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LESSONS IN CONTINUATION AND TRANSFORMATION: THE UNITED STATES AND SOUTH AFRICA *

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INTRODUCTION

Addressing issues concerning South Africa is a daunting experience. For a people who have been through so much, and for issues so complex, I cannot promise to offer answers. In fact, answers imply more permanence than prevails in the social world we examine. If there is an answer, it is the process of dialogue that gives us ideas to put into practice and, later, to evaluate that practice. Dialogue provides not a static answer but a solution-generating process.

My perspective is from a distance. I do not know South Africa close up. I can only offer a perspective from a distance. What you can see from that distance is different from what you can see close up. It is not more or less accurate, just different. Also, what you can see close up is not the same as what you can see from a distance. Perhaps the combination of these perspectives enhances the dialogue. It is with this hope that I offer my perspective. If it is useful to you, please use it. If not, at least I have learned from the effort.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

THE NEED FOR SOCIAL WORK

Social work as a profession developed with industrialisation. While there were professional physicians and clergy prior to industrialisation, there were no pre-industrial social workers. Before industrialisation there was no need for such a profession and the activities of social work were incorporated into the everyday activities of the culture. Robert Morris (1986) in *Rethinking Social Welfare: Why care for the stranger?* conceptualised this transition within the western world. He introduced each chapter with brief quotations that captured the spirit of the times as follows:

- The early record, biblical foundations: Thou shalt not harden thy heart nor shut thy hand from thy needy brothers but shall surely open thy hand unto him. DEUTERONOMY 15:7-8.
- The Greek and Roman world: Why should the worthy be in want when you have wealth? HORACE (Latin lyric poet and satirist under the emperor Augustus, 63 BCE - 14 CE).
- The feudal world: The poor, widows, orphans, and pilgrims shall have consolation and defence so that we ... deserve the reward of eternal life. CHARLEMAGNE (King of the Franks, 768-814, King of the Lombards, 774-814, and Emperor 800-814).
- Nation-states, commercial capitalism, and government responsibility for poverty: By this means the wealth of the nation will be increased and everybody put into the capacity of eating his own bread. SIR MATHEW HALE, 1609-76 (one of the greatest scholars on the history of English common law).

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- Eighteenth and nineteenth century economic: *For the idle man there is no place in this England of ours. He that will not work and save accordingly to his means let him go elsewhere; let him know that for him the law has made no soft provision.* THOMAS CARLYLE, 1840, British historian and essayist.

In these quotations, Morris captured the destruction of the inclusive community. While there were bounds to the community, be it family, clan, tribe, fiefdom, and the like, those within the bounds were cared for. Often the religious institutions, as an integral part of daily life, organised the care. Industrialisation destroyed the inclusive community producing isolated individuals in the name of freedom and individualism. This destruction of the social fabric created a need for social work as a specialised activity.

While my examples are Eurocentric, industrialisation is a global phenomenon. Along with a market economy, industrialisation, once established, spread throughout the world in its own form of imperialism. While non-Western countries have at times presented resistance, few – if any – have been successful at thwarting the social destruction.

SOCIAL WORK AS A SPECIFIC ACTIVITY IN THE UNITED STATES

In the US, the work of Jane Addams and the Settlement House Movement (SHM) begun at Hull House was an attempt to fill a need created by industrialisation. Jane Addams (1910) stated that:

A settlement is drawn into the labor issues of its city can seem remote to its purpose only to those who fail to realize that so far as the present industrial system thwarts our ethical demands, not only for social righteousness but for social order, a settlement is committed to an effort to understand and, as far as possible, to alleviate it (166).

Addams was not attempting to adjust the largely immigrant population of inner city to the demands of industrialisation. She and many of her associates sought significant structural changes to American society (Deegan 1986). In some ways these were progressive in that they attempted to establish what had not been possible in the past. In other ways these changes were forms of resistance in that they attempted to preserve elements of successful cultures. Lundbald (1995), in discussing Jane Addams, addressed this point but framed it in terms of generational conflict. She stated that Addams, having seen the breakdown between generations, was overwhelmed by the desire “to help children of immigrants to understand their parents”. To this end the Hull House Labor Museum was developed (Addams 1910).

Hull House also offered activities that assisted the inner city poor, many of whom were immigrants, with managing their daily lives. For many this included education programmes around public health, language instruction and workers’ rights. It was not a goal of these activities to adjust the workers to the needs of the industrial order, though some cultural competence was necessary. Rather social work, as understood by Jane Addams, was a reform effort, perhaps with a radical orientation (Lasch 1965).

The origin of social work within the United States does not date solely to the Settlement House Movement. During the Progressive Era (1896-1914) the Settlement House Movement competed with the older Charity Organization Society for direction of the emerging social work profession (Day 1997). The social change orientation of the Settlement House Movement contrasted with the “improvement of the individual” approach of the Charity Organization Society (Abramovitz, 1998). This group, the Charity Organization Society, believed the cause of poverty to be personal failure, largely attributed to moral flaw and deterioration resulting from the act of receiving public relief (Axinn & Levin 1997). Their practice was based on the friendly visitor. Individuals, usually

women, would visit the homes of the poor to assist in correcting their character flaws and to encourage the poor and needy to strive for independence and the moral life (Lubove 1969). This approach also required a degree of investigation into the specific conditions and practices of the family in question.

Charity Organization Societies grew rapidly during the 1800s but the increase in poverty forced a re-evaluation. Cash payments were made to deserving families and paid staff or "agents" replaced the friendly visitor (Popple & Leighninger 1996). The approach of the Charity Organization Society lent itself to training. The agents could be taught the skills needed to investigate and encourage. Mary Richmond, the head of the Baltimore and later the Philadelphia Charity Organization Society and also a recognised founder of social work in the US, saw that this approach could be taught and called for the creation of training schools. Later she developed a training text, *Social Diagnosis*.

During this same period, industrialisation in the US changed the nature of work and the social relations formed around work. Both the social rewards and skills associated with crafts were severely diminished. In an attempt to again control one's work, though in a new setting, modern professions developed (Wenocur 1989). For the US the late 1800s and early 1900s constituted an age of professionalisation. In keeping with the times, the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, a forerunner to the National Association of Social Workers, invited Abraham Flexner to discuss the topic, *Is Social Work a Profession?* Flexner was noted for his attempt to develop a working definition of professions. Among the criteria he used were (1) a basis of science and learning, (2) practical use of specialised knowledge and (3) shared practice technique (Banning 1998/9).

Flexner's response to the question concerning social work as a profession was a resounding No. He considered social workers as mediators between clients and professionals such as doctors or lawyers. This response probably marked the drive for American social work to become professional. According to Flexner's definition, the establishment of training schools and texts were consistent with the development of a profession. Schools and texts provided the infrastructure for unifying practice and supporting research. This was precisely the direction provided by Mary Richmond in the development of a social casework approach.

Members of the Settlement House Movement, at least the early members, saw themselves as participating in an effort to restructure society to more fully meet the needs of all its members regardless of race, class, gender or ethnic group. They were dedicated to a cause and that cause was social reform. The methods for achieving this reform varied with the setting and the issue. Charity Organization Society members saw themselves as eliminating poverty from society. They had a specific method for doing this and it focused on the correction of individuals. It was their function to aid in the smooth operation of the social order (Popple & Leighninger 1996). With Flexner's report, if social work were to be a profession, the "cause" approach for social work was seriously in question.

World War I cooled many of the political ambitions attached to social work, particularly those aligned with the Settlement House Movement. By the late 1920s social work was rather compliant and moving ahead with the task of professionalisation. A series of meetings, the Milford Conference, produced a document identifying the core elements of casework, proclaiming that this core unified the various forms of social work.

Porter Lee, Director of the New York School of Social Work, articulated this perspective in his presidential address of 1929 to the National Conference of Social Work. Basically Lee stated that social work had changed from focusing on "cause" to "function". Lee (1937) defined a cause as

“usually a movement directed toward the elimination of an entrenched evil” (3.). He went on to state that “At the moment of its success, the cause tends to transfer its interests and its responsibility to an administrative unit whose responsibility becomes a function of well-organized community life” (4.). For Lee, social work had matured. It had become a function which began to play a functional role in community life. Later Lee reported that this function was based upon scholarship and training. The fit between a functional definition of social work and professionalisation became comfortable.

As a function social work had given up its position of critique. It then had no basis to resist the transformation imposed by industrialisation. Rather, in becoming a function, social work joined the industrialisation process and accepted the role of tidying up any mess that might be left behind.

The Great Depression of 1929 and Roosevelt’s New Deal further bolstered American social work’s alliance with mainstream American politics. The depression swelled the ranks of the needy. Not only were they the traditionally poor – that is, the elderly, minorities and the disabled – they now included vast numbers of unemployed working- and middle-class families. The need for services far exceeded the capabilities of largely privately funded welfare agencies. Roosevelt’s response was the New Deal, which established federally funded relief. The number of social workers increased dramatically but more importantly, their employer became, directly or indirectly, for the first time, the federal government. While social workers debated their political role, most chose the traditional view of professions as objective and non-political (Mahaffey 1987).

World War II alleviated the economic crisis and hence the political tension within social work. In keeping with the individualism of American society and the tradition of the Charity Organization Society, social work became enamoured with the work of Sigmund Freud. Social casework became psychoanalytically informed and continued its focus on the individual. The ideology of social work was thus wedded to the individualism of the political ideology. In addition, the structural position of social work was well inside the functions of the economic system. Social work had become the “them” of what the Settlement House Movement would have considered the “us” and “them”. Psychologised, American social work moved to providing psychotherapeutic services. The issues was no longer the social order but the “adjustment of the individual to the social order”. This is of course not a full account, but on the whole it is accurate and there is evidence that social work in South Africa followed similar trends (McKendrick 1990).

WEALTH, POWER AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

Some elements of American society must be kept in mind. One is the overlap of wealth and political power. For an industrialised country wealth in the US is highly concentrated. Also, in the US money controls politics. Domhoff (1967) provided ample empirical evidence in his now dated *Who Rules America?* But little has changed since then in this arena as evidenced by Domhoff (1998) and Domhoff and Zweigenhaft (1998), who showed that the more things changed the more they stayed the same.

Given these conditions it almost appears reasonable that, for the most part, US social workers envision the social order as a given, largely unchangeable entity. No social order can exist without a corresponding set of legitimating ideas, i.e. knowledge. Also, no basic transformation of the social order occurs without a competing set of legitimating ideas. Gramsci (1971) and Foucault (1972) have made this clear. Much of the American social work profession has accepted the “knowledge” that legitimates the American social order. The drive to professionalism was, if not the first, at least an early step in that direction. According to Laura Epstein (1999), given the

psychological focus, the function of much of contemporary social work is to “normalize” the population under the guise of mental health services. To the extent that this is true, social work is a form of social control contributing to the legitimisation of the current social order. Those experiencing problems are defined by the dominant professional social work practice as abnormal. When they are made normal they will “fit in” and reap the benefits of our society, a society, from this perspective, whose beneficence is unquestionable.

South Africans know better that this. The transition of the South African government and the current recreation of the civil society show that the social order is not fixed, nor permanent, nor immutable. This is a lesson, a gift, South Africa can provide to the US. South Africans also know that there are competing ways to conceptualise the social world. While not capturing the diversity of South Africa, we need only compare the ANC, IFP and the NP. South Africans know major social change can and does occur, and South Africans know social movements can and do transform societies.

SOCIAL WORK IN A NEW CONTEXT

What then is the role of social work? US history seems to indicate that professionalising the field leads to “normalising” functions. South Africa does not need to normalise in this sense. There is not a singular “normal” to which it needs to return. It needs to create and there is a role for social work that is creative. In many ways we can look to the US for negative examples.

To this point, the negative effect of professionalisation within the American experience has been illustrated. From our vantage point in the present such an argument is easy to make. Making it within the historical context in which the professionalisation occurred is another matter. Looking at social work today we can identify three overlapping trends that have called the foundation of this professional social work into question (Rossiter 1996). First, the faith that scientific knowledge is objective and that its application can solve human problems has been shaken (Code 1991; Habermas 1972). At minimum this challenges the legitimacy of a scientific foundation for social work. If we accept Foucault's (1972) perspective, we may conclude that the application of science to the resolution of social problems is a form of repression. A scientific footing is no longer enough, or even perhaps applicable. Hartman (1992) addressed the point clearly. She stated that science established its own criteria for truth. In doing so, it discredited other knowledge as being unscientific and hence irrelevant. This led to the subjugation of knowledge outside the “accepted discourse” of science.

Hull House included the immigrants' voice in the discourse. The “friendly visitors” of the Charity Organization Society did not. For the Charity Organization Society poverty, which was concentrated in minority and immigrant groups, was a product of character flaws. To give voice to the poor would be to give voice to their character flaws. Also, the professionalisation of social work, one facet of which was the establishment of a scientific foundation, also excluded the voice of the client. Their perspectives were unscientific. In some ways social workers became missionaries bringing “enlightenment” to backward people. They were experts either in knowledge or models in “correct” living that brought “solutions” to the needy. South Africa has had enough colonisation and “enlightenment” from the outside to have social workers repeat the process.

The second trend questioning the foundation of social work is the increasing distrust in generalisations based upon “universal” characteristics of human beings (Rossiter 1996). Feminist perspectives such as Spender's (1980) work on gendered language, Miller's (1976) on women's psychology and Gilligan's (1982) on gendered development contradict the notion of universal

characteristics. These characteristics, believed universal, appear now to be male characteristics and most likely Western.

In a nation as culturally diverse as South Africa, these insights, contributed largely by the feminist movement, have particular significance. To attempt to include all South Africans in a single category that contains their needs, wishes, aspirations, desires and identity is its own form of "universal" fallacy. The South African nation contains 23 different languages, the four major languages being Zulu, Afrikaans, Xhosa and English (Human Awareness Program 1992). Each of those languages conveys a culture and constructs the world in a slightly different way (De Saussure 1959; Rosaldo 1989). Each of these worlds articulates its own understanding of needs, wishes, aspirations and desires, and each of these worlds needs to be respected. A singular social work practice is not a viable goal. In fact, not only do the needs, wishes, aspirations and desires vary, what is understood as a problem also varies from one culture to another.

The third trend questioning the foundation of social work practice in the North American context is current social movements, such as the women's movement, Native organisation and disability rights groups, who have raised questions about individualistic, adjustment-orientated approaches to social work. This critique has been taken seriously by the adherents of the strengths perspective (Saleebey 1992).

These three criticisms strike at elements of the professional foundation of social work given the US model. Again, the US lessons for South Africa are primarily warnings. Basically, professionalisation, as done in the US, in its subtle ways leads to the reproduction of the existing social order. To the extent that problems such as poverty, violence and alienation, and their manifestations in personal acts, result from the structure of the society, the practice of professional social work as conducted in the US reproduces these problems. Secondly, if the primary funding source for social workers is the government, and if the government is largely an arm of the economic interests as it is in the US, the function of social work practice becomes the reproduction of economic interests as they currently exist. This is not to question the intention to do good either on the part of individual social workers or the social work profession. The intent is there, but the vision is limited to solutions acceptable to the current economic and social interests.

South Africa is, of course, not identical to the US. The perceptions of Americans are that the US is a stable country pursuing its process of development. The society is very much "in order" and moving along. South Africans are in the process of forming a nation. Things are not "very much" in order and there is little history to hold things in place. Rather, South Africa is in a creative phase, forging something new that welds together the various strengths of diverse cultural groups.

South Africa has its own unique context. For one thing, at this point political power and economic power are not synonymous. Wealth is concentrated with the white minority, but now political power does not share that concentration. While in the US linking social work to government funding resulted in tying social work to the dominant economic interests, the same may not be true in South Africa. The majority of South Africans who control the government may not have the same economic interests as the wealthy. The government may be more inclined to redistribute wealth, but such attempts by the government to redistribute wealth, either through monies or services, presents tricky balancing issues. Money or power alone is vulnerable to the elements of a modern world. The primary task in South Africa seems to be the establishment of a just civil society. This requires participation by all segments of the society and the redistribution of wealth requires a commitment – that is still fragile – to a civil society (Gray 1998a & b).

THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND THE COMMON GOOD

Adapted from the work of Frederic Reamer (1995), the concepts of “public interest” and “common good” are helpful in understanding the position of social work in South Africa. The common good refers to actions or beliefs “in a shared pursuit of values and goals” with the understanding “that the good of individuals is dependent on the good of the broader community”. The phrase “public interest” rests upon the “assumption that society is a rational alliance of primarily self-interested individuals” in which the public interest results from the sum of the private interests. While these may not be the words in the languages of the different cultural groups, the ideas seem to capture the range of orientations within South Africa. The common good assumes a collective identity, which may limit minority or individual pursuits. At one level the task of a civil society is to forge a common identity but not at the expense of diversity.

The other perspective, the public interest as the sum of individual interests, does not consider differentials in power, be they caused by wealth or numbers. South Africa has a history that attests to the fact that powerful individual interests do not serve the population as a whole. There may be no correct answer to this issue of public interest versus common good or the answer may rest in discarding the notion that there is a correct answer. South Africa has a rich, diverse cultural history with varying responses to individual and community needs. Each of these cultures has held its own solutions to establishing a just society. In many senses each of these solutions worked. If this history is respected there is a great deal to be learned from diversity.

When speaking at the level of a nation, the notion of “just” raises the discussion from the individual level to the group level. For example, is the just national society the sum of the interests of the individual groups based upon race, tribe, gender, wealth or religion? This presents the same issues as the notion of public interest. The power of the varying groups distorts what is considered the public interest. In fact, it appears that power defines public. In the US Native Americans were defined as not human, as were African slaves. South Africa experienced the same phenomenon at the hands of Europeans.

There is, however, the possibility of a dialogue among groups. This dialogue, if it respects difference, creates an overarching commonness, a history of having participated in a shared experience. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) presents an example. The individuals appearing before the TRC never assumed a common identity, but the process of engaging in the efforts of the TCR created a shared identity. The TRC was not the “Truth and Reparation Commission”. That would have shifted power but kept division. It was the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”. Its presence shifted power but forged community.

The dialogue often is not easy in part because of difference, but also in part because the cultures of the various groups have been distorted. A product of both colonialism and apartheid is the destruction of local cultures. The same is true of industrialisation (Katz 1996). The destruction of local cultures, regardless of its source, produces dependency. With the indigenous cultural solution destroyed or invalidated, the members of that culture must turn to the dominant group for solutions. In doing so they become dependent upon the dominant group, thus establishing a fairly simple power dynamic and the breakdown of civil society. Civil society here refers to the rights and obligations imposed upon individuals as a requirement of membership. These requirements are transmitted through the culture and are generally unnoticed and unquestioned. Usually internalised, they provide prescriptions and proscriptions for social interaction. Through these guides, much disruptive behaviour is contained. Social problems such as AIDS, poverty, violence and crime beset South Africa. To a great extent these problems result from a diminished civil society. These problems are in fact social problems requiring social solutions. The strengthening

of local cultures, that is the reestablishment of regional or tribal cultures and their advancement within the contemporary context, offers the solutions for social problems. The context now is a single nation of South Africa within the twentieth century. The goal, from this perspective, is unity without uniformity. This kind of unity is temporal with shifting boundaries. The relation to the cultural groups as well as the cultural groups themselves change over time. The unity is not a given but continually reconstituted through dialogue. In other words, the process of dialogue, not the result of the dialogue, offers the solution.

MULTIPLE NEEDS, MULTIPLE PROJECTS

Social work as a whole faces a number of dilemmas. Metaphorically speaking, do you feed the starving or do you teach them to procure their own food? If you feed them they will not die of starvation that day, but they will return tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. If you attempt to teach them to procure food, they may die before they can learn. Also, your "lessons" may not fit their lives. The answers rests in attending to immediate needs but finding solutions within the culture of the client and then strengthening that culture. Each culture had answers before and still has the foundation for answers now.

Food is not an issue for every group in South Africa. The needs range from first to third world issues. To accept one set of issues to the exclusion of another is to accept one culture over another. Within their contexts the issues are important and the contexts must be respected if some sense of the common good is to be maintained on the national level. It is likely that social workers will not be doing the same things nor necessarily be using the same skills in addressing the array of issues in a culturally sensitive way. Also, there is a correlation of issues to regional or cultural groups. Social work practice may become attached the needs of a particular group. One criticism of American social work as a profession is that it never attached itself to its constituency (Epstein 1992). Social workers in South Africa have a number of possible constituencies defined by both need and culture. If the social workers find their solutions within their constituencies, as has been suggested, there will be a diversity of constituent interests across the practice of social work.

Within the social work community itself the issues of the "common good" versus "public interest" emerge. Should social work be the sum of the interests it serves? Should social work develop a notion of common good and sacrifice some of the constituent interests? Can social work have enough commonness to have a coherent identity? These are the questions facing the profession of social work in South Africa.

From the perspective presented here the pitfalls of American professionalism can be avoided. The National Association of Social Workers, the professional organisation for social workers in the US, has been accused on more than one occasion of being more interested in securing the profession than in providing services to those in need. It can be argued that a secure social work profession ensures services to the needy. While this is plausible, it rests upon the idea of a fixed social order. It even assumes the solution lies within the existing social arrangement. This is not the experience of South Africa. There is the possibility of creating a fluid, responsive social arrangement. Perhaps a single national organisation for social workers is not the answer. On the other hand, there is a single national government and perhaps a single voice representing social work needs to speak with that government. If social work in South Africa were to develop a single voice, how would that voice be determined? Is this a question of power? If so, what would determine it, the number of members, number of constituents, programme budget, client's wealth, or perhaps political influence?

There is an alternative that embraces diversity yet develops a common identity. It lies in social work establishing its presence through the guidelines of a confederation. Social work would establish a voluntary association of independent organisations that, to secure common purposes, would agree to specify limitations on their freedom of action. The confederation would establish some joint machinery for consultation and deliberation, and would represent the varied interests of social work. In this way, social work as practised in South Africa, with its various constituent groups, does not lose its diversity.

Drower (1996) pointed out that the most vocal calls for professional unity for social work in South Africa have come from the privileged, white, majority segment of the social work community. This is, of course, a minority of the population as a whole. It is easy to imagine this minority significantly influencing professionalisation in South Africa and something approaching the US experience reoccurring. It appears that "the majority of the practitioners" in this instance corresponds to the majority of wealth in the country. This, however, is a minority of the population and a minority of the social needs. The needs of the white minority are not to be dismissed, but these needs occur in a context.

To the extent that the national government does not fully correspond to the economic power in the nation, the government itself acts as a balance in addressing social needs. For social work to play a significant role in programme design and implementation it needs a voice. This voice must reflect the diversity of the population as well as the diverse needs. The confederation would give a voice, while providing a mechanism for continued debate in the ongoing formulation of social work policy.

Among the usual roles for professional organisations are (1) ensuring competency and (2) defining rules of professional conduct. The suggestion is that these occur at two levels: the confederation and individual associations of the confederation. The confederation would contain the most general statements with the individual associations elaborating upon competency and conduct within their particular practice context. The individual associations may form around constituency groups or methods of practice. Included in these groupings are varying worldviews and resulting mandates. Practice methods and constituencies most likely would overlap. This does not present a difficulty since the organisational form, a confederation, is designed to include a broad diversity of perspectives without any of the perspectives being overly influential.

Drower (1996) pointed to the diversity of values among South African social workers as an impediment to unifying the profession. She also noted that the varying associations have been able to work together on issues that do not require ideological compromise, such as the issue of children in detention during the mid-1980s. This suggests there is a general area of agreement among social workers. This may be as broad as adapting the preamble to the International Code of Ethics for the Professional Social Worker. It reads in part as follows:

Professional social workers are dedicated to service for the welfare and self-fulfilment of human beings; to the development and disciplined use of validated knowledge regarding human and societal behaviour; to the development of resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; and to the achievement of social justice (Ramanathan & Link, 1999: 7).

Under a version of this umbrella statement there is ample room for the variety within social work (Gray 1992). The priorities and methods are left to the individual association. The assumption is that the individual associations will link with meaningful social units within South Africa, assisting them in their cultural development and giving voice to their needs.

This brings us close to the issue of regionalism, which can be reminiscent to many South Africans of the separatism of apartheid. Khosa and Muthien (1998) addressed this issue at length. They concluded that

“The unfolding of regionalism through the mobilization of politicized ethnicity could have dire consequences for the new democratic state, if the spiral of political violence and conflict characteristic of the late apartheid era were to flare up again. In the immediate aftermath of the elections, the new South African society faced two formidable centrifugal political forces: the one mobilizing for regional autonomy on the basis of ethnic self-determination, against the other attempting to build a unified nation from fragments of a divided society” (221).

Both processes are vital. To forge a new nation without recognition of difference will institute another form of oppression. To exclusively regionalise will diminish the possibility for dialogue and set the stage for regional conflicts. These same issues are played out in the field of social work. Both the diversity and the unity must be nurtured.

CONCLUSION

There is an opportunity in South Africa to create a socially just society. The diversity both in terms of cultural groups and forms of economic development provide this opportunity. The diversity also makes the task complicated. South Africans know that societies can be transformed. This is a lesson they have provided for the rest of the world. South Africans have also shown that transformation does not mean simply replacing one powerful group with another. The TRC showed that new and different forms can be developed.

There is a role for social work in the experience, but it is as yet ill defined. The professionalisation of social work as it occurred in the US illustrates the pitfalls. A professional social work as constituted in the US does not contribute to creativity in establishing a just social order. Hopefully South African social workers can generate a better integration of “cause” and “function”.

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