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Africa Social Work Network



Decolonised Social Work

Actions, Strategies and Processes

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Topics covered

What is decolonisation of social work?

Dangers and shortcomings of colonial social work

Dangers and shortcomings of colonial social work

Benefits of decolonising

6 Ls of decolonising

Leaders

Libraries

Literature

Lecturers

Learners

Laws

Assessment/Assignment Questions

These are text slides, readers should expect more words than usual per slide



DEFINING DECOLONISATION OF SOCIAL WORK

Decolonisation of social work is a process of removing colonial elements from the profession's literature, libraries and laws through the effort of leaders, librarians, lecturers, and learners.

Dangers of colonisation

A colonized mindset says:

1. White is best, Black is inferior
2. Black skin or hair is inferior
3. History of African people told or written by white people is the correct history
4. Missionaries are/were not colonialists, they are men and women of God
5. White people's God is better than our God
6. European religious stories are the only religious stories
7. White ancestors are better than black ancestors
8. Western artifacts e.g. white dolls, the bible are better than black dolls or black stories
9. Western education is better
10. Western methods, theories, philosophies, values and models are better

Key shortcomings of colonial or western social work in Africa

1. Focus on the individual (casework, therapy)
2. Focus on welfare (curative)
3. Focus on white, urban and educated populations (elitist)
4. Focus on western knowledge (theories, research and case studies)
5. Focus on markets - free market neoliberalism
6. Focus on deficits and dominance (colonial)

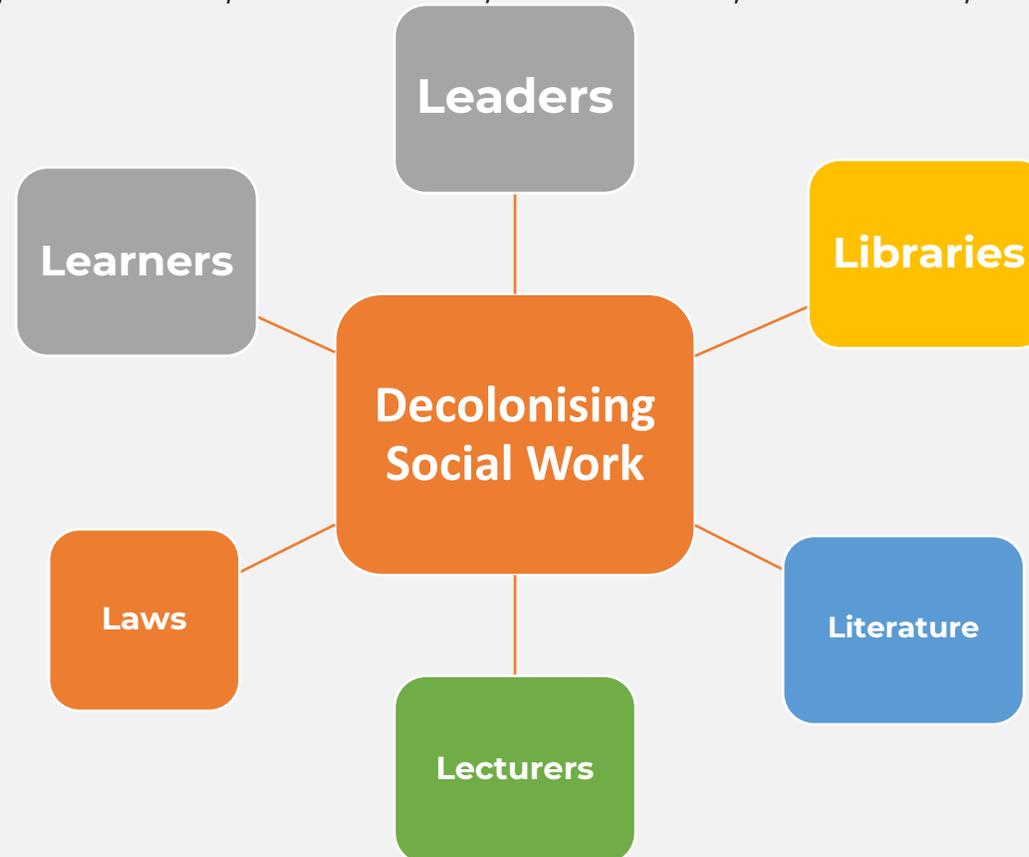
Benefits of decolonising

1. Decolonising reduces violence, conflict, disharmony and tension in families, community and society
2. Decolonising results in social workers who are confident with what they do, and the methods they use
3. Decolonising the profession reduces conflict between the values of the profession and the values of communities
4. Social workers increase their belonging to the profession and feel safe to participate with other social work and professional organizations around the world
5. The contribution of Africa to the growth of social services, social welfare and social work is acknowledged
6. Decolonisation has economic benefits, it allows for local affordable literature and publishers to blossom.
7. Students and communities understand the philosophy of the profession much better
8. Brain drain is addressed, because as it is, social workers are being trained for foreign not local markets
9. Using local language, ideas, values, theories etc breaks gatekeepers, who devalue what Africans write based on language and values.
10. Research that focuses on more appropriate social issues and problems

Six (6) L's OF DECOLONISING

Six (6) L targets or elements of decolonization

Leaders; Libraries; Literature; Lecturers; Learners; and Laws.



Leaders

They manage social work education institutions (SWEI) and social service organizations. The role of leaders is to ensure that decolonization of their institution or organisation they lead.

What should leaders decolonize?

Item	Decolonised curricula	Colonial curricula
Philosophy	Ubuntu philosophy, relevant to Africa	Eurocentric, assumes or forces global relevance
Pedagogy	Ubuntu, Liberatory	Positivism, Colonial
Core curricular/Main subjects or courses	Developmental Work, Socio-Economic Development, Social Policy, Culture and Heritage, Community Development, Family Work etc	Casework/Individual Work, Health, Pathology, Social Welfare, Community Welfare etc
Ethics and values	Ubuntu ethics and values	Eurocentric ethics and values
Principles	Ubuntu principles	Eurocentric principles
Inter-disciplinary knowledge	Development, Politics, Economics, African Sociology, Agriculture etc	Psychology, Western Sociology, Anthropology etc
Major settings	Rural, poor communities, developmental	Urban, capitalist, health and welfare
Domains & Methods	Family, community and national in focus	Individual focus
Knowledge sources or base	Orature: theories, laws; Experience	Written literature: theories, books, journals and policies
Social problems	Relevant to the environment and culture	Assumes western problems are universal

What else can leaders do?

1. Look at the physical space of your institution or organisation and identify colonial symbols. Make the space more indigenous
2. Look at artwork on walls, entrances and corridors, and statues and evaluate
3. Consider names of buildings, roads, scholarships etc
4. Have a decolonization plan in place and review it regularly
5. Check your academic attire/regalia (colours, artwork, design, fabric etc) and academic processes such as graduation
6. Examine your intake or entry requirements, are other groups not left out?
7. Examine your training approaches, are they indigenous and relevant?
8. Examine your school board, shareholders, trustees, review boards, staff, management etc
9. Lobby regulators of higher education to use indigenised tools or policies
10. SWEIs get their students from high schools, so it is important to ensure that decolonization of the curricula is done at all lower levels

Librarians

Librarians run libraries. They order or retire literature. They have an important role to play. Their roles include retiring colonial literature, ordering decolonising literature. They also promote orature.

Strategies for librarians

1. Identify and retire colonial literature
2. Identify and order decolonized literature
3. Promote oral sources – invite speakers, record interviews
4. Promote local languages
5. Promote production of local literature
6. Get into archives and retrieve relevant literature, some of which might have been suppressed
7. Ensure that the journal run by your SWEI has a decolonized policy, process and content
8. Promote translation into local languages of:

The wrongs of using colonial literature

1. Literature plays a significant role in communicating cultures, desires, values, policies, it is a political tool, literature communicates a people's past, present and future, it hides and shows truth and justice. It is entertainment. It is a people's voice and memory.
2. Books (literature in general) written or imported before the independence of African states were heavily censored so that the content aligned with western values of subjugating Africans. We no longer have to use those books.
3. Current international literature is still full of western values
4. International literature is expensive and it is not easily accessible because of commercial protections
5. Foreign publishers have too much control of the publishing process and distribution
6. Western literature is part of the imperialist project, it displaces local literature
7. In the past, and also now, African writers were limited to writing uncritical text only and were censored for any political writing and decolonial writing, they were nurtured to defend the colonialist's ways and to demonize African ways.
8. Colonial social work literature favours colonial languages. Not many communities understand what social work is until it is named in their language.

What needs to be written or translated to local language/s?

1. The nouns Social Work, Social Welfare, Poverty, Development, Social Worker, Fieldwork, Family work, Community Work and others
2. The ethics, values and principles of social work
3. Major literature used in teaching
4. Names of social work training institutions
5. The philosophy of the social work program
6. Major researches
7. School motto
8. Abstracts and key words in reports and manuscripts
9. Thesis

Literature

Literature includes oral sources, books, journals, pictures, artefacts, videos, audios, posters, newspapers, internet, artwork and other sources used to inform social work. Often oral sources are neglected.



Oral literature

1. African literature is largely oral or orature, for example:

1. Stories
2. Songs
3. Folklore
4. Poems
5. Proverbs
6. Maxims
7. Riddles
8. Humour
9. Speeches
10. Artefacts
11. Genalogies
12. Leaders are sources of history and laws
13. Elders are walking libraries
14. People with lives experience as resources
15. Observations and immersion in communities
16. Attending ceremonies and rituals
17. Interactions

2. Orature is public property, it belongs to all, and can be used multiple times. It is not individualized, copyrighted or commercialized.

3. The articles below are very useful to help readers understand the power of oral literature

1. Makaudze example: Makaudze, G. (2013), "It still makes sense!: Shona ngano (folktale) and the contemporary Zimbabwean socio-economic and cultural setup", International Journal of Development and Sustainability, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 521-529. <https://isdsnet.com/ijds-v2n2-6.pdf>
2. Gudhlanga E S and Makaudze G (2013) Useful or less serious literature? A critical appraisal of the role of ngano (folktale) among the Shona of Zimbabwe, <http://www.aessweb.com/pdf-files/2291-2299.pdf>

The power of artefacts - dolls

One day Black children and their parents walked into a shop and saw shelves full of white skinned dolls of different races: Europeans, Asians and some of mixed races. This was in an African city, where you rarely see White people. For this shop, all shoppers and workers were Black. The English doll called Babbie was among the dolls on the shelves. Babbie is popular with White kids.

Reflection

What do you think the family did?

What was the market for these dolls? Who ordered them, who made them, who marketed them and more importantly where were black dolls?

Have you ever wondered why situations like this exist?

Verdict

The white doll teaches black children, at a very tender age, to believe that white people should be seen as supreme, it prepares them to be weak psychologically. By fancying white dolls, they will fancy having white kids and living a white culture. Babbie represents whiteness. Babbie is associated with white culture – dressing, shows, and white memories. Babbie reinforces imperialism. There are several artefacts in social work that act in the same manner.

Lecturers

Lecturers play an important role in decolonising because they have contact with librarians, libraries, learners, literature and leaders.

What can lecturers do?

1. Together with teaching assistants, tutors, subject coordinators, fieldwork coordinators, field educators, researchers and chairpersons, they can:
 1. In designing the program content, use a decolonized philosophy and select appropriate subjects/courses
 2. Identify books to be retired
 3. Write new books and journal articles
 4. Order or recommend appropriate literature
 5. Design decolonized course or subject outlines
 6. Set decolonized assessment and examinations
 7. Ensure rural and marginalized communities are covered in teaching and fieldwork
 8. Present decolonial content at conferences
 9. Lobby for decolonised international policies
 10. Design decolonized continuous professional development (CPD) for practitioners

Learners

**Learners doing coursework, research or fieldwork have much to contribute to decolonize.
Learners are future practitioners.**

The role of students in decolonising

1. Buy indigenous textbooks
2. Read indigenous literature
3. Recommend to librarians books to be retired and those to be ordered
4. Appreciate local literature
5. When you start practice, avoid colonial methods, strategies, approaches, theories, frameworks and tools
6. Lobbying, for example the #RhodesMustFall campaign, and #LiberateMyDegree campaigns were run by students with the help of faculties
7. Contribute to creation and review of a decolonization plan
8. Wear decolonised graduation attire

See example of a decolonization or indigenisation plan in next slide

Laws

Social workers use several laws, legislation or policies that are found at organizational or institutional; community or local; national; regional; and international levels.

Strategies for laws

1. Identify and lobby for international laws, conventions and declarations to be revised
2. Identify and lobby colonial national laws to be revised
3. Lobby for new laws to be put in place
4. Use laws created by the community
5. Respect family laws
6. Work with the legislature e.g. parliament

In most African communities laws are not written, they are oral. These laws are widely used by local courts presided by family leaders, community leaders and local area authorities.

Example of an indigenisation or decolonization plan

Indigenisation Plan of (Name SWEI or Organisation)

Adopted on 23 June 2020

Indigenisation Coordinator, Officer or Committee: (Put names)

Aim: This plan aims to document how we will recognize local culture, histories and knowledge in our institution.

Action plan

Focus area	Actions and Participants	Timeframe
Leadership		
Library/ies		
Literature		
Lecturers		
Learners		
Laws		

Date of review.....Date of renewal.....

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write the genealogy of your family back to 300 years (try harder), for each generation, mention and discuss the colonial challenges that they faced and fought. What were the outcomes? What are the colonial challenges of your generation? What about the next generation?
2. Discuss the shortcomings of colonial social work?
3. Identify any 3 artefacts or reminders of colonialism in your life, 3 in your community and 3 in your country and 3 on social media. Discuss one of each.
4. Create 8 slides to place in a local museum about decolonisation.
5. Visit one agency providing social work. Interview the social worker about the methods, types, theories and books of social work they use. When you come back, classify these into 'colonial' and 'not colonial'. Reflect on what you learned from this exercise (500 words reflection).
6. Identify a real person whom you think requires social work services. Arrange a short interview with them. You need consent from the person so we recommend a friend or family member. How could you use a decolonized social work process to work with the person. See next slide for the process.
7. A family/clan praise poem carries cultural, historical, biographical information and family laws. Can you write or record one for your family? You can get this song or poem from a relative. You can present this information in diagram format. Summarise the information that you got? How can you use that information in social work?
8. Read the slide about the power of artefacts – dolls. Write your critical reflections (your deep or strong thoughts) about this story.
9. Discuss any 6 African principles of social work.
10. Discuss any 5 oral sources of social work knowledge

FURTHER READING

1. Most of the content found in these slides is found on the website of ASWNet, www.africasocialwork.net unless otherwise indicated.
2. See Introduction to Social Work slides for information about definitions of social work, philosophy, history of social services and social work, values, ethics, process, principles, domains, methods, sources of knowledge, social problems etc
3. See Fieldwork in Social Work slides for information about placements, practicum or attachments.
4. There are also more detailed slides about what colonization means in general and phases of decolonization.

THE END



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