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BOOK REVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction to Social Work (2nd Edition) is a valuable resource for students, educators and practitioners in the field of social work. The editors' extensive expertise and diverse research interests make the book both informative and engaging, offering users a well-rounded view of the theory and practice of social work. Whether the user is new to the field or seeking to deepen their knowledge, this book provides essential insights into the complexities and benefits of the profession.

To provide context for this review, it is essential to highlight the expertise and backgrounds of the editors, whose collective experience and knowledge have significantly enhanced the second edition of *Introduction to Social Work*. John Victor Rautenbach is a distinguished Professor of Social Work and the Academic Head of the Department of Social Work at the University of Zululand in South Africa. His work focuses on social work education and practice, with notable contributions to the body of knowledge, boasting over 200 citations. He is also involved with various academic and professional organisations, serving as a national representative for South Africa in the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (IASSW-AIETS). His research includes evaluations of social work field instruction and other critical aspects of social work education.

The second author is Savathrie Margie Maistry, who holds a PhD in Community Development Education and is currently a Research Associate at Rhodes University in South Africa as well as the Editor-in-Chief of the *African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement* (AJHECE). Dr Maistry is a distinguished academic and researcher whose research interests include community development, social work, higher education engagement, and women's studies. She has served in academic roles at the University of Waikato in New Zealand and was the Africa Region Programme Manager for Volunteer Services Abroad in Wellington, New Zealand. Her extensive experience and contributions have made her a key figure in these fields in South Africa and beyond.

The third author is Allucia Lulu Shokane, a distinguished academic and currently a Professor and an Acting Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Zululand, South Africa. Professor Shokane's research interests encompass a broad range of topics within social work and community development, including indigenous knowledge, poverty alleviation strategies, and asset-based community-led development (ABCD). She has published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals, with over 230 citations of her work. Her professional roles have included serving as Vice-President of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI), and a regional mentor for the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS). Shokane is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Inkanyiso: Journal of African Thought*, and a member of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf).

Genre and publication information: Building on the foundation of the first edition edited by the late Lionel John Nicholas, Rautenbach and Maistry in 2010, *Introduction to Social Work* (2nd Edition), published in 2023, is an invaluable academic resource that also serves as a practitioner's companion.

Brief overview: The book covers a wide range of topics in social work, including foundational theories, methodologies and contemporary practices. The varied backgrounds of the editors and contributors ensure that the book incorporates diverse perspectives, particularly regarding practices in South Africa and global social work standards. Furthermore, given the editors' extensive field experience, the book includes practical insights and real-world applications of social work principles. Their academic standing and prolific publications guarantee a well-researched and scholarly approach to the subject matter. Lastly, the inclusion of community development, research and indigenous knowledge systems, among others, reflects an interdisciplinary approach that enriches the readers' understanding of social work's multifaceted nature.

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT

Book outline: The book is organised into three distinct but interrelated sections. The first section provides an orientation to the social work profession by addressing a critical ontological question on what the social work profession is. It defines the essence and fundamental characteristics of what constitutes the social work profession. In elaborating in this, critical themes such as social work values and ethics, theories for social work practice, social welfare policy and legislation in South Africa, and the critical history of social work in South Africa are explored.

Section two delves into the praxis of the social work profession. An investigation of praxis, as described by Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, highlights the interrelation between theory and practice, and underscores the centrality of practical activity in understanding and transforming the world. Marx (1859) emphasized that the rationale for an analysis of praxis is to promote revolutionary practices to address and overcome social injustices. Developing this further, Gramsci (2020) introduced the concept of 'organic intellectuals', who are deeply engaged in their communities' practical struggles and use their theoretical insights to drive social change. Contributors to this section explore a variety of themes, including casework, social work with

groups, community development, social work management and supervision, and introductory research methods in social work. These topics are examined as integral approaches to advancing social justice.

The third section of the book addresses significant psycho-socioeconomic and political issues affecting social work service users within the South African and broader African context. Contributors explore a wide range of topics such as children and families, youth in conflict with the law, sexuality and HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, diversity and multicultural practice, and poverty.

The focus is largely on South Africa as a context that has been viewed as ideal for the training of social workers, given the multiplicity of problems that affect service users and create the huge gaps of inequality, unemployment and social exclusion among others (Bhorat, 2024; Nattrass, 2018; Ncube, 2024; Plagerson, 2023; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005; Stilwell, 2011; Thornton *et al.*, 2023). While the democratic government has had its fair share of failures since its inception in 1994, it is important to reflect on the historical legacy of these problems. It is this complexity of the South African situation that makes the country an ideal training ground for social work practice.

Writing style and strengths: The book is written in a simple and understandable language, making use of the relevant occupational jargon necessary for students, lecturers, and practitioners. Furthermore, the themes and subthemes have a logical flow which leads the user to develop a mind map of the essence of the social work profession from its definition to issues of concern in the field. The format of the book, with regard to aspects such as font size and clearly demarcated subthemes, makes the book reader-friendly. But of the utmost importance are the case studies and revision questions posed at the end of each chapter. These help to reinforce learning, encourage critical thinking, gauge the user's level of understanding, make learning more engaging and interesting, as well as facilitate integration of knowledge into practice.

Weaknesses: In sections focusing on legislation, the book necessarily touches on South African laws, but would have been equally important to include references to international legal instruments and conventions to familiarise readers with these frameworks. This is particularly relevant given the significant number of postgraduates and practitioners migrating to Europe and North America. The book also misses an opportunity to address other pertinent themes, such as migration, considering the mass movement of people within and across borders, and climate change, which is increasingly recognised as an existential threat with considerable social implications not only in South Africa, but globally as well. Addressing these themes would enrich the content and provide a broader context for readers, suggesting potential areas for expansion in future editions of the book.

CONCLUSION

Overall impression: I am pleased to have engaged with this publication, which continues to serve a wide range of purposes in my roles as a researcher, practitioner and academic. From a decolonial perspective, it is particularly gratifying to observe the emergence of such substantive material authored by African scholars within the context of the social work profession. The

limitations identified above in no way diminish the overall scholarly value and impact of this work.

Recommendation: This publication is highly recommended both as a prescribed text for first-year students and as a valuable supplementary resource across all levels of study. It also serves as an essential companion for beginning practitioners in the field.

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