if possible, rolled back or, at the very least, contested and disrupted. Following a number of authors at the core of a movement that aims to decolonise knowledge in general and social work in particular, the chapter highlights the importance of legitimising epistemological alternatives. Daring to dream and imagine that alternatives to the canon of interventions following theories developed by Western experts are indeed possible, valuable and desirable. The one question that looms large in the chapter, setting up other contributions to this important book, is what do alternative social imaginaries look like? If Indigenous ways of thinking and doing have been pulverised by a colonial modernity, what traditions and wisdoms can we access and draw upon to reconstruct social work? In 2004, the Canadian sociologist Charles Taylor published a book entitled *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press), in which he channels Gidden's argument that the Marxist tradition lacks reflexivity when it comes to practice in order to explain how change actually happens. And while Taylor's contribution unearths multiple social imaginaries within a Western modernity whose cornerstones are described as a secular, self-governed society, a functioning public sphere and a market economy, it offers a glimpse of the importance of a practice that might lead to change. Thus, when Tascón problematizes the division between thought and action/theory and practice, she locates the colonial project in the discontinuity between the two. Her solution is thinking that is deeply grounded in the experience of and collaborative practice with participants. She reminds us of the liberationist creed that highlighted the importance of 'listening to the other' and to learn from 'the people'. Her chapter foregrounds the importance of storytelling, poetry, creative literature and popular culture in the production of alternative social imaginaries that are not based on Aristotelian binary divisions and that facilitate an appreciation and acceptance of non-Indo-European classification systems and their associated truth claims.

The chapter offers novices to decolonial thinking a number of tools that help to deconstruct colonial vestiges that social work has incorporated (i.e. linearity, teleology, binary decision matrices) leading the reader to consider creative, imaginative and more intuitive ways to be a social worker. The chapter opens a door to a new socio-cultural social work project, a socio-cultural animation that is practised not to integrate the Other in new cultural spaces manufactured for minorities but to open the dominant culture, creating the possibility for a new radial epistemological pluralism. Tascón takes issue with the modern-scientific basis of social work and the promise that the mess of modernity can be cleaned up by social workers turned into social engineers. Moreover, she

highlights the (white) cultural and epistemological heritage that informs social work approaches and interventions in the global South. Her well-articulated critique leads her to the position that underpins most contributions to this volume: that social workers can be anti-oppressive only if they become allies of those they work alongside with; that social work can be allied work that is bounded by reimagined cultural traditions that are the process of collapsing in the face of rapid industrialisation and globalisation. The chapter invites us to imagine that the answer to the growing social inequality that can be witnessed around the world is epistemological, cultural, communal and political – rather than modern welfare informed by abstract knowing.

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2 Whiteness from within

Jim Ife

Introduction

This chapter is inevitably a personal account. To write it in standard 'academic' style would be to perpetuate the language, world view and epistemology that it seeks to question. So I have tried to avoid detached 'white academic-speak', and instead to write a personal account. It is also, for me, a problematic chapter to write. I spent a long time wondering whether it was appropriate for someone like me – a privileged, white, English-speaking, heterosexual, able-bodied male, who has manifestly gained status within social work as a result of this – to have any voice in this book. The whole point of the book is that voices (and worse, world views) like mine have dominated social work thinking, and it is precisely this domination that demands to be interrogated and replaced. Other voices than mine must have priority in this book, and by writing anything I risk being part of the problem rather than part of the solution. On the other hand, it would be remiss of me to remain silent on what I have come to see as a major challenge facing social work. To have been part of the problem, but then to refuse to be part of the solution, is, to me, morally irresponsible. All I can offer is a critique 'from within', and some tentative ideas about being part of the solution, yet I believe that this is an important story to tell. There is surely a place for the dominant white epistemologies of social work to be critiqued from inside as well as from outside. This is not the most important critique of social work whiteness – that must come from other voices and other backgrounds – but I offer it here as a contribution to the dialogues that are so important if social work is to have any relevance in the turbulent future that awaits us all. It is addressed largely to other white mainstream social workers, and is offered in the belief that people like me have a responsibility to help ensure that transformation towards a decolonised social work happens, but on no account to take leadership of that process.

The terms *indigenisation* and *decolonisation* are sometimes used interchangeably, yet they convey different ideas. In the context of this book, which is primarily concerned with social work knowledge, indigenisation is the validation, acceptance and insertion of Indigenous knowledge and world views, and the incorporation of Indigenous ways of thinking and doing, into social

work, as at least equivalent, if not superior, to Western ways of thinking and doing. Decolonisation, on the other hand, is about addressing and dismantling the dominance of Western world views. Decolonisation is necessary for indigenisation to occur, as without it there will be no space for Indigenous world views to achieve central importance. For many Western social workers, it is often easier to accept the idea of indigenisation and more threatening to think about decolonisation, as the latter directly challenges the social work assumptions they have internalised. Indigenisation may be less threatening as it can be seen as simply allowing other world views a place, but without decolonisation that place will always be marginal.

My view is that white Western social workers like me have more of a role to play in decolonising than in indigenising. We should not assume that we 'understand' Indigenous knowledge and world views, and we should certainly not presume to define or articulate them in a process of 'indigenising the curriculum'. To assume that we know and understand them is to perpetuate colonialism. But we do have an important role to play in decolonisation. That requires us to address the dominance of white Western world views in shaping social work, not only in social work practised in non-white settings, but also in white Western countries (which are in any case becoming more cosmopolitan and less 'white'). While we cannot fully understand Indigenous and other non-Western world views, we certainly understand white colonising world views, as we have been part of them, they are part of us and they have given us particular privileges.

The journey of decolonisation

The imperative for the indigenisation and decolonisation of social work knowledge has become increasingly clear and important to me throughout my professional life. I have been on a journey – a journey that is far from over – of learning and discovery, and, as that journey has progressed, I have gained insight and understanding, both of the richness of non-Western knowledges and cultural traditions, and also of the narrow constraints of the Western epistemologies and traditions in which I was socialised, reinforced throughout my schooling and university education. There is still a long way for me to go on that journey, and I look forward to its next stages. But as I reflect on my journey so far and think of a number of key moments of learning and consciousness-raising, I have realised that none of these was prompted by anything said or written by white social workers or others from the Anglosphere. The incidents that I now see as critical learning points, pushing me on my journey, all came from encounters with non-white, non-Anglo people, often in face-to-face interaction, but also through reading. This includes a number of encounters with Indigenous People in Australia, Aotearoa and Canada, and also with people from Asian, Latin American, African and Pacific cultures. Not all of them were social

workers, of course, but, most importantly, none of them were white Anglos. Some were students, some were community leaders, some were colleagues, some were friends, one is my partner and some of them are contributors to this book. These encounters were rich and powerful, and from them I grew immensely and have started to understand, inevitably in a partial way, the importance of indigenisation and decolonisation. White social workers will never learn about decolonisation, or move more than a short distance on that journey, if we only listen to and read white Anglo scholars and practitioners, however well-informed and enmeshed they may be in 'Whiteness Studies'. To be open to, and indeed to seek out, encounters with people with different world views, on the other side of the colonising relationship, is essential. I have experienced in these encounters a remarkable generosity and willingness to share, despite often long and painful histories of colonisation, racism and disadvantage.

My journey so far has been both personal and professional, and I have found the 'personal-professional boundary' decidedly unhelpful. Colonisation, and decolonisation, are intensely personal experiences, and cannot be confined within the boundaries of the detached 'professional'. Indeed, the rigid personal/professional boundary, of largely unquestioned importance within white Western social work, is one of the constraints that a decolonising social work must dismantle or at least reconfigure. It does not represent the reality of social work outside the West, where family connections and obligations are far-reaching, and overlap with, or even replace, ideas of 'community'. This can lead to non-Western social workers being accused by their white Western supervisors of having 'boundary issues', while alternative cultural and epistemological traditions would suggest that actually it is the white Western social workers who have the 'boundary issues', in their obsession with a boundary that is either meaningless, or at least constructed very differently, in alternative contexts. For a profession that, appropriately, seeks to problematise the boundary between personal and political, it is surely not too much to ask to similarly problematise the boundary between personal and professional.

Beyond critical reflection, towards critical action

In addressing the obscenity of colonisation, critical reflection – that activity so central to Western social work – is simply not enough. A social worker from the colonising culture, however well-intentioned, is implicated in the colonising structures and knowledges that are responsible for disadvantage and oppression. The social worker cannot be neutral and is required to take sides. In doing so, a white social worker needs to critique the assumptions behind their professional socialisation, education, employment and practice. Critical reflection may be the initial stage, but it is reflection that recognises and accepts the worker's complicity in colonisation, and thus committed and informed action (not just detached 'intervention') is required.

But what sort of action? One of the characteristics of a colonising mentality is an enthusiasm to rush in and take over. The colonialist assumption that one's world view is superior expresses itself in an urge to set the agenda, to decide what is to be done, and to do it. A new convert to decolonisation may rush in with all the enthusiasm of any new convert, knowing just what they have to do – thereby merely reinforcing the colonial perspective of 'I know best'. Simply saying that 'action' is required can be an invitation to dominate the agenda, on the assumption that I know best what to do and how to act. Colonialism thus reproduces itself, with the best of intentions, and the white social worker remains in charge. Therefore one of the first things that white Western social workers must realise is that an imperative for action does not imply an imperative for *immediate unthinking* action, however 'obvious' the way forward may appear. White social workers may feel guilty about their complicity in the colonial agenda, and that guilt can lead to an immediate urge to right the wrong; in doing so, the white social worker retains agency, and becomes the 'white saviour' with those of other cultural traditions remaining disempowered and expected to fill the role of victim and to feel suitably 'grateful'. Stepping back and learning, rather than rushing in and doing, is essential. Yet to do nothing is also not an option. There is an obligation on white social workers first to address the implications of colonisation and their role in it – to start on the journey – and then to find ways to assist in the process of decolonising, in a spirit of solidarity, but not to take leadership.

We can identify three stages in this process. The first is *stepping aside*. Often this is cast in terms such as 'validating other voices', 'allowing other voices to be heard' and so on. But here the language betrays a persistent colonialism. It assumes that the speaker has the power to 'validate' or to 'allow', thereby reiterating that it is still the white social worker who is in charge and has control of the territory. To validate and allow is to retain ultimate control, as it implies also the ability to invalidate and disallow. It reflects the language of 'inclusion', which implies that 'they' can be included in 'our' world, without the necessity of examining the validity and value of that world or implying any need for the dominant culture to change. Such assimilation is the antithesis of decolonisation. For genuine decolonisation, the stepping aside must be undertaken with no conditions or caveats, with no implication of what is or is not 'allowed', and with no claim of the power to 'validate'. It is only by a complete and unconditional stepping aside that other cultures and world views can be established on their own terms, and not on the terms of the coloniser. In relation to social work knowledge, this means we must set aside all that Western social work knowledge – the 'knowledge base', the values, the models, the theories, the research methodologies, the idea of 'profession' and so on – so that other knowledges can take centre stage and define what 'social work knowledge' means.

White privilege is often described as seeing your own world, your own race and your own privilege reflected around you, so that you do not question it. We whites do not question the overwhelming dominance of white faces among TV presenters, among politicians, among professors, among authors,

among conference keynote speakers and so on; they represent our world. We do not question the dominance of the English language; we take it for granted. The same applies to the whiteness of social work knowledge. White social work knowledge is that knowledge which we take for granted, which derives from and represents the white English-speaking patriarchal world, and which by its very presence marginalises other kinds of knowledge. It is that knowledge that must be set aside, in recognition that other knowledges must take the lead.

The second stage, after stepping aside, is *falling in behind*. This implies that it is the colonised that become the leaders, and those of us from the dominant culture allow ourselves to be led by others. Falling in behind requires listening, learning and recognising that others have control of that process. Often in the decolonising process this can be a place of discomfort, as those of us who are used to 'knowing best' become those who know least. We have to engage with the process of unlearning before we can start to learn anew. It means being in a space where social work 'knowledge' can be reformulated, in a process led by those from non-Anglo cultures, who have access to knowledge that Western Modernity has ignored.

The third stage in the process is *walking beside, in solidarity*. This is only possible if the first two steps have been successfully achieved. It is impossible to show true solidarity if we have not first stepped aside, and then fallen in behind, as these two steps are necessary for Indigenous and other non-Western knowledges and world views to be freely articulated and embraced. This kind of solidarity is discussed in much more detail by Clare Land in her book *Decolonising Solidarity* (2015), an important reference for white social workers seeking to come to terms with these challenges. Walking in solidarity means not having a separate agenda, but rather sharing an agenda and a commitment to moving forward together in a spirit of equality. In terms of social work knowledge, this is the stage when it becomes possible to see whether there are some aspects of Western social work that are worth saving, perhaps in revised forms, that can sit alongside non-Western epistemologies and can complement them. At the solidarity stage, the assumed binary between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges can be addressed. This is the stage where genuine dialogue – learning from each other in an equal and mutually respectful relationship in Bhabha's (2004) 'third space' – becomes possible, though it is still very difficult. It is impossible for white social workers to appreciate fully the experience (including the experience of racism) of non-white social workers and those with whom we work. We must recognise this, and do the best we can, always seeking to learn, and with humility and respect for the experience of others.

The imperative for decolonisation

Traditionally, decolonisation has been advocated as a matter of social justice. Indigenous People have clearly been subject to gross discrimination, disadvantage, oppression, denial of culture and genocide, and so a strong case can be

made for their world views to gain a more significant place in our understanding of the human experience. This has been particularly important for social workers in working with Indigenous communities, and in other non-Western contexts, as it suggests a form of social work practice that is culturally sensitive and appropriate, and that accepts other traditions on their own terms. But there is a further argument for decolonisation, which has been given additional impetus as a result of the multiple crises or catastrophes facing humanity in the 21st century: climate change, toxic pollution, resource depletion, overfishing of the oceans, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, economic crisis and political crisis. The Western world view, characterised by Enlightenment Modernity, and embracing capitalism, individualism and the separation of humans from 'nature', has proved to be both unsustainable and ecologically disastrous. Increasing numbers of critics, and indeed of the general public, have recognised that a different world view is needed as a matter of urgency. In seeking such an alternative, Indigenous wisdom has been seen by many as representing important insights into different ways of thinking about the world, and humans' place in it. Indigenous People lived in a sustainable way on the earth for hundreds of thousands of years, in sharp contrast to the wasteful, corrupting and aggressive 'achievements' of a few centuries of Modernity. In this light, indigenisation (and hence decolonisation) becomes not just a fine idea, motivated by social justice, but an imperative if we are concerned for the future of humanity and of the rich diversity of the Earth. In coming to terms with, and incorporating, decolonisation and indigenisation, social work joins with other social movements, and becomes part of the global movement for a saner and more sustainable way of living.

Decolonising social work knowledge

The above ideas about decolonising can be applied to all aspects of social work: not just interactions with 'clients' but also in team meetings, in supervision, in the university classroom, in student assessment, in curriculum planning, in policy development, in the professional association, in accreditation and in social work advocacy. All of these are arenas in which colonial relations can be acted out and reinforced, often with the best of intentions. They are all arenas where what counts as 'relevant' social work knowledge is defined and applied, and they are all arenas where decolonisation needs to be addressed. The major problem is that whiteness, and Western epistemologies, remain largely unremarked and have the status of taken-for-granted reality, expressed in the ultimate colonial language of English. It is important to examine these taken-for-granted assumptions behind a large range of social work ideas: intervention, family, protection, accountability, supervision and so on. A list of such ideas, with questions about their white epistemological bases, is included in Chapter 12 of this book.

Interrogating these ideas, from a decolonising perspective, must be done in dialogue with others from different cultural backgrounds and different

epistemological assumptions. This is easy to say, and easy to agree with, but in reality it is difficult to enact. This is because true dialogue requires that the two parties have equal status, and that equal status is not just in terms of power and privilege, but also in terms of epistemology. When a white social worker and an Indigenous social worker sit down for a 'dialogue', but the white social worker has high status in the profession, has a senior academic or managerial position, and has written important books or articles about social work, while the Indigenous social worker has significant cultural wisdom but has none of these trappings of legitimised white knowledge, genuine dialogue is simply not possible, without first addressing the epistemological inequality of their relationship. It may well be that each has entered the relationship with goodwill, generosity, radical politics and the best of intentions, but the relationship is still epistemologically unequal. For dialogue to occur, significant questions need to be addressed about the different assumptions about knowledge, and about the valuing of particular forms of knowledge, in order to create a safe and equal dialogical space. This can be a complex process, as described by Santos in his important book *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (2014). To achieve that dialogical space is itself a political struggle, and this must be acknowledged and addressed by both parties to the dialogue. The struggle for both the white social worker and the Indigenous social worker is to analyse and dismantle the assumptions of white epistemological privilege that are reinforced by dominant structures and narratives, within academia, within professional discourse and within the wider society.

I will not proceed to suggest how this can be done, as it can only be achieved in a genuine mutual struggle to establish the dialogical space, and this process is for the people concerned to negotiate, rather than for me to prescribe. What I can do, however, is to suggest some areas where I have found conventional white social work knowledge to be restricted and deficient, as this may open up some possibilities for further exploration in the context of other chapters of this book. There are, of course, other aspects of white colonising social work that require critique; what follows is simply an identification of seven areas where such critique seems to me to be important.

Individualism

The individualism of Modernity, reinforced by the world view of capitalism, is reflected in much conventional social work knowledge, where social work 'clients' are assessed and conceptualised largely in individual terms, with individual needs, rights and aspirations. And social workers are also thought of as individual agents; it is the role of *the social worker* (singular) that dominates ideas of practice. In Western social work discourse, those forms of social work that seek to work collectively are often marginalised and can be seen as somehow of secondary importance to an individualised 'direct practice'. Social work, however, cannot be simply about individuals working with individuals. It is, after all, *social* work, and is concerned with

relationships. Non-Western world views understand the primacy of collective obligations rather than individual 'rights', as is discussed by several of the contributors to this book.

This suggests that an important area for the decolonisation of social work knowledge is to emphasise both collectivist values and relational reality as at the heart of social work knowledge (Gergen 2000; Spretnak 2011), and the importance of symbiotic relationships. Instead of knowledge based on Descartes (I think, therefore I am), social work could, as pointed out by other contributors to this book, emphasise knowledge grounded in the African idea of *ubuntu* (We are, therefore I am) and similar collectivist ontologies from other cultures.

Language

Social work literature is overwhelmingly in English, and international social work conferences are in English, though sometimes with translation into other colonial languages: French and Spanish. This book is in English and would not have been published had it been written in any other language. This is a strong manifestation of colonisation, and an impediment to epistemological decolonisation. If social work is to take decolonisation seriously, it will have to address the need for a genuinely multilingual social work.

Language constructs knowledge. Many English social work terms have no equivalent in many Indigenous languages, and similarly there are Indigenous words with profound implications for social work that have no exact equivalent in English; for example, see the discussion in this volume around *ubunto/obuntu* by Kathomi Gatwiri and Sharlotte Tusasiirwe, the discussion of *solesolevaki* by Jioji Ravulo, and the discussion of *guanxi* by Siew Fang Law. Indeed, as we pointed out in the introduction, some Australian Indigenous languages have no word for 'knowledge'. The constraints placed on social work knowledge by the dominance of English work against genuinely decolonised social work and determine a particular epistemological world view.

Challenging the domination of English in social work discourse is therefore essential in the process of stepping aside, as discussed above. This might be achieved by encouraging multilingual conferences, journals and education programmes. Multilingual practitioners, researchers and scholars could be specifically encouraged (and this would need to move beyond the colonial European languages). Specific words or ideas, and their cultural meanings, might be the focus of workshops, seminars and university courses, so that students and practitioners can explore ideas embedded in other cultural traditions.

Metaphor

> Metaphor is the language of relationships, the language of natural systems, in which there is room to communicate in spectrums of possibility, instead of tightly defined cul-de-sacs.
>
> (Nora Bateson, from the film *The Ecology of Mind*)

This quote is directly applicable to social work, which, after all, is concerned with relationships, and in communicating 'spectrums of possibility'. Yet the professional language of white Western social work, largely in English, is remarkably deficient in metaphor, and frequently leads us down Bateson's 'tightly defined cul-de-sacs' (the term itself is a powerful metaphor). In the white social work legacy of the Enlightenment – the love of empiricism, the allure of defined categories and the desire for clarity and precision – the creative, imaginative yet imprecise world of metaphor has little relevance. One area where this is very obvious is the field of human rights, often seen as central to social work. Recent research (Higgins 2019) with African refugees in Australia has shown that Africans will define 'human rights' using a rich mixture of culturally grounded metaphors, proverbs and stories that express and explore ideas of humanity, mutuality, obligation and community. Yet the Western language of human rights is dominated by the law and the precise and unimaginative legal language of treaties, conventions and bills of rights, which are typically metaphor-free zones. White social workers happily and unthinkingly use this legal language when defining human rights, and in doing so they are effectively adopting, uncritically, white ways of thinking and are devaluing the kind of understandings of 'human' and 'rights' that can be expressed in metaphor and story.

White social work professional writing, by and large, does not use metaphor to any great extent, as is evident in social work journals, reports, research findings and case notes, though there is some use of metaphor in more therapeutic and narrative fields. But where we do resort to metaphor it can suggest certain assumptions which are worth unpacking. Elsewhere (Ife 2010) I have commented on the use, particularly though not exclusively in community work, of military metaphors: 'strategic', 'tactics', 'campaign', 'alliance', 'target', 'engagement', 'social justice warriors' and so on. These aggressive words, with strong military origins, have crept into social work language unannounced and unquestioned.

Examining the use of metaphor can be a useful way to begin an examination of white social work epistemologies. This can be both in terms of the lack of metaphor in professional discourse – what would social work look like if we wrote and spoke largely in metaphor? – and also an examination of those metaphors that are used by white social workers, and what they suggest about white epistemology. In this light, the metaphor-rich language of other cultural traditions opens up imaginative and creative possibilities which white social workers may never have considered. If we start to think in this way, it is white social work that is epistemologically deficient and that deserves to be colonised by other world views 'for its own good'. Again, I will not develop this argument further; my aim is simply to identify some possible avenues for exploration and critique, rather than to be prescriptive.

Story

All forms of knowledge transfer can be thought of as storytelling, yet this does not sit comfortably with the Enlightenment traditions of 'research',

'education', 'training', 'supervision', 'evidence-based practice' and so on. To call these 'stories' is, from a Western Enlightenment framework, to devalue their accuracy, precision, validity and authenticity. Yet a decolonising epistemology would not hesitate to call them stories – of a particular kind – that can be set alongside other stories that have their own validity, authenticity and legitimacy.

Thinking of social work knowledge in terms of stories is a way of setting aside the scientific and empirical precision of Western knowledge systems. It is interesting that white social workers are happy to accept the idea of story in terms of narrative therapy – where it has proved a rich and powerful form of practice – but often do not extend the idea of narrative to their own professional discourse. Stories are something that are fine for those labelled as 'clients' or 'patients', but perhaps not for social workers themselves.

Yet it is in terms of story that Indigenous ways of working are so powerful. An Indigenous person is far more likely than a white person to answer a question by saying 'let me tell you a story'. And Australian Indigenous People know the importance of yarning in understanding and transmitting knowledge. White social workers also like to use fluid and open informal discussion – usually at breaks in conferences, over lunch, or after 'work' – but these interactions are devalued by comparison with formal ways of interacting; the lively discussion over morning tea must be cut short so that everyone can file into the auditorium and listen quietly to a formal presentation by a keynote speaker, complete with PowerPoint slides prepared in advance in a very different context. Yarning is seen as a waste of time when compared with passively listening to the voice of authority. Why do we continue to organise our social work conferences in this very white way?

This is just one way in which Indigenous world views challenge white ways of thinking and doing social work – if only they have the space to do so. Another is the idea of law. White social workers have a strong affinity with law and legal ways of thinking: they pervade our ideas of justice, rights and advocacy. Yet as I mentioned above, legal language is metaphor-free, and far from the 'imprecise' and 'fluffy' idea of story. Indigenous understandings of law – or lore – are expressed in story and in metaphor. It is from stories that Indigenous law is derived and described (Cairns and Idumduma Harney 2014). Young people in traditional Indigenous societies are required to learn the stories from Elders, and these stories – rich in metaphor – contain the law that governs individual and social behaviour. The stories have to be worked on and have to be understood at different levels; learning the law is an ongoing journey through stories, not a simple task to be 'completed' (Sveiby and Skuthorpe 2006).

Of course, white society has its stories too. The stories of Homer, the Bible, Shakespeare and other poets, novelists and artists – rich in metaphor – provide a vast cultural background for Western 'civilisation'; but these stories are now devalued in the brutal practical world of Modernity and the superficiality of Hollywood. Perhaps Western social work could also look to its own deeper

cultural heritage, as a way of understanding Indigenous reliance on story and metaphor in constructing professional knowledge.

History

The importance of stories brings us to the importance of history. It has been said that a white person is lost if (s)he doesn't know where (s)he is going, whereas an Indigenous person is lost if (s)he doesn't know where (s)he has come from. This suggests an important direction for the decolonisation of knowledge. From an Indigenous perspective, history – stories of where we have been and where we came from – is central to knowledge. In Western culture, however, history has become a pastime rather than a necessity, and it is a future of goals, objectives and outcomes that drives the agenda. And the presentation of history is inevitably biased, usually in favour of the world view of the colonisers, though this is increasingly being questioned by critical historians and by Indigenous People. Social work education programmes will often include the history of social work and of the welfare state, more as introductory background than as core knowledge. But Indigenous People will tell us that the stories of where we have come from are central to our identity and form the core of our 'knowledge base'. And other non-Western 'clients' often carry important histories that date back millennia. The history of colonisation, and of colonial exploitation and oppression, told by Indigenous People themselves, as well as the history of migration – forced or voluntary – must be central to any decolonising of social work epistemology.

Art, music, dance and theatre

A sixth arena that we can consider as a place to start the interrogation of white social work is that of the creative and expressive arts. I have already mentioned stories and storytelling, but decolonising social work also requires us to ask about the place of art, music, dance and theatre in social work. These have not been central to Western social work (Tascón 2019). Social workers have used music therapy, forum theatre, art therapy, community cultural development, photography, video and film as part of their work, but these still occupy a marginal place in the profession. They are not generally reflected in accreditation or practice standards and have the status of electives rather than core in social work education programmes. Decolonisation should ask us to question their marginal status, especially given the central place of such artistic expression in Indigenous and other non-Western knowledge creation and transmission.

The non-human world

A final area I would suggest as a site for decolonisation of social work is to address the anthropocentrism of social work located within white Western Modernity. The separation of 'human' from 'nature' has been a taken-for-granted

assumption behind Western humanism, which is the philosophical basis for social work. Social work, in its white manifestation, has been almost exclusively concerned with *human* welfare, and the welfare of animals, plants and indeed all of what we call 'nature' has been of little interest. Social workers who have concerned themselves with this are in a marginal position in the profession. Yet Indigenous world views understand 'humanity' as deeply embedded in, and interdependent with, other species and the earth itself. Western anthropocentrism has come under sustained critique within the more radical environmental movement, and it can be argued that it has been the cause of the ecological destruction that is now threatening many species and human lives (Jensen 2016; McKibben 2019). A more ecocentric perspective is now urgently needed if some form of human civilisation – to which social work is committed – is to survive past the 21st century. From this imperative, anthropocentrism is one of the least defensible aspects of white Modernity and is a priority area for decolonising critiques. This has profound and far-reaching implications for social work knowledge and practice, which I cannot even begin to articulate here, but it requires a deep listening to Indigenous knowledge and wisdom, and a willingness to ask hard questions about the privileging of the human over the rest of the living earth.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given my own – white, privileged, male, English-speaking – perspective on the indigenisation and decolonisation of social work. I have tried to identify some areas where it seems to me that the important project of the decolonisation of social work knowledge could start, but this is inevitably a limited and blinkered view. I believe that white social workers can, and indeed should, play a role in decolonising, in terms of trying to become more aware of the limitations of their white world view and articulating a critique of that world view, albeit a critique from within. But the further development of that critique, and the articulation of alternatives, must be led by our Indigenous and other non-white colleagues and friends.

Comment by Kathomi Gatwiri

Professional boundaries: An oxymoron

In his chapter, 'Whiteness from Within', Jim Ife provides a personalised nuanced critique of whiteness. In so doing, he positions his privilege as a tool that has facilitated a powerful 'voice' that has shaped social work knowledge in Australia for the last two decades. In sharing the power that is wielded through his whiteness, heterosexuality and masculinity, he now attempts to *step aside*, *to fall behind* and *walk in solidarity* with marginalised voices to bring to the fore the different knowledges that have been silenced by discourse. This reflection focuses specifically on the concept of 'boundaries', which, Ife argues, needs to be rethought due to its conflation with epistemological coloniality and white

performativity. Epistemologically, professional boundaries are championed as a standard of social work practice without much critical examination of how they impact on relational practice.

Firstly, it's important to acknowledge that the knowledge that we accept as valid is created through a process of putting boundaries around specific ideas. When the ideas are repeated over time, the boundaries around them are set, creating powerful discourses and what we call a 'body of knowledge'. But it is exactly the nature of putting boundaries around pieces of ideas that corrupts them by taking away their original fluidity. The boundaries around ideas create a reductionist rigidity that can lead to 'bad knowledge' – that is, knowledge that is contextually meaningless and irrelevant or knowledge that is used uncritically. The dominance of the ideas produced in the *White West* has also been perpetuated by creating the 'singular truth' boundary around those ideas, which subsequently obstructs other knowledges from being accepted as valid. As boundaries around the dominant 'body of knowledge' are set, the knowledges of other cultures, which are produced of the body rather than of the mind, are relegated to the margins. Knowledges of the folklore, of the dream, of the song, of the proverbs, of the land, of the rivers and of the heart and of the spirit are disappeared.

Secondly, the idea of 'boundaries' is sometimes oxymoronic in the context of social work. They presuppose that our clients will not fall in line, that they will violate our professional spaces and as such we need to protect ourselves by declaring separation in our interactions with them. They are also a presupposition that we, social workers, are incapable of discerning what is appropriate and what is not in our interactions with our clients. Simply put, we trust neither our clients nor ourselves to maintain the integrity of our professional relationships. Being a relational profession, social work relies on the engagement of the personal to influence the professional. However, while Western social work promotes the ontological need for relationships, it also emphasises separation through 'boundaries', which sterilises the authenticity of relationships. Although there are persuasive philosophical and practice arguments which point to the need for boundaries to minimise the potential for abuse of power and exploitation, the question as to what determines the boundary within the defined boundaries and how they function outside of the *White West* context remains unexamined.

The paradoxical space of negotiating personal and professional boundaries can present a challenge. Recently, following the completion of teaching for one of my topics, an African student pulled me aside and, amidst tears, gave me a heartfelt hug and presented me with a beautifully handcrafted beaded African necklace. She reflected that observing my blackness and Africanness in a powerful display of *beingness*, made her feel – for the first since arriving in Australia – proud to be black and African. She explained that while she had previously felt very invisible (despite the hypervisibility of her blackness), in this class she felt seen, because others *saw* me. Her proximity to my Africanness provided an

opportunity to be perceived differently. She then handed me the necklace and cautiously declared that she was not trying to 'bribe me' but that she wanted me to know that I had a significant impact on her and how she felt about herself. In this case, summoning the discourse of 'boundaries' would mean saying no to the gift and what it represented. I took the necklace, but I wasn't sure if it was a breach of professional boundaries. The next day, I took the necklace to the course coordinator and 'declared' it. I explained why I felt I couldn't turn down the gift from this student and the complex nuances involved in the gifting process. Managing this delicate process exposed the limitations of boundaried expectations which often require me to reject (or treat with suspicion) any gestures from my students that constitute affection.

The homogeneity of professional boundaries in social work relationships leaves little room for context, such as with my student above. Professional boundaries which assume a stance of professional distance and professional objectivity are not an accurate representation of how social work is culturally nuanced. In fact, in spaces where singing, dancing, walking together, laughing and crying together, holding hands, sharing a cup of tea, dining with families is part of 'doing social work', the concept of professional boundaries becomes almost meaningless. That is not say that there are no 'unspoken' boundaries enacted in these spaces, but such boundaries are not necessarily invoked to prevent spillage into each other's personal spaces. While doing social work in this 'unboundaried' way may seem unprofessional, or as 'crossing the line' to Western social workers, it also suggests that the nonchalant way in which other cultures think about boundaries may mean that they are not preoccupied with the danger of 'crossing the line' as the premise of their practice. On the contrary, as Ife suggests, it is the Western social workers who, in their obsession with boundaries, have 'boundary issues'. For boundaries to be meaningful, they need to be contextual of space and place.

Thirdly, it is my argument that the unexamined enforcement of boundaries in social work is an extension of epistemic colonisation. If used uncritically, they can be a tool of maintaining power and separation rather than connection. By invoking the 'power of boundaries', a clear-cut distinction of who wields power in the relationship is summoned. Similar to the story I narrated earlier about my student, the refusal of the gift, although masked through lenses of 'professionalism' and 'boundaries' also dictates that I have the power to take an innocent gesture and transform it into a problematic incident that requires to be 'declared' and 'reported' like a common crime. When Eurocentric social work practice encourages a curation of the personal by emphasising 'professional' boundaries, it also encourages alienation. The relationship between alienation and professionalism ensures a tiered system that is underpinned by power. It objectifies and treats the intentions of our clients with suspicion and mistrust. As clients entrust and bare their very personal information and feelings to us in the process of the intervention, social workers are trained to remain conscious that the personal does not spill into the professional.

For a profession that fundamentally relies on building trusting relationships with clients, social work must problematise this contradiction. Simply put, the preoccupation with boundaries is separationist and essentially a derivative of the capitalist and neoliberal obsession with 'risk management' rather than relational practice. In Indigenous and in African cultural contexts, boundaries are viewed differently because the nature of the human relationship is perceived differently. As Ife suggests, different 'cultural and epistemological traditions' construct boundaries differently and therefore, a critical examination of the explicit Western universalism in the summoning of boundaries in social work practice is not only important but necessary in the journey towards decolonisation.

Comment by Bindi Bennett

Many non-Indigenous social workers continue to occupy our space without our express permission or support. In doing this they steal our opportunities, growth and career development. I am not sure why non-Indigenous social workers continue this practice in 2019. I am often contacted at the last moment but I am not often thought about as a first option, as lead author or co-editor. Jim states: "White social workers will never learn about decolonisation, or move more than a short distance on that journey, if we only listen to and read white Anglo scholars and practitioners, however well-informed and enmeshed they may be in 'Whiteness studies'" (p. 3). Are non-Indigenous social workers benefiting from occupying the Indigenous space and being rewarded for this?

Jim states that social work needs a voice that is critiqued from the inside as well as from outside that dismantles the dominance of the Western world. Non-Indigenous social workers should play more of a role in decolonising.

There are at least four questions a non-Indigenous person must ask themselves before venturing into any First Nation space.

1. **Am I wanted?** Has someone specifically asked for you, your help or knowledge? Would being in this space be a positive rather than more colonisation?
2. **Am I needed?** Is there someone else that could/would/should be in this space other than you? Could you support them instead? Are you taking up the chair so someone else cannot sit in it? Are you really needed?
3. **Am I doing this for me or for true and real reasons?** Are you really putting aside all your privilege for the right reasons or are you getting kudos, money, power and in this way perpetrating continued colonisation?
4. **Can my ego handle it?** Are you ready to be told what to do, to give up first authorship or editor rights, to truly share and collaborate in the space? Are you ready to be told you are not wanted, needed or necessary or to do the work with but not take the glory?

There are seven themes a non-Indigenous social worker must be aware of to be culturally responsive.

1. The need for self-awareness. This is where you need to be aware of your own values, world views and any privilege you hold. You need to show humility and empathy towards Aboriginal people and be a fighter against colonisation and all the issues that surround it such as racism, continued child removal and continued abuse and misuse.
2. Learn our past and be aware of our lived experiences. You need to be aware of all of the governmental policies past and present that continue to impact on us as well as the intergenerational trauma that contributes to most of the current issues challenging Aboriginal peoples today.
3. The need to seek guidance. There is an old saying 'nothing about us without us'. This is so true. Have you consulted anyone Aboriginal at all (do you have any relationship?).
4. The need to develop cultural awareness. Not just of our culture but on the impact of yours. Respecting diversity and acting with flexibility are core to this theme.
5. The need to develop cultural communication. Being aware of the local and national protocols (many good documents to teach you about this). Are you aware of the NHMRC ethical guidelines?
6. Commitment to advocacy. If you want to work beside us, you must also fight beside us for a real VOICE and for social justice.
7. Maintain accountability. Perhaps you need an accountability person? Have you got regular professional supervision from an Aboriginal person or training?

And finally, don't forget reciprocity. Aboriginal persons rely on and maintain reciprocal relationships. If you are not being transparent and real, you will not truly get to know us or what is going on for us. Our lives are constantly in a state of flux and change. It is often nice to be able to rely on someone in these times to support you; to 'have your back'.

True self-determination and social justice means working alongside us and allowing us to speak on subjects that affect our lives. If you really are here for us, you won't mind taking a step back. Otherwise, the term 'critical self-reflection' or 'introspection' just becomes an appeasement statement for no change at all. There is still a lack of Indigenous Australian social work viewpoints represented in social work practice and education spaces. It is up to non-Indigenous social workers to give up their power and position as 'experts' and to participate in de-privileging themselves in this space.

Non-Indigenous social workers, I urge you to be critically self-reflective. Could you 'help' us by staying silent? Would you support me without having to brand your name on the work? Should you be in this space at all? Only you can answer that. But I am hoping you *will* answer it.

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3 Acknowledgements in Aboriginal social work research

How to counteract neo-colonial academic complacency

Bindi Bennett

Introduction

I acknowledge that this piece is being written on Darumbal lands and I acknowledge the Elders and traditional custodians both past and present.

I am a Gamilaraay (Gamilaroi/Kamilaroi) Aboriginal woman with 25 years' experience as a social worker with children, young people and families experiencing trauma. I currently teach in a university setting, and it has been this experience that has led me to begin to become frustrated with a system that commits both overt and covert violence upon Aboriginal peoples. In Australian universities there are many policies and procedures about how to do research that concerns Aboriginal peoples, but very little about how to effectively collaborate, consult and co-write with Aboriginal people. Even what should be a routine act of always acknowledging the contributions of Aboriginal people in published articles remains elusive and serves to reaffirm the possession of knowledge, production and control by others (usually non-minorities). Social work continues to 'Whiten' the landscape of academic literature and thereby undermine the self-determination of Aboriginal peoples (for example, articles written about Indigenous peoples without any Indigenous input, collaboration, authorship, acknowledgement or governance group). These injustices in research reporting are in direct conflict with both the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW 2016) commitment to prepare for culturally safe, inclusive and responsive social work practice and several of the core values highlighted by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) (2010).

The AASW is the professional representative body for social workers in Australia. According to their website, they currently have more than 11,500 members (AASW 2019). The AASW has a duty to be a strong voice for social justice, providing governance and management and furthering social work in Australia. There are currently eight board of director positions, one being specifically designated to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The current AASW complaint system is not clear around rules or regulations that refer to Aboriginal peoples about social workers' accountability and responsibility for the reporting of unsafe, disrespectful and re-colonising research (AASW 2019).

I began writing this chapter because I became tired of reading yet another paper, book or grant application about Aboriginal people that purported to expertly and comprehensively represent the subject as the 'expert' opinion – or worse, seeing that we had been utilised (or used) to gain reputation, success or money. Of course, this means that the academic authors were exploiting Aboriginal peoples and had co-opted their cultural knowledge for professional advancement. Many non-Indigenous social workers are ignorant about the correct protocols of acknowledging Aboriginal peoples in their research, articles, books and grant applications and often fail to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of their Aboriginal collaborators and participants. The continuation of what are colonising practices in academia represents a persisting belief in the superiority of Western ideas, voices and processes, which perpetuates a meta-narrative that Western knowledge is supreme and excludes Indigenous knowledge from the discourse. The resistance to change in this area is particularly strong.

In my frustration to hold someone accountable, I investigated existing protocols and guidelines online. I searched for anything written that obliged authors to acknowledge Aboriginal peoples as what Westerners would call 'owners of the research'. NB: Aboriginal philosophy means that we don't actually own anything but instead are custodians of knowledge, skills and history (Davis 1996–1997). Custodianship is incomparable to Western views of private ownership or commodification of knowledge and is more an understanding that we collectively take care of the knowledge of cultural ideas, values and principle, including deciding carefully how and with whom knowledge can be responsibly shared. My search found that no such policies exist. There needs to be a paradigm shift to create more than an encouragement to acknowledge Aboriginal knowledge, culture and voice. For successful decolonisation, there must be a new attitude, backed up by legally binding obligations, that forces researchers to address underlying and sometimes unconscious racist assumptions and practices. If someone is culturally appropriating the research, there is currently no clear recourse or complaint system. At the very least all academic institutions must adopt a clearly worded set of policies that recognise Aboriginal sovereignty in research and how it must be represented in publications.

Dispossession of knowledge

Colonisation is more than dispossession of lands and peoples. It results in a system that incorporates the knowledge, beliefs and world views of the colonisers into every part of the Indigenous society: intentionally or otherwise disregarding, disrespecting and devaluing the culture that had been here for at least 60,000 years. Colonisation also creates positions of power for those people of expertise that are not of the Indigenous culture and provides ways to abuse Aboriginal peoples whilst hiding behind the rhetoric of 'closing gaps', 'helping' or 'empowering'.

White scholars are often positioned as experts and of superior knowledge to Indigenous people. It is because of this that research concerning Indigenous populations has been criticised as biased, exploitative and disempowering (Henry et al. 2004; Davey & Day 2008; Kidman 2007; Rowe et al. 2015; Sherwood 2010). It is essential that historical bias, privilege and ontological knowledge of the researcher must be recognised, understood and analysed to decolonise social work as a profession and the research that social workers then undertake.

Epistemicide is a systematic destruction of particular forms of knowledge and has been described as knowledge genocide (Bennett 2007; de Sousa Santos 2014). Publications in the social work literature have a long-established format. We are taught in school and at university how to write a sentence, use grammar, construct a narrative and reference an idea. We are familiar with this approach to presenting and accepting knowledge. In contrast, Aboriginal cultural knowledge is "not static and is based on social, physical and spiritual understandings" (New South Wales Government 2010) and is mainly oral and many have not had the same education, opportunities and privileges of the majority of the Anglo-Australian ruling classes. The historical racial achievement gap is well documented and severely hinders Aboriginals from achieving their full potential in literacy, numeracy and the successful completion of higher education (Closing the Gap 2017). Thus, we often turn to working with a 'translator': someone who can get through the obstacles required for successful publication and grant writing and ensure that our voices and issues get heard. However, once a translator is used, it is likely that our knowledge is misrepresented because it is assimilated into other established categories of accepted discourse. This process may lead to changes in ideology and phrasing in a process referred to as 'Epistemicide' (Bennett 2007; Hall & Tandon 2017). It would be interesting to discover whether non-Indigenous academics and researchers have ever used a translator in order to make their work more accessible to Aboriginal Australians.

One of the abuses that often happens in this translation process is due to the established and conventional ideas of the 'lead author'. The designation 'lead author' gives the perception that this individual is the person who has made the most significant intellectual contribution to the work and it is he or she that communicates with and responds to the (probably non-Aboriginal) editor and reviewers. Translators (often hiding behind words such as collaboration, consultation and allyship) are frequently given or assume first and corresponding authorship. Due to the conventional Westernisation of articles and abbreviation of references, the Aboriginal knowledge holder then becomes an 'et al' and thus another subtle example of Epistemicide is revealed.

Social work purports to address social justice when, in fact, many non-Indigenous academics are making a substantial career out of Aboriginal issues. In the last decade, Aboriginal research has become topical and makes money, kudos and careers for those that have seized the opportunity. Many non-Indigenous academics saw an opportunity to create expertise and enhance their reputation

by studying Indigenous peoples and to use that to help them climb the academic ladder of success. I liken these 'allies' to dragons guarding and hoarding treasure, much of which was stolen from others. Many of these opportunistic academics do not like to share what they have learnt or what has been told to them, despite verbal promises and stated intention and assertions to the contrary. They are unwilling or unable to bring their own original interpretation to the subject and so rely completely on our culture and take full credit for what they might claim as original research, culture or knowledges. Although much literature about us is abundant in social work, we are still rare as the leaders of the research and often rendered invisible (or as a mere footnote) through the consultation and collaboration process. Despite this recent surge in interest, and the many negative issues associated with it, there are research gaps and significant issues surrounding Aboriginal peoples that have been ignored. There is still a limited amount of literature addressing Aboriginal issues as they relate to social work (McMahon 2002; Bennett Zubrzycki, Bacon 2011).

Aboriginal peoples have been treated as 'objects' and their essential contributions were ignored much in past research, but they must be recognised as active agents and participants in the research process (Brown and Strega 2005). It is important to decolonise the current literature and to counter any negative effects past research has had in terms of values, thoughts and perspectives in Australia (Gray et al. 2016). The construction of ethical relationships between Aboriginal peoples, on the one hand, and the research community, on the other, must consider the principles, values and protocols of Aboriginal cultures. In 2003 the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHRMC 2003) suggested that "failing to understand difference in values and culture may be a reckless act that jeopardises both the ethics and quality of research. Working with difference in a research context takes time, care, patience and the building of robust relationships" (pp. 2–3). This highlights the need to develop new protocols that are evidence informed and culturally responsive. Whilst there is not enough space to explore cultural responsiveness here, it is of course important and impacts on our continued efforts to decolonise our social work practice spaces. It is also important to know that decolonised research will positively change and impact future social workers.

Allies and allyship

> "Where do we find allies?"
> Father Yarvi smiled. "Among our enemies, where else?"
>
> (Abercrombie 2015)

Allyship is a process whereby those in privileged positions build relationships with marginalised and oppressed peoples based on trust, consistency and accountability (Finlay 2019). I, as an Aboriginal woman, have never requested allyship. In fact, I have often said that since I have never ceded my sovereignty, what I would really like is a chance to speak for myself. Maybe after getting

a real voice, I (and others) may need some solidarity through an empathetic partner or close friend. This would be someone to co-conspire and with whom to form allegiances and probably a person who gets in as much trouble as I do speaking up and speaking out. 'Allies' is a military metaphor used in context of war and struggle. Alliances can be temporary and can be readily broken to suit personal interests. They do not imply a commonality of purpose (Ife, personal communication 2019). The trouble with non-Aboriginal allies is that although well-meaning, they return to their environment where they subconsciously re-establish their privileged position. In the context of this article, being an ally is more than just 'helping'. It requires challenging and changing the many systems of white dominance. People, it is argued, do not need allies. Instead they may want/need friends, comrades, brothers and sisters and other relationships that create solidarity (Ife, personal communication 2019).

Currently, allyship often adds to rather than reduces oppression. This is due to some non-Aboriginal allies claiming it as a part of their identity or worse, using it to dispossess our knowledge and create a platform for their own voices and work as an expert (Utt 2013). On my (and others) requests to stand down or 'yield the floor' (Spark4community 2017), 'allies' have completely disregarded my request, showing a complete lack of responsibility. Authors sometimes have a tendency for self-congratulation, and some condemn allies for having a self-deluding saviour mentality (Owens 2017). The most insensitive of authors will assume themselves as experts in all aspects of the research and justified in speaking for us even when this robs us of our legitimate platform and voice. Sometimes allies withhold their support if we do not make them feel good and appear to undermine their authority. Our passion and even anger at misrepresentation makes some authors feel uncomfortable to the point that they start to choose times, places and more 'well-behaved' Aboriginal people as collaborators. Many of our so-called allies continue to insist that they are well-meaning and well-intentioned and are trying to be fair and impartial. However, this may be just 'lip-service', and if they are genuine in their concerns they should be fighting in many forums for a formal recognition for Aboriginal peoples. Only then can research advance on a deeper and more significant level that can lead to positive social and political improvements (Pelizzon & Kennedy 2012). "True commitment to a cause means refusing to leave the room just because the fire you started is hot" (Ziyad 2015). Ally work involves transforming systems of white dominance and trying to make relationships equitable, and one way to start this is in complete and detailed acknowledgement of all contributors. This is important in both social work research and also practice (for example, organisational frameworks and documents).

Interrogating the coloniality of acknowledgements

Acknowledgements appear in at least half of all published articles, usually after the discussion or conclusion section of an article (Hyland & Tse 2004; Acknowledgements and References 2019). Acknowledgements thank people

who have contributed to the work but do not qualify for authorship, as well as disclosing the contribution of funding bodies to the research (Peng 2010). It is also one of the usual requirements of the publishers under the potential conflict of interest provisions and to cover legal requirements. Acknowledgements give the writer a 'social embeddedness' (Cronin 2004 p. 558). This means it shows that the writer is not just a scholar but is connected to the outside world and has social circles, and that the research has a wider perspective.

Acknowledgements can identify individuals who have assisted, vouched or gifted cultural knowledge (Hyland & Tse 2004). This is important when deciding who has influenced your thinking and writing (friends, colleagues, students) and how researchers should then deal with Aboriginal custodianship, particularly as this is accentuated by being relationship-based. It is then important to avoid tokenistic acknowledgements and instead make sure that they are genuinely and honestly presented.

A prominent acknowledgement to Aboriginal participants in academic literature is an indication of honesty by authors and a sign of respect for all contributors, an essential aspect of responsible research practice. Furthermore, acknowledging clearly and appropriately the participation and contribution of Aboriginal peoples shows that the authors are aware that they are not the sole original knowledge producers and that, without the input of Aboriginal peoples, the research could not have progressed to publication. It is essential that appropriate acknowledgements are accepted by all social work academics and practitioners to promote diversity, equality and social justice.

Decolonising research

> History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and 'Othered'. In this sense history is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the 'truth' will not alter the 'fact' that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.
>
> (Smith 1999)

To begin to understand where and if authors are acknowledged, I conducted a content analysis between 2004 and 2017 with four national and international social work journals. Excluding editorials, commentaries and book reviews, I examined 2,244 articles. Of these, 45 articles had Indigenous content but 22 of these did not cite, discuss, acknowledge or give respect or recognition to Aboriginal participants and cultural knowledge. The main reason for not including an acknowledgement was that the authors believed using secondary data would strengthen their arguments within their articles rather than the use of the Aboriginal voice. Some articles indicated that the main reason for no

acknowledgement was that the authors used literature rather than empirical research to inform the topic they were investigating.

The top four most read articles (*Australian Social Work* 2019) in the *Australian Social Work* journal were all topics concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, indicating the interest in the area, particularly in Australia. These articles had at least one Aboriginal author but only two had any form of acknowledgement.

Copyright contractual and personal responsibilities of authors, publishers and journal owners do not recognise the origin of knowledge and ownership of cultural content by Aboriginal peoples. Although the journals have protocols regarding plagiarism, they have not yet shown an awareness that not acknowledging could be considered misappropriation. Out of 41 articles, 29 acknowledged Aboriginal participants or the sources of the information. Universities should take the lead here and state that appropriate acknowledgements must be included in all publications, but I know of no initiatives in this area. Outdated and inappropriate systems and thinking still prevail.

After completing this analysis, I wanted to investigate current social work practitioner views on authorship. I developed an online Qualtrics survey that was advertised on the AASW website and NSW newsletter. It was also a part of snowball sampling through Twitter and Facebook networks. Participation in the survey was anonymous with no information collected that could identify a participant (for example, gender or name). A total of 41 responses were received.

Most survey participants did not have an issue with the idea or process of acknowledging Aboriginal contributions. There were seven responses that indicated the workers felt that acknowledgement is not important enough to even be discussed. These participants argued that Australia is a multicultural nation and as such should not be singling out any nation or minority group, as this was political correctness, tokenism and 'reverse discrimination'. Two were clear that not only did they not support it, that they would not subscribe to participating in this practice at any point in their research work.

'Reverse racism' is a term that has been used to describe the perceived denial of the rights, privileges and unfair treatment of the dominant group in society (usually British Anglo cultures within Australia) by the disadvantaged section of society (in this instance Aboriginal Australians). Allegations of 'reverse racism' have been typically voiced by the dominant British Anglo-Australians in complaint against any government affirmative action programmes perceived as providing an unfair advantage to Aboriginal Australians, despite their attempts to readress existing gross structural inequality. As Kivel (2013) claimed, 'reverse racism' typically occurs as a strategy used by the dominant (usually white) group to deny the racism they themselves are enacting, and to "counter attack attempts to permit racial justice" (Kivel 2013 pp. 74–75). These claims of 'reverse racism' reflect the entrenched racist, intolerant attitudes of British Anglo-Australia that ignore the disparities of power and authority that continue to exist within Australia. Ansell (2013) argues that 'reverse racism' cannot exist

as a form of racism from Aboriginal peoples towards the non-Indigenous population because Aboriginal peoples are in a subordinate position and lack the power to impact on the dominant group. These comments are indicative of the varied levels of education and therefore the knowledge and understanding held by social workers in terms of Aboriginal history in Australia, the impact of colonisation and the current experience of marginalisation.

When asked why it would be important for social workers to acknowledge the contributions of Aboriginal peoples, one participant stated that it was useful when the authors identified their research and their own values, life experience and cultural heritage. A participant pointed out that by being able to indicate the author's own cultural heritage, this can then give the audience a better understanding of the origins of the author's perspective. In this way, authors can own any assumptions that they might have brought to the research and the impact this might have had in their approaches and findings. Participants viewed this as strengthening the robust discussions that can occur within social work research. One participant highlighted that it is important not to copy and paste acknowledgements into articles.

Several of the participants supported the belief that acceptable practice protocols should acknowledge all of those participants that actively contributed their knowledge, time and/or resources to the completion of the article, regardless and irrespective of their culture. One participant analogised the process to intellectual property, whereby the information belonged to all the participants and not just to the primary researcher. However, this is a complex and multifaceted issue, as we want to avoid sounding paternalistic or this being a power conversation. It needs to be in some sort of agreeance and control from Aboriginal peoples themselves. By specifically involving Aboriginal people and communities in research, social workers model respect, collaboration and reciprocity. By doing this, these individuals also need to be named and recognised in some way.

The majority of participants stated that the most useful/appropriate time to acknowledge contributions was when Aboriginal issues are being discussed and when information significant to the article results from Aboriginal communities and their participation in the research. One responder indicated that any acknowledgement must be collaborative/agreed to by the individual or community prior to publication, as this respects the perception, interpretation and significance of the Aboriginal contributions.

The way forward

In determining if authorship or an acknowledgement should occur when writing a paper, the lead author should address the following three questions:

- Would I have been able to write this article without any Aboriginal knowledge or input?

- Has an Aboriginal person directly contributed information or was the information collected by someone observing or interviewing them?
- Have any Aboriginal peoples had their cultural knowledge discussed when preparing the article?

If one or more of the answers are in the affirmative, then an acknowledgement is essential. When and how acknowledgement occurs should also be decided in consultation with the Indigenous peoples involved, as the wording used must depend on *their* perceptions and interpretations of their contribution to the research. In this way, we as social workers and researchers can help ensure that acknowledgement isn't tokenistic, or as a standard one-statement-serves-all process. Several questions remain unanswered and need to be consulted on:

- Where should it be located?
- Who is ultimately responsible for the acknowledgement: the author or the journal/publisher?
- What are the consequences for researchers not using an acknowledgement but insisting on writing about Indigenous issues?
- How do authors word the acknowledgement if they are causing offence to Aboriginal peoples? (And should this even be discussed for publication?)

Of course, these questions are complex and do not necessarily have one right (or wrong) answer, and community consultation is essential to develop protocols and practices that are fair, honest, respectful and beneficial to all.

Social workers have both a professional duty and a moral obligation to cite and acknowledge any person who has informed, influenced or guided the research. This is to the author's benefit: the use and the acknowledgement of the Aboriginal experiences give credibility to the research and recognises and propagates the involvement and knowledge of Aboriginal experts. Acknowledgement also demonstrates the respect of the author for Aboriginal people and ensures culturally safe and sensitive practice that will benefit Australian social work and the wider community.

We, as social workers, must create protocols, principles, statements and other creative and non-Western ways for academics working with Indigenous peoples and convince journal editors and publishing houses to include this in their guidance to authors. The main principle is that the acknowledgement should become best practice. In addition, each issue of the journal should include a page dedicated to an acknowledgement of country and Indigenous peoples as participants and sources of knowledge. Another recommendation is that the journals that routinely publish studies of Indigenous people should incorporate a special logo on the cover page.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involved in any of the above-mentioned research both past and present and thank

them for their knowledge and contribution to my ideas. I acknowledge my Elders and colleagues in this space. I acknowledge those who helped shape this chapter at various times (Elaine Lindsay, Jean Burke, Krystal Evans, Peter Constantinou, Claire Morse, Terri Farrelly, Richard Burns and Joanna Zubrzycki). I acknowledge my family for their continued support and all interested social workers fighting to advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Comment by Sonia Tascón

A research-strong chapter that raises serious issues about ownership of knowledge, and the respect and acknowledgement to be accorded to Aboriginal peoples for the use of their knowledge. Bindi does raise important questions about what has been termed as an industry, the knowledge industry, and the institutionalisation of knowledge has had serious ramifications, as it relies on a particular relation of power centred on individualism and capitalism. As other authors have pointed out, these foundational principles of Western modernity, carried forward and imposed on the globe through perpetual colonial relations, are not only foreign to other, more collectivist cultures, they are also an imposition that results in those who are in diminished positions of power to be mere instruments in their preservation.

The individual holding of knowledge, and the individual rewarding of knowledge, is what gives rise to such disrespect – all one has to do to understand this is to see the way in which films or collectively produced cultural artefacts (and even a painting has been enabled by many people) are awarded as individual achievements. Other cultures, such as mine, of Latin origin, discourage individuals from seeing themselves as able to achieve anything without a reference to many others, with family usually the end point, but family in a much wider sense than mum, dad and siblings, rather to anyone who shares my surnames (we carry two surnames – father's and mother's – to announce our familial and communal relations to strangers). Knowledge is produced for the benefit of more than one person, but for the purposes of a whole wide community, a principle that has been stripped from our very imaginations by modernist individualist institutionalised knowledge production that rewards one individual. Bindi makes reference to this when she comments that in Aboriginal societies nothing was owned individually but was held in custodianship. This is a concept I would have liked to hear more about, expanded upon, and used to create alternatives as Aboriginal-specific ways of knowing and being that academia and other knowledge industries need to incorporate.

But Bindi raises other questions for me about the colonial relationship embedded in knowledge production that involves knowledge about, or knowledge from, Aboriginal people. These are questions to do with who and what: who gets considered as equal partners in knowledge production, and who a mere intermediary, simply a gateway for the 'real' work? And what kind of knowledge ends up being deemed to be valid, so that no translator is needed

to mediate? Both questions harken back to the question of relationship, something that Bindi raises explicitly as part of the ways in which Aboriginal people produce knowledge, again from a locus of collectivism. I think that Bindi's concerns shine a light directly on the colonial relationship in which colonial subjects have been created as empty vessels to be written upon by those whose knowledge really counts. In that there is the assumption that the colonial subject has nothing directly of interest to impart; it is the 'expert' white knowledge maker who knows the 'real' knowledge that is to be extracted from the empty vessel, and thus knowledge always has to be interpreted by that white expert. Much like the concept of terra nullius used by the British colonisers, to insert their actions and interventions on the Australian land, as if it were a passive entity merely waiting and grateful to be so occupied and used (raped and plundered?). So, to me, the questions are about who is capable of making knowledge, who has the agency and why? And who is made impassive by the principles upon which knowledge is validated? Who is capable of making knowledge? And which kind of knowledge is valid?

The discussion on acknowledgement is, I think, an important one, and one that certainly begins to recognise who has been part of the knowledge creation process, and whose knowledge has been crucial in making it. I think the problem has been that knowledge has been seen as needing to be mediated by white expert researchers, because *they* know what real knowledge is. But acknowledgement is not enough, and Bindi's earlier assertions were stronger and more to the point of what is needed. Acknowledgement is a nod towards, can be tokenistic because it is not knowledge, but [ac]knowledge – it is, again, a mediation, a bestowing upon rather than a radical changing of a relationship that has created knowledge around principles that disavow too much in order to make it. And in this, acknowledgement language betrays, so that 'closing the gap' and 'empowerment' appear to acknowledge some harsh realities but end up sustaining the colonial relationship of inequality because, again: who empowers whom? Who is *needing* empowerment, and why? Who in the position of power to bestow such eradication of a gap and power?

I enjoyed Bindi's discussion of Epistemicide the most because in that exploration she turns to that colonial relationship that is at the heart of her paper – the need to translate the Indigenous, and the marginalisation of Aboriginal knowledge production, as an 'et al'. But she also implicates social work directly, as, if in the institutionalisation of knowledge is revealed a colonial relation deeply ingrained, then in the institutionalisation of 'helping' is likewise revealed the same. Her [non-Aboriginal?] social work respondents' answers that 'we are all the same, subject to the same laws' and of 'reverse racism' uncover a pretence at empathy and social justice by some in the profession and that subjectivities and knowledge production are constituted neutrally or even equally. And Bindi's proposed suggestions are practical, are targeted and go some way towards building a better knowledge industry, but also a more equal profession.

Bindi, thank you! You have given us much to think about.

Comment by Jim Ife

Bindi's chapter raises the question – complex and contested – about not only what constitutes 'knowledge', but of who 'owns' that knowledge, who can have access to it, who can 'use' it and for what purposes, who can communicate it, and who can claim it as 'theirs'. The politics of knowledge is a complex and contested area, and, as Bindi so clearly argues, it is another space in which Indigenous people are readily and frequently disadvantaged. The very act of non-Indigenous people recognising the validity and importance of Indigenous knowledge – a positive step when compared with the devaluing and marginalising of Indigenous knowledge through colonisation and colonialism – carries with it a new danger, namely that of the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge by non-Indigenous people, for their own benefit and advancement. Thus what may seem like a decolonising act – the valuing of Indigenous knowledge – can simply reinforce colonialism at another level.

It is not only Indigenous people who suffer from their knowledge being appropriated by others with more institutional power. In academia, women have had their work appropriated by men, new researchers and PhD students have had their work appropriated by older established scholars, and so on. The problem lies with the very institutions of 'knowledge making' and 'knowledge transfer', though of course personal and institutional racism, and the perpetuation of colonialism, make the problem more acute and more damaging for Indigenous people.

The issue is exemplified by the extraordinary term 'intellectual property', and the mind-set that it conveys. The very first time I heard this term – some 30 years ago – I simply could not believe it. And to this day I regard it as absurd. It implies that ideas can be owned and defined as someone's 'property' so they can be commodified and turned to profit. This has always seemed to me to be nonsense. Any 'ideas' that I may have are as a result of interactions with many other people through written, oral and visual communication. They are not 'mine' alone. I may organise these ideas in a particular way that makes sense to me, and then communicate this to others, but even as I do so my ideas change, they keep changing, and others will modify and adapt them. Knowledge is not individually owned, rather it is shared and social. Indeed, if ever we have what we think might be an original idea, our first impulse is to share it with others, to try it out, to seek feedback, to obtain help with thinking it through and developing it, and so on; we make it a social phenomenon, not an individual commodity.

To move beyond the traps of the commodification of knowledge, and of 'intellectual property', we must dismantle the idea that knowledge should or must be used for personal or institutional profit. It has not always been thought of this way. The contrasting idea that knowledge has intrinsic value and should be used for social purposes is much older than the modern obsession with using knowledge to make money. In modern times, Jonas Salk is perhaps the best-known example. As the discoverer of a vaccine for polio, he could have made a fortune from his research, but he refused to patent his work. When asked in

1955 who owned the patent, he responded, "Well, the people I would say. There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?"[1] Salk's comment about the absurdity of patenting the sun suggests a rejection of 'intellectual property' and a view of knowledge that is more in tune with Indigenous understandings expressed in the Indigenous quote at the start of the introduction to this book:

> *our land is our knowledge, we walk on the knowledge, we dwell in the knowledge, we live in our thesaurus, we walk in our Bible every day of our lives. Everything is knowledge.*
>
> (Sveiby & Skuthorpe 2006, p. xv)

The issue requires not only critical awareness on the part of those non-Indigenous people who see the value of Indigenous knowledges, but also that we confront the colonialism and whiteness inherent in academic and research institutions, dominant understandings of knowledge 'ownership', copyright, patent law and the primacy of the profit motive in capitalist societies. These are major challenges, but they must be tackled if we are to address the important issue of appropriation. Critical awareness and sensitivity can only go so far, when the system itself creates the problem.

Not all knowledge, however, can or should be shared. Some knowledge is dangerous and should only be accessible to those who can use it appropriately. In Western societies, it is accepted that some knowledge should be limited to people with particular expertise who know how to use that knowledge responsibly (for example, confidential case notes, police records or knowledge about how to make explosive devices). Here knowledge restriction is seen as having a social benefit, in contrast to knowledge that has restricted access for profit, using the label 'commercial in confidence'. Similarly, not all Indigenous knowledge is appropriately shared with non-Indigenous people, or indeed with some groups within Indigenous communities. Some knowledge is appropriately held by Elders or others, and not shared generally (Sveiby & Skuthorpe 2006). Some knowledge is confined to men only, and some to women only. But this knowledge restriction is very clearly for social purposes, for the benefit of society as a whole. It is not knowledge that is kept secret for individual gain.

One way forward, perhaps, is to stop using the idea of knowledge as *owned*, and instead use the idea – familiar to Indigenous people – of knowledge as *held*. Indigenous Elders are thus the *holders* or *custodians* of important knowledge, not the *owners*. The same thinking applies to land. Being a custodian, rather than an owner, means that people will value the land very differently, take seriously their responsibilities to it, and will not 'use' it instrumentally for personal gain. Surely this can also apply to knowledge. After all, from an Indigenous perspective, knowledge and land are one and the same (Wallace 2009; Turner 2010).

1 https://www.history.com/news/8-things-you-may-not-know-about-jonas-salk-and-the-polio-vaccine.

The idea of holding, rather than owning, knowledge implies a duty to respect and preserve the knowledge, to use it wisely and to pass it on to those who can continue good custodianship. It is thus the knowledge itself that has the power and that demands respect, rather than the person who 'owns' it. We can think of social work knowledge in this way – as something to be respected and used wisely – rather than as something to boost our careers or our bank balances. But to do so we must work to change the institutional and epistemological contexts within which we practise, learn and teach. Those of us who are not Indigenous must not only seek the wisdom of Indigenous knowledge but must also accept what Indigenous cultures tell us about knowledge itself.

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4 Afrocentric ways of 'doing' social work

Kathomi Gatwiri

Introduction

Social work practice is historically 'mired in colonisation and whiteness' and dominated by Western epistemologies. Social work in Africa must now be understood within its political and historical context. In the first instance, understanding the "origins of social work theory allows us to be critical, informed and creative in the [process] of transforming and applying critical concepts, ideas [approaches and methodologies]" in context (Badwall & Razack 2012, p. 137). The introduction of social work in African contexts was first established through Judeo-Christian capitalist missionaries who believed that they were bringing the well-deserved and long-overdue help to the local natives. To do this, they imported foreign 'experts' from Western countries to modernise and design social welfare systems which continue to influence social work education, theory and practice in African contexts and communities today (Cox and Pawar 2012). As Badwall and Razack (2012, p. 145) add, "[T]he spread of social work to [Africa and] to different parts of the world helps us to conceptualise the pervasiveness of Western influence". The perverseness of this dominant way of 'doing' social work complicates efforts to decolonise the classroom. As Spitzer (2014) states:

> Colonialism and its concomitant mechanisms of modernisation in the post-colonial period have had a huge impact on the way social work is conceptualised in Africa today. Economic systems, administrative structures, educational and other social institutions were permeated by colonial rule and survived after independence as did the structures of rudimentary social welfare services based on Western models.
>
> (p. 15)

The impetus for Afrocentrism in African social work practice is now gaining momentum. Numerous scholars have argued that the heavily westernised social work model in Africa has failed and as such, there is a need to re-establish and redefine itself through Indigenous ways of addressing social problems (Gray et al. 2014; Kaseke 2001; Mwansa 2011, 2010; Ibrahima and

Mattaini; Mathebane and Sekudu 2018). With increasing poverty, socioeconomic crises, political instabilities, high unemployment, violence and mental illness fuelled by neoliberalism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, many African countries and their governments are struggling to meet the social, cultural and structural needs of their citizenry. Social work, a profession that is supposed to facilitate social change through the principles of advocacy, collective human rights and social justice is just as incapacitated, and the challenges it faces in the African context have been documented for decades now. The fact that calls to decolonise social work have been made for more than two decades, with little response or blatant refusal, signifies the strength of the resistance to decolonisation and the power of colonialism. Twenty-five years ago Osei-Hwedie (1993) stated:

> Social work in Africa has failed to respond appropriately to the major social problems confronting the region. The social work profession is heavily influenced by Western theory and no meaningful attempts have been made to ensure that the profession fits into the social, economic and practical environment in which it operates.

The quest to define social work in the African context lies within a solid conceptualisation of the needs of Africans in Africa. To impose solutions from outside means to also impose the problems from outside. The imposition of Western solutions on Africans exemplifies how the white saviour mentality functions in social work teaching and practice. According to Straubhaar (2015, p. 384), the white saviour complex is an ideology that assumes that it "is the role of the white outsider to 'lift' the poor and oppressed in developing countries [and transform them through] Western [knowledge] and its thinking". The white saviour mentality is a projection and a manifestation of the white ego which seeks to save while it dominates. Cole (2012, np) says that the white saviour complex is mostly manifested in impoverished environments when the white ego can thrive while being put in full display for the 'impoverished' to see and marvel at. He says:

> Africa serves as a backdrop for white fantasies of conquest and heroism. … [It] has provided a space onto which white egos can conveniently be projected. It is a liberated space in which the usual rules do not apply: a nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike saviour or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied. Many have done it under the banner of 'making a difference'.

This does not mean that a white privileged Westerner cannot 'help' or 'make a difference' in African spaces. Often the intentions of those seeking to 'help' are in the right place, but it is always important to investigate the underlying, unconscious and masked racism that can underpin the 'good intentions'. Put simply, at the heart of the 'white saviour' premise lie a narrative, an authority

and a process of moralisation that legitimises the superiority of the white helper over the non-white person being helped. As the white outsider assumes the role of 'saving' the poor and the unfortunate Africans from their 'blackness' or their 'oppressed' realities, they inadvertently position Africans as passive, helpless and powerless victims who lack agency to solve their own problems. This imperialistic and paternalistic approach features prominently in social work practice and reinforces a universalising and infantilising rhetoric that reiterates colonial 'single-story' narratives of Africa and Africans. The 'danger of the single story' is a phrase that was coined by celebrated Nigerian novelist and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her famed TED talk. This relates quite strongly to how Africa and Africans are talked about, talked for and talked over in media and in discourse in singular and monolithic ways.

Interrogating the colonised African classroom

Almost all countries in Africa were colonised. This invasion to their land, history and culture informed the way education was developed and delivered to Africans. Epistemic colonisation continued in classrooms where the curriculum was completely divorced from Indigenous African knowledges, histories and worldview (Owusu-Ansah & Mji 2013). According to Asante (1987), the universalisation of Western ways of knowing in African spaces not only fails to address our unique social, political and cultural needs, but also presents possible intellectual danger though lack of curiosity.

I studied Social Work at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. During our training, we did not focus at all on colonisation of knowledge or decolonised teaching, methodologies, theories or approaches. Mostly we referred to the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the United States, National Association of Social Work (NASW) to frame our understanding of social work within a Kenyan context or African more broadly. At that time, we (the students) did not have much understanding of the inherent imperialism and colonial nuances that unashamedly found their way into social work classrooms. Modelling Western ideologies to frame our thinking about social work influenced our professional identities as social workers and did not offer us much opportunity to explore how Africa's 'backwardness' together with its people's internalised and learned powerlessness, hopelessness and state of apathy was connected to colonialism and other globalised power structures. Instead we focused on 'helping' the individual with an immense emphasis on embracing the individualised principles of Western social work as non-judgementality, unconditional acceptance and purposeful expressions of emotions among others. With the focus purely on the individual and an emphasis on maintaining 'personal boundaries' (also see my response to Ife's chapter), we did not learn how to understand social problems using a sociological imagination or how to 'connect the dots' of the racist and the oppressive colonial undertones that dominate the institutions where most of us would end up working – in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Considering this, how can social workers in Africa practise while ignoring that the majority of our 'clients' are products of a violent, colonised state? How can we practise, while putting the pressure on the individual to 'change themselves' while they still live in dehumanising conditions as a result of structural failures? How can we turn a blind eye to the fact that our very profession is a colonial product, loaded with Eurocentric ideologies that, if left unchecked, continue to paternalise or patronise? Can social work in Africa ever truly be effective when it does not rigorously critique the continuing implications of colonialism?

I never started to think of interrogating the whiteness inherent in social work knowledge, training and education until I started to teach social work in Australia. The same pattern was visible. Most social work programmes barely acknowledged how social work in Australia was complicit in re-producing white power through its curriculum (Gatwiri 2019). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and ways of knowing within social works are often approached or taught as an add-on, or as a 'by the way'. Privileging and actively supporting the sovereignty, wellbeing and cultural, spiritual and land rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have not been placed at the centre of teaching social work in Australia (Bennett et al. 2017). I started to wonder how my social work students could work in a culturally safe way with not only Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples but also other people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds if this knowledge was absent in their training and education. Considering the Eurocentric paradigms, theories and approaches that seek to centre whiteness through social work knowledge, having a culturally informed repository of critical, historical and cultural knowledge that prioritises alternative ways of knowing and being as opposed to the Eurocentric norm is crucial.

While negotiating this dilemma, I slowly realised that my own social work training was no different as I started to remember the specific challenges that I encountered as a young social work graduate in Kenya. The theories that we learned in class were not readily applicable in the Kenyan context. I struggled to practise as it became more and more apparent to me that my clients not only were navigating the indignity of poverty and corruption, but also had internalised a colonial narrative of themselves. Growing up in a colonial system that repeatedly diminishes, devalues and dehumanises people produces a collective trauma and sense of powerlessness in people. Confronting this reality made me aware of my own internalised sense of inferiority too (Gatwiri 2018). But because our focus was mostly on 'helping individuals to cope' with daily challenges, and not on challenging and advocating for a more humanised and empowering system, I was stuck and immobilised in my practice. Essentially, my social work training implied that it was the individuals' fault if they did not learn how to cope effectively within the very system that dehumanised them. The irony was thick, and I had no tools or skills to penetrate it.

What became obvious and necessary during this time of contemplation was the need to critically dialogue with and reflect on my own internalised Eurocentric ways of seeing the world, which were a result of my socialisation in Kenya, and now in Australia. My own ways of thinking, doing and knowing were influenced and deeply rooted in my consumption of whiteness through media, education and other personal and structural negotiations with colonial institutions. Indeed, my socialisation process allowed me – or rather restricted me – to think and engage with the world in a very singular way. The journey to critical reflection led to a difficult process, a path to 'unknow' what had always been presented to me as a given – as a fact – as truth. As I put in effort to undo the whitewashing that dominated my thinking, my teaching in the social work classroom began to transform too. This process has allowed me to think deeply about whiteness in social work education and practice in Africa and what the role of the profession is in re-engaging with Africans through a prism of cultural humility.

Teaching a colonised curriculum in a colonised classroom and in a colonised context is difficult, but creating a decolonised space for African students is no easy task. Doing this requires students and teachers to "participate in a 'post-colonial' discursive struggle to contest the Afro-pessimist" and colonised narrative about Africans (Mkono 2018, np). It also requires a deep critical consciousness and ability to systematically dismantle the Eurocentric ideologies that have convinced Africans that 'Africa is bad, because Africans are bad' and that the problem with the 'failing continent' is because of their inherent and personal failings and shortcomings as individuals. It is challenging and actively undoing the learned powerlessness we carry due to the enormous burden associated with the 'dark' continent as a representation of our 'failure'. To undo the long-standing 'Afro-pessimistic' stereotypes of Africa and Africans often characterised by negative and doom-filled narratives, teachers and students who are restricted by the colonised curriculum must engage in a process of decolonisation, a process of rejecting the white Western textbook narrative and a process of reimagining an Afrocentric way on knowing. As Townsend-Cross (2018) argues, centring Indigenous knowledges creates alternative ways of challenging colonialism within the education system.

It is not just teachers who should be tasked with the 'burden' of decolonising knowledge and creating liberatory and transformative spaces to learn. African students too are starting to realise that most of the education system is a shorthand to colonial ideologies: they feel cheated of an education that is liberatory and empowering to them. In South Africa for example, students created the *#RhodesMustFall* campaign, which was a call to decolonise academic spaces (Francis and Hardman 2018) as well as "to remove the [white supremacist] symbolism and the statue of British colonialist Cecil John Rhodes, who promoted institutionalized racism and exclusion of Black students from higher education" (Bosch 2017, p. 221). Recently, the statue of Mahatma Gandhi (who was also notoriously racist towards Black Africans but is now hailed as a

global hero) was removed from a Ghanaian university following students' protests. African students are starting to reject the notions that white knowledge is the unquestioned standard knowledge by engaging in collective action to revise curriculums and creating safer classrooms that reclaim their Africanness through antiracist knowledge.

Put simply, social workers in Africa need to critically understand how whiteness [as a form of colonial power] informs the profession's theory and practice. We cannot ignore that social work is contextual – determined by space and place and is shaped by an intersectional interplay of economic, political, social, cultural, historical and religious factors (Chetty 1999). Beginning with the implications of colonialism in the past and neo-colonialism in the present, these colonial structures have created a system of domination and subordination which have led to the exploitation and dehumanisation of Africans within a global context. These systems of domination have promoted wars in Africa; produced narratives of civil, political and economic instability; and positioned the Western countries as saviours of the 'dark' continent. These narratives are reproduced in all areas of social life, and Eurocentric social work assumes that a 'helping' approach can be enough. Africans now say: it is not.

'Doing' social work through Afrocentric ways of knowing

Afrocentric social work is "a method of social work practice based on traditional African philosophical assumptions that are used to explain and to solve human and social problems" (Schiele 1997, p. 805, cited in Ndungu 2015). It is about "documenting, discussing, and advancing African-centred knowledge" and "utiliz[ing] African philosophies, history, and culture as a starting place of interpreting social and psychological phenomena [affecting Africans in order] to create relevant approaches of personal, family, and community healing and societal change" (Bent-Goodley et al. 2017, p. 1). Owusu-Ansah and Mji (2013, p. 2) also add:

> African knowledge … is experiential knowledge based on a worldview and a culture that is basically relational. The spirit of the African worldview includes wholeness, community and harmony which are deeply embedded in cultural values. [This means] if we speak of the inclusion of African indigenous knowledge in any investigation, we would be speaking about the examination of African reality from the perspective of the African and not with the African on the periphery.

Although the literature is clear, and there is developing scholarship on the importance of adopting Afrocentricity in social work practice, there is a "glaring reluctance on the part of contemporary scholars [and practitioners] to integrate this approach into social work theory, practice, and research" (Bent-Goodley et al. 2017, p. 2). As already established, most social work education

and practice in the African context rely on practice approaches and theories that have been developed from Western and Eurocentric paradigms and those which, in many cases, are not relevant to, or supportive of, African values, beliefs, culture, rights and ways of knowing. Anucha (2008, p. 229) states that Eurocentric models of "social work that have been exported to Africa [are] unable to address the unique issues and cultural characteristics of the majority of Africans". Afrocentric social work should teach African social work students how to recognise and be aware of patterns internalised racism, colonial attitudes, patterns of domination and different power dynamics so that they can be better positioned to challenge those issues within a structural and institutional framework. Spitzer (2014, p. 15) states:

> Social work in Africa, albeit confronted with a myriad of challenges, has unique characteristics and specific ways of dealing with social problems which are sometimes very different from how social work is seen in the contexts of industrialised societies. One feature of social work in African countries is its struggle for appropriateness: to overcome the legacy of imported, Western-based models of intervention which are too often unsuitable with regard to the distinctiveness and complexity of African cultures.

As established, social workers in Africa have continually called for the development of a paradigm for social work that is African-centred (Kwaku 2002; Osei-Hwedie 1993; Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie 2011; Mungai et al. 2014; Anucha 2008). Despite this, arguments on how to universalise, standardise and internationalise social work are still dominant in the discourse of indigenising social work (Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie 2011; Gray 2005; Gray and Fook 2004). Ferguson et al. (2018) posit that although social work is a global profession that addresses the implications of global problems such as poverty, economic and political crisis, mass migration of people and climate change and shares universal principles of social change and social justice, it also needs to be situated within context (location) and culture. Mungai et al. (2014) state that considering space and place is not just about *adding local knowledge*; it is about putting it at the centre of the practice in that locale. True respect for Africans when *doing* social work with Africans is about drawing on their Afro-Indigenous expertise and trusting their local knowledge on how to fix issues that affect them. This is to say that the "theories, values and philosophies that underlie [social work] practice must be influenced by local factors [and should embody an] indigenization emphasizes to cultural dimension" (Kwaku 2002, p. 314).

The complexity that exists is when traditional African values or ways of 'doing things' are seen as oppressive and primitive. However, as much as it is necessary to understand that not all cultural traditions are good traditions, it is important for social workers to acknowledge the strengths of

traditions that hold African communities together and have done so for centuries (Maathai 2009). In fact, many of these traditional practices are a part of pre-colonial social welfare approaches that Africans used to solve social problems before they were eroded by colonialism and the imposition of professionalised westernised social work. In pre-colonial Africa, social welfare systems were largely informal, and they included different ways of helping people and solving problems in the community. Interventions were carried out "through family, kinship and local chiefdoms and [were] based on mutual aid and collective action facilitated through traditional customs and culture. Once these systems were weakened through colonisations and modernisation, there was a gap in service provisioning and problem solving" in communities (Twikirize 2014a).

From a Kenyan context, Wairire (2014) argues that pre-colonial support systems in Kenya were interwoven within the social and cultural practice in different communities. Wairire adds that "social responsibilities were clearly defined for different community members through traditional socialisation. Individuals with different needs requiring social interventions were, therefore helped at the community and individual level" (2014, p. 94). As an example, each age group had initiation rituals and mentors who would teach the different roles in community. Everybody knew their role in the community, and they were carefully guided to do so. Mentors of each age group supported individuals to cope through the challenges of everyday life (Wairire 2014). With the breakdown of these structures, people not only lost their support systems but were also displaced because their roles in community were no longer clear-cut. In Tanzania, Mabeyo (2014, p. 126) states:

> Tanzanian ethnic groups had well established kinship and community ties and structures that acted as safety nets, social security and protection mechanisms for those who could not provide for themselves. [Whereas] extended families had a responsibility to meet the social, economic and spiritual needs of their family members, surrounding communities acted as providers of social services and voluntary assistance to community members in need.

In Uganda, Twikirize (2014b) says that traditional chiefs and rulers had a responsibility to look after the vulnerable people in their chiefdoms. The pre-colonial welfare systems provided a form of social security, a social safety net and social protection. Issues of family violence and conflict, mental illness, disability, orphanhood and child protection were handled within the extended family as well as the community (Twikirize 2014b). Children in particular were considered to be of utmost importance – the beings that start and complete the cycle of life – and as such, they were never considered to belong to individual people but belonged to the community. Every adult in the community had a responsibility towards child protection.

With this in mind, social workers can summon Afrocentric ways of *doing* social work as a way to disrupt the postcolonial positioning of social work in Africa. This is what Ndungi wa Mungai (2015, p. 65) argues is the revisiting of the "past to find what is forgotten in order to build a strong and resilient future [for practice], noting that the past, present and future are all interconnected". There are two key concepts/examples that I will discuss in relation to *doing Afrocentric social work*. One is *Sancofa* and the second is *Ubuntu*. As elucidated by Ndungi Wa Mungai (2015, p. 70), for the Akan people of Ghana, *Sancofa* embodies a mythological bird, which likes to fly forward but with its head turned backward symbolising the Akan proverb that *It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten*. Afrocentric social work practice is therefore about returning to and renewing African knowledge that has been marginalised and forgotten. *Ubuntu* on the other hand, argues that we are made human through the humanity of others. It is the willingness to see and feel the depth of others through a compassionate process of immersing the self into the selves of others and the interconnectedness. Although *Ubuntu* cannot be easily dissected into a methodological paradigm, "it is a bedrock of a specific lifestyle or culture that seeks to honour human relationships as primary in any social, communal or corporate activity" (Nussbaum 2003, p. 2). The African view of humanity based on the *Ubuntu* philosophy is centred on this premise: *I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am* …. This philosophy embodies the true essence of what social work is, which is about promoting connection, belonging and humanity. Relying solely on westernised theories and knowledges implies that our own *Sancofa* and *Ubuntu* philosophies are inadequate to theorise our needs and solutions as Africans. Afrocentric social work, seen through the lens of *Ubuntu* and *Sancofa* is about returning to your roots, to your soul, to your land, to your values and fostering 'community and selfhood through collective belonging' because it is the power of cultural connection that inspires 'profound communal responsiveness' (Nussbaum 2003, p. 8).

Implications for Western social work practice and education

Traditional and cultural Afrocentric structures which were eroded and weakened by colonial structures were crucial tools of 'social welfare' for Africans in pre-colonial times. In Afrocentring social work programme and policies now, it is not necessarily viable to get rid of everything foreign, but there is a strong imperative for identifying and utilising local knowledge – local expertise – and local ways of doing. This must be done within the boundaries of cultural humility, in respect and in acknowledgement that the 'west is not always best', and neither does it provide a superior form of doing and knowing or solving problems. In fact, as a matter of professional integrity, Western social work education and practice has the responsibility of decolonising itself. The onus of unpacking the remnants of colonialism should not be put on colonised people. Western social work can revisit the principles of *Sancofa* and *Ubuntu* to teach

itself of the richness of African knowledge. It would be beneficial for Western social work to consider the three underpinning principles of *Ubuntu* as a way to inform the core values of universal social work practice (Nussbaum 2003). These include:

1. Deep listening: This is mindful and present listening that is about affirming others. It is listening to understand, not to respond. This *Ubuntu* way of listening fosters trust, reconciliation and dignity in relationships. This is similar to *Dadirri*, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander term that is similar to mindfulness and means deep and respectful listening. Fernando & Bennett (2019) refer to it as the "spiring that inside all of us" (p. 56). They also add that "by using dadirri, we begin to decolonise our minds and perhaps the space around us … [and] could [help us] reflect deeply without judgement and thereby honour [Indigenous] worldviews, ideas, and beliefs" (Fernando & Bennett 2019, p. 56).
2. *Ubuntu* consciousness: This is the acknowledgement that the 'self' is rooted in others. It is the premise behind the 'I am because you/we are' philosophy. This foundational knowledge enables us to view each other as equally important in building the community and fostering social change. Fostering change is not about meeting the needs of the ego (unlike white saviour complex) but about communal growth and healing.
3. Common humanity: This means that our humanity levels us equally regardless of our class, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion. *Ubuntu* seeks to affirm and honour the dignity of every human being and seeks to develop and maintain mutually affirming and respectful relationships that are grounded in deep respect of other people's humanity.

While some of these concepts are incorporated in Western social work practice, they are often presented as tools of social work performance, as 'things' that need to be done *for* clients. *Ubuntu* on the other hand is neither about 'performing humanity', nor a 'tool of practice or procedure'; instead, it is a way of life – it is a depth of *being* human and a fountain from which attributes that foster love, consciousness, respect, freedom and humanity flow. As social workers, therefore, *Ubuntu*, as Nassbaum (2003, p. 1) states, calls us to teach, believe and practise in the Afrocentricity of knowing that:

> *Your pain is My pain,*
>
> *My wealth is Your wealth,*
>
> *Your salvation is My salvation.*

Comment by Jim Ife

Reading Kathomi's chapter, I started to play a mind-game. I tried to imagine what it would have been like for me and my fellow social work students at the

University of Sydney, back in the 1960s, to be taught only by African social work lecturers, to have to read only African textbooks (not in English, so we would need to be competent in a new language), to learn from African case studies, and to be taught social work methods designed and practised in African villages, using traditional African knowledge systems and forms of cultural expression, on the assumption that this was the 'real' social work that needed to be applied in Australia. If we had been taught that way, it would have produced graduates who were unable to practise effectively in the Australia of the time, and who would be responsible for invalidating the lived experience of the people they worked with. We would have had to try to apply these totally alien concepts to white Australian families – Australia was very white then – yet we would have had to describe our work in those African terms in order to read and publish in the international journals (in African languages) and to attend international conferences where African languages predominated and where African cultural and intellectual traditions were the unexamined norm. This may sound bizarre, almost surreal, yet it is effectively what was asked of Kathomi, and also of Sharlotte Tusasiirwe (see Chapter 5) in their colonial social work education in Africa, and it brings into focus the absurdity of colonialism, and the extent to which white Western paradigms have colonised social work globally.

Yet on reflection, as Kathomi points out, Australian social work could have benefited, both then and now, from African knowledges. She argues that understanding world views of *Ubuntu* and of *Sancofa* could benefit and enrich white social work, and as someone who has long advocated the importance of the collective and of a historical perspective in social work, I strongly agree; except that the African understandings of *Ubuntu* and *Sancofa* imply far more, and require a deeper, richer way of knowing and being, than the English words 'collective' and 'history' could ever convey. Had our social work education in the 1960s required us to listen deeply to these traditions, as well as Australian Indigenous traditions, and to understand how they could enrich both Australian culture and the lives of the 'clients' we worked with, how different Australian social work would be today; it would certainly be better equipped to practise in multicultural Australia and to respond to the serious challenges and threats facing us at a global level. It is not too late, however, for white Western social workers to take Kathomi's recommendations to heart, and to listen deeply and humbly to the wisdom of cultures that are far older and wiser than white Western modernity.

Actually, as social work students in the 1960s we were also colonised, though less dramatically. The social work education we received in Sydney at that time was very much part of the US colonial project. Our texts, case studies, readings, theories and even one of our practice lecturers were all from the USA, and the social work we were taught was based on conservative individualism and on psychoanalytic casework. The radical politics of Sydney University campus life at that time, and the wider social and political upheavals taking place in Australia, did not penetrate into the social work classroom.

The subtext was that conservative therapeutic US-based social work was the ideal, and we needed to learn it from our colonial masters. And, of course, with the colonisation of our social work education, we became colonisers in turn, and helped to perpetuate the marginalisation of Indigenous people, their lives, their cultures and their knowledges. A colonised curriculum led naturally to colonising practice, and even as we later sought to break free from US domination and establish an Australian-based social work, the 'critical' social work approaches developed in the 1970s and 80s remained uncritically white (see Ife 2017).

Although our experience of colonisation was not as dramatic, traumatic and extreme as the experience of those in the Global South (after all, our society was both Western and 'affluent', our skins were the same colour as our colonisers' and we spoke the same language), it is worth recounting simply to emphasise the pervasiveness of the colonisation of social work knowledge. This was maintained by the dominance of a positivist paradigm in much social work education. Positivism emphasised the universal 'body of knowledge' (largely created in the USA) which was added to by empirical research, and the devaluing of contextual influences such as culture. This universal knowledge was seen to apply everywhere, so it could uncritically be imposed on social work students and practitioners anywhere in the world, regardless of context. Although the positivist paradigm has been subject to critique within social work for some time, its influence remains in such terms as 'evidence-based', 'best practice', 'body of knowledge', 'intervention' (see Chapter 12), in the medical model that, despite critique, remains strong in much social work thinking, and in the top-down managerialism that pervades the practice context of most social workers. The critique of positivism must therefore remain as one of the starting points for any project of decolonisation and should be foundational in any social work education programme. Only then can the pervasiveness of Western epistemologies be effectively challenged.

Two sentences from Kathomi's chapter particularly resonated for me:

> In fact, as a matter of professional integrity, Western social work education and practice has the responsibility of decolonising itself. The onus of unpacking the remnants of colonialism should not be put on colonised people.

Simply reading and listening to strong non-Western voices such as Kathomi's is not enough. Western social workers need themselves not only to listen deeply and to learn humbly, but also to set out on the path of decolonisation of white colonial social work. We may have started, but there is a long way to go.

Comment by Sharlotte Tusasiirwe

Dear Kathomi,

Your experience regarding social work education in Kenya is similar to my personal experience in Uganda. I agree completely with your observations

of dominance of white Western epistemologies in social work in Africa and Australia as well. Indeed, colonialism is an ongoing practice, yet many social workers want to think about it as a thing of the past. In fact, discussions of colonialism where professional/Western social work itself is implicated are almost non-existent in social work classrooms in Uganda and Africa more broadly. Yet, our internalised colonialism has made it possible for uncritical imitation of the West and the continued teaching of only Western social work as influenced by only Eurocentric events and cultural values of individualism. Having this opportunity for dialogue in this book, this is our chance to network and collaborate as like-minded people interested in decolonising social work education. I think the role of colonisation in Africa is not acknowledged enough and although indigenisation is being embraced, we need to decolonise first to create space for Indigenous ways of being and helping to be rediscovered, revalued, recognised and strengthened. Can we join hands to challenge and disrupt the colonised curriculum and education in Africa that transcends just social work education to include the whole colonial education system from primary to higher education, where African ways of knowing and helping have been excluded and silenced?

You ask the question, 'Can social work in Africa ever truly be effective when it does not openly critique and condemn the past and the continuing implications of colonialism, as well as actively seeking to remove the subtle remnants of colonisation from theory and practice through education?' My answer is that social work cannot be effective unless it openly engages in decolonisation. Our current social work education is continuing the project of colonialism by continuing to centre Eurocentric ideologies as well as not engaging in truth-telling about the colonial history of professional social work and the crisis coming from its trivialisation of traditional ways of helping. The need to decolonise, way beyond what indigenisation can offer us, is needed to begin to disrupt and reverse the impact of past and ongoing colonisation.

I am captivated by your statement that 'with the focus purely on the individual, we did not learn how to unpack the racism and the oppressive colonial nuances that dominate the institutions where most of us would end up working – in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)'. Indeed, the role played by NGOs, particularly international NGOs and agencies, in perpetuating past and ongoing colonisation in Africa is less acknowledged, documented and disrupted. We need more social workers to share their voices and experiences of how this is happening in all our different contexts. However, as other scholars have argued (Twikirize 2014a; Manji and Coill 2002), international agencies and organisations are subtly imposing their philosophies, models and epistemologies on social workers operating in African contexts, making it almost impossible to talk about indigenising social work. The example of cash transfers in Uganda that I talk about in my chapter is also an example of how Department for International Development (DFID) as an international agency is determined to push through its social protection agenda across Africa.

In Uganda, the cash transfer as a form of social protection for eligible older people is a Western technology, run and managed by DFID's own private firm based in London, which undermines local capacity building of Ugandan ministries in managing cash transfers. The transfer does little to build on local/Indigenous ways of defining and helping older people. I therefore challenge donors/international agencies claiming to be interested in helping the poor in Africa to take on the responsibility of leading *decolonisation* of their ways of working with social workers in African contexts. Through engaging with social workers and the local people being supported, the questions for donors to ask include: what local initiatives exist that could be built on and supported, and what do local people want? A talk with older people themselves in the community would bring out voices around having universal access to services like health, education for grandchildren and housing that NGOs could focus on providing, if they are really interested in helping the poor: universal, not targeted, quality services for everyone.

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5 Decolonising social work through learning from experiences of older women and social policy makers in Uganda

Sharlotte Tusasiirwe

Introduction

The dominance of western epistemologies in social work in Uganda is deep-rooted. Uganda was colonised by the British from 1894 to 1962, although formalised social work education was not introduced until the 1950s (Twikirize, 2014). In 2004, when I stepped into my first class on introduction to social work, I was taught that social work started in the UK with the English Poor Laws of 1601 and in the US with the Settlement House movements of 1889. As a social work student, I was expected to admire and be inspired to apply social work as practised in these contexts to our Ugandan context. In class, we read western textbooks and spent time interpreting and adapting western theories and models to the Ugandan context. This teaching of social work from a European and North American perspective, shaped by western ideas, cultural values and events, silenced the teaching and learning about social work in our local contexts as shaped by local ways of doing and knowing. The assumption was that social work has a "universal methodology that all social workers are taught to apply with equal conviction in countries of disparate economic, political, social and other characteristics" (Midgley, 1981, p. xii). This assumption, however, disregarded the western virtues that informed the foundation of this western social work, for example individualism, liberalism and capitalism, which are not universally shared in all communities worldwide (Midgley, 1981).

While the grounding of social work in western perspectives has given us Ugandan social work graduates qualifications recognised internationally, the profession in Uganda is grappling with many challenges. Social workers are struggling to find their own domesticated identity (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). Currently, 'social work' or 'social worker' does not have a local translation into any of the 56 local languages in Uganda. Most social workers struggle to define who they are to the public (Twikirize, 2014). What has even been more ironic is that social work in Uganda has maintained an urban focus (Twikirize, 2014), reflecting its western and colonial origins. However, this is unjustified in Uganda given that social work is neglecting the majority of the population and the very poor and critically vulnerable who reside in remote rural areas.

Such contradictions, among others, have been grounds for questioning the appropriateness and adequacy of western social work in the Ugandan context.

The aim of this chapter is to explore and critique current social work practices and to suggest ways of decolonising social work in Uganda. It will draw on research focussed on the experiences of policy makers, driving social policies and practices, and the experiences of older women in a rural community. The older women are practising Indigenous social work, utilising local ways of knowing and doing, providing alternative knowledges and frameworks that remain marginalised in professional social work. I start by looking at pre-colonial social work in Uganda, after which I explore the current research into present-day social work practice in Uganda. Two themes from this research are then discussed: the persistent predominance of western models and epistemologies in professional social work, and the persistent Indigenous helping approaches that provide alternatives, if recognised and validated. I conclude with lessons that western social work can learn from these experiences.

Colonisation and social work

The colonial story is that social work in Uganda was started by the British (Twikirize, 2014). The British model of social work was a replica of the social welfare system that existed in Britain rather than a modified model adapted to the needs and cultural context of Uganda. The colonisers assumed that anything from the west was superior, the best and modern, while what was locally existing was primitive and traditional (Ouma, 1995). Thus, they introduced a government welfare system, and established centralised planning, with ministries at central/national level responsible for policy making and programme design (Ministry of Planning and Community Development, 1965). The Westminster model of governance was replicated in Uganda with the elected parliamentarians working alongside government bureaucrats to make and approve policies and programmes. After 'independence' from British rule in 1962, a close interaction with the former colonisers under international agencies like the World Bank (WB), Great Britain's Department for International Development (DFID) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been maintained through these systems.

The concern is that this colonial 'modern' model displaced the traditional ways of doing social work embedded in traditional systems, creating gaps in problem solving which it could not resolve. The traditional systems relied on the extended family, kinships, clan elders and communal mutual aid systems which provided help to the sick, the very aged and children. These traditional systems were pronounced as backward under the colonisers' modernisation ideology (Ouma, 1995). However, the story that is not told about the colonisers is that the British established social security systems for only the white settler community and a few African civil servants serving in the colonial administration, leaving the rest of the population to continue to depend on

the 'backward' traditional kinship and communal systems (Barya, 2011). If any learning was needed, it was the colonisers who had a lot to learn from African communities, especially about community work based on mutual aid, trust and relationships. However, the pronouncement of traditional ways as backward, alongside the trivialisation and demonisation of African ways of being, resulted in cultural and epistemological genocide, which explains why little attention and research have been devoted to exploring and documenting the Indigenous approaches and models of helping in professional social work literature. The research on which this chapter draws attempts to 'mind this gap' in social work.

Current social work theory and practice: Stories at the centre

As part of my PhD project, I conducted a study that brought together voices of 'social workers' at three levels in a rural community in South-Western Uganda. The first level of participants were ten older women, who shared their life stories of what it is like for them in the community and how traditional ways of doing and knowing have helped them deal with and ameliorate social problems. The second level involved three community workers. This involved talking with and shadowing one professional case worker and two community development officers in a local government district. The aim was to gain insights into what help they were providing to people in the community including the older women. The third level of the project involved in-depth interviewing of nine policy makers who created policies and programmes to be implemented by the community workers.

The rationale behind the methods and the sampling and recruitment of participants was to privilege African Indigenous and local ways of knowing embedded in African oral storytelling (Chilisa, 2012; Chinyowa, 2001; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). In Africa, older people, especially older women, are highly regarded as the custodians of knowledge and age-old wisdom derived from their lived experiences and those of our ancestors. This knowledge and wisdom is passed down across generations through telling stories (Chilisa, 2012). This was the spirit in which older women, community workers and policy makers were approached to contribute their stories and experiences.

The analysis of the stories from older women, community workers and policy makers demonstrates the persistent relevance, but also the marginalisation, of Indigenous approaches to helping in professional social work practice in Uganda. The older women talked of the Indigenous ways of helping through their self-organised mutual support groups, which were neither recognised nor supported by the top-down approaches adopted by policy makers. Policy makers followed the colonial centralised planning approach and continue to be influenced, predominantly, by western ways of doing and thinking, as elaborated in the section below.

Persistent dominance of western models and epistemologies: A case of SAGE social welfare programme for older people

A decade-long battle over implementation of cash transfers in Uganda was finally won by Britain's DFID in 2010 when the Ugandan Cabinet approved the piloting of a senior citizens grant programme – SAGE (Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment). In the early 2000s, donors led by the DFID and the IMF started 'selling' the idea of social protection and cash transfer programmes in Uganda and other African countries, claiming to be following their pro-poor mandate (Hickey & Bukenya, 2016). However, the idea of cash transfers in Uganda was vehemently rejected by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) for three reasons: affordability, sustainability and the donor-led character of the programmes (Hickey & Bukenya, 2016).

DFID needed a strategy to push through its social protection agenda. The strategy involved building a globalised policy coalition of senior government bureaucrats and international development agencies/donors. This team became a strong social protection constituency that advocated for SAGE in Uganda. Since the idea of social protection was new to Ugandan bureaucrats, the World Bank and DFID embarked on training and international visits for government bureaucrats, mainly from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), MoFPED and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). Training was conducted in Uganda and also overseas, including Paris where the Ugandan team went to train in the WB's preferred model of social risk management (Hickey & Bukenya, 2016).

Lynne, senior bureaucrat, describes this process of establishing SAGE:

> For the pilot of SAGE, we already had development partner funding [DFID funding], but we had to go to cabinet with a cabinet paper to justify why government should allow a piloting of a cash transfer program… it was about talking to the 'right' people, the decision makers, to bring them on board. We were also able to take some of them for international visits to other countries, where these programs are working.
>
> (Lynne, policy maker, Government)

Lynne recalls that they had to use multiple strategies including international visits and constant meetings to convince decision makers in Cabinet and Ministry of Finance to allow the implementation of the cash transfer programme. In 2010, a five-year pilot project was approved, funded by DFID, where each older person aged 65+ in the pre-selected 14 districts of Uganda was to be given 25,000 Ugandan shillings (UGX) per month ($8).

The cash transfer enabled older people to support the education of their grandchildren and to access health services.

> *Older people are now also economically active but they are also able, some of them, to support their grandchildren, to go back to school, participate in education which otherwise, they would not have been able to participate in because even if you*

> *have universal primary education, the challenge has been always with the scholastic materials. … They have been able to gain access to health services, even just transport to a health facility and better nutrition.*
>
> (Lynne, policy maker, Government)

Although the cash transfer has boosted the subjective wellbeing of the beneficiaries, the evidence shows little impact on poverty rates. The grant is very small, and the target is on the oldest, and not necessarily the poorest, in the community (Hickey & Bukenya, 2016; Angucia & Katusiimeh, 2015).

An evaluation was done in 2016 and a gradual national rollout of the programme was recommended. By 2020, SAGE is projected to cover 40 out of 121 districts. This time, the government was to co-fund SAGE together with DFID. However, SAGE is not a universal grant that covers all older people in Uganda. It is rather using 'age-based discrimination' by targeting the first 100 oldest people in a sub-county. The oldest are identified by looking at written records like birth dates on national identity cards, which demonstrates outright dependence on western ways of defining and identifying older people in contexts where birth registration is not a norm. It is not uncommon for older people lacking such written or accurate records to be excluded from the programme.

The SAGE programme has been severely constrained by inadequate funding, which is threatening its sustainability.

> *Every time the budget is read, there is a shortfall. Year in, year out there is a discrepancy in government budgeting. Even right now, like in 2017/18 budget framework, there is a shortfall of 12 billion (AU$4800) for SAGE. So, we are trying to engage the government while working with the Parliament and saying that, 'hey, look here, you committed yourself to this, you signed an agreement with the donors. So, do not make this a donor (kind) of program', such that the government can fully own it, support it and then sustain it, so that when the donors pull out, the program does not collapse.*
>
> (Josiah, policy advocate, NGO)

The Ugandan government's ownership of the programme, and its sustainability, is not clear. The lack of adequate funding has forced the government to adopt strategies to reduce the number of eligible older people to enrol into SAGE. Further restrictions have been proposed to increase the minimum age for older people to benefit from SAGE to 80 years (Busuulwa, 2019). This is about excluding the very poor and a majority of older people below this age, which puts into question the pro-poor mandate of the programme.

What is more concerning is that the cost and sustainability of the programme are exacerbated by the external management, which did not look to build capacity of the government ministry to run the programme. SAGE is managed by a London-based economics consultancy, Maxwell Stamp PLC, which is not only costly but has also raised concerns:

> [C]ontracting such a consultancy firm for five years is definitely expensive-is this a way of sending British money back home in the name of

> technical support? Couldn't Ugandans be trained to do what Maxwell is doing in the short or medium term or will the government of Uganda be forced to retain Maxwell forever if it decides to take over and rollout the programme?
>
> (Angucia & Katusiimeh, 2015, p. 11)

In short, western agencies, riding on their financial privilege, promote their western ideas and technologies as well as their firms to run these programmes, taking little or tokenistic recognition and use of local epistemologies. This is typical colonising practice that is yet to be acknowledged and addressed in social policy. What would happen in a decolonised practice is to develop a model of helping from the experience of the very poor people that these agencies are seeking to support. The next section presents some of the Indigenous models and initiatives that older women seek to be supported.

Older women's self-organised groups: Mutual helping groups as alternative model of social work practice

The ten older women in this study have spent a lifetime engaging in self-organised mutual aid groups through which they support each other to ameliorate social problems. The groups are embedded in *obuntu* philosophies of working collectively while also utilising available Indigenous knowledge and accumulated wisdom. The groups are not static but keep evolving to respond to emerging contemporary problems. Some of the mutual helping groups are demonstrated in the figure below.

Older women have been part of the broader community groups like *Bataka* groups, from which they have mobilised to form smaller groups like grandmothers' savings and loan groups, which respond to some of the structural barriers and problems such as exclusion from credit access because of age. I will use stories of two older women to demonstrate how the groups are organised, the problems that are addressed and the external support older women would want.

Prisca's story: *Bataka* and rotational farming groups

Prisca, 62, is married, with ten children. She has been caring for her husband, who has had a kidney disease for over eight years. She is also caring for two of her children still going to school in addition to her late sister's child. Prisca did not go to school because her parents were too poor to afford her school fees. She, like other older women in rural areas, depends on Indigenous knowledge passed on from her mother on how to do subsistence agriculture for a living. She has formed and taken on important roles in self-organised communal groups where members support each other and the community.

Prisca is the treasurer of their *Bataka* group, which is comprised of around 40 neighbouring households. The group provides mutual help in three ways: (i) provision of burial assistance, (ii) pursuing communal developmental and income generation projects, (iii) space for remobilisation for other smaller groups.

The original role of *Bataka* groups was mainly to provide burial assistance to a member who loses someone. Prisca below explains how group members pool together resources in cases of loss of any member:

You see what most people do here is to join groups, they are in different groups, like me I am in the one of Abataka, when we lose someone, we buy posho, beans, and we prepare the food for the mourners, we do not buy the coffin because there is another group we are in that does that.

Group members collectively bring together material assistance to support the bereaved family. Also, non-material support provided includes labour and highly responsive psychosocial support and counselling to their member.

When a member gets a problem, we are the first to be there and we have to spend three days with her. We sit with her; we cook food and make sure the mourners are okay.

It is a cultural and moral obligation and a sign of respect to provide a decent burial for the dead, which is why this group is important. Burial aid groups like Prisca's are common in most parts of Uganda and Africa in general (see Twesigye, Twikirize, Luwangula, & Kitimbo, 2019).

What is unique about this group is that Prisca and the members have decided to scale up the focus of their *Bataka* group beyond burial assistance to include developmental projects. They have bought land as a group and they are constructing rental houses to generate income for the group.

Now we are constructing a building with four rooms and we would like to complete them and rent them out, and in one room put in our things like saucepans.

As the group develops income-generating projects, it is also a space for mobilisation for the participants to form smaller groups to fulfil other functions. For example, Prisca mobilised other older women to form a rotational farming group comprised of 11 women. In this group they help each other, on a rotational basis, to till their fields, plant, weed and harvest crops.

Yes, I have benefited from it, you see where those beans are it is about two and half acres, with my little energy would I weed that whole garden and finish it? It would not be possible but when I invited them in just two days, we had finished the weeding.

Older women collectively share the tasks involved in cultivation, which helps their families have food security. After making their own gardens, the group is hired to dig by members in the community, for money which the members save as an emergency fund to help them in case of any problems like illnesses. There are related groups in the community which are dedicated to saving and lending money as discussed below.

Treasure's story: *Bamukaaka* (grandmothers) savings and credit groups

Treasure, 55, is a widowed woman currently caring for eight people in her household: six grandchildren, her daughter who separated from her husband and one son who is still in school. Treasure, like other older women, has been struggling to raise school fees for the children in her care. This has been exacerbated by the poor health (stomach ulcers) that has seen her hospitalised several times. She struggled to get transport and fees for the hospital bills. Four years ago, Treasure and 25 other older women decided to form a *biika oguze* group (saving and lending), where they would each save 1000 UGX (30 cents Australian), to help them in times of such emergencies. The cycle is 12 months, after which they share the money or buy household items, and then start a new group cycle.

The group has been helpful to older women in two ways. Firstly, it is a source of credit for older women who suffer structural and age-based discrimination from commercial banks and micro finance institutions. Because of their age, they are not regarded as credit worthy, and they also do not have property to use as collateral/security. Secondly, the money is used to buy household items which older women use in their everyday lives.

We share that money and sometimes some people may suggest that we buy things that help us in our homes, and then we buy them like plastic chairs, sometimes like saucepans, mattresses. The group has benefited me because like those chairs I would not have been able to buy them alone, and yet I had to take the child to school. At times I would borrow money from there and pay at school, and even use it to look after these other children.

Besides borrowing for their basics, grandmothers would like to engage in some income-generating projects like rearing goats. While they have been saving, because of cash poverty and a lot of emergencies from the members, they have not been able to fulfil their plans of accumulating savings for bigger

projects. This is where older women said they needed additional support to help them start up projects. Social workers in Uganda could respond to this, supporting older women to build on their achievements. However, where NGOs and government have decided to support such communities, the practice has been to by-pass the self-organised Associations and establish new groups like the Village Savings and Loan groups (VSLAs), which are externally driven and controlled by organisations (see Musinguzi, 2015). Older women are thus under pressure to run their self-organised groups and also to be members of the externally driven groups which they join in anticipation of some external support such as funding for group projects. Yet, in some government groups, older women have been excluded on the basis of their age; for example the current Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP) targets only women aged 15–65 years (Rupiny, 2016).

Unique principles governing the self-organised groups

The self-organised groups of older women were established and run following various principles, of which two will be discussed here: i) working as a collective as opposed to individualism, and ii) consensus decision making and operation based on trust and on unwritten but well-known rules.

Working as a collective as opposed to individualism

The groups follow collectivist values and work in solidarity to find local solutions for existing social problems. By sharing ideas and knowledges and pooling together material and non-material resources, older women with other community members have managed to navigate and survive structural barriers and problems including poverty, albeit with a need for some additional support. Collectivism is encouraged as opposed to individualism, and this is seen through knowledge transmitted through the different proverbs drawn on by that the members, as summarised below:

Runyankole proverb	**English description not direct translation**
Orunyatsi rumwe rwaruuga aha'nju terikuutura	When a blade of grass falls off a grass-thatched house, it does not cause the house to start leaking especially if the other grass continues to stick together.
ageetereine niigo gaata Iguufa	People who work together accomplish even the hardest/ impossible tasks, just like all the teeth working together can break a bone compared to what each individual tooth can do.
kamwe kamwe nigwo muganda	One by one makes a bundle (if each one brings the little they have, it creates a pool that can help many).

The encompassing principle in working together is that it reflects humanness or the cultural philosophy and moral value of *obuntu*, where community members are expected to co-exist and support each other during hard but also

good times. The emphasis is on unity, cooperation and solidarity, rather than on individualism. This does not mean that individuality, personal will and unique identities are not appreciated and recognised, but rather "the individual cannot develop outside the context of the community and the welfare of the community requires the talents and initiatives of individual members … the individual has two responsibilities: one to the individual him/herself, and the other to the community" (Osei-Hwedie, 2007, p. 5). Individual responsibility to the community receives less emphasis in western social work, which instead emphasises responsibility to the individual.

Consensus decision making and operation based on trust and unwritten but well-known rules

Older women's self-organised groups operate on trust and unwritten rules and regulations, decided through a consensus. There are two reasons why these rules are unwritten. Firstly, in the oral tradition, a man's or woman's word is as good as the written word. Therefore, whatever is agreed in the groups becomes an accepted rule, whether this is written down or not. Secondly, most of the older women and others in rural areas can't read or write, and therefore verbal agreement is the norm which everyone is trusted to obey. Through consensus, sanctions and fines are also set for those who disobey, and every group member is each other's 'police'. Group members are accountable to each other. For instance, in *Bataka* groups, those who disobey the group rules agreed on in *Bataka* group meetings are punished through exclusion from the group (*okucwa*). In such cases, all group members agree not to help that person when they have a problem or lose someone. This means that no one will come to provide psychosocial support, or support for burial. If admitted to hospital, no one will come to see that person in the hospital or help with the chores or care of family left home. This exclusion is the last sanction after several warnings from the group, and every group member dreads this punishment more than they do arrest by the police, because this means that the person has been stripped of their membership and belongingness to the community, and this is of great value not only for individuals but also for communal wellbeing. Through consensus, groups have set their rules and agreements which have helped to keep the community cohesive and which ensure mutual trust. These principles are all embedded in *obuntu* philosophies, which represent an important potential framework for social work in Africa.

Mutual Helping and *Obuntu*: An alternative knowledge framework for African social work

There is growing consensus among African scholars that *obuntu* or *ubuntu* is a potential philosophical framework for social work in Africa (Mugumbate & Andrew, 2013; Mupedziswa, Rankopo, & Mwansa, 2019). These scholars have discussed extensively the concept and its application in social work.

This chapter has presented the case of mutual helping done by older women together with other community members, and this is embedded in the principles of *obuntu* which include working collectively, caring, sharing, cooperating and consensus decision making.

Therefore, adopting *obuntu* as the foundational knowledge framework for social work in Uganda is likely to make a difference in social work practice, education and research.

I) It will help us to teach and practise social work that we are able to explain to our local people, using language and terminologies or philosophies they can understand, rather than western concepts.
II) Social workers can then use *obuntu* as a tool for community mobilisation, for *validating* and encouraging self-organisation and self-help that is already being undertaken in the communities. The role of social workers would be to facilitate and find additional aid to support the already existing initiatives in the communities, as demonstrated by older women who seek modest support for their initiatives.
III) *Obuntu* philosophies are passed on from generation to generation through stories, proverbs, taboos and totems, all embedded in the oral tradition. Social workers interested in decolonisation need to examine and incorporate this Indigenous literature in social work theory and practice with the communities. In social work education, exploring with social work students the proverbs and stories from diverse communities would ground the teaching in epistemologies that students and the communities understand and live by.
IV) In social work research, adopting relational and *obuntu*-based methodologies like those embedded in African storytelling and oral tradition provides alternatives to the western-based methodologies that dominate academia (Chilisa, 2012).

Western social work learning from non-western social work

I am compelled to write this section because of Midgley's concern that "it is unforgivable that western schools of social work still accept students from [the] 'Third World' without providing courses which are suited to their needs" (Midgley, 1981, p. 173). Australia is a destination for many international students, some coming to pursue master's degrees in social work. Most of them are admitted under a Master of Social Work (qualifying) programme, such as the one at the university where I teach. Students are pursuing two pathways with this programme: there is a group of students who seek knowledge to practise social work in Australia and other western countries, but there is also a group of students who genuinely want to go back to their countries to 'make a positive difference'. Those who stay in Australia may work with multicultural communities of refugees and immigrants. Thus, for western social work educators, the question to ponder is whether current educational practice

adequately meets the needs of the two groups of students. From my experience, western social work still predominates in this programme and little or no voice or content is given to exploring social work as done differently in those other contexts where students wish to practice. Thus, the risk of perpetuating 'west-to-the-rest' or 'west-is-best' knowledge is high. The challenge for western social work educators is to teach international students social work in a way that does not perpetuate cultural or epistemological imperialism and colonialism, but values and encourages voices about diverse social work. It is not uncommon to find some students not actively participating in discussions, because they have no experience of the context assumed in the curriculum, yet pedagogy that relates to and shows interest in social work as understood in their contexts may see them engaging and learning. It is important for international students to learn western social work, but it is equally important for these students to engage in multicultural exchanges about social work in other contexts, so that they can explore ways to start from what they have in their countries to achieve the social work to which they aspire. In addition, multicultural Australia has students, immigrants and refugees coming from communal or collective communities. Some of these people have knowledge and skills in self-organisation and self-help. Social workers therefore need to facilitate and encourage them to engage in such Indigenous ways of being and helping.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the enduring resilience of *obuntu*-embedded models of helping and thinking that remain relevant but highly marginalised in social work practice and education in Uganda. The chapter has also demonstrated the endemic and persistent dominance of western models of helping perpetuated by international agencies from a position of financial privilege. This is the endemic colonising practice that must be acknowledged and addressed to centre voices of local people to inform policy and programme design. Although older women may be poor and illiterate, they have self-organisation skills and have already established initiatives that they seek to be supported, and in their context decolonising means building on their experience rather than 're-inventing the wheel', putting at the centre their voices. Social work education continues to uncritically perpetuate and celebrate the triumph of colonialism by continuing to marginalise non-western ways of doing and helping. This colonialism must be acknowledged, addressed and dismantled, so that a more inclusive and decolonised social work, giving equal weight to 'other' perspectives, can be developed.

Comment by Iris Silva-Brito and Goetz Ottmann

In Australia, the internationalisation of social work education is raising several issues for academics, field educators and students alike. Sharlotte Tusasiirwe's chapter is timely, relevant and a significant contribution to this conversation. In it, she discusses two distinct topics: 1) the content of western social work courses

and its relevance to practice in non-western countries, and 2) western social work pedagogy in light of the internationalisation of social work education.

The content of western social work education

Tusasiirwe's chapter, among other key points, draws our attention to the colonialist aspects of social work education. The chapter shows a disturbing reality: an apparent disconnect between social work theory and practice. In the example of social workers from non-western countries upon graduating from educational institutions, instead of fighting for social justice and social change, their practice continues to perpetuate colonialist and oppressive practices by developing or implementing programmes without questioning their relevance for the population they are aimed at.

Whereas, at a conceptual level, many social work schools have accepted and even embraced decolonisation, social work practice appears stubbornly unaffected by the decolonisation agenda. For instance, despite the attempts of many authors to bring to light the various facets of a global social work history (Noble, Pease and Ife, 2017; Mendes, 2005; Healy, 2008), the western origin of the discipline still dominates the curriculum literature and classroom discussions. And many examples of relevant social work approaches and principles of social organisation developed in the Global South are not included in our social work canon currently dominated by tired models derived from counselling and psychology.

Furthermore, deeply embedded in social work education are the modern liberal mantras of development, growth, progress, capacity building and empowerment. Applied to the Global South, these mantras are transformed into signs of weakness, lack of development and lack of ethical and moral integrity, creating a hierarchy that is cemented by geopolitical power relationships and transnational financial organisations. Tusasiirwe's chapter shows that decolonisation can happen at 'the grassroots'. It can be autopoietic or 'assisted' by walking alongside communities. It can be scaled up to become decolonised institutional knowledge. But this requires the translation of threads of knowing into a fabric of knowledge that is anchored in a forest of laws, policies and scientific truths. During the up-scaling process, it is easy to lose sight of the most disadvantaged. They no longer lead the conversation and are merely 'consulted' and 'represented'. Tusasiirwe's chapter highlights that the decolonisation process only remains authentic if they are involved, consulted and able to work collaboratively in designing their future through the shaping of social work practice and education.

Social work pedagogy in light of the internationalisation of social work education

Tusasiirwe's chapter touches on another dilemma. Social work courses in the Global North are flooded by socially privileged international students seeking

the status and possibilities of a western education. If they return home, they carry with them fragments of a colonising education that will again compete with and possibly delegitimise local ways of knowing. How can western social work be decolonised in a fashion that is relevant for social work practice both in the Global South and in the Global North?

Tusasiirwe's chapter highlights that some forms of epistemological pluralism are needed if we are to take decolonisation seriously. Scholarships for less privileged students, alternative assessment modes, recognition of lived experience and acknowledgement of thought/language systems that make the translation of key concepts difficult would be just the beginning. Changing AASW guidelines, legislation and workplaces to create the possibility for alternative epistemic approaches to be valued in practice would be the next step. Current western social work education often emphasised written work to the detriment of other forms of knowledge expression such as storytelling, drama, video and so on. Jim Ife further explores this topic in Chapter 2 of this volume. Given that the capacity to articulate thoughts in one language may not be easily translated into another one, where should the focus of knowledge assessment lie? How should educational institutions assess students? When in the field, international students are faced with a variety of obstacles, including the fact that field educators are more and more resisting requests for field education supervision. Recent research shows that field educators tend to refer to the experience of supervising international students as negative (Ross, Ta, Grieve, 2019). While field educators are committed to social work education and to the profession, and want to prepare students for practice, they not only struggle with difference and acceptance, they also struggle with the need to comply with standards for social work education that leave very little room to accommodate alternative social work practice let alone a plurality of epistemologies.

Within an Australian context, social workers often work with people from an Indigenous background. And while the fact that Indigenous knowledges differ from the mainstream has resulted in the acceptance that social work practice needs to be 'culturally safe', this has rarely translated into a more profound questioning of mainstream social work practice. As a result, Indigenous epistemologies are treated as an exotic 'other' that is incorporated into the mainstream by means of a handful of processes and procedures. Indeed, the fact that many social workers are very comfortable with their epistemological assumptions and have not yet questioned their practice is worrying. Social work professionals must be deprogrammed to think and practice in institutionalising ways that contradict the essential principles of the profession – social justice and respect, which ought to include epistemological plurality. If it does not, the decolonising message will be at best, incoherent.

Tusasiirwe's chapter assists us in an attempt to broaden the discussions about the decolonisation of social work by providing us with examples that highlight the contradictions in our profession and that point us towards ways we might be able to resolve them – *obuntu*.

Comment by Jioji Ravulo

I greatly enjoyed reading though this chapter, as it resonates with my own personal and professional commitment to the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in social work. Despite the challenges we face globally in having our voices validated amongst a backdrop of westernised discourses evident in my own countries of heritage (Fiji & Australia), I am encouraged by the shared courage to push ahead and disrupt whiteness.

Similar to *obuntu*, the Fijian culture is influenced by the concept of *solesolevaki* and the role of the collective in ensuring wellbeing for all. In my writings across the area of *Pacific Social Work*, an emphasis is placed on working with individuals, families and the wider community in the context of their cultural ways of knowing and doing, being and becoming. It's within this approach that true development can occur, that in turn supports outcomes that are tailored to the people we are working *with*, not *for* or *over*. We also strive to critically challenge oppressive structures, unhelpful cultural dynamics and personal problems that perpetuate marginality within contemporary settings.

As suggested by Sharlotte, such issues have occurred within Indigenous communities due to the ongoing rampant devaluing of Indigenous perspectives through colonial discourses. Funding is still in the remit of what the funders want, not necessarily the community itself, their respective needs and ways of resolving concerns.

Utilising local knowledges to maintain connection to space and place, and live subsistently with the land is a positive way to go. The need to further promote traditional approaches across our contemporary Pacific spaces is ever more necessary, especially with rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and our overreliance on energy-dense nutritionally poor (EDNP) imported products that are costly to purchase on low hourly rates people strive to earn across long working hours. Surely such exploitative capitalistic approaches should be challenged, changed and eventually reshaped to ensure fairness is at the forefront rather than profits. If not, and over time, we perpetuate reliance on colonial structures often violent in nature and reinforce paternalistic patterns of power and control.

However, there is hope, and Sharlotte has provided two excellent case studies to highlight the practical manner in which Indigenous perspectives can be integrated into contemporary societies. The first case study stems from cultural practices around collective grief sharing and support, evolving more broadly into other development projects that are encouraging, empowering and enriching and where local communities actively generate income to be shared more broadly. The second case study explores the notion of collectively owning items as a means to prosper together. Reciprocal living at its best. TRUST and age-old practices underpin the approach through consensus. I was further impressed by the use of summary concepts alongside proverbs in Runyankole, which also helps to disrupt whiteness by visually challenging our realities of esteeming English as our official language across our colonised

countries. We should be more intentional across social work in utilising different languages, words and their concepts to disrupt the dominant discourse perpetuated in our discipline, and to be more than just paying lip service to diversity.

Overall, I'm constantly reminded of the value of Indigenous perspectives, their ways of knowing, doing, being and becoming and how that can be meaningfully utilised in contemporary practices, policies and research and implemented across all communities. This includes scope for westernised systems and their structures to be readily influenced by such tradition, which can also transform individualistic approaches to become more collectively oriented. Rather than western epistemologies dominating discourses, I believe we can aim to create a shared space that enables multiple discourses to be formed, enabling more inclusive and robust societies that embrace diversity and its differences. In turn, this would challenge whiteness at its core, dismantling its harsh elements that marginalise many.

Also: *challenge accepted* to create social work education that is more inclusive of diverse perspectives! Through my relatively new role at the University of Wollongong, which includes overseeing the Master of Social Work (qualifying) course, I have intentionally emphasised a need to incorporate three additional underlying tenets to support overarching course learning outcomes: 1) explore and include global Indigenous knowledges, 2) utilise international literature (not just Australian or western sources), and 3) ensure that cultural diversity and its differences are reflected across case studies and topics. As all subjects are core social work subjects, with no electives, this has provided tangible scope to create, develop and directly influence each subject to embed all three tenets across individual subject learning outcomes. Rather than relegate Indigenous, international and diversity content as separate, stand-alone individual subjects, we are actively striving to ensure that all subject content is being influenced by such tenets. To date, we have found our international students (generally 50% of our southwest Sydney campus cohort) encouraged to see their own ethnic, cultural and national origins valued and validated, and empowered to actively call on their own experiences to further shape classroom conversations and content. Domestic students are also challenged to critically reflect beyond their own contexts, and to deconstruct social work beyond its westernised origins. Collectively, our MSW(Q) degree encourages all students to then reconstruct, redefine and relate more broadly to a profession striving to make a difference whilst understanding their own individual commitment to counteracting power imbalances created by whiteness and its associated privileging.

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6 To know is to exist

Epistemic resistance

Lobna Yassine

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that more thought is required around not only what is known, but about what is permissible/acceptable to know, and what is *made permissible* to know. My imagined audience is those who lack epistemological authority by virtue of their racial marking. Although it is tempting to focus on subordination, I have chosen to instead focus on domination, and on making this tangible through use of a personal example. This choice is perfectly described by Toni Morrison who said "my project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (1993, p. 90). This chapter is not about 'us' (Muslims or anyone else marked by race), but rather about them: those accepted as white, and about how it might look to Other whiteness.

In saying this, I am also conscious of my own privilege as somebody who is not Indigenous, as somebody who is white in relation to Indigenous people, but as 'Other' to the white settler. I am also aware that I am somebody who holds epistemological privilege in the very writing of this chapter. I want to use this platform to suggest that there is perhaps nothing more troubling or distressing when *you know* but that knowing is deemed illegitimate because it is not validated by the white institutions within which you live, work and study. I am learning to master the art of *knowing* and hope to use this space for 'talking-back' (hooks, 1989; Moreton-Robinson, 2000) to systems of oppression, and moving towards 'liberated voice' even in the face of fear (hooks, 1989). As an early career academic, my opinions leave me professionally vulnerable; however, in the words of Audre Lorde, "it is not difference that immobilises us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken" (1984: 44). This is my attempt at mobilising by speaking, not just as a social worker but also as a Muslim woman who talks back, challenges, refuses to behave and refuses to accept the place that I have been assigned; that of the 'good Muslim'. I am here to cause a disturbance, and so this is a political act. In any conversation about fighting and resistance, I must mention the work of First Nations people who have already expressed my thoughts about social work and whiteness. Social

work in Australia remains dominated by white middle-class women who represent the benevolent colonial experts that continue to marginalise voices of First Nations people and people of colour. As such, those that have written about social work and whiteness previously must be acknowledged, such as Maggie Walter, Sandra Taylor, Daphne Habibis, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Susan Young, Bindi Bennett, Joanna Zubrzycki, Violet Bacon and Sue Green (Walter et al., 2013; Bennett et al., 2011; Young and Zubrzycki, 2011; Young, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Briskman, 2016; Tascón, 2004). They have formed much of my thinking-through this process, and so I owe them a great deal.

I also want to explicitly discuss how whiteness wields power, and what that means for people of colour who practice as social workers. I am speaking about whiteness because social work is a space dominated by whiteness, and racial privilege is structured into and legitimised within Australian social work. It is important that I define how I am using the terms 'white people' and 'whiteness'. I understand white people as a political behaviour, and as a political category. I am referring to the unequal distribution of power, and about who is included or excluded along racialised lines. I understand white as an institution rather than an individual person.

Muslim knowledges

Being a Muslim has led me to a form of social work that is different. In writing about my work, mostly with young Muslims, I do not claim authenticity just because I am Muslim, but rather suggest that there are practices and epistemologies that speak to the specificities of Muslim young people and of the marginalisation of Muslims in Australia. It is also to suggest that there are multiple and various epistemologies available outside of Eurocentric ones. I am attempting to expand the limits of social work practice, and to support and make space for counterhegemonic knowledges at work. This involves actively questioning, challenging and taking risks and maintaining practices that sustain us.

I have been either indirectly contributing to youth programmes, or actively co-facilitating and adapting youth programmes, specifically with young Muslims in Sydney, Australia. Here I share what resistance to white social work looks like *in practice*. Many of the practices I outline were *all* constructed in collaboration with Muslim colleagues, and in particular with my friend and colleague Ola El-Hassan. At face value, it might appear as though we simply 'culture' and 'adapt' programmes; however, what are doing is establishing alternative ways of knowing, working, and resisting and transforming ideas of 'professional', of 'engagement' of 'care', of 'learning' and of 'justice'. Here are some examples:

1. *Love, food and power*

   In Ola's youth programme, an entire day was dedicated to cooking together with young people. Cooking a common cultural dish, from

scratch, brings a certain kind of love into the space. I was present at the last cooking session, and observed young men cooking, laughing and talking together with their head chef: Arwa El Masri, a woman from the community who cooks beautiful food and reminds the young people about the Islamic etiquettes of being in the kitchen, such as saying *bismillah* prior to preparing food, and the value placed on hygiene, and not wasting food. Of food, Arwa says:

> [O]n a broader scale, I believe it can bring communities together and encourage conversations. …The old saying 'to break bread together' means something profound to me, because if you share a meal with someone you have shared far more than food; you are sharing a moment in which you stop and sit together, a moment to feed not only the body but also the soul. From then on you are linked".
>
> (El Masri, 2011, xii)

In Ola's youth programmes, a large chunk of the budget is spent on lunch for the young people. As Muslims, we express love through food, and through the sharing of food. Typically, food is the least thought-about aspect of group programmes, especially when working with young people. For both Ola and me, it is central to the running of the programme. Through food, we are showing love, and respect, for the young people. Hospitality is cherished in Islamic culture, and so Ola always introduces herself as 'hosting' the young people, and positions them as 'guests' whose company we seek and appreciate. In this way, we also hope to shift some of the power, because in Islamic culture, a guest takes priority and their needs are given the utmost attention.

2. *Nurture, warmth and love*

A lot has already been said by bell hooks in her book *all about love* and her work around the politics of love. In mainstream social work, love is not only deemed irrelevant, but also deemed as dangerous. In our work, Ola and I draw specifically on an ethic of love to work with our young people and position love as a 'radical' component to our work. So how is this expressed? Mainly via the use of language, tone, affection and nurturing. For example, we may at times communicate in Arabic terms of endearment that older people often use with younger people. Many people from Arab backgrounds would mostly associate these terms with love from an elder, such as a mother or grandparent. The young people always seem to respond positively to this. This affectionate way of working could easily be interpreted as 'blurring the boundaries'; however, the boundaries being blurred were not of our making to begin with. We are brushing up against boundaries that do not belong to us, and do not work for us. We could not work *without* moving out of the designated boundaries.

This reminds me of my Pacific Islander sisters who I learned so much from when I was working for juvenile justice. They were often described as having a *lack* of boundaries when working with other Pacific Islander families because they went 'overboard' in their caring roles. They conducted home visits outside of hours to accommodate families, spent more time 'than usual' visiting families because they knew it required gentle patience, and outwardly expressed affection and love for the children and families they worked with. Rather than seeing this as an appropriate, and in fact more productive, way of working, they were relegated to white understandings of 'caring' and of 'professionalism', and eventually 'pulled up' for this. The Eurocentricity of social work and its close scrutiny of workers' boundaries, and in turn, a worker's ability to remain 'professional', disguises the fact that *rigid* boundaries are also cultural; they are white. Describing white ways of working as 'professional' positions and maintains white as rational and objective and maintains white privilege and authority over knowledge.

3. *Music and rap: Engagement and politicising*

I have used music to engage with young people, especially those of colour, for over ten years now. I specifically draw on rap music to discuss serious issues and have carried this into youth programmes. Growing up Muslim in Australia, rap music was a huge part of my identity, and in fact, it politicised me. Tupac and the Notorious BIG said things that I was thinking but unable to articulate as a younger woman. The artist's criticism of 'the system' was largely relatable and validating. Perhaps not surprisingly, more than two decades later, I am working with young Muslims who listen to the *same* music and the same rappers. Instead of censoring this type of music and deeming it 'inappropriate', it is used to connect with young people on a personal and political level, and to garner their understanding about systems of oppression. I use music to gauge their social consciousness, and to encourage it along.

4. *Communal prayer, and Islamic grief and loss*

Prayer is often an important component when I'm working in groups, and the young people often ask if they can partake in communal prayer. Most young people decide to join in, perhaps not only for the religious aspect, but for the sake of feeling a part of the group. Hearing the call for prayer made by a young Muslim participant, and then standing alongside one another, is an almost automatic and immediate form of connection on a spiritual level. Spiritual connection has been explicitly restricted in my past jobs. For example, when I was working in juvenile justice, employees could not attend the funerals of those clients who had died. This (white) policy was void of cultural respect and the importance of being physically

present for the young person who had died, and for their family. I vividly recall the mother of a young Muslim woman, whom I had temporarily worked with, visit the office sometime after her daughter's funeral. When I went to greet her with a hug and a kiss, as Muslims do, she fell into my arms and began to sob. She asked me if her daughter would be admitted into heaven, and that she had doubted this considering the circumstances of her daughter's death. I reassured her that her daughter would absolutely be in heaven, and spoke of Allah's love, compassion and mercy. We together sent her daughter a gift through the reading of *surat Al-Fatiha*, a Quranic chapter often read for somebody that has died. I then suggested that we form a group of women to read the entire Quran on behalf of her daughter's soul, a common practice when a Muslim has died. The local Muslim community in Sydney now has a group that facilitates the reading of the Quran for Muslims who request this on behalf of their loved ones. Then we began to discuss setting up a charity fund in her daughter's name, another common practice amongst Muslims. This is our language of grief. In that instance, professional discourse could have restricted me from this raw and humane moment. Instead, I attended to my own Islamic understandings of grief and loss, and of 'care' for this heartbroken mother. This 'care' entailed a shared love of her daughter, shared tears, shared memories and a shared understanding of Allah's love and mercy. For this mother, her healing could not only be understood in terms of Eurocentric ideas of grief and loss, but where intimately connected with spirituality and spiritual healing. This is a sorely missed area in social work education and practice.

5. *Contextualising racism and justice*

When working with any marginalised communities, apart from making the acknowledgement of country, social work practice and knowledge-production rarely involves an active and conscious effort to embed context and history into its core function. I am a migrant settler and although I may struggle with racialised subordination, I continue to benefit from the colonised lands and resources of First Nations people. As such, most of the young Muslims I work with are in a similar position. To provide context into our shared socio-political locations, I often frame social justice in terms of colonisation by linking the devastation of colonisation (past and present forms) to current forms of oppression and marginalisation. When I ask the young people to consider what hopes they hold for themselves and others, I encourage them to consider hopes they hold for First Nations people too. This more than often leads to rich conversations around social justice, and shared struggles. They already come from strong beliefs around charity and 'giving back' due to their Islamic roots, and so I capitalise on this and have them think about *collective* hope, and try to create an understanding that for their hopes to be 'just', they

must be tied to hopes of others having 'justice' too. For example, in the most recent group that Ola and I facilitated, a young man wrote, "Inshallah a law comes in to help the Aboriginal people with racism and poverty issues". Another wrote, "I hope Indigenous children build a better life" after hearing about the suicide rates in those communities. In social work practice, struggles are often disconnected and decontextualised, and therefore so is freedom and emancipation. These are rendered individual projects. In my work with young Muslims, I hope to teach them that there can be no freedom or equality until others who suffer from racial subordination are also made free. We try to create a space where Muslim young people may bear witness to the suffering of others and bring attention to conditions of subjugation that impact them as well as First Nations people. I do not wish to exaggerate the impact of this in my work with young people, nor do I explicitly announce this, because to do so would potentially mean being excluded from various community grants and support. Instead, this is threaded implicitly into my work, ever so quietly and persistently.

6. *Fighting, love and self-care*

In my role as a social work educator, students often ask about 'self-care', a concept that has become increasingly popular in social work. Amongst my Muslim friends who are in some way fighting for justice during work hours, and outside work hours within their own communities, I have often discussed how *self*-care often occurs *with* the people that we work for, because we are ourselves suffering from racialised oppression on some level. It sounds antithetical, but we find healing and 'care' in our collective fight against racism, because we know that caring is fighting. We fight for what we care for. The persistent protests, the resistances and collective struggles are a form of self-care for us. We feel despair, genuine fear and distress over the injustices that others are facing here in Australia, those in off-shore detention, and more globally. 'Self-care' is probably for many of us the last thing we consider because we cannot afford to put a pause on caring for one another collectively. That is not to say that we do not find our individual ways of 'switching off' at times (and even that highlights a certain type of privilege), but when we do switch off, it is often with the purpose of refuelling our energy and passion, ready to fight harder the following day. It is not for the purpose of watering down our sense of justice or accepting and accommodating injustice. The common term for 'self-care' often encourages individual forms of caring for oneself, and also disconnection from the people we work for. No recognition is given to those whose work *is* their life. For example, for Ola and me, our 'work' continues well into the evening and after hours, whether that be through reading, writing, learning or 'unpacking'. For us, self-care is relational. This is another way that we show love, because we fight for what we love.

7. *The non-human world*

In the Tree of Life programme (see El-Hassan and Yassine, 2017), we utilise the tree metaphor to discuss 'roots' (histories), 'trunk' (skills and strengths), 'branches' (hopes), 'leaves' (significant people) and 'fruits' (gifts). In this programme, it was a relatively natural transition to bring the trees and forests to life, as the natural world is important to Muslims. We often reference Islamic knowledge regarding the 'rights', and benefits afforded to plants and trees in Islam. How might ideas like this push the boundaries in terms of how and what we use to heal? How might we begin to make space for ideas like this, alongside the Western biomedical lens to issues such as trauma?

8. *(Re)connection to community*

Typically, and for young people in particular, once they face struggles they are further removed from their communities, and help is sought outside of their communities, for example, within schools, police and justice and mental health services. State intervention dominates their lives. In my work, I adapt programmes to resist this. For example, I have facilitated youth programmes that involve adults from the community who share similar stories of strength, resilience, loss, love and struggles. It involves the tracing of roots and histories, and the transferring of stories, from one generation to the next, of resistance and of healing. The aim is to foster a sense of belonging to a community. This is reflected in the one words of a young person who said "we now feel like the community cares for us. We didn't know this before". I also try to alter the physical environment. Connection and healing do not occur in a 'professional' space with a single professional worker. To counteract this, we sit under a tree for example, on the ground and on prayer mats, to emphasise the connection between healing and nature. We may also sit around a bonfire with mentors from the community. I recall a young person who spoke specifically about what it was like to hear an elder speak about his own insecurities about 'failure'. The young person said that hearing this was one of the best experiences of his life. What I recognised early on is that caring and 'help' can be more effective when shared, and that the more the community participated, the richer the experience was. 'Care' was expanded beyond just me, and certainly beyond the one-on-one work that social work often entails. Caring is a communal act. As such, mentors from the community are always part of youth programmes.

Such innovations have not been easy, and there have been restrictions. I am well aware and overly conscious of the political nature of my work, and in fact of the existence of Muslims in Australia. There have been a number of times I have purposely 'shut down' conversations with young people in order to protect them from consequences. For example,

any conversations or questions that pertain to overseas conflicts, or local politics, such as the political commentary in 2016 about banning Muslim migration, may have been deemed as 'dangerous' or 'too political'. I find myself fearful of interventions in young people's lives since they are already treated as dangerous or threatening. I could not include certain conversations with young people, even within this chapter, due to politics. This certainly silences certain knowledges and demonstrates the power/knowledge nexus that Foucault speaks to. Power drowns out knowledge, which brings me back to my initial suggestion that it is important for us to question what is *permissible* to become knowledge. I often wonder what these spaces would have offered if power was not so relevant.

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) case study

How do these ways of thinking, doing and being get diminished by traditional white social work? And, how have they not been valued and disseminated? My interest is in how these ways of knowing, being and doing get diminished by acts of institutionalised epistemic violence. Drawing on an example, I hope to bring attention to how white race privilege operates, how it works to silence and devalue other knowledges, and what happens when white people are positioned as experts and knowers, and as gate-keepers to what are considered legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge. In using a direct personal example, I am attempting to make power as tangible as possible and to demonstrate how white domination is affirmed. The practice of speaking and naming a problem has the power to bring it to life. Like Tascón (2008), I believe that the 'personal' and the 'everyday' "are the sites where the (re) production of racialised privilege as normalised may be demonstrated most clearly" (p. 256). It is in the everyday practices that voice, political participation and self-determination are deactivated. Racism and examples of how power is circulated are often difficult to pin down and therefore difficult to challenge. This is one attempt at this.

In March 2019, a few days following the horrific Christchurch attacks in which a white man murdered 51 Muslim worshippers in a mosque, I wrote a letter to the AASW to express a grievance. My grievance was with the association's decision to participate in a governmental initiative around Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programmes in Australia. These programmes are preventative in nature, with the supposed aims of stunting potential 'homegrown' terrorism. With the uptake of phrases such as 'Living Safe Together' and 'Helping Communities', CVE programmes draw on the resources of community to 'counter' violent extremism. On the ground, this means community initiatives and programmes that focus on 'cohesion', 'resilience' and training professionals to become 'aware' of radicalisation.

According to myself and other concerned Muslim social workers in the community, promoting CVE in any shape or form, and training social workers

on 'violent extremism', as though violent extremism is uncontentious, is and will impact Australian Muslims in particular[1]. Despite its 'neutral' appearance, CVE rhetoric is entrenched in the public imaginary of the 'at-risk' Muslim terrorist. The ease at which 'Muslim' and 'potential terrorist' are being pushed together is via a number of avenues, CVE being one of those.

There are many more examples that I could include to demonstrate the inherent racism of CVE that dehumanises Muslims (youth in particular) and fixes violent extremism to Muslims. I do not suggest that there should be an equal focus on white supremacist violence, but rather that this is allowed to occur *because* of white supremacy. The settler state of Australia cannot be disconnected from its history. Not only was Australia born out of white supremacist terrorism, it has built and sustains it. CVE is another tool of the settler state to enact violence on marginalised people.

The violence of CVE operates on a broader level to reproduce institutional racism and privilege and to naturalise whiteness. The AASW CVE training programme, which I and other Muslim social workers have been privy to, shocked us by its content and the extent the creators have gone to in order to prove how *non*-racist the programme is. However, the subtext is in the violent extremist Muslim (and mostly male Muslim) that comes to mind, despite that this is never explicitly stated. Social workers are being trained to watch for a list of 'radicalisation triggers', which include "experiencing discrimination or social unfairness" and "overseas events that harm *their* community, family or friends" (my emphasis). I am curious to know who 'their' refers to since Anglo-Australians consider themselves as being 'home' in Australia.

As such, I had brought lived experience, and knowledge, directly to the AASW. I was essentially asking the AASW to abandon the partnership with the government because of its underlying discursive and material impacts. Essentially, the AASW had decided that this was not a racist programme, and that it was best to continue on with it, despite my claims that it would hurt Muslims. Confronting the AASW with knowledge that they are participating in a racist regime was difficult since social work is purported as anti-racist, and mostly benevolent and caring. I wondered how the association might accommodate my grievance if they are unable to associate social work with racism, or social work itself *as* a racist practice. It quickly became clear that the AASW is able to control definitions of racism and have become gate-keepers to what is defined and accepted as racist. They are the final arbiter of what is counted as racism and *because* they consider themselves 'anti-racist' they maintain a legitimacy that I cannot question or challenge. Ultimately, their knowing automatically invalidated my knowing. It also seems that the AASW is claiming epistemic authority simply because Muslims had attended the training. Only those Muslim participants

1 For the original letter contact me directly, and for further information about the specifics of these partnerships, see Yassine and Briskman (2019).

who attended the training are seen to be speaking for all Muslims, whereas because I disagree with the programme, I am not considered an authority on this issue. Dyer (1997) states:

> There is no more powerful position than that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race.
>
> (Dyer, 1997, p. 2)

In accepting the partnership with the government, the AASW is considered to be acting on behalf of all social workers, and by virtue of its white race privilege it is able to speak for all, and is positioned as a universal voice. It is not seen to be speaking for whiteness and is privileging white social work to the exclusion of other world views.

This type of response and others of 'benevolence' work to mask the power differentials and denies the fact that CVE was established for 'the Muslim' (violent or not) and the soft-policing of social workers as agents of the state. It is these types of responses which function to further marginalise and exclude those who have differing opinions, or as Fredericks (2009) says, "[T]hey want us but not our opinions". The AASW want the 'good Muslim' who participated in the training without question, and without causing a fuss. They want the 'good Muslim' who enables and maintains the 'goodness' of the Association, the 'good Muslim' who they can then attest 'embraced' this training, and is therefore evidence that it is not in fact racist. The mere presence of the 'good Muslim' disproves and undoes accusations of racism.

The incapacity of the AASW to listen to or hear the 'Other' enforces and projects its own Eurocentric knowledges and ideals of what 'justice' means, of what 'inclusion' means and of what 'racist' means, while the Other remains unseen and unheard. Ultimately, my grievance is considered an illegitimate one, but perhaps by participating in the process, as they suggest, I may come to see the programme as they do, and therefore be silenced. What this example does is elucidate how silence functions and how power is embedded in social work. And despite the widespread critique of CVE programmes (Aly, 2013; Morsi, 2017; Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011; Abdel-Fattah, 2019; Latham, 2018), it is the AASW that holds what is considered 'legitimate knowledge' that underpins and maintains their power (Fredericks, 2009).

Urging me to become part of the process insinuates that I am getting in the way of this 'important' project that appears to be a 'way forward'. This brings to mind Audre Lorde, who said:

> When women of Colour speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are 'creating a mood of helplessness', 'preventing white women from getting past guilt', or 'standing in the way of trusting communication and action'.
>
> (1984, 131)

The AASW have accepted CVE as natural, necessary and inevitable, but they accept this at the expense of others, who had no part in the process itself. This way of working reproduces and sustains systems of racial oppression. It is important to note that this is as much about feminism as it is about race and about how white women *become* the patriarchy. In 2019, Sarah Malik tweeted:

> The strategies involve infantilising/patronising and suggesting they know better, by using their power to talk over you, talk 'for' you and dominate the space, and by gaslighting and implying that you are naïve for pointing out the problem.

I knew a lot of details prior to writing to the AASW; I knew the intricacies and the history of how the programme began, and the process that followed. Yet, in their response, I am told what the programme is ('building community links' and 'resilience') and what the programme is not (it is not racist). It would have been quite different had the AASW taken my letter seriously. They can be blamed for their initial unreflective decision to take part in the programme, and for missing the underlying racial logics of the programme. They can be further criticised for being unprepared to take on my views when they were challenged. In this instance 'not-knowing' moves to denial.

Amy Rossiter, Canadian social work academic, stated: "I want my white students, for example, to be able to tolerate the knowledge that they will be dangerous to people of colour all their lives." I extend this invitation to tolerate this knowledge beyond the university settings and wonder if any of the AASW board members, or any white social workers for that matter, might see themselves in this way. If so, what difference would this make about how and with whom they make decisions? Unfortunately, however, it appears that there is a difficulty in the field of social work to reflect on itself as potentially contributing to structural racism.

The above example of the AASW shows the ways in which social work institutionally continues to silence certain knowledges, while we are operating to bring forth the strengths of our youth and future, to bring forth the strengths of their contributions. This is a form of epistemic violence and of white epistemologies continuing to bolster themselves.

Conclusion

Whiteness poses a barrier to so much possibility in social work practice. There needs to be a reconfiguration of how we *do* and how we *think* in social work. White people and white institutions cannot be the ones doing the reconfiguring because they reconfigure it to their benefit and to their advantage. This is inescapable for a profession such as social work. Part of that reconfiguration is calling out, naming and 'Othering' whiteness, while also continuing to contribute to social work knowledge and to make room for others, in particular to privilege First Nations people. If we are to learn anything about how we fight and resist, then nobody is better placed than First Nations people who have been resisting

since the arrival of the first colonisers. This means questioning taken-for-granted concepts such as 'advocacy' (advocacy for who and what?), who is defining what is or is not racist, fair, inclusive and collaborative. If the definers always happen to be white people and white institutions, then we have a problem.

White ways of knowing precede that of any other type of knowing, even when it is regarding issues that do not impact them (those with white race privilege). This is limiting of what we may accept as knowledge. We must change our starting point to this: we (settlers) all carry anti-Indigenous biases, and for those who are white, they are all marinated in racist biases. One of those biases is the assumption that only white voices are adequate and have epistemic authority, which means that people of colour cannot offer commentary or knowledge about *their own lived* experiences. We need to persistently speak about how racism is necessary for social work to exist, and seeing whiteness as part of racism, not external to it. The appearance of social work as benevolent, as 'helping' and as anti-racist is getting in the way of change.

If institutions are not in regular contact with the work or experiences of people of colour, this functions to maintain white supremacy. If people only approach you when they require epistemic 'diversity', they are maintaining white supremacy. Racial acquiescence occurs when you raise a problem, and the first reaction you receive is one that defends or minimises the harm you have brought attention to.

Whiteness must be attended to, because it is having detrimental effects and colluding with white supremacy. We can no longer wait for white people to simply 'recognise' and 'acknowledge' the privilege of their positions. This leaves us at the mercy of white people's 'understanding' as though they are naive (white innocence) and simply unaware of their racial privilege. So much goes into *not* noticing and *not* knowing. As Sara Ahmed says, so much is invested in not recognising structures of privilege. While we wait on 'understanding', things are happening, people are being harmed and communities are further marginalised. Movement cannot rely, depend on or be at the mercy of whiteness. Instead, like this book, we must increase the volume of marginalised voices and knowledges as a form of *epistemic resistance* (Medina, 2013). In this way, we can continue to interrupt white privilege and undermine white epistemologies.

Comment by Jim Ife

Even though Lobna addresses her chapter primarily to social workers from non-white cultures, there is much of value in her chapter for white Western social workers as well. Her description of Muslim knowledges and social work in Muslim contexts, with eight themes that flow through her social work, represents a sharp contrast to mainstream social work as understood in the white West. Words such as *love*, *food*, *prayer*, *rap*, *fighting* and *non-human* do not occupy central places in dominant social work discourse; they are not

represented in social work curricula, accreditation guidelines or conference themes, yet for Lobna they are central to her practice. Reflecting on them highlights the limitations of social work understood only from within Western Modernity. Many of the things that give depth, meaning and connection to life, not only in Muslim cultures but in other contexts as well, are largely missing from the mainstream social work world.

One word recurs throughout Lobna's description of Muslim social work, and that is *love*. It is present in three of her eight headings, and the idea of love permeates her writing. Love is perhaps the most powerful human emotion, and yet it is largely absent from Western social work language. It is interesting to speculate as to why this is so. Perhaps one reason is that love is so hard to define, to categorise, to operationalise and to pin down in 'clear and precise' academic terms. It does not readily lend itself to the 'evidence-based' world of social work practice where everything must be measured and counted. Love is more commonly described in poetry, in film, in novels, in song and in art, but does not lend itself to the precise empirical definitions that are the holy grail of Western positivism. It seems to be forbidden territory for Western social work, and this must lead us to ask the question as to why such a powerful, fundamental human emotion is so absent from an apparently 'caring' profession. A world view that allows this to happen is surely not conducive to social work except as technical, rational, social engineering. Perhaps one of the most significant acts of decolonisation of social work would be to bring love to centre stage, in the way that Lobna has done. We could look forward to the day when love is included in the international definition of social work, is named as a specific aspect of social work knowledge, values and skills and is considered core curriculum in education programmes and a core component of professional accreditation. That such an idea seems far-fetched is simply a reminder of how much work has to be done to achieve genuine decolonisation, but also a reminder of what Muslim social work can contribute to social work throughout the world.

Lobna's case study of the AASW is another aspect of this important chapter that deserves comment. It must be remembered that the leaders of the AASW are well-meaning, committed people, for whom the social work values of social justice and human rights are strong. They condemn racism, promote 'anti-racist practice', advocate for the indigenisation of social work, and so would most likely be affronted that their actions can be understood as perpetuating whiteness, as that would be far from their intention. Yet that is the very point. Whiteness is systemic, and is perpetuated not just by right-wing racists, but also by good people with good intentions. Social workers, for the most part, are good people with good intentions, yet they can readily be part of the systemic perpetuation of white privilege and the marginalisation of racial and other minorities. Whiteness is a way of thinking, being and doing that, by uncritically accepting the white world as the norm, reinforces structures and discourses of marginalisation, often in the name of 'inclusion'. The acceptance of the CVE programme, as a space where social work can 'make a contribution', effectively reinforces

and perpetuates a social work where practices are judged from the point of view of white normality, and where the dissenting voice of a Muslim social worker, acutely aware of the wider implications of the programme, has no place. All white social workers are susceptible to this, and all of us, if we are honest, can identify things we have said or done, often with goodwill and the best of intentions, that have reflected uncritical whiteness. Lobna's critique of the AASW may seem hard; it is, and it should be. Those of us who perpetuate whiteness, however well-intentioned, need to be challenged, and those challenges will be confronting and discomforting. They require us to abandon the epistemological and institutional privilege that we have taken for granted. The whole point of decolonising is that the discomfort, the marginalisation and the devaluing have always been felt by the colonised and not by the coloniser, and it is time that this was reversed; the coloniser needs to be challenged and made to feel the discomfort, so that the world view of the colonised is not only 'validated' and 'included', but actually foregrounded and privileged.

Lobna's chapter is a very important contribution to this book, and to the idea of decolonisation. It provides a significant critique of the whiteness of social work, manifest in one of its mainstream institutions, but it also shows the possibility of another, richer social work, informed by Muslim traditions and world views, where the idea of love can take centre stage.

Comment by Bindi Bennett

We're not racist BUT …

To comprehend why Lobna's chapter was even needed in 2019, we need to firstly begin with a conversation that is more candid and unapologetic about racist Australia.

Recently I watched the poignant documentary 'Final Quarter', about the tumultuous end to AFL Sydney Swans champion and ambassador Adam Goodes' career. It chronicles the consistent booing Goodes endured, a staggering 17 weeks in succession in the 2015 season alone. The consistent and repeated booing occurred for a period of three years. The racially motivated backlash began immediately after Goodes called out a 13-year-old girl in the stands for calling him an 'ape' during the Indigenous round of AFL in 2013. Now it was made quite clear by Goodes that he did not wish any ill harm or negative consequences for the young lady in question, but the racist behaviour and racial vilification that was occurring had to stop. What was astounding in this story is the reaction by the Australian people in the aftermath of this event. Hordes of football supports began audibly booing and yelling at Goodes. Goodes was heckled and criticised for being too provocative and antagonistic. Goodes was systematically attacked by the media, mocked by an Australian white media personality as 'King Kong' and by other white men in sport and the media, alleging he was a 'sook' and a 'cry baby" and should simply retire if he couldn't 'man up'. Goodes developed a mental health issue from the high

levels of psychological distress and trauma that he endured during this time. Australia did not boo the white players who were accused of assaulting or raping women or who were arrested and charged for abusing drugs and alcohol. What Australia chose to boo, both persistently and quite unapologetically, was an Aboriginal man standing up and saying 'no' to racism. The white men in this situation remain gainfully employed and continue to be vocal with no consequences. The crowd who booed Goodes for all those years did not have to face any responsibility or accountability. Welcome to the fight we face against racist Australia.

Another significant role model of blatant and merciless racism in Australia is Pauline Hanson. Statements such as 'Australia will be in danger of being swamped by Muslims', and her recent hashtag #WakeUpToRacism and 'It's okay to be white' request for examples of anti-white racism received this gem: "I'm definitely treated differently for being white. Last month for instance, I sailed through immigration checks in Australia, USA and Canada while my brown friends were treated like terrorists and given the 3rd degree everywhere we went. #WakeUpToRacism". Many politicians and media outlets also support racism with their subtle nods of acceptance and incongruent words and actions. Whilst ever we have leaders like this, what chance do we have against prejudiced, xenophobic policies and programmes?

Organisations and professions seem to want us to leave our diverse identities in a bucket at the door as we come into work and collect them on our way out. We still do not penetrate deep enough to the level that is needed to break down the colonised systems, organisations and racist ways of being in Australia. It is not a new experience to be at odds with organisations that are largely governed and run by white people protecting white interests that are completely incompatible with diverse ways of being, knowing and doing, as highlighted by Lobna. Aboriginal people are already in a very long queue waiting for: constitutional acknowledgement, a Treaty, Sovereignty, Recognition, non-Racist and safe workplaces and self-reflective humans in general (and particularly social workers).

The section within this chapter on boundaries, love, food, nurturing and 'self-care' really resonated with me as an Aboriginal social worker. I can remember being taught about maintaining appropriate personal and professional 'boundaries'. Boundary setting, a strange white people's concept that sanitised and controlled workplaces, prevents workers from developing real connections and feelings of trust with clients. I can recall feeling conflicted and hiding the cultural components of my social work practice. I chose to take food when I had an appointment with an elder. I spoke to families and individuals when I was at the local Aboriginal football on the weekend and then brought in the referrals on Monday. Our organisation went from having 0 Aboriginal clients to 40 in a single month. True respectful, reciprocal community-based relationships are real and ARE social work.

I placed self-care in quotation marks in the last paragraph because I really don't believe Aboriginal people get to do 'self-care'. Between suffering

intergenerational trauma, high levels of poverty and over-representation in correctional facilities, presenting as patients with chronic health issues in Australia's health systems, experiencing enormous community and family grief and loss, living in constant crisis and being exposed to continuous racism and disadvantage in education, work and daily living, self-care is a fantastical social work myth, a pink unicorn in the Aboriginal community. Being an Aboriginal person requires reciprocal complex relationships that involve accountability, commitment and vast amounts of time. We haven't even touched upon the burden, accountability and extra responsibility that come with working in an Aboriginal space as an Aboriginal person: facing lateral violence and witnessing our own people being hurt and abused by systemic racism, cultural ineptitude and ignorance by the very profession we are a part of. Social work is a continuous, exhausting and at times hopelessness endeavour. Many of my white 'allies' get to go home at night and do 'self-care'. Many have walked away from this space and from away me as a colleague and a friend because my life is too hard, too exhausting, too Aboriginal. They want to go back to the comfort and ease of their white privilege and lucky for them.

And where to from here? We are still at an early phase of decolonising social work and the white establishments that control it. Social workers from all ethnicities can support each other in their journey through this process. I may not have all the ideas but what about some collaboration? How do we bring us together to talk and discuss? How do we form an advisory body for organisations that showcases our voices and diversities? How do we flesh out these discussions?

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7 Supporting the development of *Pacific social work* across Oceania – critical reflections and lessons learnt towards disrupting whiteness in the region

Jioji Ravulo

Introduction

I believe that a societal perception broader than a divide – a huge, encompassing and spreading gulf – occurs between the notion of living a traditional way of life, compared to creating and moving forward to achieve a contemporary society. The way we perceive human development over the ages is characterised with such rhetoric, with many Western discourses underpinned by the need to highlight the advancement of the human race – as being better than what we were previously. Western societies conveniently label time periods to point out that we have come a long way from the Stone Age to the Information Age, characterising previous periods as less humane and helpful. We also perceive such developments under the premise of knowledge acquisition, which in turn promotes the creation of technologies that then lead to perceived human happiness through the parallel acquisition of wealth, generally underpinned by materialism and the notion of financial security. Socio-political framing of these perspectives further supports this notion of advancement, with capitalism alongside the virtues of globalism characterising the perceived way forward. But it is within the broader application of these world views that many are left behind. It is also within this epistemological lens that the traditional ways of knowing and doing are discounted, and no longer seen as relevant to assist in our contemporary, more 'advanced' way of being and becoming.

Those that continue to perpetuate this ideological divide do so because of the need to maintain their own perceived status quo, power and control, domination and influence, whilst creating propaganda within a socio-cultural context that deters questioning such motifs and perspectives. A gulf is also then created between those perceived to be more right-wing oriented or conservative, and the altering positioned as left-wing or liberal. In current times, especially in Western societies including Australia, the two are pitted against each other, and populations are further divided by the way in which they vote at the ballot box. Such polarising then continues to mobilise a fierce uncertainty,

or even hatred, towards each other, perpetuating a more individualistic, less collective or shared approach to how society should be managed.

With the above in mind, this chapter strives to question the way in which we, as a modern westernised society influenced by the underlying discourse of whiteness, see social and welfare needs in working with marginalised communities in Australia. I will be examining my professional career to date, looking at how the various projects I've been involved in have been established through funding bodies with good intentions in mind, but may in turn only uphold the status quo of dominant discourses. I aim to also provide an overview of how such work has been shaped through social work and Indigenous cultural lenses to counteract such dominant, westernised perspectives of need, and the desire to ensure we are creating a more collective approach to resolving social and welfare concerns. In essence, my attempt is to disrupt whiteness, including its prevailing emphasis on neoliberalism, and neocolonial practices and perspectives. Flipping dominant discourses to being more meaningfully informed by Pacific epistemologies and ontologies whilst also creating and involving strength-based and solution-focused approaches to such concerns is also examined. This includes utilising the concept of *solesolevaki* – a collectivist Indigenous Fijian perspective to change the discourse in which issues are viewed, understood and resolved. Additionally, I will amplify the need to create a more collective perspective on the role of deconstruction, where we challenge the dominant view that all matters in society are consistently constructed within a binary framework.

Solesolevaki and deconstruction

Broadly, *solesolevaki* is an Indigenous-Pacific concept from Fiji that highlights the role of reciprocal wellbeing, where my individual wellbeing is inextricably connected to and moulded by others. This concept highlights the role and responsibility we all share in supporting self and others, with a view that such reciprocity is manifested across many areas associated with our wellbeing. Included in this bigger-picture perspective is our physical, psychological and spiritual contexts that pervade the way we exist within the collective. Other key concepts are also enacted, including the notion of *veiqaravi* – to serve – and the need to maintain a nurturing relationship through *vā*, the sacred space that exists between all respective domains in life. These concepts are also undergirded by the notion that life is circular, not linear, and within this context we hold a level of responsibility to ensure that harmony amongst each other is achieved. Conflict is still within life's equation, but its resolutions are guided by the need to reconcile and promote unity. I believe *solesolevaki* is similar to other notions of collectivism found across Indigenous communities in Oceania, including Australia and amongst other traditionally oriented cultures globally. Unfortunately, such concepts have lost synergy with westernised and white perspectives, that rather uphold a more individualised way of looking at society. I'm not saying that the Western gaze is not inclusive of the importance found in community, and the role of family and peers; however, the

way in which we administer service delivery and provision within social work continues to uphold a more linear, and less holistic view generally found across Indigenous knowledges. Responsibility is perceived to be that of the individual, and that society and its structures are independent of the way in which one person exists vis-à-vis neoliberalism. Again, this is contrary to the notion of *solesolevaki*, which also proportions responsibility back on society in ensuring its members are part of the collective, irrespective of social and welfare needs.

In essence, I am suggesting that collectivism as a societal concept can genuinely act as a tangible and pragmatic platform to developing social work practice, policy and research and its accompanying teaching and learning strategies within the realm of social work education. From this approach, we promote the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous and traditional epistemologies. Additionally, I believe the philosophical notion of deconstruction may also assist within a Western context. Within deconstruction lies an innate commitment to the need to move beyond the perceived reason why one perspective on something is privileged over another (Derrida, 1982; Guillemette and Cossette, 2006), and the binary nature Western society has in understanding life in general. Western society, or whiteness, continues to privilege their modern ways of thinking as being better than the traditional way of living, and as such demonises the role Indigenous knowledges can have on contemporary practices, policy and research. It is also within the role of deconstruction that people are challenged to question the underlying discourses that perpetuated the inequality found within the binary view, and to also accept the possible tensions as part of a broader quest to look for possible solutions that move beyond the two competing polar opposites.

Therefore, I'm suggesting that it is possible to still strive for contemporary advancement, but to also include traditional or Indigenous views as part of this journey. One should not be sacrificed over the other; rather they can jointly influence the possibilities of finding and supporting the reality of cultural diversity and its many differences. Too often do we see cultural harmony as an exercise to tolerate and accept that differences do exist, however; it is still within the remit to assimilate to the status quo, the *west is best*, *white is right* discourse in Australia. In the next section of my chapter, I further explore the possibilities of being able to meaningfully work within the greys that exist between the binary, and the way in which social work can still take a place in promoting civil and just societies with both Western modernity and Indigenous collective underpinnings.

Inclusive approach to research, policy and practice

What I have developed over the last 20 years of practice since I started working in the community sector in the year 2000 has been a journey in and of itself. I propose the following model which is a critical reflection in hindsight, and something developed more recently to help tangibly shape my own narrative and understanding of what I do as a social work academic and practitioner across practice, policy and research. I am also conscious of not portraying a

self-proclaimed, self-righteousness view of my career – but rather a critically constructive viewpoint on what has been undertaken, and how I've utilised my own Indigenous views, consciously and subconsciously within a westernised and white context, to help shape a more *inclusive* approach to social work. I've deliberatively chosen to use this notion of *inclusive* practice, policy and research as the key concept that surrounds my evidence base, which is premised by three key scholarly disciplines. The overarching themes that occur as a result are manifested across five key areas. Platforming this model within a Pacific framing, I see the concept of being inclusive as the underlying waves, the Sea, that border the three key scholarly disciplines, which analogically is seen as the Land, and the five overarching key themes are portrayed as the Sun. Each of the three entities – the Sea, the Land and the Sun – operate in their own way, but form a greater assemblage (Price-Robertson and Duff, 2016), interconnectedness and collectivist view of each other. This model provides a greater understanding of how my previous, current and future career

Table 7.1 Inclusive model underpinning career via key disciplines and themes

Underlying waves that stir my career (SEA):

I **Injustice occurs** across society, and creates marginalised groups, where
N **Neocolonialism and its discourses** pervade such structural and societal inequalities.
C **Cultural diversity and its differences** are an important part of creating a fair and just society.
L **Locating strengths and solutions** within such equity groups can assist in having a wider
U **Understanding of marginality** and reshaping social and cultural capital to include diversity.
S **Social Work education, practice, policy and research** can play a role in promoting
I **Indigenous knowledges** globally and creating collective collaborations that in turn challenge
V **Violent structures** to become reformed (across the micro/meso/macro).
E **Effective models of engagement** are subsequently created that lead to enhanced service delivery and provision.

Evinced by three key disciplines (LAND):

- Social Work
- Educational Engagement & Leadership
- Cultural Research

Overarching themes manifested (SUN):

- Youth Offending
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Mental Health
- Widening Participation
- Decolonising Social Work

is nuanced, and produced, and further reflects my commitment to challenge dominant Western and white perspectives that may deter inclusive approaches. Table 7.1 further outlines this model in more detail, highlighting my professional views and broader storyline.

Interestingly, the three disciplines highlighted as the Land resonate with the three degrees I've undertaken: a Bachelor of Social Work, a Master of Education (majoring in Educational Leadership and Critical Pedagogies) and a Doctor of Cultural Research. Each discipline constructs my assemblage, and further highlights the way in which my five overarching themes have influenced the practical way my career has been created over this time.

To further assist my focused argument in disrupting whiteness in social work, I will now unpack my involvement in practice, policy and research by giving tangible examples across these five specific overarching themes: 1) Youth Offending, 2) Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD), 3) Mental Health, 4) Widening Participation and 5) Decolonising Social Work. *Each area will include the way in which Pacific communities across Oceania, including their diaspora in New Zealand and Australia, have been perceived within a Western and white lens, and the need to create a stronger sense of incorporating Indigenous-Pacific perspectives across these areas through deconstructing such dominate views and creating possible solutions*. This may take shape via the notion of Pacific Social Work, a burgeoning concept that aims to profile the uniqueness of and collective response to working with Pacific peoples. As recently defined by Ravulo, Mafile'o and Yeates (2019, p. 12), *Pacific Social Work* is:

> *Centring Pacific-Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, being and becoming for community, family and individual wellbeing whilst counteracting structural, cultural and personal oppressions within Oceania and throughout the diaspora.*

Additionally, the need to promote a shared and collaborative approach also underpins this perspective, with the view that everyone needs to be involved in this conversation, not just Pacific people (Ravulo, 2018a). Everyone includes people from non-Pacific or non-Indigenous backgrounds, and the need to ensure they too are also part of promoting a shared solution that enhances wellbeing for all. This further highlights the need to deconstruct rhetoric where equity groups are seen as the only ones responsible for their marginality. Rather, from their Indigenous perspectives they can use their voice to be part of creating a more collectivist understanding of where they are positioned, with the hope that broader society can be inclusive of such narratives. This may then create a shared consciousness across communities to be part of a broader conversation where everyone is meaningfully considered and included. Hence, my personal and professional commitment to ensure a shared response and solution is achieved, rather than creating further silos that lead to apathy, and the ongoing othering of such groups in society, including Pacific people. Disrupting whiteness, and its respective gaze on how such people groups are perceived to be independent of their

[inequitable] social structures they create, may also occur and continues to be part of creating discourses that challenge the status quo.

Theme 1: Youth offending

My initial interest in youth offending came from an NSW Judicial Commission report by Gallagher and Poletti (1998) that highlighted the sentencing disparities between Anglo Australian young people and their Australian Indigenous and Pacific counterparts. In various instances, Indigenous and Pacific young people were being sentenced with double the severity of white youth despite having the same or similar offences and offending histories. As a young Pacific person at that time, this made me angry. The idea that Indigenous people from Oceania, including the Pacific, were susceptible to harsher treatment by a legal system that claims to be fair and impartial blew my mind. In essence, this concretised my growing passion to become a social worker and to work towards correcting discrimination within a youth justice system in Australia. During my social work degree, I started working across multiple fields of youth work in 2000, focusing on providing safe spaces for marginalised young people across various areas in south and southwestern Sydney. After completing this degree in 2002, I undertook my first full-time role as a post release support program (PRSP) caseworker, assisting young offenders to reintegrate back into the community after spending time in custody. A large proportion of my clients, as anticipated, were Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and Pacific young people located across the Campbelltown and Liverpool local government areas, which are known to have the largest urbanised populations of such community members in Australia.

This overrepresentation of Indigenous young people involved in the youth justice space, including those from Indigenous-Pacific backgrounds, truly reflects the structural inequalities that continue to occur in Western settings (Ravulo, 2015; Ioane and Lambie, 2016; Shepherd and Ilalio, 2016; Ravulo and Ioane, 2019; Ravulo, Scanlan and Koster, 2019). From a white lens, Indigenous young people are seen to be held responsible for their ongoing marginality, despite the many systemic inequalities that such young people and their families face in Western settings. Many of the young people I worked with were not consistently engaged in education, health and employment opportunities, which perpetuated a diminished view of such communities. But it is within this polarised position that inequalities are then not further unpacked and understood. And it was through this bigger, macro perspective that I strove to develop and finesse social work practices, policy and research that would hopefully make a difference.

Pasifika Support Services (PSS) was created in 2005 through NSW State Government to work in partnership with NSW Police and NSW Juvenile Justice to better facilitate a culturally nuanced response to the overrepresentation of Pacific people in this space (Ravulo, 2016). As the co-creator of this model under a national NGO, I was responsible for implementing service

delivery and provision through an integrated case management (ICM) model via direct referrals of young Pacific people known to both partnering government agencies. The young person was provided with an initial 3-month case management plan, with a view to extending if needed. The overarching premise to the model was to be holistic in nature, emphasising the need to understand and resolve criminogenic factors that led to recidivist offending behaviour. This was achieved by working collaboratively with Pacific young people and their families collectively to set tangible life goals and outcomes across 13 life domains, including education, alcohol and other drugs, personal and social skills, financial matters, family and health. Overall, the need to meaningfully include a Pacific perspective in the creation of social and cultural capital underpinned the approach, enabling Pacific people to be part of the solution, rather than passive recipients of statutory service provision that reinforced their marginality.

NSW Police and NSW Juvenile Justice policies were changed to develop more responsive approaches to Pacific youth offending that were guided by Pacific people through community consultation and participation. An external evaluation of the young people that participated in the program found that 65% of clients hadn't reoffended after 12 months of successful completion (ARTD Consultants, 2007), and my own doctorate was based on the development of antisocial behaviour in Pacific youth, and the evolution and implementation of this ICM model (Mission Australia and Ravulo, 2009). Work continues to be developed in this space; that is, things are still not perfect. However, the conversation to disrupt whiteness, and the way it has disenfranchised Indigenous-Pacific youth and their families, is an ongoing challenge, and one that is being discussed.

Theme 2: Alcohol and other drugs

Through my work with marginalised young people who offend, an underlying theme around negative consumption of alcohol and other drugs is evident. Key messages on harm minimisation were and continue to be profiled as part of a broader conversation on healthier and safe consumption. Beyond me is the desire to control people's ability to use, as they are individually empowered to make informed choices and decisions on what constitutes good personal practice. It's also within this philosophical approach that social work may limit the broader, bigger-picture perspective on creating treatment plans and options that best suit the family and their wider systems. Pragmatically, we generally provide alcohol and other drug counselling support via individual sessions paired with case management that aims to create practical goals that deter negative consumption. In severe situations, we promote detox units, which then lead to rehabilitation in therapeutic communities situated away from the environs that led to problems with alcohol and/or other drugs. We then expect that after someone completes this residential program, they can successfully move back into their own support structures that hopefully help maintain abstinence, or safer usage.

However, these circumstances may be further challenged by collectivist cultures where substance use is perceived as part of the social and traditional ways in which individuals connect. For example, in Pacific communities, kava, a root grounded into powder and mixed with water to make a drink, is used both recreationally and ceremonially (Faleolo and Ravulo, 2019). Much importance is placed on consuming this substance as the collective in a shared and circular arrangement – it is rare that this would be drunk by someone alone. Over time, other substances in a Western setting like beer, wine and spirits have also entered the drinking circles of Pacific people. But the desire to consume collectively remains (Faleolo and Ravulo, 2019). Therefore, when working with Indigenous-Pacific individuals who are seeking support for negative alcohol and other drug usage, the need to work more around peer group alongside familial and kinship responsibilities should be part of the conversation. Much of my own ongoing work in private practice counselling outside of my academic work focuses on ensuring such conversations are undertaken, and encouraging that other practitioners through my external supervision with community agencies are also aligned to such thinking. My previous and current research in AOD usage with ethnic communities across NSW is also underpinned with a desire to ensure that the white and Western gaze of usage is challenged to include diverse perspectives, whilst also developing models of service delivery and provision that move beyond pathologizing the individual alone.

Theme 3: Mental health

Through my ongoing clinical work, I have also been challenged by the way in which mental illnesses are understood across the wider community. From a medical perspective, they are perceived as diagnosable, with treatment plans developed to work alongside positive partners towards recovery. Health social workers provide both in-patient and out-patient support in conjunction with community service teams and broader providers to ensure care is consistent, and that medications are adhered to. Case management support is also given to help with educational and employment goals. Psycho-education has also proven to be an important component of having wider family and peer groups best support their loved ones (Smith and Jury, 2017).

For many Indigenous communities, including those from a Pacific heritage, understanding mental illnesses as a health issue alone is still evolving. Instead, mental illnesses are perceived as a spiritual issue (Ravulo, Faleafa and Koro, 2019), especially when symptoms related to psychosis occur. I believe we may have a limited world view on the role of mental health and wellbeing from a westernised perspective, seeing such issues as problems to be overcome to ensure social functioning occurs. However, for many traditional cultures globally, people with today's understanding of mental illnesses have been seen as gifted, as those having special talents and abilities to cut through into a spiritual realm (Mila-Schaaf and Hudson, 2009). And this includes industrialised, Western nations who previously upheld such discourse across society (Braam,

2017). Similarly, Pacific communities have in the past seen such illnesses as an ability to see beyond the physical and natural, and even connect with ancestral spirits and beings. Within contemporary Pacific societies the role of the supernatural continues to pervade the everyday reality of many Pacific people, who will share stories of hope through their connection with the past, and the way in which such narratives pervade everyday realities. This includes certain rituals where certain tasks are refrained from or undertaken to ensure that harmony is kept intact between the physical and spiritual realms (Le Va, 2017)

Professionally, I continue to work in developing a shared understanding between the traditional and contemporary views, striving to bring a more nuanced and less binary perspective. I'm working on a new federally and state-funded research project called 'Mental Health Talanoa' that strives to undertake three key outcomes: 1) assess the number of those with mental illnesses amongst Pacific people (prevalence), 2) examine the impact of such illnesses amongst individuals, families and wider communities (morbidity), and 3) create better access to service delivery and provision within a culturally relevant and engaging manner (help-seeking behaviour). Across all three components, I'm attempting to promote a more holistic and collaborative view of mental health issues, with a view to challenging dominant medical discourses as the only lens through which we view wellbeing amongst Pacific people.

Theme 4: Widening participation

Higher education is seen as a goal for those that have the means to academically achieve. If you are able to do relatively well in high school, then this is a platform to possibly aspire towards further post-secondary studies. Other influencing factors can also determine your destination after high school, including your parental and peer influences on what they believe you should do, and what needs to occur to achieve this (Ravulo, 2018b). For many who have a positive attitude towards lifelong learning, the desire to go on to University is part and parcel of this perspective. Universities have been perceived as the beacon of Western civilisation, where knowledge is power, and to be socially capable and mobile requires tertiary completion (Ravulo, 2019). Access to professional employment across the high-skilled labour force is enhanced as a result of obtaining such qualifications, further bolstering access to financial remuneration and security to purchase assets like homes and cars that further reflect positive social and cultural capital.

However, for many across equity groups based on ethnicity, indigeneity, class, gender, language and ability, the desire and opportunity to obtain qualifications through higher education providers may be perceived as unrealistic. Students from such diverse backgrounds are expected to assimilate into University systems that require them to comply with the rigid styles of teaching reinforced by specific disciplines that uphold dominant Western rhetoric and discourse (Ravulo, 2019). Students are increasingly seen by the tertiary sector as a commodity, passive knowledge consumers rather than critical creators

capable of higher-order thinking that deconstructs the status quo evident in the structures that uphold such institutions.

The notion and application of *widening participation* strives to shake such constructs, with a view to promoting opportunities for people across equity groups to see higher education as a possible option. From this premise, Pasifika Achievement To Higher Education (PATHE) was created through my academic role at Western Sydney University. Focused on 'developing vocational and career aspirations across Pacific communities in Australia' its broader focus is manifested across three key components; 1) Student support for current Pacific University students, 2) Outreach support to Primary and High Schools across greater western Sydney, and 3) Project Innovation to further engage wider community including peers, family and stakeholder groups. Founded in 2012, and still operating across the region, PATHE flips the dominant discourse previously evident in Pacific communities that higher education was only for 'papalagi' – white people – and strives to also counteract the overrepresentation of Pacific people in youth and criminal justice spaces (Ravulo, 2019), and the notion that we are only good at sports and the performing arts. Instead, PATHE endeavours to re-shift the overrepresentation towards completing further education and training, in turn promoting scope for sustainable and long-term employment to be obtained in higher-skilled labour, promoting enhanced social and cultural capital and overall mobility. But it's also about creating a shared, collaborative and collective space for Pacific people and other equity groups to be counted, to be heard and to help disrupt whiteness across Universities and other sectors they may enter post-tertiary study. This is also reflected in the PATHE moto – 'when one achieves, we all succeed' – acknowledging the ripple effect individual achievement in higher education can have on the broader collective including immediate and extended family, peers and wider communities evident across Indigenous-Pacific cultures.

Theme 5: Decolonising social work

As per the premise to this book, let alone this chapter, conceptually social work within its broader understanding and application has a strong Western and white foundation. The professionalisation of *helping others* has become synonymous with the idea of being and becoming a social worker, further underpinned by the notion of making a difference. The way we teach and learn social work continues to be premised by theoretical constructs founded by white philosophers and thinkers, with accompanying research and its associated literature utilised across our curricula. Social work practice, policy and research reinforce these perspectives, further reiterating white ways of knowing and doing. The people we come into contact with as social workers are then treated within such parameters, and made to comply with our own possible biases as we compete to overcome the weight of being an agent of social control instead of an advocate bent on social justice and reform for the betterment of those we serve.

Decolonising social work has for me become a growing passion to counteract the ongoing influence of neocolonialism evident in neoliberalism across Western society. The need to meaningfully engage and incorporate Indigenous perspectives in the *way we do things around here* is part of this quest. Additionally, the need to deconstruct dominant discourses by including diversity and its differences based on an array of categories is also important. Often we may perceive the decoloniality movement as relegating responsibility of whiteness to those oppressed by it, by giving those that were colonised a chance to be considered in the mainstream. Yes, this is important; however, we as a broader society are also responsible to be part of this conversation, and not recreate the 'us' and 'them' through this process. And social work plays an important part in this quest across Oceania, especially for myself.

The Pacific Islands Field Education (PIFE) initiative was also created within my academic posting with Western Sydney University (WSU) espousing three broad components: 1) Provide international learning opportunities for social work students in completing their final field education placement in the Pacific, 2) Assist in the development and decolonising of social work education and its accompanying teaching and learning practices throughout the respective curricula, and 3) Increase the role of *Pacific Social Work* across the region. Since its inception in 2003, PIFE works collaboratively in partnership with The University of the South Pacific (USP) and has enabled nearly 40 students from Western Sydney University to undertake a 3-month agency placement in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga or Vanuatu. The need to also pair WSU with USP students together during their placement has been emphasised, with a view to creating a reciprocal learning exchange. The need to also challenge WSU students to ensure that are not entering into the Pacific with a 'west is best', 'white is right' view is counteracted through a series of pre-placement meetings that are conducted via a *Talanoa* approach, yielding a shared and collective conversation amongst students enabling critical reflections and reviews on their preparation and time in the Islands.

WSU, USP, and now my current institution, University of Wollongong (UOW), continue to learn from the way in which Indigenous perspectives are included across social work degrees. This includes a commitment to ensure that diverse literature is utilised across the core readings, and that Pacific models and epistemologies are taught alongside other approaches. The notion of *Pacific Social Work* has also grown over this period via other projects that have occurred during my involvement in PIFE. This includes a research project on the initiative that has led to various publications, and the new edited collection (Ravulo, Mafile'o and Yeates, 2019) published by Routledge that yielded the definition of *Pacific Social Work* quoted above. Additionally, a unique working partnership with Massey University and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) has helped establish the Social Work Regional Resource Centre of Oceania (SWRROC), bringing multiple institutions across Australia, New Zealand, Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia to work collaboratively in this space. The constant and consistent fervour to decolonise, deconstruct

and disrupt whiteness through these projects are a true testament to working together, to collaborate and share the wider responsibility as a collective, further reiterating the role of traditional perspectives in the contemporary.

Summary and closing comments

Across the chapter, I aimed to create broader, bigger-picture thinking about the way in which whiteness in social work may be disrupted by challenging the status quo, underpinned by dominant discourses that lead to marginalisation. Deconstruction was used as a complementary lens to assist in unpacking the way in which society perceived such groups, including Pacific people, and the need to move beyond the binary. This includes ensuring the Western and white gaze is not just reversed to the converse side and moving from one extreme to the other. Rather, it is focusing on the possibilities that may exist when everyone is including in the conversation, promoting scope for everyone to have shared responsibilities for the issues that exist in society. It's through this collectivist approach, or *solesolevaki*, a shared and reciprocal view of the world with shared responsibility, that we truly create a platform for people to *veiqaravi*, to serve, and support inclusive and just societies, locally, nationally and globally. I encourage fellow social workers to reflect on what constitutes their Sea, Land and Sun and its broader assemblage as part of their professional commitment to making a difference. It is also my ongoing hope that this can be achieved by promoting discourses that lead to embracing cultural diversity and its differences, whilst creating social work practices, policies and research that disrupt the pervasive and persuasive nature of whiteness.

Comment by Lobna Yassine

Asalaamu Alaykum Jioji. The immediate sense I had when reading your reflections was excitement, and a sense of hope of what social work might 'look like' when it makes space for other ways of knowing and doing. I love that you and others are taking control of the narrative, privileging it and sharing it. Even seeing the words 'Sea', 'Land' and 'Sun' feels radical in a (mostly white) space like social work. In your closing comments, you mentioned the 'possibilities that may exist when everyone is included'. Your work is evidence of these possibilities. I have found that in my own work, making room for other knowledges is so much more exciting, meaningful and genuine. It allows for more creativity in a field where, as you say, binaries are so prevalent. Your chapter allows for 'grey' areas, it gives us permission to draw on tradition, to draw on the spiritual, the cultural and the familial. It gives us permission to also experiment with other ways, with the aim of finding not just 'the solution' or just another 'one-size-fits-all', but rather ways of working that are varied, thereby increasing the possibilities even further.

I resonated strongly with your hopes of working more collectively, of sharing the responsibility and of 'serving' our communities. It seems to me that

contemporary social work practice is synonymous with individualism, and in this sense, perhaps the goal is to give ourselves permission to maintain, and speak freely about traditional ways of working. When I use the term 'traditional' I am referring to what I personally understand as traditional, and more specifically, I think about the small village my parents are from in the north of Lebanon. It is far from perfect; however, every time I visit, I return to Australia craving a more collective approach to social work. Most activities in my village are undertaken in groups, whether it be teaching, cooking, farming or caring. I imagine how foreign they would think it is for services to work with one member of the family, and not the others. How foreign it would be to them that children are removed and handed over to complete strangers as a way of 'solving' problems.

I worked in juvenile justice for a number of years, and as such, am familiar with the shock that you experienced. It was painfully difficult to work with a young person without actively working with their family and community. Although I had the capacity to visit families, I did not have the time or the resources to focus on family or communal healing. Most of my work involved supporting young people to attain neoliberal goals: specifically education and employment. Their 'rehabilitation' could only be understood through this lens. I recognised early on that as long as the family was struggling, so would the young person. The most powerful moments did not involve the authorities whatsoever. They occurred between mothers and their children, fathers and their children, aunts and uncles, grandparents and grandchildren, and community elders. I often wondered what it would be like for young people to be made accountable to their families and communities rather than something as disconnected and oppressive as the state.

I was keenly interested in the third theme you mentioned, mental health. You beautifully framed this as a 'spiritual issue' that involved 'rituals'. Similarly, in Islamic culture, mental distress can be understood as a spiritual issue. In my circles, mental health professionals and services are rarely drawn on for support. Religious rituals are usually the first port of call. Again, this is not perfect; however, it has the potential to *add* to contemporary ways of working in this space. I appreciate that your chapter emphasised this. My sense of working in this space is that mental health professionals are often afraid of the unknown, and of that which is uncertain. It also means that we, as professionals, might need to loosen our grip on power. Fear often manifests itself as a rejection of alternative understandings to mental health and a discouragement of turning to community for support. However, as your chapter highlights, it is a sense of *certainty* which often functions as a 'shutting down' and devaluing of cultural and religious knowledges. Once we think we know, we stop listening. I feel your chapter gives me the possibility of holding a number of ideas together, respectfully and delicately.

My mind is blown by how you are expanding and widening participation to create a 'shared, collaborative and collective space for Pacifica people and other equity groups to be counted, to be heard …'. There was a 'ripple effect'

the minute you entered this field, and your writing about the activities you've been involved in is testament to that. You are perhaps also a representation of the possibilities that lie ahead when participation is widened, when people like us 'take up space'. The challenges you pose to students prior to placements would be imperative, and I imagine that a lot of 'unlearning' would need to first occur. This really highlights the importance of educational spaces, and how we can begin to decolonise the academy. It is not simply sending students to other regions, or simply hiring more people of colour. It is having the power and authority to *shape* content too, as you have.

Thank you, Jioji, for making 'tangible' what can sometimes seem vague and unattainable: the project to decolonise social work. Just like social work practice, this endeavour must be a collective one. We *all* share in this responsibility.

Comment by Jim Ife

It is impossible to comment adequately on all aspects of Jioji's chapter, so I have chosen just a few points to add to his contribution.

Jioji raises an important question of what we mean by 'inclusion' and 'inclusive'. These are terms that I have found problematic, as they usually imply a form of assimilation: how can 'we' include 'them' on 'our' society. The 'we' in this case is usually the white, Anglo Western world, 'generously' offering to include others in its evidently superior space. This has applied also at the epistemological level: how Western knowledge systems can 'include' other world views, without really questioning the validity of the Western worldview itself. In this chapter, however, Jioji uses the term in a different sense. He invites us to *include* the sea, the land and the sun in our knowledge sources, implying no necessary superiority on the part of the 'including' culture, and indeed also sees the sea, the land and the sun as being inclusive of *us*. Personally, in this sense I prefer to use the term 'embracing' rather than 'including', as this is a term that implies welcoming, affirmation, celebration and enrichment. Jioji is asking us not just to include, but to embrace, and be embraced by, alternative epistemologies.

The sea, of course, is of central importance for Pacific Island people. It is ever-present, the source of life, and also the source of threat and danger. To other Indigenous people, for example Australian Indigenous people from the Central Desert, the sea is remote and unknown, and it is the land that is the source of both nourishment and threat. For Australian Indigenous people from coastal areas ('saltwater people') the sea is of course much more significant, but they also experience a large land mass, stretching indefinitely away from the sea, and it is both sea and land that are sources of, at the same time, sustenance and danger. They can retreat from the sea if necessary, in ways that Pacific Island people cannot: a significant issue at a time of sea-level rise. The oceans of the world are now in crisis, due to overfishing, destruction of the ocean floor and of kelp and sea grass, acidification, global warming, coral bleaching and so on. Pacific Island knowledges, based on a profound and intimate relationship

with the sea, are therefore central to developing a successful and sustainable global future, and this includes the knowledges that Pacific peoples can contribute to social work.

One of these contributions, as emphasised by Jioji, is the importance of *navigation*. Successful navigation is vital for Pacific peoples, and is a matter of life and death. They have oceanic navigational skills second to none, without the aid of GPS, satellites, radar and complex computer programs, or even the explorers' tools of map, compass and sextant from the 'Age of Discovery'. Navigation is important for land-based Indigenous people as well; consider the ability of Australian Indigenous people to navigate for long distances with the aid of the stars and of Songlines as sophisticated and informative as any map or guidebook. The skills of navigation present an important metaphor for social work. Social workers need to navigate their way in a hostile world of managerialism, neoliberalism, colonialism and patriarchy. And the individuals, families and communities with which social workers work are also required, metaphorically, to navigate through hostile seas. Jioji's chapter describes his own navigation through a social work career, and also the navigations of other Pacific people in countries such as Australia. In these difficult and challenging times, the art and science of navigation are important knowledges and skills for social workers, and while the use of the word 'navigation' here is metaphorical, that should not lessen its significance. As I argued in my own chapter for this book, metaphor is powerful in non-Western cultural traditions, and represents an important alternative to the largely metaphor-free world of white Western social work. Pacific Knowledges can help all social workers think more deeply and more creatively about what is involved in navigation.

Jioji talks about the importance of 'collectivist' Pacific cultures, and this is a word that needs careful consideration, as it may not adequately convey the meaning of *solesolevaki*. In conventional Western social policy, collectivism has been understood in a top-down sense, as seen in social democratic ideology advocated by Richard Titmuss, T.H. Marshall and others, and as exemplified in the Scandinavian welfare states. Here the collective is the whole society, incorporated in a welfare state of which all citizens are a part, and in which all citizens share. For Jioji, however, collectivism is less centralised and far from top-down; it refers to the family and the community, where people can have rich personal connections rather than the depersonalised and bureaucratic operations of a welfare state. It is a more personal and decentralised collectivism, and is in line with what many commentators have argued in relation to the importance of community. *Solesolevaki* as outlined by Jioji also resonates with the African idea of *Ubuntu*, as described in the chapters by Sharlotte Tusasiirwe and Kathomi Gatwiri, from their experiences in Uganda and Kenya, respectively. It is a familiar idea for people from non-Western cultures, but, tellingly, there has not been the need for an English equivalent. Collectivism, like inclusion, is a key social policy concept, that has been perhaps too influenced by the white Western world view in the way it has been incorporated into social

policy discourse. Indigenous knowledges require us to consider both collectivism and inclusion from different perspectives, and this is Jioji's invitation.

In his chapter Jioji seeks to create a space for dialogue and mutual understanding: Bhaba's 'third space'. This raises some difficult questions for social workers. How big is the third space? Is there room there for genuine dialogue? Does the overwhelming privileging of white Western epistemologies in mainstream social work make such dialogue possible? Does Western social work's professionalisation of helping others mean that there is a fundamental incompatibility with Indigenous world views that cannot be resolved, however well-intentioned we may be? These are difficult questions, which social workers – white and non-white – are required to face. While I share Jioji's optimism that there is a dialogical way forward, it will not be easy, and will require significant analysis, self-reflection and struggle. The persistence of colonialism privileges white Western world views and knowledges, and this foregrounding of the Western must be addressed if genuine dialogue is to occur. This does not mean that all Western epistemology must be abandoned – such thinking falls into the all-or-nothing trap of modernity – but rather that other world views must be given *at least* equal status, and Western dominance must be subject to strong critique, if what Jioji refers to as the 'huge, encompassing and spreading gulf' is to be bridged.

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8 Cake art as social work

Creative, sensory and relational knowing

Tracie Mafile'o

Introduction

This chapter is a narrative of how my cake art expresses my knowing and being as a mixed heritage Tongan social work scholar in the diaspora. Using an auto-ethnographic approach (Méndez, 2013), I share my Cakes with Love story and examine the epistemic of creating and sharing cake art in my communities of place, culture and profession. Auto-ethnographic stories "are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience" (Adams, Ellis and Jones, 2015: 1). Within the Cakes with Loves story, creative, sensory and relational knowing is examined in light of Tongan tā-vā epistemology (Ka'ili, 2017; Māhina, 2010; 2017) and border epistemology (Mignolo, 2011; 2018). I consider cake art as a metaphor and method for more fully human social work, which disrupts boundaries and binaries within mainstream social work, and expresses decoloniality in the diaspora. The narrative invites consideration of relational Moana (Pacific-indigenous) epistemologies which give primacy to mutuality and creativity for re-shaping, re-colouring and reconstructing social work as we know it.

The *Cakes with Love* story

A lemon yoghurt cake with tiny black modelling chocolate stars on top of the lemon buttercream was the way I said, 'Thank you'. The cake was presented in a black and white gift box, with a yellow ribbon securing the 'thank you for your kindness' message. When my father passed away, I was looking for a tie for him to wear to his final resting place. The man who served me at Goldfinch and Cousins Menswear downtown had heard of the fatal accident that occurred a couple of blocks from the store. When I mentioned why I was looking for a tie, he pushed my $50 note back across the counter towards me. The $49 tie was gifted to me, free of charge. Kindness soothes a grieving heart. When I delivered the lemon yoghurt cake some months later, his father was looking after the store. I cannot describe how much it meant to me to hand the gift-wrapped cake to his father. Sharing sweet art as an act of gratitude between

relative strangers in a community of place, created a moment of reciprocity, mutuality and relationality.

It's 4 am. My eyes spring open. Awake. Before my feet touch the ground, my mind is creating the cake. I am imagining colours, taste, texture, the message and the meaning this cake will have for the recipient. The pumping adrenalin awakens my senses, and the pressure focuses my thinking. I mix, taste, construct and anticipate what is to emerge. The climax is in gifting and presenting the cake, the mutual exchange and nurturing of a relational space. The cake experience mutually delights and affirms. In that moment, we sense and know that we are connected and belong, and that we are celebrated and have dignity. I create cakes to celebrate life milestones, to show gratitude, to build community or to communicate a message through the senses of sight, smell, sound, touch and taste.

I am a light shade of brown, my own kind of colour mix. From my father's side I descend from Tonga, the expansive Moana and first peoples of Oceania. From my mother's side, I descend from the British Isles, sitting now as a settler in Aotearoa New Zealand, swept in through waves of imperialism and coloniality. As a second-generation mixed-heritage Pacific Island migrant in Aotearoa New Zealand, my place is in the borderlands, traversing indigeneity and coloniality. I split a coconut, its thick white flesh sitting in contrast to the deep brown textured shell. Exposed, the half coconut is poised on top of cakes I create for others whose biographies also traverse the Pacific diaspora borderlands. While 'coconut' has been used in derogatory ways to refer to Oceania peoples, in cake art it is re-framed. Traditional narratives of *Hina* and *Tuna* speak of the deep history of the coconut within Oceania cultures, and the everyday sustenance and healing sourced from coconuts. Grown in tropical homelands, the contrasting textures and colours of the half coconut symbolise our grounding in 'island' identities and our desire for decoloniality in the diaspora.

Cakes with Love enhances inter-generational celebration within diasporic Pacific communities, by creating cakes for Tuvalu, Fiji and Papua New Guinea community celebrations in regional New Zealand. Most Pacific Island nations are former colonies of Britain, Australia, France or New Zealand, and so Oceania communities celebrate 'independence' in the diaspora. My connections to these communities are multilayered. For example, I had been chair of a Pacific community trust, with the vision of thriving Pacific communities. Some of us were also part of the same faith community. My father had spent time in Fiji en route to New Zealand, stowing away on a boat, and had developed friendships with members of that community. The Fiji independence cake sat on a rustic round wooden platter, with handmade turquoise frangipani and hibiscus flowers cascading down the three tiers of blended turquoise and natural buttercream. The cake design drew inspiration from *vanua* (Nabobo-Baba, 2006), the land, and our sea of islands which connects Oceania peoples (Hau'ofa, 1994). Sitting to one side of the cake, a community member added a *tabua* (polished whale's tooth), a treasured traditional cultural item. Cake art enacts a visible tribute to Indigenous perspective in the diaspora. Cake art, sweetening cultural community celebration, brings forth a border epistemology, "anchoring a politics of

knowledge that is both ingrained in the body and in local histories" (Mignolo, 2011: 274). Decoloniality is expressed in the Pacific diaspora, through cake art which builds memories in new lands, using homeland frames of reference.

Cakes with Love is 'home-grown'; it did not start as a professional or scholarly endeavour. Being a cake artist is not something I planned or had formal training for. As a child, I enjoyed cooking and learnt basic baking skills from my mother, who had learnt from her mother, through a relational sharing of knowledge. Yet, arguably, cake art is also deeply rooted in Tongan indigeneity, being a new iteration of *faiva ta'o mā*, the traditional art of bread baking (T Ka'ili 2019, personal communication, 13 May). Baking and creating cakes for causes developed organically, and apparently, accidentally. I offered to do a 'Minion' cake for my nephew turning eight years, to help my sister out. I then decided that, to be fair, I would decorate a cake for all my nephews and nieces that year. I kept finding reasons to create cakes that year – anniversaries, teacher appreciation day, community fundraisers, hosting faith community meals at my home. I also kept finding new techniques I wanted to try out – rosettes, scallops, ruffles, drip cakes, gum paste flowers, fresh foliage. At the end of the first year, I had decorated more than 70 cakes. On reflection, *Cakes with Love* has been an antidote to the pressures of working in a busy (neo-liberal) university environment. Where tertiary teaching is now largely mediated through a computer screen, sharing baking is a way I can be more tangibly connected to my communities. I have been a social work educator for nearly 20 years, but for the last few years, I have also spent many spare hours creating cakes for causes.

It was national social workday, and my university was organising a local event, with about 60 social workers in attendance. As the MC helping to facilitating the day, I prepared chocolate cupcake bags with a 'celebrate social workers' message attached. Between seminar speakers I invited participants to volunteer to come forward and gift a cupcake to a colleague they would like to affirm. A social worker who had moved to New Zealand from overseas stood to acknowledge an Indigenous social worker from a different agency who had been generous in sharing cultural knowledge for working in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Another social worker was affirmed after undergoing a challenging time in a national role. A participant in a practice research project stood to affirm the researcher for the way the research gave voice to her experience as an Indigenous social worker. A transformation of the relational space took place – there were tears, there was deep listening and we experienced a heightened sense of shared purpose and collegiality. The transformative power was not the cupcake itself, but the relationality and mutuality which was enacted in the gifting and the sharing of the cupcake.

Sharing technique and the philosophy of *Cakes with Love* has also been underpinned by an ethic of relationality and mutuality. My friend worked at a teen-parent learning hub. She and the young mothers came to my house for a cake art workshop. She reflects:

> At the heart of my role is providing meaningful learning pathways for … youth … Tracie hosted a 'Cakes with Love' workshop to demonstrate

> technique, creativity and the heart behind sharing your talent with others. Driving up to Tracie's home, the girls were wary of the neighbourhood... After two hours... the young women … carefully carried their edible creations to the van. The drive back to course was full of … comments like … 'That was amazing … thank you', and 'Can we go there every day?' Today these young women bloomed with confidence, excelled in a not-so-simple skill and shared affirming moments between each other. Today they were cake decorators, skilled and experienced. Today was a beautiful day. (Blog: Journey of Julene)

I wanted to do more than share technical skills; I wanted to share the *Cakes with Love* philosophy. To do this, each young person received a bag with basic cake-decorating tools and encouragement to use their new skill to create a cake for someone they wanted to affirm or show gratitude to – to bake-it-forward. Sweet art brought diverse sectors of the community together through shared learning experiences.

Cakes with Love, sweet art with heart, is my new delight. I bake and decorate cakes to build stronger communities of place, faith and culture and of the profession of which I am a part. I am beginning to explore how my enactment of cake art brings welcome new flavour to social work. Cake creation fosters creativity, mutuality, hospitality and relationality. In so doing, my cake art invites a disruption to social work discourse of professional-client and professional-personal binaries. *Cakes with Love*, as an expression of relationality, mutuality and decoloniality, has been life-giving. The *Cakes with Love* story evokes consideration of creative, sensory and relational knowing which will be discussed in the following sections.

Creative knowing

Creativity is an integral part of knowledge and its construction and, as such, ought to be anticipated and cultivated. One might anticipate, for instance, that the creation has the potential to provide new insights and perspective for the creator. I felt nervous, yet bravely adventurous, creating a cake as an artistic response for an international community development conference. I noted the conference call for abstracts included an artistic responses category in addition to the usual papers, posters and workshops categories. The idea of myself as a culinary artist was entertained. The alignment between my personal and professional values was more evident, and more deeply experienced, through my cake art over the previous two years. *Cakes with Love* had given me fresh insight into how simple things like neighbourliness and hospitality can be transformative. The creative process and material outworking constructed knowledge for being a social worker as a way of life. The artistic response included a display of photos of my cake creations, illustrating how my cake art strengthens communities. I also baked and decorated a cake to reflect the conference theme of *Power, Participation and Progress: Community Development towards 2030, Our Analysis, Our Action*. After making sure that the university accommodation

where I stayed had an oven, I packed baking and decorating tools, travelled to the other side of the world and baked and decorated the cake. Interestingly, it was not until the cake creation was complete, and I sat back and looked at it, that I could actually know how the cake reflected the conference themes. It was then that I wrote the blurb. This experience illustrated to me that new knowledge and perspective emerges from creativity and from the creation itself.

The salience of the artistic in everyday life tends to be overlooked or undervalued. Much of the food we consume in our global capitalist matrix is mass-produced to near perfection. Cake art contrasts with standardisation and commercialism in food production and is bespoke, personalised, handmade and creative. In my youth, both my parents worked as labourers in a breakfast cereal factory, and I worked there packing cereal boxes and cleaning the machines in school holidays. Our labour in this food production, disconnected from the recipient, required conformity over creativity. When creativity and cause work together, and the recipient is at the forefront of the cake design, the cake experience is memorable, delightful, soothing and moving. Cake art counters alienation of capitalism and connects producers (cake artists) and recipients. Listening to a radio programme discussing Prince Charles and Lady Di's wedding, I was captured by Lady Di's reflection that her best wedding gifts were the handwritten notes and the home baking from children, things they had made with their hands. Since *Cakes with Love* evolved, I have strongly attuned to others' experience of the artistic in everyday life. Homemade sweet art created with my hands, head and heart, for visual and literal consumption, reflects creative knowing and the artistic everyday life.

Creativity as an epistemic characteristic is not only materialised in the cake itself; more potently, creative knowing manifests through the social relations of exchange inextricably a part of the cake art. Tongan *tā-vā* epistemology holds that symmetrical relations of exchange create harmony and beauty (Māhina, 2010, 2017), and food-sharing practices amongst Tongans in the diaspora are a way such symmetry is created (Ka'ili, 2017). According to *tā-vā* theory, all things exist within *tā* (time) and *vā* (space) bringing nature, mind and society into eternal relations of exchange (Māhina, 2010, 2017). Knowledge and knowledge construction from a Tongan *tā-vā* epistemology therefore involves an artful exchange involving nature, mind and society. According to Ka'ili (2017), nurturing the relational space, *tauhi vā*, is an art form which, like all Tongan arts, "aims at creating harmony and beauty through the rhythmic or symmetrical arrangement of *tā* in *vā*" (time in space)' (Ka'ili, 2017: x). Relatedly, Adapon (2008: 31) demonstrates the agency or power of food art and the artist to mediate social meanings "which are powerful enough to lead to social changes in other levels in the matrix of cultural forms". Knowledge and knowledge construction according to Tongan *tā-vā* epistemology are ultimately creative, artistic and aesthetic.

Arts-based social work (Kim, 2017; Moxley and Feen, 2016) is gaining momentum. The arts enable social change in contexts where injustices result from colonialism, providing a mechanism for re-storying history, facilitating healing and strengthening collective action (Sinding and Barnes, 2015). *Cakes with*

Love contributes to this broadening of social work more explicitly grounded in the creative arts. Social workers, as suggested elsewhere, need to "use not only argument, but also art, music, film, poetry, dance and drama to articulate the value and processes of collective and diverse humanity" (Ife, 2018: 126). Like social work, *Cakes with Love* merges science and art. This is also the case with indigeneity, where science and humanities are one body of knowledge; Indigenous science is expressed in poems, chants, songs, dances (all forms of humanities) (T Ka'ili 2019, personal communication, 13 May). In cake creation, technical skills and knowledge need to be honed, developed and applied with precision, without which the quality of the outcome is compromised. In baking, for example, an extra drop of the wrong colour can dramatically change the whole appearance and mood of the cake art. Or, removing the cake from the oven too early will result in a sunken centre. Yet, baking and cake creating are more than technicalities. Creativity and cause merge with scientific and technical knowledge. Creative knowing also implies knowing which embraces all the senses.

Sensory knowing

Cake art, as both a metaphor and a method for social work, elevates a sensory view of knowledge, over a rational and technical view of knowledge. Through the senses – taste, touch, smell, sight – we know. Sensory, spiritual, affective and emotional knowing and knowledge construction reflects Tongan *tā-vā* epistemology. Ka'ili (2017: 46) points out that "Tongans engage in *tauhi vā* [nurturing the relational space] first to reconcile conflicts and create harmony and beauty and second to experience feelings of warmth, joy, or honor". From this perspective, for social work to promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people (as per the international definition of social work), social work knowing is not only factual and cognitive. Knowledge construction also occurs through a spiritual dimension and through all our senses. We know our worth and our belonging within our families and communities in ways that are not contained in language, theory and reason alone. Drawing from a similar epistemic assumption, Scott (2006) demonstrates how the audible sound of the *kāranga*, the call by women to welcome visitors into the traditional Māori meeting house, is a powerful expression of respect and mana contributing to *ōranga* [well-being]. As another example of sensory knowing, Tolia-Kelly (2016: 896) reflects on the experiences of "Māori bodies looking at 'self', as 'other'" in a British museum and posits the value of considering the affective politics of 'race' and culture. In this example, knowing happens affectively and through literally seeing how the colonisers saw the colonised. The presence and affective response of the 'other' disrupt the reading of museums as "texts, disembodied and removed from communities" (Tolia-Kelly, 2016: 896). Similarly, sensing as a way of knowing disrupts 'othering' in social work education, research and practice. Such othering can happen in social work when an essentialist approach to cultural competency (Naden, 2017) assumes a white positioning,

and social work students, practitioners and scholars of colour look at self as other. In these instances, sensory and affective responses are a legitimate way we know and can also potentially inform more just ways of being and acting.

Relational knowing

Cakes with Love conveys relationality and relational knowing. Relational knowing conceives that connection, context, inter-subjectivity and relationality characterise what is known and the way in which we know. Lim (2015: 15) explains that relational epistemology foregrounds "the interactive connections between social beings on the one hand and knowledge on the other hand" and restores "a focus on the qualities of the inter-subjective relationships people experience". Likewise, Tongan epistemology perceives knowledge as emanating from the holistic, collectivistic and circular arrangement of *tā* and *vā* reflecting nature/ecology (Ka'ili, 2017). Ironically, the way in which mainstream social work has developed often promotes disconnection, instead of relationality (O'Leary, Tsui and Ruch, 2013). Oceania Indigenous practitioners have reflected that ways of practising based on their cultural knowing are challenged in mainstream social work agencies (Mafile'o, 2004). This includes, for example, being seen to be making too many home visits or working outside of an agency's service contracts by transporting clients to appointments. Relational knowing undergirds a more connected, inclusive and dynamic social work based on mutuality, providing an alternative to the construction of professional boundaries incongruent with the ethos of social work (O'Leary, Tsui and Ruch, 2013). My cake art epitomises relationality as a way of knowing and being that informs a reconstruction of social work and a reconstruction of boundaries.

Knowing and being which engages across personal, cultural and professional dimensions has been a focus of discussion amongst Oceania social work scholars (Autagavaia, 2001; Watson, 2019). Drawing on research with statutory social workers of Pacific (Oceania) ethnicity, Autagavaia (2001) presents a model of Pacific Island social work supervision. The model has three concentric circles with the personal dimension in the centre, the cultural dimension in the next layer, and the professional on the outer layer. According to Autagavaia (2001), supervision of Pacific social workers needs to draw on the personal and the cultural to enhance the professional. This approach stood in contrast to what her participants had experienced, where supervision tended to focus just on the professional dimension. Cake art as social work expresses a similar disruption to increasingly rigid boundaries around what is considered professional and the diminishing of that which is considered to belong within the personal domain.

In cake creation and gifting, there is an intentional entering into another's world to bring delight and to honour. The Lion King cake represented a small act with potential for a big impact. The cake was for a teenager who had in recent years lost a significant family member to suicide. When he excelled taking a lead role in a theatre production, his family wanted a cake to acknowledge his achievement and his new-found talent. It takes a village and I am glad to be part

of his village. Perhaps it is the dissipation of personal-professional binaries, and the concomitant promotion of relationality, that enables meaningful and transformative interaction. The resultant sense of connection and belonging to a community could be a measure of success. The dissipation of a boundary between 'them' and 'us', between 'expert' and 'client', could be a worthy achievement. In social work, the disciplined use of self is promoted, but this has been interpreted into a form of self-compartmentalisation in a manner which has undermined relationality. Relational epistemology, on the other hand, promotes knowing which is interconnected and valuing of the diversity within and amongst us.

A relational epistemology means that love can be centralised in my cake art and as a core principle for social work. '*Ofa* (compassion/love) is a value Tongan and other Oceania social workers identify as a key aspect of their practice (Mafile'o, 2019; MSD, 2015). Love is receiving more attention in social work literature as an ethic for radical social work (Godden, 2017), and at the heart of emancipation of oppressed groups, making practice more fully human (Morley and Ife, 2002; Walker, 2015). Love has also been given prominence in Pacific-Indigenous education (Manuatu et al., 2016) and in disrupting white masculinity in teacher education (Reyes, Radina & Aronson, 2018). According to Palmer (1987), love is a prerequisite for knowing and learning, which in turn is a communal, rather than individual, act. Enacting love, *Cakes with Love* unapologetically enriches social work discourse with love.

Gifting and sharing food, as an expression of love, is a potential mechanism for decolonising social work. Decoloniality delinks from capitalism and communalism and presents a third option which draws from Indigenous reservoirs of ways of life and modes of thinking (Mignolo, 2011). Sharing food is integral to the production of social relations within Tongan and other Oceanic communities. The word for food in Tonga, *kai*, is also linguistically linked to the word for relatives or family, the people we share food with, *kāinga* (M*ā*hina, 1999). As shown earlier, sharing food enacts *tauhi vā* – nurturing the relational space (*fakapotopoto he tauhi vā; poto he angā*) – wisely maintaining harmony and well-being of society ('Ahio, 2011). In sharing food, a powerful interchange between giver and receiver is brought to fruition, which can be intergenerational across time and space. Food also connects us as social workers with those we work with as clients; as human beings we all eat, and mindfulness can develop awareness of social and ecological justice when considering who has prepared food and who is without food (Apaitia-Vague, 2011: 69) and the interconnectedness of our food with the natural environment. Cake art as social work, flowing from a relational epistemology, resonates with decolonial border thinking. In border epistemology, indigeneity speaks from the exterior back into westernisation (Mignolo, 2011, 2018). Such borderism delinks from linear, one-dimensional knowing and embraces circular, facing-backwards-to-move-forward knowing (Kaili, 2017). *Cakes with Love* outlives such borderism, where I exist on the border of professional and personal, on the border of knowing and being, on the border of land and sea, on the border of me and we. Its borderism is what makes it what it is. Border thinking carries

its potential to transform and to bring different flavours, textures and shapes to decolonise the social work endeavour.

A story not yet concluded …

The *Cakes with Love* story continues to unfold as I live out this passion of creating cakes for cause and of doing cake art with heart. In this auto-ethnographic narrative, I have taken the opportunity to make sense of my cake art story. I have considered how my experience of growing *Cakes with Love* has given me insight into creative, sensory and relational ways of knowing in the context of my being as a mixed-heritage Tongan social work scholar in the diaspora. These ways of knowing connect with Tongan *tā-vā* epistemology, which undergirds the art of symmetrical socio-spatial exchanges creating beauty and harmony and producing warmth and joy. Cake art reflects decoloniality in the diaspora, bringing cultural and epistemic flavours to reconstruct social work for more fully human practice imbued with love.

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Comment by Sharlotte Tusasiirwe

Mafile'o's point of relationality and relational knowing embedded in Tongan epistemologies and ways of life is related to values and principles of *obuntu* in western Uganda where I come from, although *obuntu* philosophies have been silenced by the highly westernised social work education and practice in Uganda. *Obuntu* is a common philosophy among Bantu-speaking tribes in Africa, which means showing humanity towards others. One demonstrates *obuntu* through embracing values and virtues including, among many others, hospitality, including sharing with other material things like food and handworks, or even non-material things like visitation and information. Mutuality, connection and reciprocity characterise such exchange spaces. Everyone in the community is encouraged to have something that they can share with others. For example, when one cooks food, they have to include extra portions in case a visitor, expected or unexpected, comes and needs to eat. It is expected that there is enough for everyone and any one's home should be an open home ready to help those in need and visitors. It is this virtue of openness, hospitality to visitors, that the colonisers unfortunately abused when they came to Africa. However, culturally, visitors are regarded as a blessing, who can gift the host family or community, be it materially or even non-materially like through engaging in conversations with the hosts. It is a tradition that if one is given an animal as a gift, for example, a cow, when it reproduces, the receiver should return a calf to the giver to cement the relationship but also to leave the giver with more properties to share and gift others. It is common for women to gift their handworks like well-decorated handmade baskets or mats made out of local materials and with designs that the women themselves create. Women also share part of their produce/harvests like crops from their gardens. Ideally,

this mutual sharing should not know any borders of personal or professional boundaries. However, the western social work profession imported to Uganda discourages such gifting by clients to professionals and leaves professional social workers in Uganda to struggle to find well-calculated strategies of tactfully refusing such gifts from their clients. This is particularly a challenge for community development workers who visit people in their communities. Refusing gifts and maintaining boundaries is a 'professional' expectation which is not supported by the cultural/local way of being, which is characterised by mutual sharing.

This restriction of gifting and relational knowing is translated to research too. During my PhD research, while ethics committees required me to provide incentives to my participants who were participating in group conversations that took more than one hour of their time, researchers like me are also cautioned about biasing or coercing participants to participate in research through the giving of incentives. While the concern is about finding a balance between preventing bias through compensation, following the *obuntu* philosophies which encourage relational Indigenous methodologies, such mutual gifting would be understood as a cultural mutual exchange. When I conducted my research with older women in a rural community in Uganda, I followed the *obuntu* traditions that I had learnt from my mother and the community that raised me. In my PhD work, I make a very first step to recognise and acknowledge this Indigenous knowledge as critical in my research. This is a bold step to include Indigenous knowledge, given that my formal education has mostly been in western epistemologies and ways of doing research. However, following my Indigenous oral education, I had been taught that when you are going to visit, you need to go with something to share with the people being visited, which I did. I purposely bought things that would be useful in daily life like salt, bread, soap etc. This was not to compensate for the women's time or even their participation in my research as required by an Ethics Committee, but it was part of how a person with *obuntu* should behave. I visited the women more than once, and during my last visit, some of the women gifted me back with some of the crops from their gardens, such as onions. I gladly interpreted this exchange as a cement to our relationship, a connection that we had, way beyond the research they had participated in. It is through this connection and relationship that we had with two of the women that they were able to tell me very sensitive information about one of the 'community elite/gatekeepers' who was misleading the older women that I had been given a lot of money from my university to give to the older women and that they should refuse to talk with me until I have given them this money. If I had kept boundaries in order not to compromise the professional relationship, I probably would not have come to know such information.

The women had welcomed me in their private homes, which was way against the Ethics Committee's recommendation that I shouldn't go to people's private spaces but instead go to public places like cafes so that I maintain the private-public boundaries and respect the privacy of the participants. While, practically, such suggested public places can be too public to protect the privacy

of research participants, it is also a tradition that people like to be visited in their homes and communities, as visitors are also believed to bring blessings to those homes and communities; as the saying goes, 'A home is a home if it is visited'.

I totally agree with Mafile'o that mainstream social work education, practice and research promote disconnection instead of relationality, or may be 'plastic/dry relationality' which really goes against my own cultural way of knowing and being. It is very difficult for me to live in the professional-personal binaries. This is why I attend my students' graduation parties, even their wedding/traditional ceremonies, even the christening parties of their children, which may be regarded as personal events. I also invite them to attend my 'personal' parties, including those held in my private home. Indeed, a more human social work where connection, mutuality and genuine relationships are embedded in cultural and epistemic flavours is long overdue, particularly when working with people/communities in contexts where these are valued rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all social work that imposes professional boundaries and binaries even where they are alien.

Comment by Sonia Tascón

What a beautiful work of art this chapter is, weaving a number of ontological ways of being and epistemological frames of knowing within it. The inclusion of Tongan frames of knowing and doing were not mere points of comparison, they were central theoretical templates that, alongside non-Tongan frames such as Mignolo's sensory knowing, auto-ethnography and emotion as knowing, became a tour through the hybridity that you embody. The chapter disrupts the binaries upon which so much western knowledge rests and reconstitutes them into a delicious new recipe that is to be made and eaten, made and eaten, together and many times, across different spaces and times. Like the cakes that are material reality *and* symbols at once, of that in-between where self meets another, where space and time collude and collide as the repetition of making and eating changes but doesn't change, a middle groundwork is being formulated and renegotiated. The sweet recipe that invites connection recognises and yet reconsiders the dispersal of those who live in-between lives, here-and-not-of-the-here, to redefine our togetherness, to create new responsibilities: "I consider cake art as *a metaphor and method* for more fully human social work, which disrupts boundaries and binaries within mainstream social work, and expresses decoloniality in the diaspora" (my emphasis).

Diasporic peoples live liminal lives, on the edges, on the threshold of becoming but never being, forever in transition. We have left something behind (or have had it taken from us) and are becoming part of another, new, form of being. And sometimes, often, new forms of being are stifled from emerging when that which we bring with us, the 'old' ways of being, are not acknowledged and incorporated into the new. That liminal space is a beautiful and yet frightening place to be – a place filled with ghosts and spectres, from the past into the present, shaping the future. As Warwick Thornton, Australian Indigenous filmmaker, evokes for his people in the film *The Darkside*, ghosts

are not always forbidding or menacing presences; they are, put simply, our ancestors. As he says: "I've grown up all my life with grandparents, uncles and aunties telling me ghost stories, telling me about ancestors and all that sort of stuff, and I find that we should recognise them". You are inviting your ancestors into this chapter, Tracie, Tongan and British, you evoke them and work them into your work of love/art. The Tongan meanings for deep relational connection of *tauhi vā* and of food as the connector; the British cake-making and decorating traditions. It reminds me of a colleague of mine, of whom I wrote in my chapter, who writes on filial piety, a Korean notion that helps to connect life and death, the ancestors to those we call 'the living'. That acknowledgement collapses time and space and poses life as interconnected across these dimensions, time in space, what you mentioned is the Tongan *tā* in *vā*. I think that so many ailments that accost us in contemporary western lives, mental, physical, emotional and social, emerge from the dualities, the binaries as schisms that we created in modernity, which disable relational connections – to each other, to others across time and space, and to the past and the ancestors – and we do not share our sense of responsibility with them as a result. This, Thornton again, says is a form of schizophrenic dysfunctionality:

> We've got all these ancestral beings, spirits and ghosts—I think that they're going, 'Why aren't we being looked after and recognised any more?'… They're almost in a limbo, it's sort of a schizophrenic dysfunctionality, because we recognised them always, daily, daily, daily.
>
> (Browning 2013 online https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/awaye/warwick-thornton-on-darkside/4518722)

That schizophrenic dysfunctionality in turn produces fear (of others, of death, of difference), which is having such profound consequences for the earth and for our need for collaborations in this time of social and political upheavals and upcoming environmental crises. What we do, instead, is deepen the schisms (think Brexit, increasing racial intolerance with Trumpian populism, rising white supremacy, and Australia's refugee detention policies) and create insecurities born of the divisions and resulting resentments. Your cakes are food and more than food, they are a political possibility; they are love beyond dyadic love, they are a love of humanity in its rich diversity, which you embody. And it is in the act of creativity that this is made manifest. As you so incisively say: "New knowledge and perspective emerges from creativity". Through the process of letting go of knowledge making, of the control of the parameters within which knowledge will be created, that knowledge took form. Japanese author Haruki Murakami's latest novel *Killing Commendatore*'s central theme is of (spirit) dimensions that cannot be understood and known, they must be felt and barely glimpsed, of a creative process that embraces its beauty by getting lost in it. The creative process takes you over and it is as if you are a mere conduit of a truth that is beyond you but will *become* through you; you are not in control, and it is in this moment that new knowledge emerges. This 'letting

go' is not encouragement to refuse the necessary agency in our lives and in the action and effort that it takes to assist others. It is simply to acknowledge that those of us who live in-between lives, of the here-but-not-of-here, know full well what it is to not be in control and may (are forced to?) allow ourselves to embrace the uncertainty of not knowing. As I have often said to my students, the margins, the edges, the thresholds, are some of the most exciting spaces to be, even if the most frightening; they often unfold great creative disruptions, and often do this through the creation of new communities of knowing and being. This chapter does that.

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9 Refractory interventions

The incubation of Rival epistemologies in the margins of Brazilian social work

Iris Silva Brito and Goetz Ottmann

> To think without passion is to make coffins for ideas; to act without passion is to fill the coffins.
>
> (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 30)

For many observers, the political crisis of liberal democracy currently unfolding in many countries around the globe has its roots in the lack of a credible alternative to the social imaginary propagated by the Global North (Mason, 2019). Faced with stagnating or declining standards of living, the de-socialisation of societies, environmental challenges of catastrophic proportions and the excesses of corporate elites, many citizens around the world experience as unbearable the current unrealism of Realpolitik. They are deeply dissatisfied with the status quo of technocracies where experts craft solutions that are not really solutions but an attempt to indefinitely postpone the need for real solutions – effectively transforming technocratic politics into 'political technologies' (de Sousa Santos, 2014). They crave alternatives to a system whose inadequacies are becoming all too apparent but that has been successfully marketed as 'the only game in town'. This epistemological poverty makes the struggle against the elimination of social alternatives the most important struggle we face today (de Sousa Santos, 2009). In this chapter, we will engage with some of the literature that critically examines our historical juncture in terms of the political success of the Global North to impose its modernity on Latin America and particularly on Brazilian social policy and social work before sketching three alternative social work approaches that have grown out of a dissatisfaction with the social, cultural and religious colonisation by the Global North.

We will provide a brief summary of emergent epistemological alternatives in everyday life in the southern Bahia, a state in the northeast of Brazil. We will argue that challenges to the epistemology of the Global North are a common occurrence and emerge in the most unexpected places mainly as a pragmatist response to experienced injustice and inequity. Although they are highly innovative in many ways, none of the case studies neatly fits our Western understanding of what is 'progressive'. Bearing this in mind, it is worth remembering Bonaventura de Sousa Santos' statement (channelling Gramsci)

that "the emancipatory transformations in the world may follow grammars and scripts other than those developed by Western-centric theory, and such diversity should be valorised" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 8). Furthermore, we are using de Sousa Santos' definition of the Global North to signify "a political, not geographical location" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 27). In other words, the Global North is a political project that, although deeply rooted in 500 years of European colonialism, is furthered by international as well as domestic elites and the organisations and institutions tied to global capitalism. We find compelling de Sousa Santos' explanation that final-stage capitalism leads to a radical break-down of social ties, cultural norms and civic rights, giving rise to an exponential growth of social inequality and to new forms of social fascism (de Sousa Santos, 2008 [2007]). In de Sousa Santos' accounts, social fascism emerges if "social regimes [are] regulated only by extreme power differences or status hierarchies of a new kind" that appear to take the form of neo-feudal hierarchies (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 50).

Coloniality of power, epistemicide and the search for social alternatives

For most Latin American post-colonial theorists, 'globalisation' is the outcome of a process that began with the integration of the Americas into the European colonial capitalist enterprise (Moraña, Dussel, & Jáuregui, 2008; Quijano & Ennis, 2000). This model of colonisation was based on the imposition of a system of hierarchical social classification that saw Western modernisation as the highest form of human civilisation (Quijano & Ennis, 2000; de Sousa Santos, 2014). Colonial countries on the other hand were seen as lacking and, at best, transitioning towards this advanced form of Western civilisation. Post-colonial theorists argue that this colonial social classification and the notion that the South (i.e., the Third World, Developing Countries) is lacking and therefore requires development still resonates within the model of power created by the Global North (Bhambra & de Sousa Santos, 2017; Escobar, 1995; Quijano & Ennis, 2000). In other words, it is the acceptance of a Western modernity and in particular neo-liberalism, its most recent instalment in the Global North's cultural imperialism, that still holds Latin America in its grip (Escobar, 1995).

This hierarchical social structure has been contested for much of the 20th century. Attempts to forge a Brazilian modernity rooted in local knowledge and tradition that could provide an alternative to the epistemological domination of the Global North have been traced to Mario de Andrade and the modernist movement of the 1920s, when he called for "a revolt against the formalistic and rhetorical archaisms of elite culture expression in favour of the use by the literary elite and the language of the people" (Lehmann, 1996, p. 7). A Brazilian anti-colonial agenda emerged more forcefully during the 1960s and 1970s in the form of liberation theology and dependency theory (Escobar, 1995). Over the course of the last 30 years, the seeds contained within these

attempts to form a Brazilian modernity have been taken up by a variety of Latin American scholars, leading to post-colonial theories and decolonial thinking in the works of Ramon Grosfoguel (2013), Walter Mignolo (2006), Enrique Dussel (1974), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Arturo Escobar (1995) and others. Approaches have largely focused on the theoretical deconstruction of colonial epistemologies and the delineation of alternatives. Decolonial thinkers largely agree that decolonial thought requires de-linking and de-colonising of knowledge and the mind, of un-learning and rejecting the naturalising assumptions made by dominant Western narratives (Mignolo, 2006). Decolonial thinkers seek to transform Western humanist discourses, arguing that the majority of people in the South do not think or care about abstract concepts such as human rights. Instead they seek to construct a new post-humanist paradigm based on the concept of human dignity (see also Agamben, 1998 [1995]), a concept decoupled from imperialist Western culture (Mignolo, 2006). Rather than producing an anti-European fundamentalism, decolonial thinkers call for a radical universalism based on the notion that there are many truths arrived at from a variety of perspectives (Grosfoguel, 2013; de Sousa Santos, 2014). For Dussel, de Sousa Santos and others influenced by liberation theology, the cultural transformation that decolonial thinkers work towards to is rooted in popular culture – the culture of the poor (Dussel, 1974; de Sousa Santos, 2014). This is plainly expressed by Dussel in the following quote:

> The culture of cultural poverty, far from being a minor culture, represents the most uncontaminated and irradiative core of the resistance of the oppressed against the oppressor.
>
> (Dussel, 1974)

Transformations of Brazilian social work

Brazilian social work emerged during the first decades of the 20th century at the interstice of two powers that sought to extend their sphere of influence: the post-colonial state and the Catholic church. At an institutional level, the Catholic hierarchy sought ways to extend its sphere of influence and apostolic mission by highlighting its social commitment to the poor, giving rise to organisations such as Social Action (*Ação Social*) or Catholic Action (*Ação Catolica*) (Ottmann, 2002). The Brazilian state, on the other hand, concerned about the political mobilisation of the urban underclass, sought to neutralise its grievances by means of instituting new forms of governmental control (Iamamoto, 2017). The first schools of social work emerged between 1936 and 1945. They were Eurocentric in outlook and were intimately tied to the charitable mission of the Catholic church. Instrumental to their emergence were women of significant social standing who assumed leadership positions and who drove the professionalisation process, drawing on a type of charitable social work advanced by the Catholic church in Europe and particularly in Belgium (Iamamoto, 2017; Phan thi Ngoc-Quoi, 1956). By the end of the

1940s, social work schools had been opened in most major Brazilian urban centres. The institutionalisation and centralisation of social assistance programs accelerated markedly during the Estado Novo (1937–45) dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, which centralised the political control over non-governmental social services by means of regulation and by making them dependent on state funding. As a result, social services became an instrument of clientelist politics and state control rather than a civic right.

It is worth pointing out that although there were a number of attempts to reconceptualise formal social work between the 1940s and the 1950s, these attempts were rather limited in scope (Iamamoto, 2017; Netto, 2005). A political project to break with the clientelist assistentialism practised hitherto only begun to take shape from 1965 onwards. Netto (2005) distinguishes between three different trajectories that emerged as part of a larger Latin American re-conceptualisation of social work: a modernising trajectory following the North American model imagining a systematic, rights-based approach to social work anchored in the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights; a neo-traditional, conservative approach embracing psychosocial assistentialism; and a Marxist-structuralist trajectory that was largely restricted to a university context (Netto, 2005). The debate underpinning this re-conceptualisation rarely involved front-line workers directly but was based on the input of social work professionals that occupied administrative positions within the state (Netto, 2005).[1] It is also important to remember that the first decade of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–74) was very repressive, forcing a large number of more radical social activists (among them Paulo Freire) into exile. As a result, in Brazil the more radical social work trajectory emphasising equality, political activism and liberation from oppression only gathered momentum during the political opening of the military dictatorship during the late 1970s and 1980s (Netto, 2005). Actors representing these trajectories became part of a larger popular movement that aimed at disrupting the link between populist politics and welfare handouts with the aim to turn welfare into a social safety net to which all Brazilians have a constitutional right (Muñoz-Guzmán, 2015). The movement was able to celebrate repeated successes in the form of the socially progressive Federal Constitution of 1988, the Organic Law of Social Assistance of 1993, and a number of decrees and laws that were passed over the course of the last 15 years that clearly articulated and expanded Brazilians' right to welfare. It is important to point out that these democratic achievements are constantly being undermined by crafty politicians that attempt to transform Brazil's social services into a clientelist reward for political loyalty rather than a civic right.

Whereas the development of formal social work was stifled by its proximity to the state during the dictatorship, the informal social work initiatives

1 Netto points out that in Brazil, the vast majority of social workers are in managerial positions within the state, rather than direct client work (Netto, 2005).

organised by Brazil's 'new social movements' led to a paradigm shift that would eventually influence formal social work. Instrumental were the initiatives of the secular left inspired by the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB) based in Rio de Janeiro, the student movements, and the community development initiatives led by the progressive Catholic church (Ortiz, 1985). Commencing during the late 1950s, the search for an authentic church of the grassroots grounded in the lived experience of the poor fomented by a consciousness-raising approach spearheaded by ISEB and the work of Paulo Freire spread rapidly during the second half of the 1960s, radically and lastingly reshaping informal social work practices at the grassroots (Mainwaring & Wilde, 1989; Ottmann, 2002). The harsh reality of widespread poverty amplified the message emanating from the Latin American Bishops' Conference held in Medellin in 1968 (Ottmann, 2002).

During the military dictatorship (1964–85), the use of social services as a clientelist instrument of control became the focal point of intense criticism. As liberation theology swept Latin America, the Catholic church's hierarchy and, alongside with it, its social mission became radicalised. Emphasising the virtue of the people (*o povo*) (the salt of the earth) the liberationist activists were set to politically liberate the poor and revolutionise the church using its social mission to create a church from the grassroots upwards – a church for the poor and with the poor. This gave rise to a massive organisational structure that comprised tens of thousands of poorer people: the Ecclesial Base Communities (EBCs). The EBCs became the foundational structure that worked in tandem with radicalised Catholic organisations such as Social Action and the Workers' Social Action and, from the 1970s onward, with the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI – Conselho Indigenista Missionário).

Liberationist activists and the grassroots leadership inspired by them have created an important legacy in the way social assistance programmes are conceived. From the 1970s onwards, the people, whose behavioural traits were previously seen as a problem, became the solution and the structural conditions that underpinned their lives were problematised. Programmes had to be participatory and developed from the grassroots up by 'listening to the people'; they made use of consciousness-raising approaches following Paulo Freire and others; they popularised the ideals of human rights and the right to a dignified life; and they often involved political mobilisation and direct action directly confronting the state (Burdick, 1993; Mainwaring & Wilde, 1989; Ottmann, 2002). At the parish level, this approach germinated a large number of public health, education, and Afro-Brazilian cultural programmes (e.g., capoeira). At the macro level liberation theology gave rise to social assistance approaches that resonate strongly with human rights, social justice, participatory development ideals and associated international networks (Lehmann, 1996).

In the remainder of this chapter, we focus on three examples of how social work practice is being re-defined from the margins of the profession. The case studies exemplify how community initiatives are often decolonising key aspects of Brazilian society by approaching social issues from a grassroots

perspective. The case studies show that liberationist principles are alive and well but have been given new expressions by a different generation of social work actors using established social and religious networks to successfully forge new responses to existing problems.

1. New solutions to old problems: The Pataxó of southern Bahia

Galdino in Heaven (Aracy Cachoeira)
The smoke rose up, 'til in the sky it stopped, and with it, Galdino
He introduced himself to God,
Saying Lord my God, to the land that left me came the cowards
that threw me off.
When I went to react, I was touched by fire, in the country's capital
my body went up in flames.
It's fire, it's suicide, illness, poverty, sorrow,
Pataxó, Maxacali, Ianomâmi, Kaiowá,
Ticuna, Guajajara, Guarani, Xacriabá.
Not one escapes the saga,
Of the evil-doers down on earth,
Our people are peaceful,
We want to hear of war no more.
Help, Lord my God,
The Indians left down there
Help, help I pray.
If things get no better
At the turn of the millennium
No Indians will be left.
The smoke rose up, 'til in the sky it stopped
And with it Galdino[2]

The history of the Pataxó in the south of Bahia is, as the history of Indigenous people elsewhere, marred by an arduous struggle for land rights and cultural recognition. Unable to rely on the state as an independent arbiter and defender of civic rights, during much of the 20th century the Pataxó faced corrupt state representatives who sided with wealthy farmers to expropriate Indigenous landholdings and to exterminate or displace Indigenous communities. The Pataxó's struggle was met with extreme violence, at times resulting in the genocide of entire communities.[3] In the 1980s, the struggle of the Pataxó became

2 On 17 April 1997, Galdino Jesus dos Santos, a Pataxó travelling to Brasilia as part of a land-rights delegation, slept at a bus stop when he was doused in alcohol and set alight by three upper-middle-class youths.

3 On average, 53 Indigenous people were killed each year during the first decade of the 21st century (CIMI, 2011).

more militant, resulting in the occupation of a number of farms established on land that was designated Indigenous reservation. A number of legal challenges were launched seeking the protection of Indigenous land rights. Most of these court cases dragged on for several decades; many are still ongoing. Since the 1980s, the focus of the Pataxó's struggle was threefold: it focused on land rights including control over resources, cultural recognition and education and access to general social and health services. Collective action became a key tool to re-take land that was historically nominated to be Indigenous, symbolising the rise of a new political actor (Carvalho de, 2009). The re-occupation of the Monte Pascoal National Park in 1999 by a collective of Pataxó communities directly confronted the state, mounting an important legal challenge to an arbitrary state-initiated demarcation of Indigenous land. The Monte Pascoal re-occupation also provocatively reaffirmed Indigenous ownership of natural resources inasmuch as the Pataxó initiated the logging of some sites in the National Park, selling the wood to the local timber industry.

Over the last two decades, the Pataxó have embarked on a march through the institutions, attempting to occupy key positions in the local administration. They also became more politically savvy, making use of social media, and managed to tie more effectively their concerns to formal political representation. As the legal system upheld some of the Pataxó's Indigenous land title claims, it also became apparent that the Pataxó's struggle for ethnic and cultural recognition had just started. It soon became apparent that retaining control of Indigenous areas was far from easy and required a tighter control over who could settle on Indigenous land.[4] In 1998, the Pataxó were granted land rights over a stretch of forest and successfully applied for an eco-tourism grant in 1999 (Mauro, 2007). The project focused on the protection of the Atlantic Rain Forest and on the cultural survival of the Pataxó community. Concurrently, the community created a commemorative ceremony (the Aragwaksã – or 'conquest of the sacred place' or 'day of victory' ceremony) that has become an established tradition, a means of community connection, a celebration of Indigeneity, as well as a tourist attraction (Grünewald, 2017). They created an immersive 'ethno-tourism' experience involving rainforest walks, a 'traditional' village, the sampling of food, face painting and bow and arrow exercises. Furthermore, the around 150 tourists that visit the community daily during the peak season receive an induction into the culture and politics of the Pataxó. Tourists are charged between R$35 and R$45 per person, of which a part is used to resource the community's infrastructure and its school and to pay the Indigenous 'volunteer' tourist guides. The resources are distributed equally on the basis of contribution to the community, and remaining funds are used to support other projects in a neighbouring township. In addition, the eco(ethno)-tourism project has served as a springboard to form

4 The Pataxó lost control over some of the land granted to them because they were unable to control the influx of people with mixed Indigenous heritage.

collaborations at the local (e.g., with local tourism operators), national and international levels and has attracted international donations (Mauro, 2007).

Clearly, eco-tourism projects are not innovative in their own right. However, the Pataxó's deployment of eco(ethno)-tourism tapping into the lucrative tourism market of southern Bahia successfully uses the capital flows of the Global North to develop a communal economy, allowing them to build a cultural heritage and a communal social alternative. Their project, developed by Pataxó for Pataxó, addresses entrenched inequalities as well as individual issues such as drug and alcohol use. Over the last 20 years, they have demonstrated that the model is sustainable and that a community can be formed around an alternative epistemology that is 'staged' inasmuch as rituals and cultural artefacts form part of a tourism spectacle that stages the native 'other' for the colonial gaze of the native 'other'. While for outsiders the eco(ethno)-tourism initiative may appear like a theme park, such a perspective would miss the cultural and political infrastructure (i.e., the primary school and community centres) the community has created alongside the tourist business using the theme park-like development as an employment and information dissemination strategy, inviting visitors to learn about Indigenous culture and to respect their community. It should be pointed out that the tight control of the leadership over the community and its discourse has contributed greatly to the ability of the community to negotiate the terms on which the spectacle is staged, turning this into a post-modern rather than a neo-colonial relationship, where the Pataxó hold considerable power over access to community and representation.

2. Black is beautiful and smart: Afro-Brazilian culture and education in the south of Bahia

> *The one who moves the rock is the one suffocating beneath it.*
>
> (Conceição Evaristo – Becos da Memoria)

In Itabuna, a major town in southern Bahia, many of the younger leaders and civic activists gained their first political experiences in the local Catholic Youth Pastoral (PJ), one of the vestiges of the progressive Catholic church in Brazil. Their PJ experience introduced them to social critical thinking informed by the theology of liberation, community work, a new religiosity and leadership roles. Indeed, the importance of the PJ in terms of consciousness raising, education and leadership training cannot be overestimated. At the neighbourhood level, PJ-trained leaders continue to play a central role in a range of social projects. In this section, we are focusing on two of these: Encantarte (a cultural programme that uses traditional Afro-Brazilian culture such as capoeira, dancing and drumming as a way to explore a black-Brazilian identity) and the PRUNE (*Pre-universitário para Negros e Excluidos* – a pre-university entrance exam course for black and underprivileged students that later became PROAFRO – *Pré-universitário para Afrodescendentes*). The principal focus of these movements is the cultural transformation of society and the promotion of an Afro-Brazilian

epistemology. They try to involve young people in projects, attempt to change their social imaginary and bring them into contact with local politics in order to turn them into more active citizens.

The Encantarte project represents a hybrid attempt to fuse cultural activities with consciousness-raising concerning the political aspects of Afro-Brazilian citizenship. Encantarte was put together by two activists in order to counter the influence of drugs in their extremely poor neighbourhood. At the time, a period of high unemployment, there were a lot of trafficking of drugs, which often led to violence. Inspired by Olodum, a Bahian carnival *bloco* of international renown, they formed a dance company as well as a music and percussion ensemble in order to attract young people. Somewhat later, they added capoeira to their list of activities. The link to popular culture was deployed to engage young people, to find something that resonates with them. The initiative grew, and in 2000 the team consisted of 15 people. The socio-cultural development fostered by the group appealed to students within the education system and the group ended up giving dance and music workshops in local schools (Ottmann, 2009). Today, Encantarte forms part of the city's established socio-cultural fabric.

During a meeting organised by the PJ, the leadership of local Afro-Brazilian socio-cultural organisations (including Encantarte), it was decided to form a university entrance exam (*vestibular*) course. The *vestibular* represents an almost impossible obstacle for students who do not have access to private schooling. Because of this, they formed an association whose main purpose was to get black, disadvantaged youths into university in order to enhance their social mobility and to stimulate social change. They found a number of teachers willing to teach the courses on a voluntary basis. In 2000, 35 people participated but only four were able to sit the *vestibular*.[5] Of these four, one passed the exam (Ottmann, 2009). In 2001, they approached the municipal education department in order to obtain financial support for the project. The department submitted the project with the help of the University of Rio de Janeiro's (URJ) PPCOR project (*Projeto de Política da Cor* – the Politics of Colour Project – financed by the UN) to the Ford Foundation. They were successful and the municipality financed another four venues (a total of five). In 2002, together with other associations including the PJ, they formed an association (PRUNE/PROAFRO) that was administratively integrated into the Santa Cruz State University (UESC).

Applicants are screened and means tested. PREAFRO gives preference to mature-age people of Afro-Brazilian descent and single Afro-Brazilian mothers on minimum incomes (Santos, Ramos, & Oliveira de, 2016). PREAFRO also organises workshops for teachers who deliver the courses focusing on racism, social exclusion and Brazil's colonial racial legacy. Currently, PROAFRO has around 120 vacancies, and its entrance exam courses are offered across the

5 The registration fee for the *vestibular* exam is quite hefty for disadvantaged students.

south of Bahia. Moreover, PROAFRO is attempting to shape education policies, lobbying for quotas for Afro-Brazilians at Bahia's universities (Santos et al., 2016).

There were moments when the community leaders almost lost control over the project and when local politicians claimed the project in the local press as their achievement. According to the Encantarte leadership, partnerships with the government are complicated by the fact that as the municipality's political agenda tends to override the concerns of community groups and ends up colonising their space (Ottmann, 2009). Subsequently, the Encantarte leadership was able to regain control over the project by linking it more formally to Afro-Brazilian politics. The struggle over PROAFRO lays bare the two-class society where well-connected administrators and politicians are able to position themselves in such a way that features the actual founders, the Afro-Brazilian community activists from the poorer parts of town, as mere footnotes in its development (Ottmann, 2009). More importantly still, control over the project impacts on the content of the programme and ultimately on the social imaginary that is being disseminated to students. Over the years, PROAFRO has generated considerable momentum, and many of its former graduates return to become volunteer teachers upon graduation (Santos et al., 2016).

3. From charity to civic right: Reframing the conservative legacy of US Southern Baptists

> You have to understand that the real question was one of status. I was a unassuming black pastor, a pastor of 'the people', who did not add status to the church. Also, I did not pray according to the rules of the rich people there. I think that was the problem.
>
> (Apolônio Brito)

In 1973, my father,[6] a black Baptist pastor in a town in southern Bahia, established a primary school. This school became emblematic of a struggle over meaning and social imaginary of Baptist communities in southern Bahia. My father personally experienced the transition from slave-based agriculture to an indentured labour system in which he grew up working off a family debt. This experience deeply shaped his outlook on life and motivated him to create education opportunities to change the lives of poor Brazilians (Matos & Brito, 2012). Encountering US Southern Baptist missionaries during his early 20s, he eventually decided to learn to read and write and to become a pastor himself[7] – one of a handful of black Southern Baptist pastors in Brazil in 1957.

Historically, the Southern Baptists were renowned for their social conservatism. Indeed, the first Southern Baptists migrated to Brazil as a result of the

6 Pastor Apolônio Brito is the father of the lead author.

7 He also completed a university degree in philosophy.

cessation wars and its impact on slave labour in the US (Price, 1998). During the 1950s, the US Southern Baptist churches were still embroiled over the issue of segregation, with moderates supporting the idea of 'voluntary segregation' (Woods et al., 2018). The Southern Baptists' mission in Brazil was first and foremost directed at spreading the word and to create religious education institutions geared to instruct its local representatives and not to establish a social mission. The missionaries carried with them a social imaginary of racial division which resonated well with Brazil's post-colonial racial relationships. My father became the pastor of a Baptist church whose members were traditional, conservative and wealthy landowners. It did not take long for ideological dissonances to surface about the church's role in society. Whereas for my father the church had to adopt a social mission in order to be relevant to poor Brazilians (he established six schools in the southern Bahia during his tenure), his congregation and colleagues largely disagreed with his subaltern epistemology. During the early 1970s, facing an increasingly ardent critique, he decided to split from the Brazilian Baptist Council and set up a neo-Pentecostal church that would work with the poor for the poor.

The above-mentioned primary school he founded in 1973 distinguishes itself from other schools inasmuch as it actively promoted the principles of social justice, free access to quality education, and equality of opportunity. It aims at transforming the lives of disadvantaged children and particularly those living with disabilities by giving them access to education. In addition to the literacy and numeracy curriculum, the school incorporates in its syllabus an emphasis on ethics, citizenship and spirituality. The institution is formally known as a school. However, unofficially it operates as a social change agent and as a community refuge where parents, children and the general community unload their frustrations with structural injustices and where they receive advice and support. Staff at the school are fully committed to its principles. It is not uncommon to see the school principal and other volunteers acting as mediators, advocates, counsellors, community development workers supporting parents, children and the wider community. Over the years, the school has acquired an excellent reputation, attracting pupils from other suburbs than the one it is located in. Families of school children with disabilities, distrusting the general school system, are finding respect and support in this school (approximately one-quarter of students have a disability). Despite the school's challenging context and a chronic lack of resources, the school was awarded the highest quality ranking in the government's regional school development index in 2018. The school has developed a curriculum that aims to raise the consciousness of students regarding their cultural identity, power and oppression, colonialism and geo-politics and Afro-Brazilian culture and heritage.

Over the course of the last 45 years, the school has demonstrated that an organic social work approach where a school becomes the support hub of a community addressing a wide range of social issues is indeed possible, effective and sustainable. Occupying a range of roles, the school's 'teachers' and 'administrators' are a widely accepted part of the town's poor and complex

neighbourhoods and are able to support families precisely because they are not seen to be 'agents of the state' but rather as supporters of their children. They are successful because they are not seen to be middle-class professional outsiders that parachute in to work with 'drug and alcohol' or 'domestic violence' to 'colonise' family life. They work and often live among them, are known to the community, and have an established relationship with many of its members. They share their grief when a young person is killed by gangland violence. They assist with job searches or donations and try hard to convince young students that an alternative social imaginary does exist and can be enacted.

Concluding remarks

> It is not important to agree on what it means to change the world. It is enough to be in agreement about the actions that contribute to changing it.
>
> (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 35)

The three case studies outlined in this chapter highlight a struggle over social imaginaries, the meaning of social justice, over the way lives can be lived, and ultimately against an epistemology disseminated by the Global North that classifies the culture of these communities as inferior. The Pataxó community in this chapter transforms its culture into a commodity, carefully negotiating the degree to which it gives tourists access to their 'sacred' practices. If Indigeneity is up for sale, authenticity can only be safeguarded if some of the rituals are indeed sacred and not for sale, if the consumerist anthropophagy of the tourist industry can be controlled, if colonising Brazil can be stopped from silently appropriating land rights that have costs many Indigenous lives. For the Afro-Brazilian activists in this chapter, the power differential that defines their position means that they have to defend the epistemology that forms the core of their project against attempts to sanitise, assimilate and integrate it into the administrative edifice of post-colonial Brazil, reducing their university admission course into an academic exercise. They managed to scale up a community project engaging in partnerships that threatened to swamp them only to reaffirm their authorship and control over knowledge and representation. The black Baptist pastor – my father – decided to become part of a socially conservative religious network with all of its racist and elitist connotations to foster an alternative epistemology that embraces and valorises the culture of 'the people' standing up to the colonial voices that denigrate it. There are aspects of social work embodied in each of these case studies, a holistic kind of social work that operates from within communities. This kind of social work does not trespass (Weinberg, 2016) because there is no threshold and steps beyond the liberal multiculturalism of the Global North that obliterates power differentials (Nylund, 2006) by turning 'culture' into an aesthetic rather than a political signifier. Removed from the cultural colonisation of the Global North, this kind of social work is able to pragmatically morph collective action, community

development and preventive and assistive approaches working with communities and the people within them. As a result, this kind of social work is central to the struggle for social alternatives. It forms part of a wider struggle of communities that fight for social justice – each in their own fashion.

Comment by Tracie Mafile'o

The phrase 'in the margins' captured my attention. For a calling/profession/discipline dedicated to liberation and transformation, social work's complicity in oppression and marginalisation (Johnson & Yellow Bird, 2012; Margolin, 1997) is astounding. Yet, as Iris Silva Brito and Goetz Ottman have illustrated with the three alternative social work approaches narrated in this chapter, it can be 'in the margins' of social work that liberation and transformation are realised. Could it be that more 'real' social work is happening in the margins than in the Anglo-individualised-case-work centre stage of neo-liberal social work?

The paradoxical potential of the margins of social work is highlighted in my early social work experience. My first role as a social worker following completion of my social work qualification was in a statutory child protection agency. Outside of my formal employment, in a volunteer capacity, my partner and I led the formation of a youth group, which grew organically to more than 30 young people, many of whom we are still in contact with after 25 years. The young people were from a range of backgrounds; they were mostly Indigenous and some were dealing with issues such as gang prospecting, family violence, substance misuse or poverty. I felt I did my best social work in the youth group role, rather than in formal employment as a social worker. In the youth group role my practice was more relationship-based, and it was where I witnessed more transformation. Yet, the youth group was in the margins, and was not 'real' social work. An encompassing epistemology is called for, which is capable of embracing the beauty and potential of the margins – margins which extend beyond contracted time periods of intervention and margins which do not segment and make superior professional formal employment over community life.

The underpinning epistemicide of global-scale coloniality is a compelling reason why social work in the margins should be more wholly embraced. Epistemicide means that knowledge and ways of knowing of Indigenous peoples are relegated an inferior, marginal position (de Sousa Santos, 2016). It is likely, therefore, that the margins are occupied by alternatives which hold hope and potential. The chapter provides inspiring and rich examples of localised action which reposition and reinvigorate epistemologies of the 'south', illustrating the liberating potential sourced in the margins. The Pataxó innovations to create conditions for economic and cultural self-determination, the Afro-Brazilian cultural identity and education initiatives, and leading a church into a social mission are all illustrations of epistemic resistance and revival. Social work as a profession and academic discipline was borne within an era

and geo-political context of coloniality. If social work is to move beyond the bounds of its inception and to be more truly liberating and transformational, the marginal needs to be brought centre stage. I made a similar observation as part of a reflection to conclude my doctoral thesis exploring social work informed by a Tongan worldview:

> The voice of Tongan social work is but one amongst a global choir of culturally diverse paradigms – singing different notes of the same chord, sometimes discordant, but at other times resolved and melodic. Like an improvisation, the dynamic of social work is unexpectedly altered, and the crescendo of the Tongan voice enhances the aesthetic of the whole piece. But there must be a lull in the voices of those who have dominated this piece to date. It is in the lull that those whose voices previously dominated can hear, respond and, for a moment, follow the lead of the other; in so doing new chord progressions and melodies are brought forth. Social work will become like an irritating monotone and be irrelevant, if it continues to sing the same tune over time. In the contemporary context, where there is increasing intermeshing of diverse cultures, social work must be varied and dynamic. … The different voices of the choir must take their place. Tongan frameworks are presenting new ways of thinking within the critical postmodern tradition and have potential to add to the core knowledge of social work.
>
> (Mafile'o, 2005)

This chapter by Iris Silva Brito and Goetz Ottmann has voiced a view and an experience from the margins of Brazilian social work. Its expression invites others to recognise the value of social work which does not fit the mainstream centre stage of modernist Western social work. A question to be considered, moving forward, is how alliances between the social work margins around the globe might be fostered, so that more of the margins can transform more of the core of social work.

Comment by Larry Alicea-Rodriguez

This chapter presents three case studies in the South of Bahia in Brazil to counteract and present alternatives and proposals from the decolonial turn against how the modernity of the Global North has been imposed in Latin America. The approach of the chapter is located in the ethical-political-epistemologi cal-analytical decolonial logic, placing the Global North as part of a continuation of the coloniality project. In this, neo-liberalism becomes the most recent installation.

It is rich and powerful to read the authors observing the Brazilian movements of forging a local modernity rooted in their knowledge and traditions. Brazil gives the world one of the most decolonial thinkers we have ever seen:

Paulo Freire. The approach made by the authors is important, because Latin America has not been a passive entity that has tolerated colonial brutality without resistance. Liberation theology and decolonial thinking itself are precisely samples of that resistance and roadmaps on possible new realities.

The chapter precisely exemplifies aspects brought in the chapter on decoloniality and intersectionalities that I wrote for this book. The authors present the genesis of social work and social work schools as a profession in Brazil and their roots since the colonisation of knowledge responding to Eurocentric and charitable perspectives. The authors also point out the transcendental role of reconceptualisation in the gestation of other social work with a Latin American and Caribbean face.

It is wonderful that the authors exemplify in their chapter through the cases the possibility of giving life to professional practices from a decolonial turn for the accompaniment we carry out to groups and communities. They begin by describing the work of the EBCs, liberationist activists and grassroots leadership to create participatory and developed programmes from the base by listening to people from the political mobilisation of the groups, in the demand for a decent life and in the confrontation with the state. These are the movements from indiscipline to which Martínez and Agüero (2014) allude to a new thinking and doing in social work.

The richness of the chapter is in the quantity and quality of concrete cases, where it is evident that there is another way of doing things outside the binary trap of coloniality. The proposal is to place ourselves in the knowledge and contexts of people and communities. The cases described in the chapter show us that it is possible. Pataxó is a concrete example of the revindication of Indigenous rights and the effectiveness of collective action and social networks. This goes together with political action to locate key positions to transform the traditional exercise of power through local administration.

Although not mentioned directly, decolonial examples take intersectionality into account. The case of Encantarte is an example of the Afro-Brazilian intersections, together with aspects of impoverishment, unemployment, violence and problematic use of substances. All this takes into account a merging of cultural activities with awareness about the political aspects of Afro-Brazilian citizenship. Intersectionalities and the decolonial turn joined an educational project far from the traditional paradigms of education, responding to the felt needs of young people in that region.

This reading should move us to action in our locations to develop responses to the needs *of* people *from* the people, into which social work is inserted to accompany and learn from the Other. Finally, the chapter shows us that the practice may be based on epistemologies that transcend binary peers or what the authors, citing Boaventura de Souza Santos, call epistemological poverty. This fits with the aim of moving towards a social work rich in social alternatives that arise from the contexts, identities, experiences and knowledge of the people and professional groups that we accompany in our professional practice.

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10 Navigating intersectional *being* while *doing* community development

Siew Fang Law

Introduction

Working towards decolonising one's thoughts, attitudes and practices must begin with oneself. This chapter is written in three parts to engage students, practitioners and educators, especially those coming from the subaltern who are studying and working within colonised systems, structures and institutions. The first section contains a critical reflection of my personal and professional journey, in particular the ways in which *being* and *doing* intersect for a Chinese Malaysian female educator working in the field of community development in an Australian tertiary education institution. I reflect on the ongoing tensions and dilemmas I face as a 'professional' (*being*) which require some levels of performativity to fit the Western epistemic and ideation of 'best practices' (*doing*) that, at times, contradict, deny, reject my plural sense of self and socio-cultural backgrounds (*being*) and cultural practices (*doing*).

I then ask the readers to join me at the second part of the chapter, which is a recollection of my Chinese Malaysian roots, heritages and knowledge of human services. Through unpacking process, I introduce deeply rooted Chinese kinship systems, *guanxi* (关系), and explain the ways in which the Chinese diaspora support each other through controversial self-governing systems and structures such as *kongsi* (公司), which mushroomed throughout the region during the colonial time. Much of the colonial and decolonial dynamics have continued shaping Malaysian society today.

The final part of the chapter contains some theoretical discussions about critical consciousness and epistemological blindness. Many members from Global South have long aspired to pursue education, training and careers in the Global North, yet every stage of this learning, unlearning and re-learning shapes and re-shapes one's *being* and *doing*. I provide some guiding questions to help educators engage in critical dialogues with their peers and students around decolonising practices.

Personal critical reflection

Critical reflection on one's own privilege can be a powerful starting point to decolonise practices (Law, 2016). This involves questioning one's way of being

and the capacity to construct practical understandings of our own social position within social systems, and the ability to act upon those understandings, reflecting upon and refining responses.

I was delighted to be invited to contribute a chapter adding to this important volume. Indeed, I felt particularly honoured to be asked to write from a Chinese Malaysian perspective. On the other hand, I was apprehensive about falling into the essentialism of the Chinese diaspora and risk representing a static, romanticised idea of Chinese communities as 'cultural Others' (Ma & Cartier, 2003).

The process of decolonisation starts with oneself. In writing this chapter, I had the opportunity to reflect and engage in thought-provoking dialogue with my parents in Malaysia while unpacking my *being* and *doing* at both personal and professional levels. Despite my training to write in a conventional academic manner (e.g. using third person, authoritative voice), I will use this chapter to communicate my reflections and theoretical discussions through switching between first- and third-person voices with the aim of engaging readers in a combination of personal and professional decolonising practices. In recognition that languages other than English have unique intellectual and philosophical traditions, I will also make references to some Chinese characters in brackets next to selected English words and phrases to supplement the semantics in Chinese texts that are not fully captured in English translations. Raised to be multilingual, I am aware that the structure and functions of a native language underpin some ontological and epistemological insights (Mou, 1996).

Recollection

I recall a time when I was a child, hearing my uncle announce: "Chinese can be found in every land where there is sea and ocean; but Chinese is always a second-class citizen wherever we go". I did not fully understand what he meant at that time, but that intriguing remark had planted a seed in my mind about the status of the Chinese in the world.

I was born as a second-generation Chinese Malaysian growing up in a working-class family located in a heavy industrial zone in Malaysia.[1] Both of my parents were disadvantaged from education opportunities. My father is of Toishan heritage, and my mother is of Hakka heritage. They raised me and my three sisters to speak Mandarin at home. My sisters and I went to a nearby Chinese-language primary school in Prai, an industrial suburb with a large proportion of factory workers and plantation workers. As the everyday was my norm, and everyone I knew looked just like me, I never realised that I was growing up in within a segregated Chinese community (华人区), a low-socioeconomic community where many of my schoolmates lived in tin roof huts in area which I realised later was an illegal slum area.

1 Further contextual information will be provided in the next section.

Like 'everyone', I read Chinese-language newspapers and fiction, and watched Hong Kong television soaps and entertainment shows (in Cantonese). My world view orbited around Chinese values and cultures. We were brought up with values such as the consideration of others' need over our own, being dutiful, disciplined and obedient. We also believed that children had a duty to 'repay' (回报) our parents for raising us – and we did this through study and focusing on securing the entrance to a reputed Chinese-language secondary school in a neighbouring town. Most Chinese-language schools were funded and supported by the local Chinese community and associations. These schools are also known for producing outstanding academic graduates. Being admitted to one of these schools would bring pride to our family and community.

My two hard-working parents drew on their life savings and sent me and my three sisters to pursue tertiary education abroad, which marked the beginning of epistemological disruption, confusion and struggle as I completed three qualifications in Canada, England and Australia. My deep-seated Chinese values, concepts and practices collided with many Western values, concepts and practices. During these identity formation years, I applied what I learned and did well in Malaysia – studied extra hard (i.e., extra hours) – but this strategy failed me dramatically. The challenges were beyond culture and language; they transcended epistemology, ideology, systems and structures. Textbooks were largely written by scholars and scientists working in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic) places as defined by Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan (2010), whose research largely drew on case studies, examples and samples from their own environments. I was thrown in time and space to a place where everybody seemed not to understand me, nor did I understand everybody. What was 'right or wrong', 'good or bad', 'appropriate or inappropriate' and 'acceptable or unacceptable' become inadequate to answer my deeper, larger and growing questions.

In the younger identify formation stage, to cope with the changes and pressures, I underwent conscious and unconscious efforts in unlearning and relearning. Knowledge from the Global North, the Western colonial systems, structures and cultures were superior and overwhelmingly available everywhere in university libraries. Western knowledge appeared to me at that time to have much more respected intellectual authority, representations, credentials, rigours and status quo than my increasingly cringed cultural traditions (to study harder; listen to my teachers; do not question the authority). The contrast between the privilege and marginalised knowledge was significant.

With great effort and hard work, I have unlearned the traditional unquestioning form of rote learning and relearned critical and analytical thinking. I have also unlearned the richness of my cultural practices and relearned some of the 'best practices' as claimed by the Western expert scholars. I gained a large number of new academic vocabularies that allowed me to express complex concepts and ideas in the English language. I later found myself struggling to find words to fully explain this 'higher-level knowledge' in my mother tongues and dialects when returning to my families and local communities in Malaysia.

In the seven years of higher education abroad, besides gaining a capacity for critical inquiry, I also enjoyed liberation and independence of thought. Navigating boundaries, power structures and epistemologies was an ongoing challenging process. In discovering the rarity of 'successful' academic role models who look and sound like me in the highly competitive academic world was confronting. I almost had to reject and deny my *being* as a Chinese woman but to behave like the hegemony (*doing*) in order to function in this (unequal) playing field.

As I have matured, literature such as the epistemology of the South (de Sousa Santos, 2014), Southern Theory (Connell, 2007), decoloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2016), critical race theory (Delgado, 2002) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) has become my intellectual anchor. This literature opened up a new dimension of thought, which instigated my exploration of intersectional *being* within different complex systems, structures and cultures. The changes in my thinking, *being* and *doing* posed new sets of challenges; the acts of acknowledging and speaking about inequality and social injustices mean shaking socially constructed ideas of harmony, stability and security. This part of the journey led me to realise the importance of having experienced and wise mentors who were prepared to be the champion for the subalterns. This latter personal and professional developmental phase has marked another significant transformation.

Contextualising Chinese diaspora in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multicultural, multi-faith and multilingual post-colonial society. Its colonial history began with the European competition for control over raw materials, such as spices, tin, tea and rubber. Resource-rich Malaya experienced multiple European colonisations – Portuguese in 1511, Dutch in 1641 and British in 1824 – until the nation gained independence in 1957. The British coloniser systematically brought in the Chinese and Indian to Malaya as *kulis* (human labourers, slaves) to meet the needs of the colonial economy. Clear job and location specifications were set up for these immigrants. The Chinese largely worked in tin mines, while the Indians built railways and worked in rubber plantations.

The majority of the Chinese Malaysians descended from Southern China, with Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka and Teochew ancestry, arriving between the early 19th century and the mid-20th century. Chinese Malaysians form the second largest community of overseas Chinese in the world, after Thai Chinese. Different Chinese dialect speakers congregated in towns and cities in Malaysia and continue to be recognisable today. For example, most Cantonese speakers are in Kuala Lumpur, Hokkien in Penang and Kuching, Hakka in Kota Kinabalu, Teochew in Johor Bharu, Hainaese in Kuala Terengganu and Foochow in Sibu. Culturally, Chinese Malaysians have maintained their unique Chinese heritage, as evidenced in food, music, dialects and language, education, media, festive celebration and ways of life.

For decades, Malaysia's national social policy has been built around ethnic and religious categories, privileging the majority population, the *Bumiputera* (the Malay Muslims) in addressing social equity issues. The population of Chinese Malaysians has rapidly declined, due to lower birth rates and extensive emigration. Over one million young and educated Chinese Malaysians pursue career prospects overseas due to a sense of social and political injustice within Malaysia.

Chinese notions of *guanxi (*关系*)*

To fully understand the ways in which Chinese Malaysians organise their human services, I draw on my earlier research on *guanxi* (关系), which is the Chinese notion of 'relationships'. The Chinese character *guan* means 'close'; *xi* literally means 'tie, links, relations'. The connotations of *guanxi* are deeper and broader than the generic English word 'relationship', which is commonly used as a direct translation.

In an English dictionary, for example, 'relationship' is defined as 1) the way in which two or more people are connected, or the state of being connected; 2) the way in which two or more people or groups feel about and behave towards each other; and 3) an emotional and sexual association between two people (Oxford English Dictionary). In Western sociology, 'relationship' is 'the meaning assigned by two or more individuals to their connectedness or coexistence' (Greenhalgh & Chapman, 1997, p. 211). Models of analysing human relationships in the West have come via classic frameworks such as Social Interaction Theory, Transaction Cost Theory and Social Exchange Theory that emphasise individual-level transactions and social exchanges.

Guanxi is a complex, subjective, fluid and nuanced concept. It is one of the most deeply rooted Chinese cultural values that represents core human relation rules and principles. It has multiple semantic meanings. *Guanxi* could refer to a 'tight, close-knit network' (Yeung & Tung, 1996, p. 54) which is the glue that holds Chinese society together. It reflects the interconnectedness of the Chinese (Fan, 2002; Xin & Pearce, 1996) and explains the rules and logic of human contact, and its sense of connection and the bonding with one another. It refers to a 'particularistic tie, based on shared attributions' that forms the intense 'norms of reciprocity… heavily shaped by the hierarchically structured network of social relations' (Hwang, 1987, p. 944), such as those who come from the same village or town and have shared ancestry.

Guanxi is not limited to biological relationships. It is a dynamic notion of kinship and is broader than the kind of relationships or social connections that are built around mutual interests and benefits. For example, different *guanxi* bases define peoples' roles in relation to context: 1) there is 'blood-based' family *guanxi* (those who share the same family name, dialect groups and clans, the in-laws etc.); 2) normal *guanxi,* which may involve personal social bases such as close friends, colleagues, neighbours, school teachers, old friends; 3) business *guanxi* formed on the basis of social capital relationships, often created through

appropriate intermediaries; 4) loose *guanxi* which may be formed by individuals who are less familiar with each other (such as the landlords and tenants, occasional visitors); and lastly 5) there is a public base which includes individuals whom you may not have any *guanxi* with, such as a stranger on the street, a police officer or a tram driver (Law, 2003).

'Family relationships' in a Western context usually refers to the nuclear family. But the Chinese notions of *guanxi* extend beyond the ways in which one relates with his/her ancestry, extended families, those who came from the same town/village, went to the same schools, and those who have done favours in the past. Beyond family context, *guanxi* can be seen as some sort of 'special' friendships (akin brotherhood/sisterhood), or special relationships between a person who needs something and a person who has the ability to give something. It is common to witness the principles of *guanxi* being practised in business among the Chinese (Luo, 1997).

The establishment of *kongsi (*公司*)*

In the British colonial era, the Chinese immigrant mining community in Malaya established self-governing structures and systems in community welfare to address economic hardship and oppressions. *Kongsi* (公司) is one of the most distinctive and recognisable Chinese social organisations dating from the 1800s. The term *kongsi* has multiple definitions, meanings and functions. The two Chinese characters for *kong* literally mean 'common, shared, public' while *si* means 'unit, organized group, department', although its direct English translation is 'company'. *Kongsi* was initially set up by the Chinese miners to pursue modest forms of brotherhood unions and collective support. The operation of *kongsi* largely resembles the Western concept of unions or cooperatives. It is largely clan based – linked with common descent, family surnames, ancestries and spoken languages and dialects. This significant characteristic of clan-based *kongsi* reflects Chinese notions of relationships: *guanxi* (关系). For decades, associated clan members have contributed funds to support self-governing structures and systems of social work, community care, social activities and welfare for the Chinese diasporas during the British colonial period.

Different *kongsi* have been established according to members' family surnames, clans, common descent, languages and ancestries. In clan communities, ancestral worship is core. Members from shared clans who consider they have a common tie live together and stay bonded by a clan system that has been observed for generations. Hence, many *kongsi* have a clan house for ancestral worship and usually a multipurpose assembly hall for functions and gatherings.

For example, the famous *Khoo Kongsi* (邱公司) in Penang Island is one of the oldest and grandest clan organisations in Malaysia. Located in Cannon Square, *Khoo Kongsi* was literally in the centre of the oldest part of the city of George Town. The heart of the site is its clan temple, which has retained its authentic historic setting. Surrounding the temple is an association building, a traditional theatre and the late-19th-century row houses for clan members, all

clustered around a granite-paved square. The site resembled a miniature clan village. It has its own self-government structure to enable its own educational, financial, welfare and social functions. It was the soul of community activities and functions.

After the 19th century, many of these groups continued to offer community support for the Chinese Malaysians, and registered as associations, non-governmental organisations and non-profits. Many have become known as *hui guan* or *hwee kuan* (会馆), literally meeting hall or assembly hall; *tong xiang hui* (同乡会) – literally 'shared village/ancestry club', some operate as *miao* or *tang* (庙/堂, temple) to facilitate traditional burial practices. Many of these registered organisations have continued to provide a range of social activities, community services and care programmes for Chinese Malaysians, ranging from women support groups (妇女组), symposiums (知识讲座会), disability support services (残疾人支持), childcare, education scholarships, Chinese medicinal care, youth clubs (青年团体) and recreational activities (同乡工馀娱乐).

Functions of *miao* and *tang* (庙/堂) are uniquely different as they are gathering places for the intergenerational Chinese diaspora across clan groups. These spaces honour ancestral and spiritual beliefs and offer community services such as the burials and memorials of deceased Chinese according to traditional Chinese customs (春秋二祭, 追思先人). Depending on respective groups, services can be found including meditation classes, qigong practices, Chinese medicinal clinics, preparation of joss sticks, community fundraisers, festive banquets (联欢宴会) and Lunar Festival events (新春团拜).

Some other associations made their halls available for the Chinese community to use for community meetings, banquets and wedding feasts. Traditional Chinese wedding banquets involve inviting anyone who has some kind of *guanxi* ties. This is reflected in the usually large size of wedding banquets. Akin to the neighbourhood centres in the West, these Chinese associations would provide supplies (e.g., round tables and stools) and associated human support services. The elders would offer advice on auspicious dates and times, the appropriate steps of performing traditional Chinese wedding procedures, including tea drinking according to *guanxi* and level of authority at tea ceremonies, and burning and presenting Chinese incense, to name a few. Other associations, for example the Toisan Association in Kuala Lumpur, promotes networking and friendship connections with Toisan people around the world (宗乡友情连接). These associations have played significant roles in actively maintaining deep-seated Chinese values, cultural practices and ways of life for many decades in Malaysia. These informal, non-governmental, organised forms of human services and community development were the hearts of the Chinese communities.

During the colonial period, the British remained ambivalent in their Western relationships with the Chinese migrants. The storylines about the Chinese migrants ranged from being 'sturdy and independent' to 'greedy' (Hirschman, 1986, p. 347). The British favoured the Chinese's hard-working attributes but resented the fact that they were 'almost completely dependent

upon Chinese entrepreneurial activity for their economic base' (Hirschman, 1986, p. 346). The British imposed heavy taxes collected from the Chinese but also left them to fend for themselves (Hirschman, 1986).

At an epistemic level, historian Wang Tai Peng (1979), who has extensively studied *kongsi* in Malaysia, argued that *kongsi* is uniquely Chinese and runs with the principles of democracy as it involves the election of representatives. Its sophisticated political structure resembles republicanism in the West, yet its existence has not been acknowledged in Eurocentric literacy. Wang asserted that "*kongsi* should be viewed as authentically Chinese democracies that developed independently from the influence of western political institutions" (1979, p. 104). While the establishment of *kongsi* has been considered to overcome economic difficulty, racism and oppression, due to the marginal status experienced by the Chinese immigrants in Malaya, the effectiveness of the Chinese communal approach in providing human services has been profoundly undermined, not only by the British but also later by the Malaysian State. Despite their democratic, independent and self-governance attributes, the hegemonic State considers various *kongsi* groups politically radical, 'underground', and gangster-like, hence they need to be tightly governed, monitored and controlled through registrations and licensing in the post-colonial time.

In the post-colonial era, the ambivalence of storylines of the descendants of Chinese Malaysians became a by-product of British colonialism (Hirschman, 1986). State-owned social service structures and systems reflected Malaysia's 'New Economy Policy', which is a 'social restructuring' project that has come to be associated with 'affirmative action' on behalf of the majority Malay ethnic, the *Bumiputeras*. State interventions have resulted in significantly greater representations of *Bumiputera* public sector administrators and workers (Jumo, 2005; Azman & Abbas, 2013), further pushing the Chinese communities to continue providing their independent, alternative, non-governmental forms of human services.

Epistemological blindness

This writing project has been an opportunity for me to dialogue, reflect, rethink and re-examine my own intersectional colonial and decolonial practices and assumptions. Growing up in a three-times-colonised country, and being a recipient of three separate colonised, white, hegemonic institutions in the West, certain things become visible while others become invisible. It is important to acknowledge that the fluid and intersectional decolonised practices in the context of Global South could be different from the decolonised projects in hegemonic contexts.

In terms of the 'visibility' of colonial practices, the differences between 'knowing', 'non-knowing' and 'unknowing' may be relevant epistemic process when decolonising practices. We rely on what we see, hear, feel and read to give us 'knowing' – a kind of awareness, consciousness, beyond

information. 'Non-knowing' is absence of a specific kind of knowings, which results in epistemic ignorance. Without exposure to different cultures, languages, world views and/or paradigms, one does not know (Geissler, 2013). However, 'unknowing' is a process of conscious-unconscious thought processes that are practised to maintain one's privilege and power within the status quo (Law, 2016).

According to Geissler (2013), unknowing involves a process of conscious effort and active process of denying, rejecting or suppressing a certain knowledge or experience, such as an awareness of material inequality and intangible constructs associated with privilege. Hence, ethics in social work, teaching and research should not be limited to superficial management of risks (e.g., to mitigate physical, social and psychological harms of self and others), but should involve genuine, sophisticated support systems that help address practitioners' epistemological-ethical dilemmas. Uncritical acceptance of 'things are the way they are' would continue reproducing power imbalances even without overt experiences of apparent harm-doing.

The history of colonisation, the system of neoliberalism and a Eurocentric structure, for instance, makes structural issues such as inequality invisible. The 'invisible inequality' becomes normalised if unquestioned. This is relevant to de Sousa Santos' theory of epistemological blindness (2014), which refers to the kind of cognitive blindness that is associated with one's social positioning. Epistemological blindness, according to de Sousa Santos, is shaped by one's historical, cultural, systemic, and structural background which simply renders certain 'things' invisible. The normality of whiteness results in epistemological blindness.

Other scholars, such as Maldonado-Torres (2017), theorise that coloniality, which refers to an interpretive repertoire that provides storylines, narratives and common frames for making sense of the hegemony and relationships within this hegemony, justifies dominant practices as 'best practices'. In doing so, coloniality provides a system of assumptions and rules that inform the decisions, behaviours and interactions of one another which in turn often result in power affirmation.

Critical consciousness raising

Critical consciousness is a crucial component of social work and community development work, especially when thinking about mobilising for social change. As students, educators and practitioners, we could learn and better understand the ways in which our existing systems and structures may constrain and strengthen our agency to fully exercise critical reflexivity, and as a consequence, our ability to question inequality within the systems and structures and practices of domination (Miller & Price, 2018). As our actions are usually tempered to meet the expected dominant social standards, so our unconscious biases, ignorance and intolerance that are privately harboured in our minds are not easily visible.

As educators working in a 'white' institution, one way to create space for epistemological balance process includes using and referring textbooks, journals and articles that draw on case studies, stories and narratives from the Global South. However, simply exposing the students to diverse materials would not be sufficient. As unconscious biases and epistemological blindness make certain elements invisible, having critical but constructive dialogues while drawing on case studies and stories from these resources would be necessary to make deeper impacts. To engage in dialogue, we may consider the following questions:

1. What are the ways in which one's own social and intellectual position shapes our *being* and *doing*?
2. When working with colleagues, students and communities, what are the principles, norms, values and world views that inform our selection of knowledge for engagement?
3. Who benefits from the engagements?
4. What assumptions does one make about backgrounds, culture, languages and schooling when engaging with colleagues, participants and communities?
5. Does the engagement take place in a particular/different locality? If so, to what extent does it draw on subjugated histories, voices, cultures and languages?
6. How does the engagement recognise and affirm the agency of members of marginalised backgrounds? How does our work legitimate and respect their experiences and cultures?
7. To what extent do we speak Indigenous or regional languages and relate to the cultures and lived experiences of a broader population?
8. How do our engagements level the playing fields?
9. How do we build a community of practices in the work we do, so people could learn actively from each other and draw on their own knowledge sources?
10. How far do we ensure our practices and processes allow our colleagues and communities to feel included without assuming assimilation?

Finally, dialogical approaches to reflexivity and decolonisation are an essential process of un-blinding and enhancing critical consciousness. Dialogue has educational functions that acknowledge the dialectic relationship between the individual and the society, and an attitude for acquiring knowledge through interactions. Through dialogue and reflection, we contribute by checking our assumptions, bridging epistemological gaps and mobilising for social change.

Comment by Sonia Tascón

Decolonisation begins with remembering; recalling who we lost and what we lost on the way to being colonised. Siew Fang Law does that beautifully in this chapter, returning to her childhood, her language and her culture's way

of imagining, being and doing things. We learn much from that. We see yet again the almost universal patterns of oppression and suppression that never completely achieve submersion of the subaltern; we see the colonisers' strategies that take place in Malaysia over layers of colonisation in attempts to obliterate whole groups of peoples' ways of thinking, being, doing, yet never fully achieving it; we read of stereotypes that become social policy that become economic policies that become political repression, compromising the viability of subaltern knowledges, and yet never completely erasing them. I read with enraptured interest Siew Fang's account of her life and how this connected with her work and now her reflections. I have known her for a long time, and yet this was an aspect of her I did not fully know. It has been a privilege to discover some things I did not know, both about Siew Fang, and also about the Chinese in Malaysia, the Chinese Malaysian.

The aspect that stood out for me were those principles for forging relationships, enacting bonds of relations that cannot be captured in another language, and how sad it is that we need to have an explanation for us in this book through the dominant global language of English. How good would it be if all of us had to learn multiple languages to 'get on'. Those words, and the extent of their meaning, would be understood immediately by Chinese speakers. That led me to think of codes of communication in terms of decolonisation. Because, as I have said elsewhere (Tascón, 2019), words are worlds, and I wrote it this way, heavily influenced by post-modern playfulness: wor[l]ds. There may well be some etymological relationship between the two English words, acknowledging that words do embody worlds and our worlds are known and transmitted through culturally constructed words, whether they be symbolised through language – written or spoken – visually, or in the body (as in culturally understood gestures, which are a type of language). And these codes of communication enable us to both connect with and respond to others and also act to shape our way of understanding that world within which we exist with others. The loss of those codes, culturally communicated and constructed, means a loss of the mapping that we use to navigate our social, economic, political and cultural landscapes.

This was a recurring theme in Siew Fang's chapter, and the disorientation she felt upon leaving her family, region and country to begin operating – navigating – within a different set of codes. It is a recurring theme in this book, that of colonisation's epistemic violences that manifest themselves through attempts to obliterate the codes that sustain and transmit important cultural knowledge. But they do not always obliterate, merely make them hidden or restricted in their use, hence modifying the range of expression they can have. Siew Fang is reclaiming her traditions in this chapter, giving expression to codes of existence that have, necessarily, needed to change in a new land.

Yet Siew Fang's chapter also raises important questions about diaspora, and how to navigate new knowledges and merge them with those of her ancestors. These are not easy questions when the dominant codes she (and all those living diasporically) has had to adopt have also opened up new ways of thinking. Decolonisation cannot mean a return to 'older' ways of thinking because

it needs to consider and incorporate the new codes that are being created. Cultures are not static and are forever changing under new influences; they must be open to being so. It means demolishing the supremacy of one way of thinking over others and creating a new equality between them, based on *guanxi* possibly? Surely *guanxi* can be operationalised around ways of knowing and being? That is, *guanxi* can bind different and diverse ways of knowing and being as being in a relationship, helping each other create something new, offering each other strengths where the other is weak, creating bonds of sharing where exists only hegemony now. I am in complete agreement with Siew Fang when she states towards the end: 'Dialogical approaches to reflexivity and decolonisation are essential processes of un-blinding and enhancing critical consciousness'. Dialogue, as she says, must be between equal partners, and *guanxi* could be developed to work into new ways of creating knowledge, together.

Comment by Jim Ife

Multicultural societies can also be multi-epistemic societies, where different knowledge systems exist side by side. Indeed they ideally should be, as epistemology is grounded in culture, and so if a different *culture* is truly present in a 'multicultural' society, then its corresponding *knowledge* traditions – its epistemology – should also be present and validated. Modern 'multicultural' societies, however, seldom reflect this epistemic diversity, and to that extent a policy of 'multiculturalism' has achieved only limited success. In Western societies, the dominant knowledge systems remain stubbornly anchored in Western Modernity, and are seldom questioned from this perspective. For example, to teach 'multiculturalism' in a Western school or university, using the Western traditions of knowledge, of teaching, of 'curriculum', of learning and of assessment of learning, is to assume a shallow understanding of 'culture' that is required to fit into Western epistemological norms. It does not delve deeper into the epistemological, and therefore ontological, foundations of that culture. The teaching of Indigenous cultures in social work programmes can often be characterised in this way. Is it really possible to 'teach' about Indigenous culture using a Western knowledge framework and Western knowledge institutions, of the credentialled instructor, 'learning outcomes', 'prescribed texts', 'assessment rubrics' and a timetabled four hours per week of 'class time'? The inevitable result will be a superficial caricature of 'Indigenous culture', packaged for white social workers, and severely modified to 'fit' white knowledge assumptions and institutions.

Siew Fang's chapter, with her account of navigating the layers of colonialism and epistemological racism experienced by a Malaysian Chinese woman working in Western societies and in Western knowledge institutions, is a good example of this problem. Western society may pretend to have welcomed those from other cultures, but only if they conform to our culturally constructed understandings of what counts as real knowledge, and of how it should be taught. The task of decolonising thus requires genuine reform of Western

knowledge systems and creating the space for other epistemological traditions to thrive. This is a daunting challenge indeed. But it suggests that social workers who are concerned with decolonisation should seek to join with others who are arguing for significant reform of the education system at all levels.

One aspect of Siew Fang's chapter that drew my attention was her discussion of *being* and *doing*, which takes us back to Sonia Tascón's discussion in Chapter 1 about the binaries at the heart of white Western Modernity. To the Western mind, being and doing often become binary opposites: one is passive while the other is active, one implies agency while the other does not. You can be one or the other, but not both at once. When you are concentrating on *doing* you have no time or space to think about *being*, and the person who is fully concerned with *being* has no time for *doing*; we thus become either unreflective activists or armchair revolutionaries. This is reflected in social work's perpetual obsession with 'integrating theory and practice' and its continuing to see this 'integration' as problematic.

Siew Fang, however, is comfortable discussing *being* and *doing* together, less as binary opposites and more in the context of Chinese philosophical tradition that sees such apparent opposites as complementary, interweaving and interdependent, rather than oppositional (Sterckx, 2019). Just as the ideas of *yin* and *yang* can exist only because of each other, flow into each other and are in dynamic equilibrium, so too we can think of *being* and *doing* as working together, and understand that in reality we are always being and doing at the same time. To think therefore about *being/doing* – like *theory/practice* – in more Chinese terms represents an important challenge for white Western social workers.

Jeremy Lent, in his important book *The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning* (2017), argues that because binary thinking was initiated by the Greek philosophers, especially Plato, it subsequently had a pervasive influence on European, Middle Eastern and Indian thought. To find an alternative to such binary thinking, Lent suggests that we need to move to established intellectual traditions that were not influenced by Greek thought, and he suggests particularly Chinese traditions as a source for such alternative explorations. To that we can, of course, add various Indigenous knowledge traditions, but his argument emphasises the point that Chinese intellectual traditions may have much to teach the West in relation to overcoming the constraints of the binary, and thus sits well alongside Siew Fang's chapter.

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11 Approaches to social work from a decolonialist and intersectional perspective

A Latin American and Caribbean view

Larry Alicea-Rodríguez

Introduction

In this chapter, I assert that intersectionality and decolonialist thought confront the knowledge and practices of social work that have developed from hegemonic knowledge. This dominant knowledge has nurtured many of the theories, methods, techniques and practices that have been taught and reproduced in Latin American and Caribbean professional activity. In many places, these practices have been uncritically and ahistorically adopted in the form of so-called 'professional intervention', conceptualising social work with those who live in Latin America and the Caribbean based on knowledge that was developed outside of our realities. Decoloniality and intersectionality are presented as a way of conceiving of our professional projects outside of the pattern of modern colonialism's power. These approaches require certain aspects to be radicalised (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Social work from a decolonialist and intersectional perspective maintains a constant view towards the social conditions that allow and perpetuate oppressions, as well as the objective of developing professional counterparts and approaches that allow us to understand, confront and eradicate them. From professional training in social work to all areas of the profession's field and attributes, assuming counterhegemonic and anti-oppressive practices is proposed, positioned outside of European modernity and always situated within our Latin American realities.

This chapter is positioned in an analytic and contextual mapping marked by the realities of Latin American and Caribbean geography and history as we live it, suffer in it and survive it – not as it has been told to us. From that standpoint, we can generate a knowledge foundation that is situated, the *locus* of the enunciation that is the genesis of the thinking. Decolonialist thought regarding the profession within Latin America and the Caribbean is carried out in the way that has been outlined by Bautista; it "implies a transcendence of modern ontology and the modernity-postmodernity project" (p. 84).

Through this decolonial approach, I will attempt to illuminate the logic that has structured economic, social, political and gender-based relationships in Latin America and the Caribbean, which are precisely the spaces in which

social work frames its professional practice, working with the materiality of the effects produced by coloniality in "bodies, lives, plans, and possibilities" (Hermida & Meschini, 2017). In this approach, intersectionality is adopted as an essential element of the so-called 'decolonial turn' that requires us to assume the impact of the multiplicity of identities. This is essential in a continent where the *mestizo* and the diverse are the rule rather than the exception. Finally, I present examples of decolonial turns that have been put into practice in Latin American and Caribbean social work in order to carry out professional activity.

Coloniality

The decolonial category was coined by the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality Group with three principal subcategories: *the coloniality of power*, *the coloniality of knowledge* and *the coloniality of being*. This group of critical thinkers includes a plexus of intellectuals, among which are most notably Santiago Castro Gómez, Enrique Dussel, Ramón Grosfoguel, Edgardo Lander, María Lugones, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano. Coming from different schools of thought and epistemic influences, this group was influenced by the thinking of Césaire, Memmi and Fanon, and by Dussel's philosophy of liberation, among other theorists (Maldonado-Torres, 2011).

Coloniality is not the same as colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Aníbal Quijano (2015) defines coloniality as a constituent element of the global pattern of capitalist power founded in the imposition of an ethnoracial classification of the world population as the backbone of this pattern of power. The author situates the genesis and the globalisation of this pattern of power in the conquest of the Americas. According to most authors identified with the decolonial turn, it is the conquest of the Americas that causes capitalist power to become global, localising its hegemonic centres in Europe. When we speak of the decolonial, we are of course referring mainly to colonialism, but viewed and analysed as a social grammar (Santos, 2010) in different social relationships.

According to Quijano, although political colonialism has been eliminated, colonialism persists in other relationships. This includes colonisation of the imagination of those who are dominated. He understands that there was a repression that was passed onto beliefs, ideas, images, symbols and knowledge, and that from there it extended into ways of understanding, of producing knowledge, perspective, images, systems of images, symbols and modes of significance. Domination also encompassed resources, models and instruments of expression. The effect of this control was that it impeded cultural production and controlled it both socially and culturally. This domination domain took place through the imposition of patterns of knowledge production and the colonisers' definitions (Quijano, 1992).

The coloniality of power

The coloniality of power is defined by Quijano (2015) as a web of articulated social relationships of exploitation, domination and conflict, fundamentally under the control of labour and its product; nature and its resources of production; sex, its products and the reproduction of the species; subjectivity and its material and intersubjective products, including knowledge; and authority and its tools of coercion. This final point is often seen as a way of ensuring that the pattern of social relationships is reproduced, and that its changes can be regulated (Quijano, 2015). According to Quijano, social classification is essential in this pattern of power. These classifications create a system of distinctions that use lines of dehumanisation to divide social reality into two universes: some find themselves on one side of the line and others are on the other side. However, the oppressed populations and groups located on the other side of the line disappear as a reality and become non-existent in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. They therefore find themselves excluded, or as Iris Marion Young puts it, "marginalised" (Young, 1990, p. 53). Marginalisation produces dependence, which, in turn, results in unjust conditions.

According to de Sousa Santos (2015), these classifications create a system of visible and invisible distinctions that are established through radical lines that create exclusion. This allows for the creation of groups that are not candidates for 'social inclusion' (p. 28). He suggests that these classifications create social apartheid, contractual fascism, territorial fascism and social fascism (de Sousa Santos, 2015). Social apartheid is visualised in the areas set aside for impoverished sectors that are commonly called poor and marginalised. In Puerto Rico, they are called *caseríos*, *residenciales*, or *barriadas pobres* ('poor neighbourhoods'). In other parts of Latin America, we see different impoverished settlements and different names used to classify them. These zones are the ones most often indicated as dangerous and subjected to multiple social control 'interventions'. In many cases of professional social work, these neighbourhoods are used to carry out interventions as part of the mechanisms of state control and repression against these populations.

Contractual fascism occurs as a product of the asymmetry of power, when the vulnerable sectors have no alternative but to cope with the insecurity that is imposed on them by those in power (de Sousa Santos, 2015). This can be observed in the privatisation of services such as health and education. Latin America and the Caribbean have established institutional and political reforms for structural adjustment, administrative decentralisation, reduction of the economy's role, and determining responsibility in the development of social programming (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2008).

Territorial fascism occurs when social actors with capital who take territorial control also capture institutions that regulate the population, without their direct participation and against those peoples' interests (de Sousa Santos, 2015). Displacement and the repression of communities for the control and exploitation of natural resources is not uncommon in Latin America. It is also not rare

for communities to become sick and contaminated as the result of business and governmental practices. Expropriations, the assassination of community and environmental leaders, and the repression of protests and popular movements defending their land are commonplace in these territories.

According to de Sousa Santos (2015), all of these practices produce a kind of social fascism that impedes access to citizenry. The coloniality of power produces exclusion. It infringes upon the ideologies of social justice. It oppresses individuals and peoples. Helio Gallardo (2015) identifies large agrarian and masculine property, patriarchal-authoritarian Catholicism and ethnic-Eurocentric superiority as the initial forces that have driven social relations since the processes of invasion and colonisation. This author asserts that all these driving forces led to extreme discrimination, criminal characteristics and legitimised violence in absolute terms. He posits that judicial impunity has sustained this violence, which arrived during the invasion, was strengthened over time and splintered with the arrival of independence. Furthermore, even in countries with left-wing projects, the coloniality of power over sex and its products works against the governments' advanced projects with regard to economic rights. There are self-proclaimed left-wing governments with repressive agendas against women's rights and the LGBTTQI community.

And it is here that we question the role of social work in the perpetuation of hegemonic power. According to Quijano:

> [I]t is this distribution of power among people of a society that classifies them socially, determines their reciprocal relationships, and generates their social differences, since their empirically observable and distinguishable characteristics are the result of those relationships of power, their signals, and their traces.
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> (Quijano A., 2015, p. 92)

In the words of Hermida and Meschini (2017), by situating social work in a decolonial perspective, we locate ourselves in the intersection where collegiality becomes materiality, which then becomes a wound that scars bodies, lives, plans and possibilities. I agree with them in that these wounds have faces, names and bodies: they are nations, they are groups, they are communities.

These groups shoulder roles that are assigned to and imposed upon their sex, their sexual orientation, their skin colour, their political affiliation and the community in which they live. It is the trans woman who does not have health coverage to pay for her hormone treatment. They are the communities in Honduras who have to travel more than six hours to reach a hospital. They are the Nicaraguans deprived of social security by a government that ironically calls itself 'left-wing'. They are the immigrant children separated from their families who feel forced to abandon their countries to seek out dreams that seem impossible in their native lands. They are the people on the other side of the line whom, in many cases, we do not see due to our privilege and position outside of their context; if we do see them, we work to make them respect

the border so they do not cross it. We collaborate to ensure that these groups internalise this oppression, creating a colonial legacy (Lander, 2000).

In many of our countries, we see social workers working for agencies that perpetuate the colonial legacy. This can be observed in the sectoral work that is carried out in some communities, primarily through nongovernmental organisations and the ambiguous third sector in its role of obscuring the social movements that have worked towards the transformation of social conditions (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2008; Montaño, 2005). These activities, developed by national organisations, focused on breaking up the social movements that arose out of the lines of exclusion to work against power structures. Third-sector organisations and civil society did not operate against the structure; they operated from within it and were financed by it. Their activity was reduced to small-scale projects to alleviate poverty without substantial social change in the distribution of or access to national and local resources. The local focus caused the national resources to dissipate and did not push for radical change. The intention was, therefore, to keep the existing power structure in the distribution of society's resources while promoting change and development on a local scale (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2008). Or, in my own words, there has been a cover-up of the manifestations of social issues.

The coloniality of knowledge

The coloniality of knowledge implies the imposition and transmission of forms of knowledge developed by the European historical experience as the only valid, objective and universal forms of knowledge (Lander, 2000). This has resulted in a cultural and epistemological colonisation that hegemonises the European system of representation and knowledge and the European perspective (Gómez-Quintero, 2010). According to Dussel, the educational process of modernity is based on European superiority (Dussel, 2010). He calls this the myth of modernity. In order to overcome it, the other's otherness must be claimed. For Castro-Gómez (2007), this can be achieved by favouring transdisciplinarity, as a transgression against the binary, the dual pairs of opposition of Occidental modernity, and towards transculturality and dialogue. He invites us to oppose those opposing pairs, between one and another that bypass diversity, which is neither black nor white, heterosexual or homesexual and what makes coloniality invisible. The pairs exclude much knowledge, and to arrive at their being known we must transgress those imposed pairs. The author challenges us to replace purity and distance with contamination and closeness, starting from zero, with the observer forming an integral part of what he or she observes as part of the experiment. This is disruptive and counterhegemonic, and this is what Martínez and Agüero call 'indiscipline' (2014).

Analysing Wallerstein, Castro Gómez (2010) postulates that an epistemic violence took place in the social sciences, in which discipline was key in the project of organisation and control of human life. This 'science', according to the author, legitimised the regulatory practices of the state that were based on

adjusting human life to production. The challenge for social sciences and for social work as a discipline of these sciences

> consists of learning to name the whole without falling prey to the essentialism and universalism of metanarratives. This entails the difficult work of reimagining the tradition of *critical theory* (that of Lukács, Bloch, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Sartre, and Althusser) in light of postmodern theorisation but, at the same time, of reimagining the latter in light of the former. It is not, therefore, about buying new wineskins and throwing out the old ones, nor is it about throwing out new wine in old wineskins; rather, it is about reconstructing the old wineskins so that they can hold new wine.
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> (Castro-Gómez, 2010, p. 158)

The discussion of how to overcome the coloniality of knowledge emphasises the need to develop a new language that reveals the complexity of the processes that take place in the modern-colonial-patriarchal-capitalist world-system, working outside of the language of Eurocentric social science and providing an alternative language (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007).

It also evokes the need for a decolonial turn that aims to reveal dominant knowledge, identifying the knowledge and practices that are based on a colonial legacy. This knowledge is distorted and wrong (Masías-Núñez, 2011). Decolonial theorists propose a global network of power made up of economic, political and cultural processes that transcend capitalism and that, together, maintain the entire system:

> Therefore, we need to find new concepts and a new language that account for the complexity of the hierarchies of gender, race, class, sexuality, knowledge, and spirituality within the geopolitical, geocultural, and geoeconomic processes of the world-system. With the goal of finding a new language for this complexity, we must search 'outside' of our paradigms, disciplinary focuses, and areas of knowledge. We need to engage in dialogue with non-Western forms of knowledge that see the world as a whole in which everything is related to everything, but also with new theories.
>
> (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 17)

It is essential that we ask ourselves: which of the elements of knowledge that nourish social work as a profession and an academic discipline attempt to approach the issues of the profession from these hegemonic views? How is hegemonic knowledge reflected in the paradigms, theories, models, methods and techniques that we use in the profession? What role do universities and social work programmes play in the reproduction of a single form of knowledge or in the subjugation of knowledge that conflict with the values of our profession?

In some debates, it worries me to hear social work professionals speak of neutral positions. Doctor Raquel Seda, one of the most renowned social workers in Puerto Rico, wondered how it was possible to exercise the profession in accordance with her values, from the perspective of an education with conservative focuses, and still orient ourselves to remain neutral. According to her, positioning ourselves as political subjects is an indispensable task. Similarly, it suggests that it is possible to be objective within subjectivity, but that this was achieved through liberating educational processes, willpower and discipline (Seda-Rodríguez, 2012). Being neutral usually implies silence: silence in the face of oppression, in the face of rights denied to collectives that are sexually diverse, in the face of continual discrimination sustained against women, in the face of femicide, in the face of our governments massacring our populations and depriving us of the rights inherent to our humanity.

Let us reflect upon our practices and the knowledge that underlies them. The proliferation and the indiscriminate use of the term 'evidence-based' concerns me as a perpetuation and application of the one-size-fits-all model for populations that experience certain problems. It seems fundamental and part of an ethical practice to seek out available knowledge, and to inform our practices with this knowledge. However, it is an act of violence to apply the practices and models without consideration for the history and context of the participants who interact in this professional exercise. My concern stems from the lack of critical rigour that can be observed in many of our work experiences.

There is no shortage of instances in which our knowledge and practices are coloured by concepts foreign to the reality that people live, their needs and the critical analysis of the social positions that serve as its base. Without this, we reproduce colonial practices. To use an example from the coloniality of knowledge, there is the situation that we face in the clinical and therapeutic practices of social work with the use of the *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, known as the *DSM*-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This document pathologises women's menstrual periods, the processes of mourning and inherent aspects of child development. In many cases, the professionals who have a clinical practice are often forced to enter into diagnostic categories principally designed by psychiatrists in order to pathologise and treat as illnesses issues that are emotional consequences of social stressors. Horwitz (2002) indicates the important sociological duty of distinguishing between what could actually be a mental illness and what are expected reactions to social stressors. This author specifies that there is nothing pathological in people responding to situations that affect them with depression, anxiety or other symptoms of tension and anguish. Netto (2002) denounces the state strategy to break down the social issue by uncoupling social problems from one another, emphasising the private dimension of these factors. Therefore, the professional exercise is focused on behaviour change, psychosocial discipline and other interventions that perpetuate inequality – interventions that constitute a clear contradiction to the principles of the profession.

The coloniality of being

The coloniality of being is defined as the lived experience of colonisation and its impact on language, connecting different genetic, existential and historical levels (2007). Nelson Maldonado explains that the colonised being's primary expressions are invisibility and dehumanisation, violating the sense of human otherness. It is the act of not being.

It seems that we must be concerned with and problematise renowned concepts such as 'resilience', as well as the fact that, on many occasions, natural sciences are introduced and applied indiscriminately to our profession. While it is admirable that people are able to confront and overcome adversity, we must observe how this concept has been used by groups in power to reinforce the idea that people must demonstrate acceptance of adverse situations. And, therefore, far from being a concept that emphasises the ways in which people and groups overcome, call into question and organise themselves against adversity, it becomes a concept of resignation. People's passivity in relation to the situation makes them 'resilient', when in reality it denies them their basic rights, and thus their own existence. It transforms them into non-beings.

It is here that intersectionality becomes a tool of practice in the decolonial turn. There is a common theme in all the expressions of coloniality that I have highlighted: hegemony, categories, distinctions, oppression – a division of those who are on one side and those who are on the other. It is the abyssal line proposed by de Sousa Santos (2015), where everything that is not compatible with the notion of universality and naturalness becomes invisible and oppressed as a result of hegemonic power.

The approach that we take from the perspective of the profession requires us to put aside binary pairs in order to think of the range of possibilities that exist between the poles. We can no longer talk about sexual orientation and think only of a gay man or a lesbian. Between these lines there is a diversity of different expressions of sexuality that must also be considered. Each of these expressions differently impacts and colours people's identities and knowledge.

Intersectionality as an approach highlights two categories of identity (Crenshaw, 1991) that are negated and made invisible by the substrates of colonisation imprinted on all categories of oppression. Intersectionality allows us to analyse power in all of its domains –interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural and structural – combatting inequality anywhere it is found. Social divisions of race, gender, age and citizenship status cause the impacts to have different implications according to the intersecting identities of people and groups. This complicates the situation for professional exercise because the solutions cannot be applied in a simple way. We must embrace complex approaches.

This implies a conscious and critical social work practice of social inequality and its causes. It also implies the understanding of the different ways in which power is organised and exercised. Add to this the promotion of solidarity and human relationships, organising people participating in emancipatory processes

based on their identities and, finally, the contextual professional and scholarly exercise of the historical processes associated with the difficulties and situations with which we work.

Decolonial examples in Latin American and Caribbean social work

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the decolonial project of social work began with the Reconceptualisation Movement. This movement can be analysed as a process of breakdown (Aquín, 2005), which was itself the product of a series of questions, revisions and searches that were based on the study of the Latin American reality, underdevelopment and economic dependence (Kiserman, 2005). The basis of the professional exercise of social work that had taken place until that point had been questioned and transformed, as were the institutional establishments in which they were carried out. All of this was compounded with a political radicalisation of the profession and the removal of what had been, until that moment, ideological perspectives, theories and social work methods that did not correspond to the reality of what was being lived in our territories. This produced a Latin American and Caribbean identity for social work that was considerably detached from the social work that had been carried out up to the point and that had been conceived principally by the pioneers of the profession. During this time, the category of decoloniality had not yet been identified, but the movement represented a decolonial turn in the exercise of the profession in Latin America.

The second milestone was the organisation of a project for the region by the social work professional organisations (Martínez & Agüero, 2014). Mercosur, the Latin American and Caribbean Committee of Social Work/Social Service (COLACATS) and the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) for the Latin American and Caribbean region have had an impact on the global definition of social work, the defence of the profession's identity in the region, the political struggle in international spaces and the decolonisation of social work worldwide. The election of the first Latin American as president of the global IFSW, Dr. Silvana Martínez, is one of the results of the region's collective efforts. For Latin American and Caribbean social work, the disruptive, decolonial and counterhegemonic perspective can be found in our identifying features, which include

> the historical, political, and holistic view of social issues; the politicization of the profession, the centrality of the state in the construction and reproduction of the social order; the relationship between the profession and social movements; the Social Workers' capacity for struggle and resistance and the familiarity with the working class tied to the precariousness of the working conditions of the professional exercise.
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> (Martínez & Agüero, 2014, p. 43)

These characteristics outlined by Martínez and Agüero are a good basis for overcoming the coloniality of knowledge that has permeated the professional work of social work in Latin America and the Caribbean. Based on this, we must create spaces to reflect on our profession at the academic level and from professional associations, but always from our contexts. In this reflection, we must identify, combat and eradicate the sediments of coloniality that influence the thinking and doing of social work, to accompany people to seek answers from our realities in a true decolonial turn.

Comment by Sonia Tascón

A theoretically rich chapter, in which Larry considers coloniality, as opposed to colonialism in many of its facets, and then decoloniality from an intersectional position. As he points out, coloniality is a remnant relation of power, a 'social grammar' that is riven through different social relationships. This is, following Aníbal Quijano, a colonisation of the imagination, disseminated and reproduced through various frames of knowledge production, including symbolic communication, images and language. Colonial domination of Eurocentric idea[l]s continues through patterns of knowledge production and having the power to define and constitute the world of ideas, knowledge, values and beliefs. This, Larry points out, is carried out simultaneously as Other knowledges, Other people, are marginalised, excluded and obliterated from the collective imagination through a process of dehumanisation. Social work is complicit, he says, through much of its work in areas that sustain the 'borders' where the privileged will not meet those who are intentionally left out of the benefits to be obtained inside the border.

Decoloniality, he states, needs to work in the interstices, in the interdisciplinary spaces, or what Martínez and Agüero call 'indiscipline' (2014) because much of the dehumanising work of coloniality takes place through the violence of the binary, "the dual pairs of opposition of Occidental modernity". This concept was redolent with possibilities and yet I was left wanting to know more, thirsty for the promise the term seemed to entice me with. It seemed to have something to do with disrupting binaries and replacing "purity and distance with contamination and closeness". Larry turns his attention too soon for my liking to social work, without exploring this middle ground of indiscipline, also for what it might bring to social work. I completely agree that the lived reality of those with whom we work has to be foregrounded, rather than knowledge frames created elsewhere for other peoples, other histories, other needs and circumstances. These frames of knowledge were/are created to fulfil other needs and circumstances yet framed as 'universal'; they are then used to further oppress the receiving peoples by castigating them for failing to have these frames of reference. The example, and critique, of the DSM is absolutely perfect in this analysis; professionals are bound to its use even if they do not agree with the violence the decontextualised pathologising such an instrument perpetuates.

The example of the use of the term 'resilience' receives thorough deconstruction and had me nodding in exuberant agreement. Again, as with the critique of the use of the DSM, decoupling the individual from their social environment and the forces that act on them, to reward them with a term that leaves them bereft of sociality in their achievement of 'resilience', is no reward at all. The term, as Larry points out, suggests passive resignation and rewards such singular passivity. That, as he says, "transforms them into non-beings". And that is because of the non-recognition of the vital social connections that make us complex, social beings and not simple categorisations as the DSM suggests; categorisations that are, ultimately, intended to create divisions, the abyssal line of de Sousa Santos (2015). That line "where everything that is not compatible with the notion of universality and naturalness becomes invisible and oppressed".

The answer is, and I completely concur as my chapter in this book attests, is to "put aside binary pairs in order to think of the range of possibilities that exist between the poles". Those categorisations of which Larry speaks before getting to his point about intersectionality create divisions because they centre on the binary. In the binary, one side is truth and the other non-truth. With instruments such as the DSM, those who come to be labelled as having a 'condition' (and, in effect, many organic events such as what Larry points out – processes of mourning, women's menstrual periods and child development – are labelled as 'conditions'), and thus acts not only as a weapon of management for professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, but also as a catalogue for those who are on the 'wrong' side of being productive/efficient/complete/unspoilt, or 'ideal' in neoliberal definitions of subjectivity.

The last section outlines the ways in which Latin American and Caribbean social work has been organised to decolonise. It appears that such initiatives as Larry outlines, such as the Reconceptualisation Movement and Mercosur, were specifically established to foreground the distinct nature of social work in these regions, appeared in the early 2000s, if the references are a guide. What these movements suggest is that there is a growing awareness of the localisation, and the rise in complexification that attends it, that is necessary for decolonisation to take place substantively. Decolonisation, Larry rightly points out, requires a number of steps:

1. Firstly, for us to become aware of the epistemological and ontological frames that we have been led to understand constitute our 'inferiority' as colonial subjects.
2. Understand that we have been led into these definitional categories as a form of power. They do not occur as neutral knowledge; they are intended to subjugate us as colonial subjects. And these categories have simplified us for the consumption of the coloniser (now, no longer the immediate 'lord' over us, but in a capitalist relationship to sell us things, ideas, hopes and aspirations).

3. The last two are a painful process to undergo because it undermines our own sense of agency that we have been made into colonial subjects without our knowledge. It is often easier to deny these processes are occurring – e.g., that racism is taking place – so that we can bypass them. It is also often easier to blame ourselves because we have power over our own actions and not over others – the 'resilience' phenomenon that Larry speaks about.
4. The need to uncouple ourselves from those epistemological and ontological frames that act against our own interests – the binaries, the acts of exclusion, the definitional catalogues. Creating and articulating complexity in our being, through a process of 'indiscipline'.
5. Resisting the dehumanisation of coloniality through joining forces with others.
6. Paying attention to local conditions, circumstances and needs, and formulating a social work that is attendant to those.
7. As our ancestors of the liberation of Latin America and the Caribbean did – Simón Bolivar, Bernardo O'Higgins, but also all the women: Manuela Saenz, Juana Azurduy, Bartolina Sisa, Gertrudis Bocanegra, Luisa Cáceres, Policarpa Salavarrieta – this new group of social workers will be reclaiming and reinstating knowledges that have never been forgotten, were only in the shadows awaiting their return.

Comment by Iris Silva Brito and Goetz Ottmann

For the outsider, Latin America is a fascinating continent. Its contradictions often boggle the mind of the Eurocentric observer, making it difficult to read and understand events. Political parties and their activists espouse a rhetoric that is unashamedly socialist or authoritarian or both, but often pursue policies that are neoliberal with social democratic tinges in the name of 'subverting the dominant paradigm', the people, order and progress, or all of the above. Military leaders install totalitarian regimes to safeguard democracy, eradicate corruption or suppress pluralistic terrorists in the name of a US-dependent sovereignty. It is bone-breakingly conservative, radical, modern and very much Indigenous. It accepts and celebrates indigeneity as founding moments of nations but keeps it at arm's length and still largely negates it in its own biogenetic make-up. It enables a social work that finds its own voice to demand social justice and to end oppression but subjugates that to a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual that turns liberation into an individualistic pursuit. It celebrates sex and sexuality, and sexualises children's bodies, but moralises and stigmatises all things queer. It renders sacred the unborn but treats it savagely upon delivery. It is solidly grounded in the local that is consumed by a ferocious modernity.

Larry's chapter artfully unmasks and explains these contradictions by revealing their epistemological roots. Using the frames of intersectionality and the coloniality of power, knowledge and being, the author proceeds to trace how

these frames can be used to allow us to recognise how social work can be conceived outside modern colonial power. While this chapter builds on a considerable body of theory, it manages to convey the lived experience. Between many of its lines the reader can sense the pain caused by binary thinking, binaries that are engraved into the metaphysical body of the continent and the social relationships built upon it. I have to admit that when I first read Larry's chapter, there were moments when I vacillated between getting emotionally stimulated by the bold ideas contained within it just to be asking myself, a split second later, whether the arguments are intellectually and philosophically consistent. Then I had a 'd'oh' moment. Of course, Larry seeks to disrupt, decentre and un-stage. The chapter purposely leaves Eurocentric academic conventions to invite us to step beyond the binary. The chapter boldly engages with a complex body of philosophical and sociological knowledge turning it into the kind of poetry that supercharges mobilisation. Yet, rather than leaving the reader floating in an epistemological space that is yet to be defined, Larry grounds the discussion by asserting that Latin American social work has already begun to decolonise hegemonic strands of knowledge pointing to the Reconceptualisation Movement. Clearly, this introduces a circularity. However, the author has a point. The Reconceptualisation Movement brought about a Latin American and Caribbean social work that built on local intellectual traditions. The result differed considerably from the mainstream US social work tradition giving rise to a range of, often Freire-inspired, radical social work projects that have largely gone un-noticed by the English social work literature. Many of these experiments break new ground and stand out in terms of their ability to offer an alternative to mainstream social work practices elsewhere and more should be known about them. However, the intellectual roots of this trajectory were often grounded in dependency theory and other Marxist critiques of global capitalism – theories that could be seen to betray the decolonial project. Should we take issue with this?

Larry showcases how coloniality/decolonialism can be used to oppose the epistemicide (Sousa Santos, 2014) that is transforming social workers into wardens of the state, that defines and monitors thresholds of what is deemed to constitute socially acceptable behaviour sanctioning those who transgress them (Agamben, 1998 [1995]). At this particular historical juncture, it should become plain and obvious that the fight against the new hybridised forms of authoritarianism, as Giroux calls it (Giroux, 2015) or the descent into social fascism, in Sousa Santos's words (Sousa Santos, 2014), will be one of the most important struggles of the coming decades. During the 1980s and 1990s – the political origins of this foray into the new authoritarianism – most commentators underestimated the depth to which this shift in economic and political discourses should re-shape global culture. We were too busy attacking each other over ontological questions to take note. I think that this is one of the chapter's most important insights: it is high time to build bridges between the philosophical currents that divided us in the past if we are to dispel the dark shroud of authoritarianism that is descending upon us.

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12 Decolonising social work vocabulary

Introduction

In this chapter, we present a number of terms which are used frequently, and often unthinkingly, by social workers. It is our contention that the way these terms are used often suggests a white Western bias in social work epistemology. Many of these words would not be used so readily by social workers from other cultural and epistemological traditions, or would be used in very different ways. We recognise that there is existing critical social work scholarship that addresses many of these terms, and we encourage the reader to explore that critical literature further, as there is not space here to explore them in the detail they deserve; each would warrant a full chapter in its own right. We have simply raised some questions about these terms, which can serve as a basis for further discussion in classrooms or professional forums, and to alert the reader to the potential white bias in conventional social work vocabulary. It is also acknowledged that these terms are in the English language, itself a significant limitation of alternative epistemological possibilities.

Accountability. The dominant construction of social work accountability is accountability *upward*, to managers, supervisors, management committees and governments. This is characteristic of Western modernity, with its obsession with bureaucracy, management and hierarchy, and it is easy to forget that there are other forms of accountability more compatible with other traditions, for example accountability to the community, to the service recipient, to the land, to the extended family, to the ancestors, to the environment and so on.

Advocacy. Advocacy is essentially a legal idea, where one person (usually a professional) advocates on behalf of another person or group. This makes assumptions about who has the right and who has the ability to speak, and how well the advocate knows the will and the circumstances, including the cultural context, of the person or group for whom they are advocating. Advocacy is potentially disempowering, suggesting that this person or group is unable to present their views adequately. It is typical of a colonial relationship where the coloniser speaks on behalf of the colonised, and can be an invitation to the perpetuation of colonialism in a social work relationship.

Assessment. The very idea of 'social work assessment' assumes that a social worker is better able to 'assess' a person or family than they can themselves – and

this is the essence of colonialism. It is also often talked about in a context-free and culture-free way. In making any assessment a social worker will come not from a neutral position, but with cultural assumptions about what counts as relevant information, and epistemological assumptions about what counts as relevant knowledge, to be included in 'assessment'. A further question is 'assessment for what?'. Is the assessment being carried out with the aim of assimilation (perhaps disguised as 'rehabilitation' or 'inclusion')?

Authority. Professional authority can readily become colonial, as it implies the professional has authority over the lives of others. Authority is often discussed in child protection, disability and aged care, and sometimes a level of authority is necessary to ensure adequate care and protection of others. But in such cases, the assumptions behind 'care' and 'protection' also need to be examined (see below). The phrase 'appropriate use of authority' is often used in such circumstances – but what counts as 'appropriate', and who defines appropriateness? This language has been used in the past to justify what we now see as blatant colonialism, including the removal of children from families and the institutionalisation of people with disabilities. It is language that potentially implies 'I the social worker know best' and should be used with extreme care, and from a specific decolonising perspective.

Best interests. Phrases such as 'the best interests of the child', 'the client's best interests', or 'the best interests of the community' are a key indicator of colonialism. It is always important to ask who it is that is defining 'best interests', and from what ideological and professional base? Some such judgements by social workers in the past are now recognised as profoundly damaging to the people involved, including the removal of Indigenous children from their families, forced adoptions, institutional 'care' for people with disabilities, and so on. Surely such judgements made by social workers today are just as likely to be condemned by future generations and must be seriously challenged for their colonialist assumptions.

Best practice. The very idea that you can have 'best practice' assumes that there is a single standard against which practice can be judged. This single standard will almost inevitably reflect a white Western world view and eliminates any validation of alternative epistemologies and cultural contexts. We can certainly aspire to 'good practice' together with a contextualised understanding of what should count as good, but to talk of 'best practice' is a clear denial of cultural diversity and a manifestation of colonial arrogance.

Boundaries. The idea of professional boundaries implies a separation of the personal and the professional which makes sense within a Western world view, with a clear construction of what it means to be 'professional'. But in other contexts, such as Indigenous communities, such a rigid boundary does not reflect the lived reality of either worker or service recipient, and hence can inhibit good social work practice. To establish a relationship with another person is often to transcend such boundaries, rather than preserve them as important. Perhaps it is the Western social workers, so intent on professional distance, who really have the 'boundary issues'.

Capacity, Capability. The ideas of capacity and capability are common in social work, understood at both individual and community levels. They beg the question: capacity for what? Neither term is meaningful without a context, and that context is too often assumed to be a white Western 'normality'. Social work that increases a person's capacity within Western institutions, structures and processes can readily become colonialist, especially for a person from a different cultural background. It may well be that the person (or family or community) has considerable capacity to function within a particular context, but social work practice aims to impose a different context and thereby devalues the person's capabilities and marginalises their wisdom and expertise.

Care. The word 'care' is frequently used by social workers, but often without any examination of the cultural context of care and caring. To care for someone is a social act, undertaken within social, cultural, economic and political contexts. Appropriate care will be different in different contexts, whether it is 'taking a child into care', aged care, care for people with disabilities, and so on. Indeed, many Western usages of the term actually imply an environment where warm, genuine caring is unlikely; in aged care, for example, a level of physical care may be provided, but emotional, social or spiritual care may be lacking. Traditions of care are often stronger and richer in non-Western cultures.

Child. The categories of 'child' and 'childhood' are social constructs that have varied historically and across cultures. They carry with them a set of ideas about what it means to be a child, what are duties and responsibilities of others, dependence and independence, freedom of movement and freedom of expression. These are culturally determined, and those cultural assumptions about childhood need to be understood in any case involving child welfare, child protection and so on. Childhood does not exist in a vacuum – rather it occurs in a context of family, community, land, school, peer group and other institutions. Yet the assumption that 'child' and 'childhood' are decontextualised universals often goes unexamined.

Clinical. The adjective 'clinical' is often applied to social work with individuals and families. The word suggests a construction of the social work relationship within a health framework, where the social worker is the clinical expert, and where social work consists of a certain sort of practice, therapy or treatment. This is potentially colonial, in that the social worker is seen as having extra expert knowledge to apply, while the other knowledge of the 'patient' is devalued. Such relationships have historically been part of the colonial agenda in many countries in the Global South. The conventional clinical paradigm is not readily transferable to non-Western and non-White forms of social work, where a more collaborative relationship is the norm.

Community. The word 'community' is frequently used within social work, but the concept of community is complex and contested. Yet many of the assumptions about community and community development are derived from Western ideas of what constitutes community. As a simple example, for Indigenous People ideas of family and community are often the same – the

'community' is actually the extended 'family' – and hence the distinction between 'family work' and 'community work' becomes meaningless. And communitarian traditions are generally much stronger in non-Western cultures. For Western social workers to think they are experts in 'community' is clearly colonialism.

Compliance. Compliance mechanisms are commonly incorporated into organisations as ways to ensure accountability, for example in relation to gender, ethical consent, financial expenditure, corruption and so on. The aim may often be consistent with social work principles, but the mechanisms to ensure compliance, and indeed the very word itself, imply control, surveillance and domination. It can readily be an arm of colonialism, by effectively forcing workers to behave in a certain way, a way which is understood from the dominant, inevitably Western, world view. Accepting compliance can negate agency.

Consent. The Western construction of 'consent' assumes the free decision of an informed and autonomous human, who is able to say 'yes' or 'no' without fear of the consequences, whether it is consent to participate in research, consent to a sexual act, consent for a child to visit a relative, or consent to receive medical treatment. Consent is often problematic, as coercion may be involved, or may be perceived, in many circumstances; consent does not usually take place in a power vacuum. Often the person being asked to give consent is not fully informed of the consequences of their decision. And often the consent is given by someone representing the person involved: the consent of a parent for a child to be allowed to do something, the consent of the family for emergency surgery or for aged care arrangements, and so on. Consent is problematic even within Western culture, but when there are cultural differences it is even more complex and contested. The informed autonomous individual is a very Western construct, denying social embeddedness in family, community and the natural world. And the act of 'consent' is often the way colonisation is enacted.

Critical reflection. The idea of critical reflection has been central to progressive social work. But the very notion of reflection carries with it certain individualised and self-directed assumptions that are characteristically Western. It sees the social worker as an autonomous individual, with the key to progressive practice lying in individual thought and action, rather than in a collective transactional context. And critical reflection is often seen as something social workers do, by themselves, rather than with the people they work with, reinforcing the 'professional' divide between 'worker' and 'client', rather than seeing reflection as collaborative and dialogical.

Empathy. In more collective and traditional cultures, empathy comes more naturally. For modern Western cultures, where social connections have been eroded, empathy is more of a challenge, hence it has had to be named and described. Empathy requires a feeling of connection, of common experience and common purpose, and this needs to be understood in a non-Western way, where connections are not only more readily felt, but are understood in terms of family, kinship, group loyalty and so on. It is an area where non-Western cultures have much to teach Western social workers. Empathy is central to

good social work practice, but how much is our idea of empathy culturally specific?

Ethics. Social workers typically have a strong sense of ethics and of ethical practice. But too often the ethics are grounded in an essentially Western philosophical tradition, emphasising individual actions by autonomous workers. Collective ethics, ethical responsibility to animals and to nature, and the ideological implications of 'ethics' tend to be left out of consideration in defining ethical and unethical practice. And too often the primary concern is with preventing unethical practice, rather than promoting ethical practice, and this is consistent with a Western liberal ideology which implies we are 'free' to do what we like as long as it is not against the law.

Evidence. Evidence-based practice has become a dominant paradigm in Western social work, and 'evidence' has too often been defined within a narrow empirical perspective. It is a word that has taken on a legal meaning, implying precise, unambiguous 'proof', and requires social work to conform to a traditional scientific paradigm that is characteristic of Western modernity. It hardly encourages the decolonisation of social work knowledge.

Expertise. The professional model has ascribed primary expertise to the social worker, rather than to those with whom that social worker is working. This suggests a colonising social work, resulting in the imposition of 'superior' external knowledge. This view has, of course, been challenged within Western social work, with an emphasis on recognition of the knowledge and skills of the people we work with, and notions of empowerment-based practice. But the very fact this has to be challenged and debated suggests the strength of the colonial idea of 'professional expertise'.

Family. The idea of family is central to most social work practice, and the word is used frequently by social workers. But how often is this understood, implicitly, as the conventional Western nuclear family, without recognition that the idea of 'family' means different things in different cultures? Often ideas of 'family therapy', 'family conferences' and so on assume a nuclear family as the norm, not recognising that different understandings of family can mean very different views of the rights and obligations of various family members.

Inclusion. Social inclusion implies the need for mainstream society to be 'inclusive' and to welcome others, who are different in some way (e.g. race, culture, ability, sexuality, age, etc.). But the question remains: what is the nature of the society within which others are to be included? The language of social inclusion is in reality a language of assimilation, and can betray implicit colonialism, as it suggests that 'they' should be included in 'our' (obviously superior) society. It implies that the problem is only one of access, not structural inequality and systematic disadvantage.

Intervention. The idea of intervention implies a social worker who is external to the family, group, organisation or community, coming in from the outside to 'intervene'. It became particularly popular with systems theory, and the idea of social workers 'intervening in systems'. This is effectively a colonial notion, defining a social worker as the external expert, adopting a form of

social engineering from superior knowledge. It would be incomprehensible to cultures of social work where everyone, including the social worker, is seen as connected, with relationships of interlocking responsibilities.

Interview. The idea of a formal interview, so central to ideas of casework and therapy, makes cultural assumptions that are meaningless in non-Western cultures, where more informal conversational and collective discussion are the norm. In many cultures a specific 'social work interview' makes no sense.

Justice. There are traditions of justice in most if not all cultures, but the way that justice is understood and enacted varies considerably. When terms like 'social justice' or 'the criminal justice system' are used, the idea of justice itself is often used uncritically. And whenever a concept is used uncritically, it is likely to reflect a dominant colonial epistemology. Justice cannot be understood in a culture-free way.

Management. The conventional Western idea of management is top-down. The manager supervises others, from a position of assumed wisdom and authority. There are other ways of 'managing' an organisation, involving more collective responsibility and decision-making. The kind of knowledge that is accepted as 'legitimate' in the white Western paradigm is normally knowledge that is owned and applied by experts, and this lends itself naturally to conventional top-down management practices.

Mental health. The notion of 'mental health' is constructed differently in some cultures, and is quite meaningless in others. Sometimes different terms are used, and some behaviours or beliefs that are seen as 'mental health problems' in some cultures are not so regarded in others. There is a danger of imposing a specifically white Western idea of mental health (and what is 'normal') on other cultural contexts, and in this way mental health programmes, with the best of intentions, can become yet another form of colonialism. The mental health field comes with a significant 'body of knowledge', much of which is Western in its epistemological assumptions.

Micro-meso-macro. Dividing social work into micro-, meso- and macro-practice has been a useful categorisation for research and teaching. But the boundaries between the three are surely blurred, and typify the urge to classify and create categories so beloved of Western Enlightenment Modernity. A more holistic and non-Western approach to social work would see these categories as of limited use, recognising that they interact and overlap, and that social work practice inevitably moves across all three if it is to be effective.

Narrative. The idea of narrative is important in social work, not only in 'narrative therapy' but also in broader uses of the word. In emphasising the importance of stories, this has helped social work move away from a restrictive and mechanistic positivism. But there are still cultural assumptions around the idea of 'narrative', including the single individual story-teller and the passive listener(s). Alternatives might include collective narration, active participation by the listener in contributing to the story, and so on.

Need. Ideas of 'need assessment' have a long tradition in social work. One important question to be asked is 'who defines the need?'. If it is the social

worker who determines need, there is the danger of colonialist practice, imposing the social worker's values on others. Need definition can be culture specific, for example when the right to education becomes restated as the need for schools and Western curricula. There are other forms of education, and of knowledge, that are marginalised by such thinking.

Practice. See 'Theory and Practice'.

Profession. The idea of a profession is a Western construct, implying 'expert' knowledge and skills, held by a defined group with approved educational qualifications. As social work in different cultural contexts 'professionalises', it will tend to define its knowledge base in such exclusive terms, and may adopt Western epistemologies as natural in the professional role. More collective, organic and reciprocal approaches to social work may be less compatible with a professional paradigm, but more realistic in non-Western, and increasingly also in Western, settings.

Protection and safety. When defining a person (usually a child or a woman) as in need of 'protection', there is an implied risk or danger. A white Western world view will usually define this danger in individual terms: the paedophile, the abusive parent or the abusive partner. Other needs for protection and safety at a more collective level are less likely to be defined as such: protection from toxic pollution, safety from disasters, protection from the effects of climate change. The need for protection and safety from damaging institutions, such as the police, the social security system, the education system and so on are also seen differently from the threat from the individual. From this perspective, social work's idea of 'protection' and of 'safety' is limited, political and culture-bound. What it means to be 'safe' is understood differently in different contexts, and community-based mechanisms to secure safety may be either devalued or ignored by white social workers with white cultural blinkers.

Rehabilitation. This is another key idea in social work, especially in, though not confined to, the field of disability. The very idea of rehabilitation implies that someone is being helped to adapt to, work and live in mainstream society. But what is that mainstream society? There are cultural assumptions about what constitutes the mainstream, and what is required to help someone fit in, adapt and thrive. In particular, in a society dominated by a particular construction of 'work' and employment, this often drives the imperative for rehabilitation. It is a word that is seldom used with any deep understanding of culture.

Research. There is a strong literature critiquing the traditional Western research paradigms, from Indigenous and other cultural perspectives. Social work has adopted this critique, but it is still the case that in the field the positivist paradigm remains strong, coming from managers and policy-makers seeking evidence-based results. The idea of 'research' is itself problematic, making assumptions about the researcher and the researched, and all research has epistemological assumptions, which are often not made explicit. Research is a key area for the decolonisation of social work knowledge.

Resilience. The idea of resilience, at both individual and community level, is significant in much social work practice. It is important to understand the

context within which the idea is used. When a person, family or community is described as lacking resilience, this is effectively a comment on the environment in which they live, and the expectations placed on them by the social, economic and political systems. To build resilience can mean to build conformity, and given the dominance of white Western narratives this can readily lead to a colonialist framing of social work practice. On the other hand, the amazing resilience shown by people from 'minority' cultural backgrounds, to enable them to survive and to progress in white Western cultures, is often unnoticed in the way their 'problems' are conceptualised.

Rights. Human rights are central to social work, yet human rights have been conceptualised largely from within a Western framework, emphasising individual rather than collective rights, and defining rights in precise legal terms. To accept this framing of human rights uncritically is to deny other more organic and collective understandings of rights, as derived in other cultural contexts. The language of rights can readily be used as part of a colonialist agenda, imposing white Western forms of education, health, housing and economics in the name of 'universal' human rights.

Risk. The idea of risk, risk management and risk mitigation is important not only in social work, but in managerial practices within organisations. The issue here is similar to that of 'protection' as mentioned above: what counts as significant 'risk' and what does not? The risk of harm to a child is, understandably, given very high priority. But what about the risk of loss of cultural heritage, the risk of loneliness, the risk of being marginalised or ignored, the risk of industrial or environmental catastrophe, and the risk of homelessness? How we determine the importance of various risks is culturally determined, yet this is seldom considered when risk management strategies are devised, or when social workers seek to minimise the 'risks' to their clients.

Services. We commonly talk about human services, social services, providing services and so on. Yet this usage ignores the origin of the term. Traditionally, when we serve, we become the servant, whose status is less than that of the master/mistress, and whose duty is to do the bidding of the person being served, entirely on their terms. But that is inconsistent with 'professionalism' and notions of 'expertise'. So Western modernity has commodified the idea of 'service' and reversed the power relationship, so that services have become *products* that professionals *deliver* to those with less power and agency. Other cultures may understand the idea of 'service' very differently.

Strengths. Strengths-based social work has a long tradition and is the basis for significant approaches to practice. But strength is often understood in terms of individual confidence, achievement, autonomy, employment and advancement: valued characteristics in Western cultures, but less so in others. Happiness, harmony, deep relationships, generosity, sensitivity, creativity, humility, warmth and connectedness are also strengths, perhaps less likely to be valued in a patriarchal achievement-oriented culture. The issue is one of who defines what 'strength' means, and what particular strengths are valued in the practice context.

Supervision. The very word 'supervision' can imply control, surveillance and hierarchy. Although the idea of supervision – learning from the wisdom of a more experienced worker – is clearly beneficial, it carries with it strong associations of the hierarchical order and control favoured by Western modernity, and can privilege this kind of professional development over others, such as learning collegially, learning from the people we seek to serve, and so on.

Theory and Practice. The 'integration of theory and practice' has been a holy grail of social work. It has been continually discussed in the literature and is the topic of recurring supervision sessions and field education seminars. The reason this is such a problem is that the theory/practice binary has its origins in Cartesian mind/body dualism, where thinking and acting are understood as separate. This is at the heart of the Western Enlightenment project, and its persistence in social work demonstrates the continuing power of that paradigm. The idea of 'praxis' is an alternative, but this still has a marginal status in Western social work literature. Reflective practice is also an attempt to cross this boundary, but the language of 'theory *and* practice' continues to dominate Western social work discourse. Other epistemological traditions, however, do not draw such a sharp distinction, and it is interesting to note that ideas of praxis, reflective practice and so on are more strongly articulated in social work from Latin America, Africa and other cultures, as seen in various chapters in this book.

Vulnerability. Social workers often label people, families, groups or communities as 'vulnerable'. Here the issues are the same as those described above for *protection* and *safety*. Often the most significant vulnerabilities for people, especially People of Colour, are not taken seriously enough by someone socialised into white Western ways of thinking about the world, and about what are the most important threats and vulnerabilities in people's lives. White Western social workers may define vulnerabilities in terms of their own cultural experiences, without considering other ways of thinking about threats and the experience of being vulnerable.

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Tracie Mafile'o

Dr Tracie Mafile'o is a Senior Lecturer in social work and Associate Dean, Pacific in the College of Health at Massey University, New Zealand. She is a Tongan/Pakeha woman, part of the Pacific diaspora in New Zealand. Her

research has explored culturally relevant social work from Pacific-Indigenous perspectives. She has worked in New Zealand, Australia and Papua New Guinea. As a board member of the Asia Pacific Association of Social Work Education, she has led initiatives to promote indigenisation of social work in the region.

Goetz Ottmann

Associate Professor Goetz Ottmann teaches social work research at the Australian College of Applied Psychology (ACAP). He held a research interest in Latin American 'grassroots' movements and has published monographs on Brazilian social movements (*Lost for Words: Brazilian Liberationism in the 1990s*, University of Pittsburgh Press) and experiments in participatory democracy (*Democracy in the Making*, Nova Science Publishers). He played guitar (badly) as part of a Rap and Hip-Hop ensemble paying homage to Paulo Freire (who was among the audience) at the Catholic University in Sao Paulo in the mid-1990s. Co-opted into coordinating a Freireian conscientisation programme involving the mentioned Rap and Hip-Hop ensemble, he developed a keen interest in subaltern refractory social inventions.

Jioji Ravulo

Jioji Ravulo is an Associate Professor in the School of Health and Society, Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong. He has an ongoing passion to deconstruct whiteness within the decolonising of social work education, practice, policy and research, with specific focus on the Pacific region. This involves working with local service providers and academic institutions engaging Pacific people across Oceania including Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu, and the respective Pacific diaspora in Australia and New Zealand. Optimistically, he believes Indigenous perspectives should be understood and incorporated across all areas of society through a shared and collaborative approach.

Larry Alicea-Rodríguez

Larry Alicea-Rodríguez has been Director of the Program of Support for Victims of Sexual Abuse at Albizu University since 2005. He has a Master's degree and a Bachelor's degree in social work from the University of Puerto Rico, a Juris Doctor from the Faculty of Law of the Interamerican University, and is currently studying the PhD in Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico. He is a lecturer in the Master's Program in Social Work of the Universidad del Este and the Department of Social Work of the University of Puerto Rico. In professional organisations, he has been President of the Puerto Rican College of Professional Social Workers since 2012. He has been President and Global Executive of the International Federation of Social Work for Latin America

and the Caribbean Region, since 2018. He has written chapters in books and articles in peer-reviewed journals. His most recent publication is the chapter: 'Forensic Social Work in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Look at Professional Practice in the Legal Field' in: *Social Work: Facing the Challenges of the 21st Century from an Ibero-American Perspective*. The book was published in 2018 by Thomson Reuters. He has been a Speaker in Puerto Rico, Panama, Uruguay, Chile, El Salvador, Spain, Peru and Colombia and was a keynote speaker at the 2018 World Conference on Social Work and Social Development in Dublin. He is a member of several professional organisations in Puerto Rico, the United States and Latin America.

Sharlotte Tusasiirwe

Sharlotte Tusasiirwe is a PhD Candidate at Western Sydney University, Sydney, Australia, where *her thesis is titled Lived experiences of older women ageing in rural Uganda: Implications for social work with older people*. She is a social worker and an academic at the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. Sharlotte is particularly interested in decolonising social work, social work with older people, community-based initiatives and bottom-up community development.

Lobna Yassine

Lobna Yassine is a PhD Candidate at the University of Sydney, Australia, where she is studying risk assessment tools in juvenile justice, and systemic racism within criminal justice institutions. She is a social worker and a casual academic in the School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney. Lobna is particularly interested in the intersections of gender and race, and in the production and liberation of subjugated knowledges in social work.

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