The Postmodern 'Turn' in Social Work: The Challenges of Identity and Equality

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Abstract
Diversity and demands for equality have challenged fixed notions of identity amongst the diverse populations of Europe. This development has prompted discourses about the significance of fluidity and multiplicity in identities that have given prominence to postmodern theories in the profession of social work. A number of social work educators have contributed to the ensuing debates. Walter Lorenz's work has contributed substantially to developments on this front by:highlighting the dangers of essentialising fixed identities in professional practice, referring to the failure of social workers to live up to professional values and ideals in the Nazi attack on Jews and others who were different from the Aryan norms that Hitler's regime sought to impose; arguing for racial equality in multicultural Europe; and ensuring that social work theories and practice engaged with innovations in the social sciences more generally to improve the profession's research, theoretical and practice bases. In this article, I engage with crucial debates that have shaped the profession during the post-war period, honouring Walter Lorenz's contributions to them in the process.

Introduction

Identity has been brought into social work through the demands of the 'new social movements' discourses by a range of authors who have sought to address the question of why a profession dedicated to improving people's well-being and working with them in empowering ways has been strongly implicated in practices that oppress people for who they are, not what they do (Dominelli 2002a). This question has become particularly forceful since the heady days of the 1960s when the new social movements began to resist the idea that the 'one size fits all' model of social services provision could meet the needs of people facing structural inequalities that were rooted in the way that contemporary social relations had been organised to exclude some people, particularly women, those from minority ethnic groups, disabled people, and those with a homosexual orientation from accessing required services, while privileging others. This gave rise to various forms of 'identity politics' that sought to expose the links between the personal hardships experienced by individuals located within particular social groups, and their specific social locations. The women's liberation movement encapsulated this view in the slogan 'the personal is political' (Morgan 1970) and later its converse, the 'political is personal' (Ungerson 1987).

These groups began by focusing on a single dimension of identity, e.g., gender, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation. However, these groups were diverse, and people within these categories critiqued their movements' failure to address the diverse nature of their specific exclusions within even these alternative groupings because they focused on these identities as singular, total or essentialising. Thus, the idea that there was an identity called 'woman' that suggested that all women were the same, was shown to leave out women who differed from

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the dominant norm. For example, Audrey Lorde, an African American, lesbian woman critiqued the failure of white American lesbians to acknowledge the differentiated nature of the category 'lesbian women' and suggested that the diversity that existed amongst women should be acknowledged and celebrated (Lorde 1984). Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000) made similar points in her book, *Black Feminist Thought*. Moreover, black people (1) demanded equality because they were different, i.e., not the same. Sameness was seen as requiring a loss of culture and enforced assimilation into that of mainstream society (Tasse 2001). And so, in challenging unitary notions of identity, these women were questioning the traditional bases of equality that had underpinned social policies in the Western world since the formation of the nation-state: a homogeneous identity (Lorenz 1994) sanctioned by law and notions of a uniform citizenship that bound disparate groups together as if they were one (Dominelli 2004).

In the Anglo-Saxon West, changes that began in the voluntary sector and in informal self-help groups moved into mainstream social work practice and the academy as women activists joined these institutions and sought to change them from their emancipatory perspectives (Dominelli and McLeod 1989). As a result, developments that incorporated identity issues as a crucial aspect of social work practice have prompted discourses about the significance of fluidity and multiplicity in identities (Dominelli 1998; 2002a) that have given prominence to postmodern theories of identity (Pease and Fook 1999) and social work (Leonard 1997). Incorporated into social work, these gave its direction a postmodern turn (Howe 1994). These favoured the uniqueness of individuals and fragmented much of the social and collectivist dimensions around which struggles for liberation had been waged during the 1960s and 1970s (Dominelli 2002a). Yet, postmodern theories have gained a strong foothold in the profession of social work. Their tenets have been strongly contested by those demanding a more complex understanding of identity, i.e., one that links the personal with the structural or collective elements of human existence alongside the individual ones (Dominelli 2002a) and those drawing on the idea that what holds people together are what they share in common or their sameness (Badiou 2001).

Challenges to fixed notions of identity have focused on differences amongst the diverse populations of Europe and demands for an equality rooted in these. Walter Lorenz sought to ensure that the social work profession engaged productively with these issues in ways that linked theory to practical responses that practitioners could use. One of his initiatives involved the formation of the ECSPRESS, a thematic network for the social professions that focused on issues of social exclusion and inclusion long before they were popular concerns in the social sciences. He also sought to transcend professional and disciplinary boundaries by ensuring that different elements of the profession – from social pedagogues to competence-based practitioners, spoke to each other in thought-provoking seminars. Other actions he promoted included founding key journals that fostered international perspectives and brought together intellectuals of different political hues to explore their commonalities as well as their differences. Amongst these were the *European Journal of Social Work*, *Qualitative Social Work* and *Social Work and Society*.

Through such initiatives, Walter Lorenz has contributed substantially to developments that sought to address issues raised by postmodern critics of the profession. His work included: highlighting the dangers of essentialising fixed identities in professional practice; highlighting the failure of social workers to live up to the profession's values and ideals during the Nazi attacks on Jews and others who were different from the Aryan norms that Hitler's regime sought to impose; arguing for racial equality in multicultural Europe; and ensuring that social

work theories and practice engaged with innovations in the social sciences more generally to improve the profession's research, theoretical and practice bases (Lorenz 1994; 1996; 2005; 2006). In this article, I engage with crucial debates around identity and anti-oppressive practice that have shaped the profession during the post-war period, and in so doing, honour Walter Lorenz's contributions to them.

Voices from Below

As marginalised groups organised in the 'new' social movements to challenge their unequal treatment by societies that espoused their opposite, they found their own voices and used these to begin influencing prevailing discourses both in the academy, especially the social sciences and in the fields of professional practice including social work, health and education. These voices from below became significant forces for change in the theories used to understand the world and the practices utilised to intervene in people's lives. The endeavours of those involved in the new social movements produced powerful critiques of practice by arguing that it failed to respond to their specific needs and led many within these identity groups to create their own personal social services provisions. This social activism meant that women, those from ethnic minorities and disabled people fashioned their own forms of practice, e.g., feminist social work (Dominelli and McLeod 1989; Dominelli 2002b), anti-racist social work (Dominelli 1988, 1997, 2007), black and Afri-centric perspectives in social work (Ahmed 1990; John Baptiste 2001; Graham 2002) and the social model of social work (Oliver 1990) respectively. These sought to expose the exclusionary nature of the social work practice that service users experienced and its proclivity to force them to comply with dominant social norms that categorised them as the problem; saw them as deficient and inadequate; and portrayed them as passive victims unable to help themselves, let alone contribute to the well-being of others.

These identity groups defined traditional approaches to helping service users meet their needs as oppressive, based as these were, on top-down views of professionalism that ignored service users' own knowledge about their lives and appreciation of what forms of support would best enable them to take control of their circumstances. Alongside these critiques, their responses indicated the formation of services that they had designed and held under their own control. Accordingly, women, for example, created women's health groups to respond to their health needs as women, give them medical information in a user-friendly form, increase their confidence to interact more assertively with health professions and challenge their expertise when they felt appropriate, as occurred in the case of tranquillizer groups where doctors were taken to task for over-subscribing tranquillizers for depression amongst women. Similar developments led to the creation of shelters for women assaulted by their men partners and sexual abuse survivors' groups and helplines for sexually abused women and children. These challenges and the ensuing services women provided for other women were hotly contested. For example, women's health groups in the USA were taken to court for 'practising medicine without a license' (Frankfort 1972).

Women's Voices: Challenges and Opportunities for New Ways of Viewing the World

By forming consciousness-raising groups and focusing on how personal problems could be turned into public issues, women developed health and social services resources that met their needs. Ironically, as these groups sought to enhance individual women's power, they engaged in creating new 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1991) whereby they started to police their own behaviour, e.g., women who had been sexually abused moving from the victim to the survivor by engaging in self-healing and women-generated groups (Bass and Davis 1988).

Thus, they focused on meeting their own their personal needs while expecting the wider women's movement to cater for those of similarly affected women and continue the struggle to reshape the mainstream social services that ignored them. Success on this point has been mixed. There have been changes in practice and mainstream services are now aware of these issues. Those employed in them will refer women to other agencies for help, but feminist services have not been mainstreamed and levels of male violence against women within the confines of the home and family continue to be unacceptably high (Hester and Westmarland 2005). Additionally, in social work, women dominate at the frontlines while men dominate amongst the managerial ranks (Hardina et al. 2007). And so, women continue to police other women through social services provision.

Despite the development of alternative services and their public profiles, the new social movements were themselves eventually found wanting on the identities front. In the rush to demand attention for their plight, they had substituted a general societal unitary identity for a singular one within their own grouping, i.e., amongst themselves as women, black people or disabled people. Thus, for example, women were defined as 'sisters' simply because they held gender oppression in common – a position that ignored the specificity of different women's experiences of oppression, and conceptualised all women as a homogeneous group that could fight the same gender struggles through the women's liberation movement and the feminist approaches that underpinned it (Morgan 1970). This monolithic view of women was strongly challenged by a diversity of women, each of whom complicated the picture to show the complexities of women's experiences of oppression and how very different were the issues that each had to face – working-class women, older women, disabled women. Black women challenged white middle-class women's view of feminism for denying their contribution to and presence in the wider women's movement (Amos and Parmar 1984; Bhavani 1993; Doress-Worters and Laskin Siegal 1994). Black women also rejected their exclusion from debates about disability (Begum 1992). White disabled women also sought to undermine white men's patronising approaches to their presence in professional practice, reveal the heterogeneity of the disability movement and raise their own sets of demands including the right to become mothers (Rousso 1988; Morris,1991; Wendell 1996).

As a result of the challenges from within, the diversity of the feminist movement itself expanded and became defined as feminisms. And by the time of the 'third wave' feminisms at the turn of the century (Baumgardner and Richards 2000), men were also claiming a stake in feminist activities and developments, with many claiming they too were feminist sympathisers if not 'feminists' themselves (Flood 2007). Ultimately, disabled men became involved in exposing how they were excluded from dominant definitions of masculinity (Shakespeare 1999) while other men were acknowledging the existence of masculinit*ies* (Connell 1995). The simultaneous re-assertion of men's power at the expense of women is evident in the backlash that is seeking to clawback women's gains (Faludi 1991) whether this is in the arena of reproductive rights, women's right to paid work at the same salary levels as men, or their full involvement in public life. Fundamentalist religious movements from the USA to Iran are indicative of this turn of events. Their aims and objectives are furthered by the erosion of the collective action and the forms of solidarity that sustain it, and can be seen as a function of postmodern politics which individualise people and tear away at collective shows of support for others. This fragmentation is also evident in the erosion of social reciprocity in welfare provisions which Lorenz (2006) argues is an outcome of neo-liberalism and globalisation. Thus, globalisation leads to a simultaneous homogenisation of social relations and a fragmentation of them.

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The early challenges to oppressive social work practice in the UK began with a consideration of class issues (Corrigan and Leonard 1979) and the dominance of a middle-class morality that had mainly middle-class women imposing their ideology on a reluctant working class claimant group that was expected to be grateful for any slight assistance received. The Claimants Unions were formed to insist on a rights-based approach to welfare issues, including the provision of services through social work practice. Their critique was extremely influential in community work circles where class, albeit often without cognisance of the relevance of issues of gender, age, ethnicity, or disability to their activities flourished and alliances were formed between community workers and trade unionists to facilitate community well-being (Mayo 1977; Dominelli 1990, 2006). For working class women, help was accompanied by a large dollop of moralising and 'unmarried mothers' in particular were stigmatised for their condition and expected to become moral beings to receive benefits (Kunzel 1993). Altering the plight of what we now call lone mothers or single parent women was one of a number of issues that was picked up by the women's movement very early on. Feminists eventually identified this moralising dimension as an issue of women policing other women, often to the detriment of both (Wilson 1977; Dominelli and McLeod 1989).

These issues became debated in the British social work academy as women such as myself moved out of practice and into the universities although there was no academic literature available that referred directly to these issues. I established the first women and social work course in the UK at Warwick University alongside one on social work with ethnic minorities in the mid-1970s. A few years later, along with a group of students, I organised the first feminist social work conference and was shocked at the high levels of interest in the topic. We were oversubscribed several times over! Despite controversy and resistance to these initiatives, these beginnings gave rise to feminist social work and anti-racist social work, although in my case, I have always held class, 'race' and gender together regardless of which one was my starting point. These issues have been mainstreamed to some extent, not least by having the then Central Council for Social Work Education and Training (CCETSW) recognise these as competences that required formal assessment under Paper 30. This requirement was the result of over a decade of working with and lobbying of this organisation to respond to the voices from below.

However, these gains were fragile and their place in the academy highly contentious, not least because they highlighted the failure of mainstream social systems to meet the needs of marginalised peoples. And, in the summer of 1993, with the support of the then Secretary of State for Health (herself a former social worker) and carefully orchestrated discourses in the mainstream media by traditional social work educators and conservative opinion formers, a massive attack on what was deemed 'political correctness' in the profession was launched with devastating effects on the capacity of the academy and the field to develop anti-oppressive forms of practice. And what did these assailants see that was so threatening? That educators and practitioners had sought to respond in very real ways to the critiques that were articulated by the voices from below (see Pinker 1993; Phillips 1993; Dunant 1994). In many ways, British social work has yet to fully recover from this particular backlash (Dominelli 2007). Nonetheless, crucial to its expression was a singular and totalising view of identity split along the white-black binary and a re-assertion of the powerless-powerful divide. In this case, black service users were deemed oppressed by politically correct white professionals. The reality was very different from this as the response to this attack revealed. Black and white people involved in developing anti-oppressive practice had involved black and white marginalised groups in developing anti-oppressive theories and practices.

Black and Anti-Racist Voices: Challenges and Opportunities for New Ways of Viewing the World

While women of all hues engaged in their own liberation struggles, black men and women, called black people for the purposes of this article, also organised around civil society organisations within black communities to ensure that legislation outlawing racial inequality was passed. Europeans have a historical legacy of ethnic strife on the continent and it was not until the Treaty of Rome that alliances to bring people together through peaceful means became embedded in ways that earlier attempts had not. Yet, even the organisations of the European Union have given less priority to social developments than they have done to economic ones and the issue of racism in Europe did not commence to get addressed as a common issue until much later than it had in several constituent member states. And the first report on racism and xenophobia in Europe was not produced until the early 1990s. One of the countries to forge ahead on coming to terms with a multiethnic and multicultural society, the UK, was compelled to confront its racially discriminatory approaches to ethnicities through black struggles that changed both the political landscape of the country and the legislation that governed public life. Race relations legislation, as these became termed, included the Race Relations Act, 1965, amended in 1976 and 2000.

Each version of this legislation sought to reduce the public space in which racist attitudes, words and behaviours would be tolerated. The 1965 Act sought to alter people's attitudes and behaviour's by outlawing overtly racist comments and actions such as those indicated by the infamous Smethwick by-election in 1964 where a Conservative candidate overturned a substantial Labour majority and Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 which painted a scenario of white people being out-populated by highly fertile black people and subject to violence in the streets. Negative reactions to Commonwealth citizens of colour had been evident in the hostility with which those arriving on the HMS Empire Windrush in 1948 and in the various forms of black resistance to their treatment including the Notting Hill Riots of 1958 (Fryer 1984). Although overtly racist behaviours and comments were reduced, and some (inferior) housing and jobs became more available to them, its more subtle manifestations and racist assaults continued unabated. Indeed, racist assaults did not become acknowledged as such in law until the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 when crimes could be defined as 'racially aggravated offenses' carrying additional penalties.

The Race Relations Acts introduced in 1976 and 2000 focused on requiring *institutions* to change their policies and practices to end racial discrimination. The 2000 Act was a response to the MacPherson Report's (1999) recognition of institutional racism as a critical issue in the Metropolitan Police. Thus, while the first two Acts targeted private institutions, the latter included public ones including government departments and the police. Ironically, social work texts had identified personal, institutional and cultural forms of racism back in the 1980s (Dominelli 1988). Although black people submerged their ethnic differences to form cross-ethnic alliances in the 1960s and 1970s to place their struggles against racism on the public agenda, this unity was fragile and the movement began to fragment. By the mid-1980s, people of Asian descent declared they no longer wished to be called 'black' because this hid their specific forms of suffering and the types of racism aimed at them. Research backed up their claims and showed, as they do today, that the social circumstances of those with Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins had failed to improve and poverty and unemployment were more likely to impact on their members than say those of Indian or Chinese descent (Modood et al. 1998; ONS 2002). Yet, despite this legacy of legislation and action, Britain remains ethnically divided, and the Commission on Racial Equality has recently began to investigate the

Department of Health (responsible for social work) for failing to comply with the terms of the 2000 Act.

Walter Lorenz, studying and working in the UK and Eire during this heady period, engaged with anti-racist theories and practices and contributed to advancing these through a number of publications. Key amongst these were Aluffi-Pentini and Lorenz (1996), Dominelli, Lorenz and Soydan (2001) and Lorenz (2005, 2006). These promoted the view that diversity was an issue to be celebrated and embraced rather than feared, an idea that has seen fruit in the European Union's commitment to interculturalism, especially amongst young people who are crucial to the future development of European society (Aluffi-Pentini and Lorenz 1996).

White anti-racists and black people in Britain also critiqued social services provisions that failed to meet the specific needs of racialised ethnic minorities and targeted the social work profession as ripe for change. The colour-blindness of the profession was seen as problematic because it resulted in welfare-oriented interventions that endorsed a specific culture – later acknowledged as white, middle-class and heterosexual, by treating everyone as the same. This approach had acquired a ring of universalism and ignored its own cultural relativism and location within the nation-state. Additionally, it had created the conditions under which it was easy for white people to ignore the impact of whiteness on their own ethnicity (Frankenberg 1997). New models for practice arose as a result of these critiques and have ranged from anti-racist social work (Dominelli 1988) to black perspectives in social work (Ahmed 1990) to Afri-centric perspective in social work (John-Baptiste 2001; Graham 2002). The lack of focus on the significance of identity carrying implications for the kinds of services people needed was central to these writings. And so, religious and cultural considerations became incorporated into mainstream practice and small numbers of black practitioners and academics rose through the ranks to the top of the profession. Yet, even those reaching these heights have had to address racism (Durrant 1991) and there remains considerable room for further growth and change.

At the same time, universality in interethnic relations across Europe more generally was given legitimacy through legislation and the courts which continued to define difference as an issue that had little bearing on their work unless it related specifically to the observance of equal opportunities in employment or education and, in some cases, housing provision. The exclusion of migrants and asylum seekers who had lost all citizenship and human rights simply because they had crossed national borders was not of direct concern. National legislation had already defined their claims as out of court. Moreover, notions of citizenship and welfare entitlements were strongly rooted to the specific boundaries that encompassed each nation-state (Lorenz 1994). Moreover, European level agreements now mean that having an application for asylum rejected by one nation-state means that this decision will be accepted by the others. Under the Dublin Convention of 1990 and the Dublin II Regulations which expanded upon it in 2003, a single Member State makes a decision on asylum applications that is accepted by other Member States. However, there were variations in citizenship entitlements regarding those admitted amongst these nation-states. For example, Commonwealth citizens in the UK could vote in all elections as long as they were not visitors (i.e., had lived in the UK for 12 or more months). In Germany, until recently, children of migrants who were born in Germany and had lived there for several generations could neither vote nor become German citizens. Such divergences remain despite growing convergence amongst those countries that form part of the Schengen Agreement, of which the UK is not currently one.

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In France, in contrast, universality was deemed the best way of addressing difference and responding to a multicultural and multiethnic society. Here, the idea of equality was used to include everyone within the French polity regardless of skin colour or religion through a singular notion of Frenchness (Abye 2001). The riots in the French suburbs during 2006 indicate that this solution continues to be found wanting by those who remain excluded by this form of social organisation, although in France, religion and culture seem to be more significant than skin-colour in the experience of racial discrimination and oppression. The examples of France and Britain indicate what Lorenz termed 'contentious identities' and expose the difficulties that European states have in responding to difference that both acknowledges and celebrates diversity whilst at the same time finding a basis for commonalities between various actors.

The value of equality on its own is insufficient because it does not deal with structural inequalities that fragment European societies across a range of social divisions or deal with the inherent unequal distribution of resources both within and across different societies and social divisions. Additionally, the nation-state's failure to address the issue of scarcity in social resources (Dominelli 2007) complicates the achievement of harmonious social relations by pitting people accessing them at the bottom of the ladder against each other.

This analysis is endorsed by a recent European report into racism in Europe. It found that those people who experienced uncertainty and insecurity in their future prospects were more likely to support racist practices and parties that blamed black minority ethnic groups for the social problems European societies experience (see Doward 2006). Thus, poor white working class people, especially young men without jobs or futures provide fertile ground for the growth of zenophobic political parties like the British National Party (BNP) in the UK, the National Front in France, the Northern League in Italy, the Vlams Bloc in Belgium. Other European countries have similar parties from the Far Right attracting varying degrees of adherence to their philosophies. All of these parties play on the shortage of social resources in the form of jobs, housing and education to scapegoat those cast as 'the other', namely, anyone who is different and is not accepted as belonging to that country or Europe more generally. The BNP in the UK, for example, has vowed to eliminate Muslims from the European continent, not just this particular nation-state (Doward 2006).

Policies that indicated an awareness of differences in identity continued to fall into the trap of seeing difference as a singular and unitary one. Within their specific differentiations, each Black minority and Asian ethnic group was drawn into a unitary category and all those encompassed by it were seen as the same. So, all people of Pakistani descent were seen as the same as were those whose origins were Jamaican, for example. Black women within a particular ethnic group were all seen as the same and the importance of responding to different ethnicities, religions and cultural traditions neglected. Additionally, the categorising of people through binary dyads that privileged one part of the dyad as superior at the expense of the other element left as inferior contributed to totalising views of identity, as in the white-black dyad or the male-female one. Moreover, the failure of those identifying difference on one dimension to see social divisions as also articulating and interacting with others meant that those in privileged positions could continue to externalise the problem and see it as one that did not directly implicate them. For example, men did not see gender relations as implicating them. They conceptualised these as only affecting women rather than articulating the relationships between them. Nor did white people see ethnicity as something that applied to them. Instead, they externalised it as 'out there', affecting only black people. Social workers generally subscribe to the views of the broader society, and they can easily co9llude

with institutional and cultural forms of racism although they are personally more tolerant. Thus, they can accept 'racism' as something that impacted negatively upon black people without seeing that their being privileged as white workers depended on their casting black people as 'the other'. Nor did they think that white people had ethnicity and that they needed to deconstruct 'whiteness'.

These binary ways of viewing the world resulted in what the Americans termed 'the cultural wars' where white men began claiming 'reverse discrimination' in situations where 'positive discrimination' was practised. This was illustrated in some white American men's reactions to positive discrimination in that country, especially if they had not been successful in obtaining jobs or places in higher education. That they had been privileged and acquired positions that they did not merit earlier because women and black people had been automatically excluded from even applying, or had had their qualifications devalued when they did, never crossed their minds (see Brooks 1996). Postmodern analysts suggest that this reaction is a result of totalising identities that make the privileged individual feel that the superior qualities that are ascribed to their particular social category applies to them, regardless of their actual attributes. Thus, a white man in California rejected for a place at a university, argued that he was discriminated against, not because he had lower qualifications than other candidates, but because he was a *white* man and not a *minority* man. In other words, his own racial attributes and those of minority men (or women) were treated as unitary and unchanging and located within dominant stereotypes that have privileged men in his position in the past. This approach pits the interests of one group against those of another group and is likely to perpetuate a continuing war over differences and their implications in the lives of all.

Neo-Liberalism Reinforces Us-Them Social Relations and Destroys Social Solidarity

Neo-liberalism reinforces singular versions of identity. Lorenz (2005, 2006) has highlighted the implications of neo-liberalism and globalisation and the challenges that these pose for diversity in Europe. The erosion of the European social model of welfare that pooled risks and drew on notions of social solidarity was crucial to the processes of globalisation, standing as it did as visible alternative to the American one of market-based, individualistic provisions. Growing inequalities in both Europe and other parts of the world have underscored the bankruptcy of a market-based approach. But sadly, neo-liberalism continues its triumphalist march across the globe, having anchored its spread in international social organisations such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). These bodies compel nation-states, especially poor ones, to undergo the dismantling of crucial elements of their welfare infrastructures, particularly those that were publicly funded and available free at the point of need – a key dimension of structural adjustment programmes that plunged Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia into economic underdevelopment and social chaos (Hoogvelt, 2007). The failure of the European Union to withstand WTO pressures to reduce subsidies to its welfare provisions or fund them through taxation means that the full impact of market-based provisions on European welfare states is yet to come. The General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) poses additional major challenges to European societies given that it requires nation-states to actively promote the opening up of public provisions in health, education and social services to private entrepreneurs.

The 'activation' state is already evident in many European countries (Lorenz 2005, 2006) and its prime purpose is to encourage people to engage with and tailor market-based provisions to their welfare needs. Of course, this ignores the fact that many people are structurally excluded

from the market and will never be able to buy their own welfare, e.g., women who look after children in the home and never enter paid employment. Moreover, high rates of divorce make dependency on men through the marriage contract less reliable than it once was. And so the marriage strategy has slipped down the ladder of supports. Additionally, the demonisation of asylum seekers and refugees and the rejection of their claims to protection and support provide further sites where the contradictions of neo-liberal globalisation abounds.

The rise of neo-liberalism today has to be seen as part of the backlash against working class and feminist gains of earlier decades, as the writings of Charles Murray (1990, 1994) about the underclass and the welfare state encouraging a climate of 'welfare dependency' amongst others reveal. Its focus on individual failings while ignoring structural ones highlights the vulnerability of hard won provisions as they are withdrawn. Even contracts with the state prove to be worth less than the paper that they were written on. Good examples, of these losses have been the demise of pension rights as the state threatens to end access to significant ones such as final salary schemes from its own employees while private firms have already begun to do so. In the UK, British Airways and other established companies claimed that they could no longer afford final salary schemes and sought to withdraw these rights from existing employees despite their having paid for them. After a public uproar, these companies settled for denying new employees entry to these schemes. Other firms demanded the right to insist that workers continued in the jobs beyond the age of 60. The British government supports these developments by passing legislation requiring today's young people to work until the age of 68 on the grounds that older people have become a burden that society cannot afford. These instances demonstrate that the activation state operating in the market context creates conditions that force people to become players in the market-place or do without. In other words, the market-place cannot cater for all. It also demonstrates that despite the formal existence of human rights and citizenship entitlements as the basis for claims to welfare in Western Europe, individuals cannot rely on the realisation of these as long as the state ceases to act as the guarantor of these rights.

Globalisation has reinforced and strengthened existing inequalities. The position of children is equally undermined and poverty amongst them is dire. Child poverty is evident throughout Europe to some extent, but it is high in countries like the UK where the government has promised to eradicate it by 2020. According to Save the Children, one in three children in Britain today lives in poverty. Moreover, child poverty and malnutrition is increasing all over the globe (UNICEF 2006). The demonisation of children, especially those who fail to behave as anticipated has become commonplace. In March 2007, Lewis Green, a child of 10 in Barnsley, was labelled a 'tearaway' by the media when given an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) despite his having learning difficulties and a form of autism. Press coverage focused on 'bad parenting' rather than inadequate social support for families with problems, a position made easier because the young boy's mother was a single parent. Discourses that promote links between the absent father and delinquent boys are commonplace in the British media and are used to explain the behaviour of such children. Meanwhile, relational social work has virtually disappeared from mainstream service provision, and social care has replaced social work in government parlance. Most new job opportunities in the social work field, e.g., personal advisors, workers in Sure Start and New Deal programmes have lost their link with social work. Additionally, professional social workers in statutory services have lost much of their autonomy and capacities to respond to individually defined needs through care management and its focus on bureaucratic forms of service delivery. Additionally, probation has become corrections-oriented under the drive to improve performance in preventing

recidivism and public safety. Seldom is the role of men in fomenting violence within those families considered.

Conclusions

Although more research needs to be conducted into clarifying the outcomes of globalisation and increasing inequalities in specific contexts and social groupings, the existence of continued structural inequalities that undermine people's capacities for growth and development indicate that establishing the conditions under which individual's human rights and access to social justice are far from being realised. Moreover, the links between identity and oppression are numerous, thereby complicating the responses that can tackle the complexities that those at the receiving end of oppression encounter and making holistic ones increasingly necessary. Social workers contribute to the perpetuation of oppression through their practice by directly or indirectly engaging in structural oppression – its institutional and cultural forms that are integral elements in the ways in which social relations in a globalising world have been organised. Key to eliminating structural forms of racism is that of addressing the issue of binary dyads that reaffirm racist dynamics rather than challenging them. Nonetheless, resistance to its perpetuation is evident in many of the responses by service users and practitioners. Social work educators and practitioners have much more to contribute to the elimination of oppression. And we can be sure that Walter Lorenz will continue to engage with this work.

Notes

(1) I use the terms 'black', 'white' or Asian people to make general points about racism and the impact of its dynamics on those who are oppressed by it. It should not be taken as commenting upon the identities of any specific ethnic group. I also consider all peoples as ethnicised in specific ways that have to be addressed in their particularlity.

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