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SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: CRITICAL IMPERATIVES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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SUPERVISED BY PROFESSOR NORMAN DUNCAN

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

0318676H
Johannesburg, 20 December, 2012

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this is my own original work and that all fieldwork was undertaken by me. Any part of this study that does not reflect my own ideas has been fully acknowledged in the form of citations. No part of this thesis has been submitted in the past, or is being submitted, or is to be submitted for a degree at any other university.

Linda Harms Smith
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg

_____ _____

LINDA HARMS SMITH DATE

DEDICATION

May rage, compassion and hope illuminate the despair of a promethean struggle, in a world of oppression and unrestrained greed - and may the philosophical interpretation of the world lead to its change. This work is dedicated to those who have, and continue to suffer, the consequences of colonialism and apartheid, and now the unrestrained magnitude of wealth accumulation and inequality. The silence of the reading of this work is dedicated to those past and recently dead in the struggle.

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Thank you to all the participants in the study for enthusiastically sharing ideas and participating in the development of a counter-hegemonic discourse for social work that is critical, engaged and constitutive of social change.

Shamed, dishonoured, wading in blood and dripping with filth, thus capitalist society stands. Not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of philosophy, of ethics, as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilence breath, devastating culture and humanity, so it appears in all its hideous nakedness

Rosa Luxemburg, The Junius Pamphlet, 1916

The birds they sang, at the break of day,
start again, I heard them say
Don't dwell on what has passed away, or what is yet to be.
Ah the wars they will be fought again
The holy dove she will be caught again,
bought and sold and bought again
the dove is never free.

Ring the bells that still can ring,
forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything,
that's how the light gets in.

We asked for signs, the signs were sent:
the birth betrayed, the marriage spent
Yeah the widowhood of every government,
signs for all to see.
I can't run no more, with that lawless crowd,
while the killers in high places,
say their prayers out loud.
But they've summoned, they've summoned up,
a thundercloud,
and they're going to hear from me.

Ring the bells that still can ring ...

You can add up the parts,
but you won't have the sum
You can strike up the march,
there is no drum
Every heart, every heart, to love will come,
but like a refugee.

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

Ring the bells that still can ring...

Leonard Cohen, Anthem

Abstract

Hegemonic discourses and ideologies of social work in South Africa, arose from the racist capitalism of colonialism and apartheid. Imperatives for social justice and social change therefore require that social work education reflect on and develop discourses of radical and critical knowledge and practice. The main aim of the study was to explore the extent to which South African social work knowledge and education, as reflected in various formal and narrative discourses, meets critical imperatives for social change and transformation. The study was qualitative in nature, using a depth-hermeneutic approach, with various interrelated, coherent empirical processes. These include reviewing extant theory to contribute to a framework of knowledge and practice constitutive of social change, conducting a politically engaged, critical thematic analysis of social work discourse constitutive of social change, as reflected historically in a selection of formal South African social work texts and in the narratives from group conversations among South African social work educators. Early South African social work knowledge and practice had emerged from the €social hygiene• and eugenics movement, but later, Afrikaner nationalist ideology and liberal and racist capitalism shaped social work. In post-apartheid South Africa, discourses of social development and reform within a free market rational economy; ideologies of liberalism and capitalism as solutions to structural social problems, neo-liberal discourses of individual responsibility and valorisation of agency, social control and regulation, are prevalent. Social work knowledge and practice consistently supported hegemonic ideologies of the state. Throughout the history of social work however, there was evidence of counter-hegemonic, radical and critical discourse, albeit suppressed and hidden. Knowledge and practice constitutive of social change can be positioned on a continuum from oppressive, domesticating and colonizing knowledge and practice, to coercion and status quo maintenance, to institutional and societal reformist knowledge and practice; to transformational and critical knowledge and practice; and to radical and revolutionary knowledge and practice.

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