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'Blaming-the-poor': Strengths and development discourses which obfuscate neo-liberal and individualist ideologies

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Abstract:	Critical interrogation of social work texts reveals ideologies and hegemonic discourse that maintains oppressive power relations. In the South African context of ongoing inequality after the 1994 democratic transition, neoliberal ideologies have structured and constrained social work knowledge and practice. Such ideologies act performatively to determine practice and social realities. This article, based on a section of the author's PhD study, examines one such thematic ideological trend in post 1994 social work texts on poverty and social development, which reflect neo-liberal, individualist ideologies of personal culpability for poverty. A selection of three texts is discussed, illustrating processes of operation of these ideologies.

'Blaming-the-poor': Strengths and development discourses which obfuscate neo-liberal and individualist ideologies¹

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Abstract

Critical interrogation of social work texts reveals ideologies contributing to hegemonic 'taken-for-granted' knowledge that maintains oppressive power relations. In the South African context of ongoing inequality after the 1994 democratic transition, neo-liberal ideologies have structured and constrained social work knowledge and practice constitutive of social change. Similarly, conservative neo-liberal ideologies underpinning social work knowledge and discourse, act performatively to shape practice and social realities. This article, based on a section of the author's PhD (Smith, 2013) study, examines one of the thematic ideological trends found in post 1994 social work texts on poverty and social development, which reflect neo-liberal, individualist ideologies of 'blaming-the-poor' and personal culpability for poverty. A selection of three texts is discussed, illustrating processes and modes of operation of these ideologies in the various approaches proposed.

Keywords

Social work; ideology; neoliberalism; blaming-the-poor; individualist; development; strengths perspectives

¹ This article is based on and drawn from the author's PhD research study entitled Social Work Education: Critical imperatives for social change (2013), an unpublished dissertation at the University of the Witwatersrand

Introduction

When some formal social work texts are interrogated and critically analysed, various ideologies emerge which, when remain unchallenged, may contribute to hegemonic 'taken-for-granted' knowledge. This is particularly the case with ideologies that maintain oppressive power relations. It is therefore important to explore and uncover the role of ideology as both performative in shaping social work as well as reflective of society and its structures (Thompson, 1990; Eagleton, 1991). In the current South African context of extreme inequality and poverty (Bond, 2005; Terreblanche, 2012; South African Institute of Race Relations, 2012; Habib, 2014), ideologies underlying social work education and interventions are significant, as these determine approaches that social workers follow in their practice.

In South African social work, broadly contested ideological areas include debates around agency and structure; issues of 'race' and racism; relations of power, privilege and oppression; and specific areas such as liberalism, paternalism and charity, neo-liberalism, individualist perspectives and development discourse (Smith, 2013). Furthermore, ideological processes are found to operate in various ways (Thompson, 1990); tend to interpellate into various subject positions (Therborn, 1980) and seem to be structured by specific conceptual determinations (Meszaros, 2010).

This article, based on the author's PhD study, relates to one of the thematic ideological trends that emerged in texts of the post 1994 period, dealing with poverty and social development and which reflect neo-liberal and individualist ideologies of 'blaming-the-poor' and personal culpability for poverty. A selection of three such texts is discussed, exploring their underlying ideologies and highlighting how these processes operate.

While the approaches described in these articles provide useful guidelines for social work interventions, it is problematic that they are linked to poverty and development. The strengths perspective, the Asset Based Community Development approach and adventure training (Gray and Collett van Rooyen, 2002; Nel, 2006; Reyneke, 2009), may offer useful strategies for social work, but fail to address serious and oppressive structural dynamics which perpetuate poverty and inequality. In these articles, discourse and ideologies of 'blaming the poor', individualism and personal culpability are overtly stated.

South Africa's neo-liberal macro-economic policy framework has constrained and determined social work knowledge and practice in recent years while the historiography of social work also shows the hegemonic nature of liberal, individualist and conservative ideologies and discourses (Smith, 2013). This paper explores and highlights such ideological positioning of discourse in the selected texts, and how these ideologies conceptually determine social work knowledge and practice in respect of poverty and development.

Research study

In a PhD study conducted between 2007 and 2012 (Smith, 2013), using a depth-hermeneutical approach (Thompson, 1990) the researcher explored the historiographical of social work dominant discourses and operation of ideologies in formal South African social work texts and in narratives of social work educators at South African Universities. After an exploration of key social work texts from the 1930s onwards, the content of the older (established in 1965) of two accredited social work journals in South Africa was examined and a representative selection of some thirty texts was made for more depth analysis, based on the various themes that had been identified. The main aim of the study was to explore the extent to which South African social work knowledge and education,

as reflected in formal and narrative discourses, meets critical imperatives for social change and transformation (Smith, 2013:16).

The various empirical processes cohered with each other. The critically and politically engaged discourse analysis (Hook and Harris, 2000, cited in MacLeod, 2004:530) together with the theoretical study, allowed for both an inductive and deductive approach, through the theoretical framework of social work knowledge and discourse constructive of social work knowledge and discourse constitutive of social change, for the analysis.

The findings of the study included that the various historical socio-political eras had seemed to determine the fluctuations in discursive dominance, with societal transitions, political developments and conflict, reflected in textual content and ideological positioning. Alternative discourses had also sometimes emerged in response to the increasing imperatives for social change. Social work knowledge and practice however, consistently seems to support the hegemonic ideologies of the state. In post-apartheid South Africa, this is shown to mean acceptance of dominant neoliberal capitalist discourse, status quo maintenance and individualist perspectives.

Developmental social work discourse in the South African context

In spite of discourses around social justice, equality and social change, South African developmental social work seems to struggle to depart from its conservative ideological base (Bak, 2004; Midgley, 2001).

South African social work has historically followed an individualist and remedial trajectory, largely arising from the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into the 'Poor White problem' in the 1930s (Gray and Mazibuko, 2002; Lombard, 1998; McKendrick, 1990; Patel, 2005). After the transition from Apartheid, a shift towards a developmental

paradigm occurred (Patel, 2008). The implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Social Welfare, 1997) had intended to break with the Apartheid past and contribute to reconciliation, transformation and development through a developmental welfare programme (Midgley, 1995; Patel, 2008).

Although the political success of the liberation struggle which led to the transition from Apartheid in 1994, the socio-economic reality shows a grim failure of the concept of 'developmental state' (Bond, 2008; Habib, 2014), a consequence both of the past Apartheid regime as well as the broader macro-economic policy framework adopted after 1994 (Terreblanche, 2002; 2012). The extreme levels of poverty and inequality, still based on race stratification, reflects 'distorted development' characterized by the coexistence of economic modernity with social deprivation (Midgley, 2001; Fine, 1995, 2010) and "where economic development benefits a minority but leaves the majority of the population in deep and unchanged poverty" (Bak, 2008:82). Reflecting the highest levels of income inequality in the world the Gini Co-efficient for South Africa was 0.7 in 2009 (World Bank 2012). Sewpaul (2013:20) quotes Maharaj (2012), the World Bank Task Team leader for the South African Economic update, who describes the consequences of these extreme levels of inequality:

"A South African child not only has to work harder to overcome the disadvantages at birth due to circumstances, but having done so, finds that these reemerge when seeking employment as an adult [...] The disadvantages [...] get transmitted across generations. The policy challenge is to find a way to break this vicious, self-perpetuating cycle of inequality in South Africa."

There is clearly “a disjuncture between the claims and ideals of the development agenda and the ideology of the state. Development has come to mean the achievement of self-help, self-sustainability and an economically active citizenry.” (Ferguson and Smith, 2012:979).

Developmental social welfare approaches are described as a move away from a social pathology perspective towards social change (Patel, 2005, 2008; Payne, 2005). The South African developmental approach is based on Midgley’s (1995) definition of development as ‘a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development’ (Patel, 2008). Patel (2008:74) states that developmental social work includes ‘poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods; family-centred and community-based strategies; community information, education and communication; social policy and planning; and advocacy.’

However, Patel (2008:71) herself, who had played a key role in drafting the policy (Midgley, 2001), argues that “less progress has been made in the repositioning of social welfare services and social work practice from a remedial approach to a developmental one”. Social development practices in South Africa, were affected unfavourably by the shift to the macro economic Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, which “advocated fiscal restraint, and liberalisation of the economy to be globally competitive in a context of low economic growth rates and indebtedness.” (Patel, 2008:77). GEAR was a shift from the Redistribution and Development Programme (RDP) with its redistributive focus and direct responsibility of government for meeting basic human needs (Adato, Carter and May, 2006) and it placed the emphasis on the ‘deserving poor’ (Lund, 2006). The neo-liberal economic policy framework based on freedom of markets, privatization, liberalization, personal responsibility and self-reliance, thus ideologically determined social welfare provision and

social work (Sewpaul, 2006:428). The broad policy framework after 1994, therefore appears to be in ideological conflict with developmental ideals of the Welfare White Paper of 1997 (Midgley, 2001).

Ideologies underpinning South African developmental social welfare approaches may be viewed as residual, individualist-reformist, conservative and judgmental within a distorted development context (Payne, 2005; Bak, 2004; Sewpaul and Holscher, 2004, Sewpaul, 2013). Describing the conservative and 'personal-deficiency' ideology explicit in the South African Family Policy of 2005, Sewpaul (2013:21) argues that

“the burden of coping with South Africa’s huge problems is reduced to the level of individuals and families, without recognition of the structural sources of unemployment, poverty, exclusion and inequality and the profound roles that society and state play in contributing to the way that families cope. Second, rebuilding the moral fibre of individuals and communities appears to be the panacea for all of the problems mentioned”

Such perspectives and ideological positions clearly depart from social justice and social change ideals, comfortably accommodating status quo maintenance and social regulatory, remedial and developmental approaches (Payne, 2005). Relationships of power and domination are therefore perpetuated and reproduced. In many ways, developmental work within a neoliberal policy framework, is seen as unsustainable project development, dressed up with rather tokenistic social welfare policy' (Bond, 2008).

When social work developmental approaches are shaped by a neo-liberal economic policy frameworks, they are characterized by individualism and personal culpability, an erosion of solidarity (Lorenz, 2005 cited by Ferguson, 2008:25), managerialism and marketization (Ferguson, 2008). South African social work approaches, which aim to achieve social change

and enhance quality of life, but which exist within the hegemonic policy context may inadvertently adhere to these conservative ideologies and therefore neglect structural dimensions of intervention. Examples of such approaches are some strengths perspectives, such as 'asset based community development' approaches, characterised by notions of self-reliance and self-help within a strengths-based perspective and using appreciative enquiry as a methodology (McKnight and Kretzman, 1996; Nel and Roestenberg, 2004; Nel, 2006).

Ideological processes

To understand the operation of ideology in these social work discourses, various theories were utilised (Meszaros, 2010; Thompson, 1990; and Therborn, 1980), and a comparative framework of these processes was developed by the author (See Table 1: Comparison of descriptions of ideological processes). A critical conception of ideology (as opposed to a neutral or positive conception) is adopted in this article, as it seeks to uncover and examine how ideology produces and reproduces relations of power and domination. Ideology therefore operates to 'interpellate' people (known as 'subjectification') (Therborn, 1980) into acceptance of the status quo, with a sense of resignation and a pessimistic view which "fails to see the possibility of alternatives" (Foster, 2004, p. 565) and this maintains the structures of power and class relations. However, both agency and structure is important as there is reciprocity between material practice, ideology and subjectification. The impact of base and superstructure on subjects, as well as subjects' agency to shape base and superstructure, must be recognised (Stevens, 2003:205). Ideology may therefore also be seen as "structurally constrained thought" conditioned by material constraints and social practices which act as obstacles to the very ideas which seek to explain them (Eagleton, 1994:190). Hegemonic discourse then maintains such relations of power, through the interpellations and operations of ideology. Social workers then become interpellated

into such ideological positions which maintain the status quo and which tend to ignore the structural nature of the problems that they encounter.

Conceptual determinations

Critical debates in social work find at their centre, questions around the nature of social change and reflect broader ideological issues of the time. According to Meszaros (2010), hegemonic discourse is positioned within the conceptual determinations of the current epoch of capitalist class based structures and are constrained and limited by the determinations of method and thought of the capitalist era itself. "The horizon of the possible" becomes limited to what is possible within the capitalist system (Alexander, 2011:2) and the "constraining limits of the common structural framework" (Meszaros, 2010:11). It is therefore difficult to transcend the parameters of various theories reflecting the class basis of society. These conceptual determinations, also understood as "specific forms of ideology" (Meszaros, 2010:13) are summarised as follows:

- 1) A "programmatic orientation towards science" leads to an expectation that social problems are solved through the advancement of science and technology alone. This then excludes the possibility of antagonistic confrontations, while fundamental and structural change is viewed as dangerous (Meszaros, 2010:29).
- 2) The "tendency towards formalism" relates to conformity, neutrality and philosophical entrapment within the limits of particular theorists or theories (Meszaros, 2010:37).
- 3) The "standpoint of isolated individuality" prevents seeing objective difficulties of social reality and has the tendency to focus on "subjective epistemological concerns" rather than social structural realities (Meszaros, 2010:70).

- 4) The “negative determination of philosophy and social theory”, means that there is a “paralyzing negativity” (Meszaros, 2010:97) about radical transformation and social change.
- 5) The “suppression of historical temporality’, (Meszaros, 2010:140) is a denial of historical agency where, change is perceived as merely a lapse of time and there is a failure to explain historical events in terms of context and broader significance.
- 6) The “imposition of dualisms and dichotomies” in the understanding of social problems leads to the impossibility of a synthesis or mediation to achieve structural change (Meszaros, 2010:152). Values critical of the established order, which is “beyond contest”, then become “condemned as heresy”.
- 7) “Postulates of unity and universality”, is an attempt to reform the contradictions and antagonisms of the social order by merely redistributing resources, which is futile as it avoids a complete transformation of society.

Modes of operation of ideology

Ideology operates in various ways, and so, “to study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990:56). Thomson (1990) describes five general modes of operation of ideology. This is a useful framework for analysing how meaning can “serve to establish and sustain relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990:59). These operations are broadly:

Legitimation. Relations of domination are presented as legitimate, just and worthy of support. Relations of domination are established and maintained on rational, traditional or charismatic grounds.

Dissimulation. Relationships of domination are concealed, denied obscured or represented in a way that deflects attention away from or glosses over relations or processes.

Unification. Relations of domination may be established and maintained by constructing a unity which embraces individuals in a collective identity, irrespective of differences or divisions that may separate them

Fragmentation. Instead of the strategy of unification, relations of domination may fragment individuals to prevent them from posing a challenge to dominant groups or by orienting opposition towards a target projected as evil or harmful ('divide and rule').

Reification. Transitory, historical states are represented as permanent, natural, outside of time or as 'things or events' of a 'quasi-natural kind'. The sociological and historical character of processes is eclipsed and obfuscated.

Ideological interpellation

According to Therborn (1980), ideology interpellates and forms people as subjects through subjection to a particular order and qualification to perform roles assigned to them (Therborn, 1980). The processes of subjectification and qualification "involves three fundamental modes of ideological interpellation" (Therborn, 1980:18) by making subjects recognize what exists and what does not exist (for example who and what we are, the nature of the world and people and therefore a sense of identity); what is good (or the ideal) and bad (normalizing desires and aspirations); and what is possible or not. This provides a sense of mutability, or how things may be changed and the consequences, which pattern hopes and fears around such change (Therborn, 1980). In order therefore to be committed to social change there must be awareness that social injustice and oppression exists, a conclusion that this is not good and a conviction that there is the possibility of change (that a better world is possible). However, the subject is generally interpellated into acceptance of the status quo, a sense of resignation and a pessimistic view which "fails to see the possibility of alternatives" (Foster, 2004:565) and this maintains the structures of power and class relations.

Table 1: Comparison of descriptions of ideological processes

Descriptions (vertical) and correspondences (horizontal) of ideological processes	<u>Conceptual determinations</u> (Meszaros, 2010)	<u>Modes of operation of ideology</u> (Thompson, 1990)	<u>Ideological interpellation into subjectivity and qualification</u> (Therborn, 1980)		
	Isolated individuality	Dissimulation Displacement Euphemism, Trope		Interpellation into descriptions of context and social reality ("what is")	Interpellations into descriptions of the ideal ("what is good")
	Imposition of dualistic and dichotomous categorical matrix	Fragmentation Differentiation Expurgation of 'the other'			
	Tendency towards science	Legitimation Rationalisation Universalisation Narrativisation			
	Postulates of "unity" and "universality"				
		Unification Standardisation Symbolisation of unity	Descriptions of mutability ("what is possible")		
	Tendency towards formalism				
	Suppression of historical temporality	Reification Naturalisation Externalisation Nominalisation/ passivisation			
	Negative determination of philosophy and social theory				

Analysis of texts in relation to ideologies of individualism, personal culpability and neo-liberal conceptual determination.

The three texts are discussed separately, highlighting various operations of ideology and interpellation. They all contain important considerations and principles for practice and, make claims about social justice, enhanced well-being and call for participation and self-determination. However, they have in common an ideological position of neo-liberal frameworks, personal culpability and blame for poverty, individualism and a dominance of adherence to agency versus structure.

The strengths perspective in social work (Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002).

This article is an interpretation of the strengths perspective in social work (Saleebey, 2002), important for its focus on the empowerment of people, exploration and acknowledgement of capabilities and a stance against pathologising discourse.

Problematic however is that the article positions strengths approaches as a 'radical alternative' to other current social work intervention models because they

“question a dominant deficit-based mental health paradigm...; anti-oppressive practice models which construe clients as oppressed and immediately engender feelings of powerlessness; and rigid mindsets such as positivism, ardent feminism and structuralism that lead practitioners to approach the helping situation with preconceived ideas” (Gray and Collett van Rooyen, 2002:193, own italics).

Arguing that anti-oppressive practice models engender feelings of powerlessness is unsubstantiated and contrary to the claims of these approaches, which are said to be opposed to oppression and seek to reduce powerlessness created by negative valuations of a stigmatised group (Payne, 2005; Dominelli, Thompson, 1997; Dominelli, 1998).

The article interpellates the reader into neo-liberal hegemony of personal culpability rather than challenging oppressive and structural power asymmetries. It seems to impose a false 'dichotomous and dualistic categorical matrix' (Meszaros, 2010) for strengths approaches versus anti-oppressive and structural approaches and conflates these radical approaches with a 'problem-deficit orientation'. This interpellates practitioners into a limited range of 'what is possible' (Therborn, 1980), by discouraging practitioners from utilising critical and radical approaches as they are deemed to be disempowering to clients.

The strengths perspective became part of dominant social work discourse when systems theory provided a shift from a psychodynamic and biomedical model of intervention (Bender, Davidson and Skolnik, 1997; Saleebey, 1999; Payne, 2005). Strengths-based approaches include for example healing and wellness practice and inquiry, resilience literature, solution-focused therapies, empowerment models, asset based community development, narrative approaches and inductive social policy (Chapin, 1995, cited by Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002:195).

Gray and Collett van Rooyen (2002: 194) describe Saleebey's (1999) "alternative lexicon", which replaces the client's vocabulary of problem and disease. They state that the strengths perspective accepts and acknowledges people's resilience, their ability to endure extreme hardship, survive seemingly insurmountable problems and to survive adversity and grow out of challenges. The "pathology culture" is to be replaced (Gray and Collett van Rooyen, 2002:196) by making a shift towards a social constructivist perspective, which accepts the importance of mutuality, acceptance of ambiguity and unpredictability and collaborative assessment. Their ideas are described from a postmodernist perspective, which denies fixed realities (for example social injustice and oppression and how to overcome these), embrace a relativist paradigm and display 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Ferguson, 2008).

A strengths perspective is said to require conscious effort and that, language around deficits should be replaced with questions around 'what is working well?' with a focus on assets and identification of 'gaps' instead of needs. Negative myths should be shattered and responsible "positive ownership" should be encouraged through involvement. Needs and deficits do require some acknowledgement in order to avoid alienation, however but

“politics” are said to “feed on deficits and the embellishment of needs and problems” (Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002:199).

These statements may be seen as dissimulation, whereby relationships of domination are obscured and presented in a way that attention is deflected from them (Thompson, 1990). It may be argued that to focus on personal capability to endure and survive, rather than the oppressive structures themselves, is an ideological interpellation into agency rather than structure being the only or most important means of change.

The ideology of individualism and personal culpability is evident throughout this interpretation of the strengths perspective, for example alluding to the idea that “all individuals, families and communities have strengths, that they know what they want and that they have the capacity to rebuild themselves” and that the role of the community worker is merely to “facilitate the release of this capacity” (Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002:197).

Finally, the writers do conclude by acknowledging that injustice, oppression, distress and unhappiness do exist and that social structures do shape people’s problems. They state: “it humbles us as professionals to get down from our expert perches and to privilege the knowledge and experience of those who we serve” (Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002:200, own italics).

This interpretation of the strengths perspective, instead of being presented as a useful perspective for social work generally, is positioned as being in opposition to approaches such as the feminist, critical, radical and structural, which themselves claim respect of strengths, empowerment, social justice and transformation (Payne, 2005).

The application of a large group intervention method based on the asset-based approach:

A repositioning of training in community development (Nel, 2006)

This article deals with an approach which is gaining discursive dominance in developmental social work, namely the asset based community development approach (ABCD) (Emmet, 2000, Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). The article begins by stating that the outcomes of community development, seen to be the “most appropriate way to address inequities in South African society” (Nel, 2006:234) have been ‘disappointing’. These failures, rather than seen as being related to by the neo-liberal economic policy context, is ascribed to the focus on deficiencies and deficits, the emphasis on felt needs and problems and the role of community developer as expert.

The ideology of personal culpability and self-reliance of the asset based approach is said to be a viable alternative as it focuses on assets and not needs and is geared towards self-reliant sustainable development. It is also an example of how social work discourse becomes hegemonic through ‘taken-for-granted knowledge, as this article relies on the article discussed previously (Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002) to substantiate arguments. The ABCD approach, discussed in this article as a ‘large group intervention method’, is presented in a similar way as in the previous article on the strengths perspective (Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002), as “a radical alternative” to current intervention models, which are said to be deficit-focused. The author quotes Gray and Collet van Rooyen (2002) and describes the pathologising trend of labelling in the mental health paradigm and conflates this with anti-oppressive practice models which are said to “construe clients as oppressed and which lead to feelings of powerlessness” (Gray and Collet van Rooyen, 2002, cited by Nel, 2006:234).

The theoretical origins of the ABCD approach are linked to Carl Rogers' humanistic client-centred approach and that "the individual has a sufficient capacity to deal constructively with all of those aspects of his life which can potentially come into conscious awareness". Rather than this leading to an interpretation to mean conscientisation and subsequent social action, the ABCD approach advocates "a range of strategies aimed at developing the capacities and assets of communities and people" towards self-help and self-reliance (Nel, 2006:235). It is stated that various policy makers in the 'third world' had seen the value of 'self-reliant participatory development' and authors such as Freire (1972), are named in order to substantiate this claim (Burkey, 2000; Chambers, 1983 and Freire, 1994). These three authors seem to be used to legitimate and rationalise the ideological position that self-reliance should form the basis for change (Thompson, 1990).

Problematic in this assertion is that the three authors quoted are very divergent in their views. Chambers (1983) and Burkey (2000) both valorise self-help and self-driven development, while Freire (1972/1994), who also bases his theories on participation, most certainly argues for critical conscientisation and social action to overcome oppressive power relationships, rather than self-help to bring about social change.

The ABCD approach is also said to be the "intervention of choice" given the basic human rights and social justice tenets of the South African constitution and social welfare policies (Nel, 2006, p.235). Conflating the ABCD approach with discourse of social justice, human rights and radical approaches, obscures the underlying ideological position of self-reliance, individual responsibility and the role of agency over structure. By using discourse which appeals to social workers committed to social change and social justice, the ABCD approach despite claiming otherwise, interpellates the practitioner into status quo maintenance (Thompson, 1990) and support of the hegemonic capitalist economic order (and in the South African context, still predominantly 'race' based). The ABCD

approach is entirely congruent with the neo-liberal policy framework with its discourse around the free-market, entrepreneurship and individual responsibility.

Changes in global development paradigms are described, highlighting their impact on “economic and political relationships, social development, civil leadership and flow of information and the role of the community in social change” (Nel, 2006:235). During the post-war period, development was understood within an industrial paradigm. This then shifted towards a global/local paradigm due to a greater emphasis on “human rights and freedom” and “booms in information technology and micro-electronics”. This paradigm is described in capitalist, free-market, business discourse and is said to be characterized by “niche markets targeting quality, a focus on end products and consumers, and horizontal structures driven by production” (Nel, 2006:237). Ideology here therefore operates what Thompson (1990) refers to as reification, whereby relations of domination through are represented as permanent and natural and their processes are obfuscated.

Organisational structures being “flattened” with “webs of inclusion” are said to bring about a focus on “anticipatory learning” and the development of a vision “while trusting individuals and groups to deliver until it is clear that they cannot do so” (Nel, 2006:237). A “clear commitment to discovering the capacities and assets of a community” is regarded as far preferable to “focusing on the community’s needs, deficiencies and problems commanding the vast majority of financial and human resources” (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993, cited by Nel, 2006:239). Such an argument that communities’ needs and problems command ‘vast financial and human resources’ and that the real assets and capacities of the individual/community, merely lie hidden shifts the attention away from the realities of the oppressive power relations and structures which perpetuate these. The ‘ideal’ is then seen to be a situation where self-reliant people, utilising their

own strengths and capacities are able to function and achieve wellbeing, The ideology operates by interpellating the social worker into a position which does not see social justice and oppression and that there is a possibility for social change (Therborn, 1980) and an acceptance of the status quo.

Furthermore, while the language of 'community' is used, the conceptual constraint operating is that which Meszaros (2013) refers to as the 'standpoint of isolated individuality' in which concerns relate to the individual (or groups) rather than social structural concerns.

The shift towards an asset based approach seems therefore to move away from transformation of structural power relations towards self-sufficiency without the 'drain of resources' from corporate capitalist profit making.

Structural power asymmetries, inequality and oppressive economic policies are therefore legitimised through rationalisation (Thompson, 1990) and remain unchallenged while communities work towards their own social and economic development.

The 'felt needs and problem-solving approach' is said to lead to the acceptance by communities of "these negative images about itself...as a result, many communities of lower income are now environments of service, where their behaviours are affected because residents come to believe that their well-being is reliant on external sources...they become consumers of services, with no incentive to become producers" (Nel, 2006:239). Such discourse dramatically obfuscates the privilege and powerful inequalities evident in the way that the elite have access to and are dependent on expensive resources, services and benefits of the capitalist order. It further denies South African historical and contextual realities of the violations of human rights through race

based oppression, unequal resource distribution and inadequate services. Reification, as a mode of operation of ideology, therefore occurs by eclipsing the socio-historical state of affairs (Thompson, 1990) of Apartheid's race-based capitalist structures.

'Traditional' community work approaches are also criticised, ignoring their many principles of participation, holism, social justice, human rights and anti-colonial focus (Ife, 2002). The main characteristics of the asset-based approach are said to be that it begins with assets rather than problems, that it is 'internally focused' and that it is 'relationship driven'. The facilitator is required to "help community members enter into true dialogue with each other" (Nel, 2006:245). This is opposed to the problem posing and critical conscientisation that Freire (1970) emphasises.

The article concludes with a contradiction by arguing that the challenge of development is "one of fundamental transition to a new social and economic order" (Nel, 2006:248) and then maintains that the approach increases "the commitment and energy of individuals in organisations and communities to take responsibility for their own development" (Nel, 2006, p. 248). This certainly does not imply a fundamental transition to a new social and economic order. The dominant discourses of neo-liberalism, obfuscation of social injustice and distorted power inequalities are therefore clearly evident. The poor are to be 'helped' to 'help themselves' as they are responsible for 'their' own development.

Using adventure to increase the emotional intelligence of the poor (Reyneke, 2009). The third article exemplifies the dominant discourse of blaming the poor, maintaining the macro-economic status quo as well as the complicity of social work in reproducing inequality through its intervention strategies. The use of adventure experiences which

lead to increased emotional intelligence is proposed as a solution to the “poverty trap” in which ‘clients’ find themselves (Reyneke, 2009). The empowerment of people in poor communities is equated with the development of human potential and emotional intelligence. The article is an example of a blaming and pathologising discourse which ignores historical and structural determinants of oppressive poverty and inequality, therefore employing reification as a mode of operation of ideology (Thompson, 1990).

The ideological position is overtly stated: “the purpose of this article is to redefine poverty and to demonstrate and describe how adventure programmes can be used to empower the poor so that they can experience improved adaptation to their environment and in that way become well-adjusted, well-motivated citizens.” (Reyneke, 2009:47). Various reasons are given for why “these people are not even willing to try and find a job”, including “a lack of emotional energy to look for a job, laziness, a lack of life skills, or it may even be that they or someone close to them draws an income in the form of a grant.” (Reyneke, 2009:48). Social workers are thus interpellated into a position where by mutability and possibility of social change relates only to personal agency, rather than taking into account structural considerations (Therborn, 1980).

The Department of Social Development (2006) also positions itself in relation to this individualist and blaming discourse by stating that “most people receiving disability and child support grants are not motivated to join the workforce” (Reyneke, 2009:48). The high rates of unemployment among social security beneficiaries are said to indicate that “there are many people who could contribute to the economic growth of the country; they just need to be activated to do so by means of improving their skills and intrinsic motivation” (Reyneke, 2009:48). This is an example of a conceptual determination of ‘isolated individuality’ described by Meszaros (2011) which prevents the reader viewing

the objective difficulties of the social reality and focusing on problems as if they are purely individual concerns. The article argues that in order to make an impact on “absolute poverty”, development should focus on the enrichment of people’s lives by empowering the individual and eradicating ‘emotional poverty’. This, it is stated, could be achieved through “playing the empowerment game and through the utilization of adventure programmes” (Reyneke, 2009:49).

The programme, a group therapeutic model, is based on “Project Adventure” in the USA (2002, cited by Reyneke, 2009:51). It offers participants the opportunity to be placed in a situation of adventure, removing them from their “state of homeostasis” and being in a situation where “he/she experiences a measure of psychological and physical stress in order to grow” and then in the restoration of homeostasis, growth and development take place. A holistic approach is said to occur, whereby the behavioural, cognitive psychological and affective receive attention. The process is characterized by the “creation of a safe environment for the participant, but one that is marked by surprise, challenges and fun”, giving participants the opportunity to try potentially difficult and sometimes “terrifying” activities in a caring environment. Care provides a sense of security so that participation occurs only at a level in which the participant feels comfortable. Clear norms are established and a contract is negotiated, focusing on emotional and social competencies. An experiential learning process is followed, with phases including experiencing, sharing, processing, generalizing and applying the knowledge gained.

The article then describes how to facilitate such an adventure process therapeutically, with work that is required ‘at the edge’ in order for growth in self-concept and empowerment to occur, referring to the work of various theorists such as Payne (2005)

and Zastrow (2001). Awareness is encouraged around components such as defences, feelings, physiology, beliefs, inner conversations, supports and the use of metaphors. It is then argued that emotional intelligence can be learned, and affects “many aspects of an individual’s mental and physical wellbeing. A high EQ [emotional intelligence] will also facilitate the ability to get along with other people, to make sensible life choices, and to succeed in school, one’s career and community life.” (Reyneke, 2009:58).

The article concludes by stating that in such adventure empowerment, unique outcomes are generated, leading to “empowerment of participants so that they can adapt more successfully to their environment and in so doing become well-adjusted, well motivated citizens, that is, people who could successfully carry the burden of creating a better South Africa and reducing their own economic and emotional poverty” (Reyneke, 2009:59).

Conclusions

The texts discussed above are representative of a theme uncovered in a study of formal South African social work texts (Author, 2013), which relates to an underlying ideology which is individualist, ‘blaming-the-poor’ and conservative. They demonstrate how ideology interpellates social workers into positions which limit their sense of mutability and hope for social change, define reality or ‘what is’ as the personal culpability of the poor and which encourages the view that ‘what is good’ is a change of attitude and response of those who find themselves in a structurally unequal world (Therborn, 1980). Operations of ideology in the texts include examples of legitimation, reification, and dissimulation so that their meanings “serve to establish and sustain relations of domination” (Thompson, 1990:56). Furthermore, they demonstrate how conceptually,

they are determined by the constraints of the current neo-liberal capitalist era (Meszaros, 2010).

The tendency to conflate social justice, developmental and transformation discourses with conservative and neo-liberal discourses of personal responsibility self-help and self-reliance, is a common trend in social work, enabling obfuscation and reproduction of structural power relations and inequality. Social workers, through ideological interpellation, consequently adopt approaches to intervention that perpetuate oppressive structural dynamics.

The three texts demonstrate how specific, conservative ideologies may underpin arguments and discourses of social work around poverty and developmental social work in South Africa. These ideologies stand in contradiction to the aims of development expressed in the Welfare White Paper (1997), to break with the apartheid past and contribute to transformation and institute a developmental welfare programme aimed to attain basic social welfare rights for all (Midgely, 1995; Patel, 2008).

The state has shifted from its early post-Apartheid transitional period of redistributive and transformative economic policies, towards constraining neo-liberal policies resulting in extreme levels of poverty and inequality. The ideologies evident in these texts are congruent with the ideologies and hegemonic discourses of current conservative policies of state-driven social development. This policy context has resulted in what is broadly referred to as a 'failed developmental state' (Saul and Bond, 2014). This demonstrates how ideology is reflective of social reality and at the same time is also performative and as such contributes to the shaping of social reality. Through interpellation into such subject positions, social workers then contribute to further shaping of social reality.

In social development and developmental social welfare discourse, the economic development responsibility of social work is emphasized, making social workers partners in 'economic development' through entrepreneurship and income generation_(South African Department of Social Welfare, 1997). Knowledge development and discourses such as are found in formal social work texts, support_processes of reform within a free-market and a rational economic policy framework, using individualist discourses of strengths, assets, personal responsibility and culpability.

Social work is therefore consistently, as was the case historically in previous eras, supportive of the hegemonic ideologies of the state. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, this is shown to mean acceptance of dominant neoliberal capitalist discourse and maintenance of the status quo with valorisation_of agency to the exclusion of the realities of structural dynamics of power, privilege and oppression. Social work texts may therefore contribute to the perpetuation of such ideologies and hegemonic 'taken-for-granted knowledges that maintain oppressive power relations.

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