SPECIAL ISSUE • Revolutionary social work: Promoting sustainable justice

pioneers of the radical tradition

Social work as protest: conversations with selected first black social work women in South Africa

Allucia Lulu Shokane, alluciashokane@gmail.com
Mogomme Alpheus Masoga, MasogaM@unizulu.ac.za
University of Zululand, South Africa

Radical and critical social work has existed since the start of the profession. Still, the history of social work education in South Africa does not put prominence on black women social workers like Ellen Kuzwayo and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, among others. Remarkably, these women also participated in the national women's protest against the pass laws in 1956 by the apartheid government. The authors espouse radical perspectives, such as feminist, human rights and social justice frameworks, embedded in an Afro-sensed approach. Expressly, the authors argue that, in its very nature, social work is protest, which can be used to restore ravaged history, as well as to influence the teaching and practice of social work.

key words protest • radical social work • human rights • feminism • social justice

Introduction

South Africa was the first country in Africa to offer social work education in 1924 (Sewpaul, 2005). Even though radical and critical social work has existed since the start of the profession (Ferguson and Lavalette, 2013; Dominelli and Ioakimidis, 2016; Ioakimidis, 2016; Cardenas, 2017), the history of social work education in South Africa nevertheless does not put prominence on black women social work pioneers, such as Ellen Kuzwayo and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, among others, who graduated from the first school of social work (the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work) in Johannesburg for non-white people in 1941. Despite the fact that South Africa was the first country to offer social work education, its founding principles were not inclusive of the entire population as they were founded on apartheid (racial discrimination and the division of races) (Shokane et al, 2016). Apartheid called for the separate development of the imagined different racial groups in South Africa. Consequently, Cardenas (2017: 55) sustains that against this backdrop, 'a history of

discrimination and oppression has played a vital role in the lack of development of vulnerable groups'.

The history of social work education in South Africa is well documented by Smith (2014), Hochfeld, Mupedziswa and Selipsky (2010) and Sewpaul (2005), among others. These scholars punctuate a historical picture riddled with inequality and asymmetry in knowledge and lived experiences (McKendrick, 2001; Nicholas et al, 2010; Smith, 2014; Shokane et al, 2016). Later, collected works emphasise how the foundations of social work education in South Africa are derived from its colonial and race-based history of apartheid (McKendrick, 2001; Nicholas et al, 2010; Smith, 2014; Shokane et al, 2016). The effects of apartheid are still evident in political oppression, misrule and injustice, and these dynamics of oppression are relevant to class/socio-economic position, 'race', gender, age, ability and sexual orientation.

Conversely, it is worth mentioning that since 1994, the South African population experienced democracy, as embedded in the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which recognises the injustices of apartheid and embraces and ensures the rights of all South Africans (Masoga and Shokane, 2016). Consequently, these recognitions have seen the social work education system to go through fundamental and rapid changes. These changes came as an urgent call for a transformed social work education that recognises philosophies and discourses such as decolonisation, indigenisation and Africanisation (Shokane and Masoga, 2018; Qalinge and Van Breda, 2018). The authors lament the fact that there have never been representations of such necessary perspectives in this space.

Social work profession

The overwhelming body of evidence shows inequality and poverty to be the root causes and underlying factors affecting the lives of people at the grass roots (Nicholas et al, 2010; Mwansa, 2011; Dominelli and Ioakimidis, 2016; Ioakimidis, 2016), which social workers cannot and should not ignore. Undoubtedly, the profession of social work promises and provides unlimited opportunities to deal with human developmental needs in restoring the ravaged human dignity of millions of people subsumed by the effects of colonial and apartheid history, such as poverty, disease and hopelessness (Mwansa, 2011).

The global definition of the social work profession adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) is clearly spelled out as:

> A practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (IFSW and IASSW, 2014: 1)

From this, one notes an interesting global admission to the broad-based agenda of social work. This article intends to have conversations with selected first black and radical social work women in South Africa, like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and

Ellen Kuzwayo, who were a women's rights activist and politician in South Africa, respectively. Evidently, their efforts were in line with the radicalism in social work, based on five main pillars: democracy, empathy, militancy, anti-oppressiveness and structural practice (Ioakimidis, 2016). Significantly, the focus will be on their roles as women, mothers, social workers and teachers, and the education they acquired during apartheid, specifically their challenges and strengths, and how they contributed to the social work profession in South Africa. For the stated reasons, Ioakimidis (2016) propels social workers as having a need to appreciate the public causes of private pain and misery. He further asserts that radical social work addresses this by reminding social workers that meaningful practice should always incorporate elements of political action (Ioakimidis, 2016).

Theoretical framing

We have assumed radical perspectives, such as a feminist, human rights and social justice frameworks, in an Afro-sensed manner, to inform our work and understanding of the conversations with these selected women regarding: their personal struggles; the strengths related to their leadership roles as women in their church, family and broader community, as well as how they were socialised; and their respective special contributions to social work. To this end, we maintain that contexts and contextualities are critical for any social work education and activisms to take place. It is the position of this article that the selected women had a strong Afro-sensed perspective and orientation. The Afro-sensed theory was developed by Masoga (2018), with the intention to guide practitioners to intervene in a local, culturally appropriate and sensitive manner. In the aforesaid theory, Masoga (2018) urges Africans to understand their own context and to apply the rich cultural practices at their disposal that can benefit all if taken seriously. Masoga and Shokane (2018: 96) assert that the 'Afro-sensed theory encompasses Indigenous knowledge and cultural approaches used to discover uniqueness and indigenous ways of coping'. In addition, the feminist, human rights and social justice frameworks are central in guiding the profession of social work in responding to the existing related challenges of inequalities and social problems in democratic countries that support an Afro-sensed approach. Considerably, an Afro-sensed approach is in line with African feminism in the sense that African feminism purposefully seeks to be detached from the notions of colonialism, race, class and so on as a way of explaining the current position of women in Africa.

Feminist theory

We have further assumed an African feminist approach to influence our ideas and contexts in writing of this article. African feminism is preferred in the body of feminisms as it allows one to 'deal with multiple oppressions' faced by women (Mikell, 1997). African feminism is well described by Goredema (2010: 34) as a 'feminist epistemology' and a form of 'rhetoric' that has provided arguments that validate the experiences of women of Africa and African origin against a mainstream feminist discourse. In this regard, African feminism guides an understanding of the multiple issues faced by these selected women, such as apartheid and single parenthood despite being married. In this case, African feminism focuses on providing justice 'that aims to create a discernible difference between women who were colonised and those

who were deemed the colonisers, and a social movement that aims to raise a global consciousness which sympathises with African women's histories, present realities and future expectations' (Goredema, 2010: 34). The analysed literature sheds light on the fact that African feminism does not concern itself only with the rights of women from Africa; rather, it is also inclusive of those living in the diaspora. Many women fought during the liberation struggles. Most black women in South Africa who fought against the apartheid system of government could be labelled feminists by the very 'act of bearing arms'. Similarly, Goredema (2010: 37) affirms that the existence of events and actions undertaken by black South African women prior to colonisation can be interpreted as feminist action.

Human rights and social justice frameworks

As for African feminism, we have opted to work with the human rights and social justice frameworks in the context of this article in our conservations with the selected women, who were selfless and fought for the human rights for all in South Africa. Human rights are clearly defined by the United Nations (no date) as 'rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience and to satisfy our spiritual and other needs'. This quote refers to the importance of the promotion and protection of human rights. As explained earlier, the social work profession cannot eschew the fundamental role of ensuring that human rights are promoted and protected. Considerably, these black women social work pioneers demonstrated an understanding of equal human rights and equal opportunities for all people in the South African community, which evident in their various liberation struggles during the apartheid era and their continuous fight for the liberation of people from 'social exclusion': 'the dynamic processes of being shut out, partially or fully, from any or all of several systems which influence the economic and social integration of people into their society' (Commins, 2004: 68).

The selected women were also icons of political liberation struggles in South African. The application of the human rights and social justice frameworks provides the context to deeply engage with what 'social justice' means, as well as its application to social work as one of the core values of the profession. It is therefore essential to integrate and apply the human rights and social justice frameworks to redress the impact that social and economic inequalities have on both the people experiencing it and the wider community (Healy, 2008; Lundy, 2011). Furthermore, Dominelli (2006, 2009, 2012) affirms that social injustices create oppressive relations that devalue and belittle differences and draw on binary identities to exclude those who are unlike the hegemonic group. Hence, social workers are urged to focus on practices and research endeavours that promote a 'locality specific, culturally relevant social work that affirms anti-oppressive and human rights-based approaches' (Dominelli and Ioakimidis, 2016: 696).

It is worth mentioning that both the feminist and the human rights and social justice frameworks are based on principles such as: the intrinsic worth and dignity of all human beings; the intrinsic importance of women's active participation in society; the necessity for removing all obstacles to women's empowerment; and the prevention of discrimination against women (Silius, 2010; Perumal, 2011; Masoga and Shokane,

2016). These mentioned principles are fundamental, being crucial to all the theoretical positions outlined earlier and the social work profession. The literature analysis for this article will account for the existing collected works focusing on: the women's social work education backgrounds; their personal struggles; the strengths related to their leadership roles as women in their church and family, as well as how they were socialised; and the contributions that they made to social work.

The history of social work education

In the light of the aforesaid, it is currently imperative for the social work education fraternity to reflect on the history of social work education in South Africa. In engaging with the history of social work education, the historical legacy of South Africa continues to influence the teaching of social work, even in the current era of transformational change. At that time, pioneers of social work education in South Africa were based at the University of Cape Town (1924), University of Witwatersrand (1937) and University of Pretoria (1924) (Smith, 2014). Nicholas et al (2010: 42) indicate that the motives for 'the social work profession supported apartheid welfare structures and actively advocated segregation'. The educational segregation of social work education in South Africa manifested itself throughout the establishment of the first school of social work, the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work, in Johannesburg for non-white people in 1941 (Nicholas et al, 2010; Smith, 2014).

As stated by Nicholas et al (2010: 45), the 'Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work only produced diploma level training for black students. Clearly, this type of diploma-level education was deemed appropriately for the black population. Remarkably, and concurring with Smith (2014), the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work graduated some well-known graduates from the college, including Ellen Kuzwayo, Joshua Nkomo, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Gibson Kente. Deplorably, the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work 'was taken over in 1950 by the state and later closed down due to the undesirability of admission of "alien" "black" students from outside South Africa and claims by government officials that the educational level was unnecessarily high' (Smith, 2014). It is noteworthy that it was at the Jan Hofmeyer School of Social Work that these selected women, Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Ellen Kuzwayo, studied social work in South Africa during the apartheid era (graduating as the first 'black' female social workers). In 1959, the extension of the University Education Act 1959 was promulgated to separate the education of the people in South Africa (McKendrick, 2001; Smith, 2014).

For the aforementioned reasons, McKendrick (2001) asserts that it was essential to educate social workers in five universities for different ethnic groups in order to prepare them to serve their 'own populations'. In addition, Nicholas et al (2010: 42) identify the five 'university colleges of the North, Zululand, Fort Hare, Western Cape and Durban' as designated to specific ethnic groups, as follows: the University College of the North was for African people of the Sotho, Tshivenda and Xitsonga groups; the University College of Zululand was for the IsiZulu group; the University College of the Fort Hare was meant for African people of IsiXhosa background; the University College of the Western Cape was for the coloured population (the term 'coloured' is used to describe an ethnic group in South Africa and is accepted by the government of South Africa to describe a person of mixed race); and, finally, the University College of Durban was for the Indian community

(Nicholas et al, 2010; Shokane et al, 2016). At the core of this entire discussion and debate is how the South African social work education historiography has evolved. There is a very pertinent question: who wrote and who currently writes about this? The fact remains that the writing on and assembling of sources and pieces of information imply an agenda and philosophical view. We state and maintain that there is no innocent writing and writing about any writing. In fact, no writing is innocent.

The current position of social work education in South Africa

The current position of social work education in South Africa is significantly more complex than what is being tackled in the classroom. Clearly, there are still unaddressed challenges in South African higher education institutions offering training in social work, even after 24 years of the end of apartheid in South Africa. To mitigate these challenges, the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) is playing a pivotal role in dealing with notions of decolonising the social work curriculum (Qalinge and Van Breda, 2018). For the reasons stated earlier, Qalinge and Van Breda (2018: 1) uphold that 'all means of colonisation in social work education and training be abandoned'.

All the same, Qalinge and Van Breda (2018: 1) indicate that there has been overwhelming attention 'given to decolonise the education system in South Africa'. The effects of apartheid and colonisation remain visible in some higher education institutions offering social work. For instance, historically disadvantaged institutions such as the University of Venda (UNIVEN), the University of Limpopo and the University of Zululand, among others, are institutions experiencing particular challenges with their respective Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programmes. It is noteworthy that the historically disadvantaged UNIVEN experienced the harsh realities of this historic alienation and exclusion during the BSW accreditation process, which became evident in the current BSW national review process. For example, the UNIVEN was the only university that still had 'conditional accreditation' due 'to lack of proper infrastructure'. However, the situation has now changed and the UNIVEN BSW programme finally received full accreditation from the Council of Higher Education (CHE) at its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) meeting of 29 March 2018. Here, we are making the point that social work is contextual and complex. Until this is understood, there will not be regard for the lived experiences and annotations of the developing world. These disparities of knowledge and interpretation should be challenged to the core.

Women leadership in South Africa

Many women leaders existed throughout Africa, even though the historical evidence for some is fragmented. Similarly, Weir (2007: 8) affirms that in South Africa, 'Zulu royal women demonstrated such leadership before, during and after King Shaka's reign and this took a variety of forms…. Sometimes military, but more often economic and religious … including rain making, administering ritual medicine and custodianship of sacred objects.' We acknowledge that there are other remarkable women leaders such as Lilian Ngoyi, Florence Matomela, Frances Baard and Kate Molale, all leaders of the federation. The selected women were both in positions of leadership. Individually, Winnie Mandela emerged as a leader, earning and becoming fondly known by the title 'Mother

of the nation', and Ellen Kuzwayo (1985) outlined in her book *Call me a women* how apartheid specifically affected black women in South Africa. These women are regarded as remarkable women, leaders and role models who demonstrated defiance, resilience and perseverance despite challenges throughout their life journeys. Ferguson and Lavalette (2013: 5) observed that, 'across the globe, there are activist social workers and pioneers who have been marginalised or hidden within social work's history and proposed ways to document and "rediscover" their ideas and practice'. Consequently, our interests are in loyal African National Congress (ANC) Member of Parliament (MP) Mama Winnie Madikizela Mandela's voicing of her position on the 'betrayal' by the ANC for adopting a neoliberal economic position and abandoning the Freedom Charter, which is shared in the social work profession. We have observed with interest how she has been called upon consistently over the years as a respected mediator and negotiator between protesting and violent communities, right up to the recent '#Feesmustfall' student movement protests. Therefore, we hold the view that from the unique insights of these conversations, social work educators, students, practitioners and other human and social scientists can draw lessons and strengths, which can be used in teaching, learning and practice to always work ethically and professionally. It is historical narratives like these that support the imagery of the strong, black, selfless African woman. Yet, the shortcoming is that the few women who have been documented have often been left in the vaults of myth and exception.

We note with interest that both Ellen Kuzwayo and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela participated in the national women's protest against the pass laws of 9 August 1956 by the apartheid government. Undoubtedly, the historical march demonstrated these women's defiance against the then South African patriarchal apartheid system and political dominance of all women in South Africa. It was during the liberation struggle that the selected women fought against the apartheid system in South Africa. Remarkably, they used their social work skills to speak truth to power. Showing fearlessness in the face of torture, imprisonment, banishment and betrayal, they stood firm in their conviction that apartheid could be brought down (Hassim, 2018). Moreover, they paved the way, playing pivotal roles in facilitating women's issues and struggles being addressed in South Africa. These women were also very supportive of their communities, as evident through their attendance at funerals and counselling of families, and as demonstrated in acts of public courage that sustained them as activists. In this case, they demonstrated *Ubuntu*, which implies a sense of 'humanness', recognising and caring about the human dignity of others.

Discussion

The main argument that we are making in this article is that, by its very nature, social work is protest, with a prime aim of focusing on, among other thing, restoring ravaged history, such as poverty, disease and hopelessness. Social work is about presence and activism. These selected women demonstrated these elements in their lives of social work activism. They revolutionised the field and made it sensible and relevant. Attesting to their social work background, these women were empowered to address the situation of apartheid. What it was like to be them, especially what it was like to practise social work under the apartheid regime, cannot just remain in our minds. This argument is supported by the research conducted by Cardenas (2017: 55), which states that 'radical social work is the tenacious use of critical analysis of historical events and their impact on vulnerable populations'. Since the situation was

one of agitation, they had to push through. To this end, this was done through focusing on the key principles and methods of radical social work: conscientisation (in Paolo Freire's sense); the empowerment of clients; the opening of social work processes to public and, indeed, client participation; and attempts to make broad political alliances between 'progressive' forces (community groups, client groups, trade unions and political parties) (Collins, 2000; Cardenas, 2017). How can all these assist social workers in addressing the current situation and challenges faced by black social workers, specifically in rural areas?

Clearly, both these remarkable women are/were mothers and undoubtedly affirmed their roles. They had to bear the burden of societal expectations as mothers, wives 'who kept the fire burning' and family units together. The family is an important institution in society, and in that unit, women play the central roles needed to build a healthy nation. It is worth declaring that both Kuzwayo and Madikizela-Mandela had to raise their children alone, without the support of their husbands. Obviously, the family system was under threat. Kuzwayo (1985) clearly highlights this in her autobiography *Call me a woman*, concerning black women's struggles in raising black children in a society without morals, with a lost tradition and with a government that saw them and their children as nothing more than subhuman. It is due to these views that women had to fight unjust systems so that their children could not experience the dreadful conditions that they were subjected to (Nkosi, 2004).

Conclusion

What emerges from this article is that both Kuzwayo and Madikizela-Mandela were involved in the political struggle, and were activists who protested in their quest for and pursuit of social justice. Their quest for immediate answers made them fiercely challenge the evil and violent structures and processes of apartheid. In their endeavours, they also applied radical perspectives such as a the feminist, human rights and social justice frameworks, which are central to social workers when responding to related inequalities and social problems, and also form the basis of this article. Clearly, a rights-based and Afro-sensed radical feminist approach was applied, which follows anti-oppressive practices in their pursuit of social justice in order to speak to the issues of poverty and inequality that were loaded onto people by an unjust system and that social workers continue to struggle to work through with the courage that is needed. Social workers are advised to use their skills and knowledge to fight any unequal system. Moreover, social workers should also create the conditions that will lead to the creation of a socially just society (Ioakimidis, 2016).

Noticeably, both Kuzwayo and Madikizela-Mandela expressed their social worker role as women to advocate and lobby to address structural inequalities affecting the poor, marginalised and disadvantaged people. They worked tirelessly to redefine their role as African women and mothers, and to re-express the importance of the issues faced by their people, women and children, especially in relation to education and health. Kuzwayo and Madikizela-Mandela demonstrated passion in social work and fearlessly fought for the liberation of the people in South Africa. Undesirably, South Africa still experiences the challenges of inequality and economic exclusion, as well as the ANC's adoption of the approach of neoliberalism post-1994. Improperly so, the economic divide is mostly evident among majority (black) Africans, who are still not economically included. Sebake (2017: 1) argues that 'many countries in a democratic space always get to be confronted by policy and economic perspective that is characterised by people

centred alternative for empowerment and change the citizens lives out of bondage of triple challenges of inequalities, poverty, and unemployment'.

In South Africa, social workers and other human and social services professionals can draw strength and inspiration for social justice in dealing with issues of poverty, unemployment, education, social protection systems, public health services, housing and discrimination. Correspondingly, Kuzwayo and Madikizela-Mandela have clearly demonstrated how to practise social work in an anti-oppressive, human rights-based and ethical manner, expressing the sentiments shared by Dominelli and Ioakimidis (2016). We concur that these can assist social workers to gain valuable insights and skills to help them with their work. Therefore, social work professionals are encouraged to continue serving their people with respect and dignity (Shokane and Masoga, 2017). In addition, this will naturally include respect for their human dignity and indigenous traditions. Masoga (2018) emphasised that Africa has rich indigenous and traditional practices that can benefit everyone if taken seriously. He further said that his approach attempts to regard and treat local communities not as 'end users' of education (simply a product), but as stakeholders in education production.

Furthermore, for social work and other human and social services professions, this will imply embracing radical and revolutionary perspectives and competency. This may imply that the new revolutionary fight against social and economic injustices should even include the fight against neoliberalism and austerity politics (in this case, even maintained by the ANC) in order to provide a policy direction with the hope of ensuring an equal society. It is not our intention to turn this article into a policy debate. However, it is notable that at its 54th National Conference in 2017, the ANC adopted a new economic and development policy that pushes for a radical economic transformation (RET) programme, with a long list of policy initiatives that are critical to the economic transformation of South Africa.

Lessons can be learned from the anti-apartheid and revolutionary fights of social workers in South Africa, which professedly fought against the apartheid system. However, Sewpaul (2012: 1) maintains that during the apartheid era, while 'some social workers engaged in resistance politics and challenged the status quo, others would argue during meetings that social work was not politics and that "one should not hit the hand that feeds us" – meaning that the government should be supported'. Social workers can still apply the same resilience and resistance that was used to fight apartheid to advocate for policies that will provide economic emancipation for all the people of South Africa. We argue for a new revolutionary fight against the economic injustices, neoliberalism and austerity politics that are still evident in South Africa. These macroeconomic neoliberal policies and economic perspectives have prioritised a peculiar monetary status of exchange in services rendered by the public sector. The conclusion of the argument made in this article is that, by its very nature, the field of social work is protest and can play a critical role of restoring ravaged history in order to influence policies and the teaching and practice of social work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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