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TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA: PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE FREE STATE

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG, IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTERS OF ARTS (SOCIAL WORK)

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JOHANNESBURG, 30 JULY, 2015

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this is my own original work and that all my 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 dissertation has been submitted in the past, or is being submitted, or is to be submitted for a degree at any University.

Mary-Ann Damons

University of the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg

_____ _____

MARY-ANN DAMONS **DATE**

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the participants in the study as well as every black social work student, educator and practitioner who are still trapped in the enclaves of the oppressive systems from which they think they cannot escape. Your struggles are my struggles. May you never grow weary in your pursuit for self-liberation and real freedom. May your voices never grow silent, your ears never grow deaf and your eyes never grow blind to the injustices around you!

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I am humbled by the Grace, Mercy and Favour of my Almighty Farther bestowed upon me years before this research even took on some sort of form. Through each encounter, each struggle, failure and disappointment you paved the pathway to this journey and through it all you sustained me. For this I thank you Lord!

The most important people whom without, this would not have been possible … all the participants. I am forever indebted to you. Thank you for sharing your stories, your honesty, passion and commitment to change.

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To the three men in my life: Franco, thank you for believing in me the times that I did not believe in myself anymore. Your unconditional love, support, sacrifices and faith in me

carried me through every obstacle and disappointment. Frankl and Franklin, thank you for your understanding and patience with me during this time. I love you all dearly.

To my late mamma, Sarah Hendricks who literally sacrificed her entire life just for me. Knowledge is indeed power, mamma. I know you are proud!

"…if we fall into the trap of believing that just because we are social workers we are there for non-racist and non-oppressive because we have a code of ethics and because our teaching institutions say they are committed to this ideology, we leave ourselves pray to colonialist and [apartheid] forces that perpetuate a culture of silence because we are, in effect, doing nothing" (Sinclair & Albert, 2008).

Thief of liberty

Racism, the perpetrator,
The real traitor of goodness,
Why you steal our spirit of oneness
And replace it with your bitterness?

Why you lie to humanity
With your insanity
Of illusion?

Why you think your son
Discrimination
Is the solution?

Population is in racism pollution
Because of your deception
And domination!!

No way racism
No way!!

You're a thief to humankind
A liar to a peace of mind
A bad influence to a good child

Humankind say no to white superior,
No to black superior
And no to other races superiority

Racism accept our diversity
Reject your stereotypes
And free our differences

Humankind
Resolution is the solution
Solidarity is the spirit of the majority
Differences must be solved for reality
Subordination must come to an end!

Included with permission from the author: O. E. Molejane (2nd year social work student, 2010)

ABSTRACT

Social work in South Africa had its roots in the poor white problem and as a discipline developed around this specific context. Within the post-apartheid South African context, social work is said to be a transformed non-oppressive and non-racist profession, however, power relations are present at every level of society and these power relations shapes the social constructs encountered also in social work. Through the narratives of the participants, the study explored the experiences of social workers in their training and professional lives around the transformed nature and oppressions of social work education and practice in South Africa. Through a qualitative research approach, the extent of this transformation in social work education and practice, as a reflection of social justice, was explored. The postmodern paradigm that allowed for the inclusion of multiple theoretical and literature perspectives laid the foundation to the research process. Eighteen registered black social workers were selected through purposive non-probability sampling. The data from nine participants that took part in face to face interviews and nine that participated in two focus group discussions were analysed through thematic and discourse analyses. Biko's Black consciousness approach and reviewed literature were utilised in the analysis of data which informed the findings. The conclusion is made that social work practice and education has changed in form but not in substance. Narratives from participants indicate that social work education still reflects it racist ideological grounding with white supremacy and whiteness as the norm in the production of social work knowledge, teaching and practise settings. In response to the Department of Social Development's call that social workers should work to engage in the root causes of social problems and uprooting dysfunctional and out-dated paradigms, recommendations around the inclusion of anti-racist strategies for social work practice, policy and education are made.

Keywords:

Transformation, racism, anti- racism, racial micro aggressions, black consciousness, post modernism, black perspectives

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DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

Transformation

Transformation occurs when, through raising consciousness, people are empowered to throw off the oppressions in their lives, to see alternatives and the vision for social change (Lee, 1994, p. 14).

Racism

Racism in South Africa is an ideological phenomenon and is instrinctly connected to white supremacy, which provided the ideological underpinning for colonialism and apartheid. Racism draws on racialised ideas and beliefs, which shapes cultures and practices that sustain the unequal treatment of groups and individuals (Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions, 2008, p. 26)

Anti-racism

Anti-racism is “an activity that requires a dismantling of institutionalised practices of racism, whether in education, in employment, housing immigration policy, and so on, as well as a direct confrontation with racist ideologies…” (Rattansi, 1992, p. 29).

Racial Micro-aggressions

Racial micro-aggression refers to the covert and subtle forms of racism that are “pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions” and are often “glossed over as innocent and innocuous” (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nedal, & Torino, 2007, p. 273).

Black Consciousness

Black consciousness aims to produce a conscious awareness in the black person of himself as a dignified human being and through its approaches and interventions instill a sense of pride in themselves as black people that would be as valid, and not subordinate to that of the white man. It further aims to correct the ‘false images of themselves that has been created by the white man in terms of culture, education, religion and economics’ (Biko, 2004, p. 31)

Black perspectives in social work

Internationally, there was a need to reclaim black perspectives in social work. The development of black perspectives in social work as a form of anti-racist strategy is seen as a major contribution to the discourse on ‘race’ and social work (Ahmad, 1990; Crawford, 1990; Green, 1993). In South Africa, anti-racist social work is non-existent, and black perspectives are still marginalised, thus the need for anti-racist social work strategies with specific inclusion of a distinct black voice.

Post modernism

Kroeze (2012) defines postmodernism as

“An overarching philosophical paradigm, presupposing that realities are created (ontology), that knowledge is fluid and provisional (epistemology), that interpretive and critical methods are more suitable to study a plural society (methodology) and that no one set of values are per definition better than the other (axiology).”