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CROSS-CULTURAL PRACTICE AND THE INDIGENISATION OF AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues involved in developing indigenous social work practice. Several African writers are making an interesting contribution to the important debate on indigenisation in the social work literature in Africa (Bar-On, 1998, 1999; Mupediswa, 1992, 1997; Osei-Hwedie, 1995). However, their work is at an exploratory stage in that they have introduced and probed questions relating to indigenisation but not developed fully the way in which Western social work differs from relevant indigenous social work practice in Africa. In this paper we view social work as a Western invention and a product of modernity, and indigenisation as a postmodern notion, a form of resistance to the cultural homogenising and universalising effects of globalisation. We argue that the difference between Western and African understanding of culture is an integral aspect of the indigenisation debate and that to progress the debate further, it is necessary to establish a framework for a clear and logical articulation of the values located in each set of cultures. We explore the notion of "indigenisation as cross-cultural practice" for, as the international literature on cultural diversity shows, there needs to be an extensive dialogue between cultural groups on principles, ethical norms and appropriate practice if a truly cross-cultural world is to take shape. A cross-cultural or intercultural dialogue needs to precede any ideas about cross-cultural practice. Thus there is still a long way to go in developing indigenous social work practice in Africa. The paper ends with suggestions as to how indigenous practice models might be developed.

This paper examines the issues involved in developing indigenous social work practice and speculates about some of the reasons why this is of ongoing importance to African social work writers. Among other things, we argue (i) that social work is a Western invention and a product of modernity while indigenisation is a postmodern notion, (ii) that the difference between Western and African understanding of culture is an integral aspect of the indigenisation debate; and (iii) that an historical perspective is needed to understand both past and present influences like colonisation and globalisation respectively. In developing these arguments further, several themes are addressed, namely, the difference between Western and African values and the lasting impact of colonialism on Africa; the cultural basis of indigenisation and the notion that culture is more central than values (which simultaneously inform, flow from and mould culture); indigenisation as cross-cultural practice and the need for dialogical (postmodernist) rather than existing (modernist) models; and indigenisation as a form of resistance and a medium for transformation from externally imposed to locally developed models of practice and solutions. We begin with a brief introduction to the international literature on indigenisation and then present an overview of Southern African literature on the indigenisation debate, the source of most of the African indigenisation literature, before moving to our central thesis relating to indigenisation as cross-cultural practice. We end with several proposals as to how indigenous practice models in Africa might be developed.

Indigenisation in the international literature

A review of the international literature on indigenisation reveals that most authors employ a modernist critique and define it as the "irrelevance of Western social work to non-Western contexts". This definition implies that we know what Western social work is when, in fact, it is a contested domain and the practice of social work varies greatly both within and across contexts. It also begs the question of whether we know what African social work is and how or whether it differs from Western social work. While in Southern Africa Midgley's (1981) *Professional Imperialism in the Third World* became the dominant text on this subject, the international literature began surfacing long before this. For example, Shawky (1972:3) cautioned against modification-based approaches that involved "adapting imported ideas to fit local needs" and criticisms arose of over use of American textbooks, inappropriate casework models, and repeated expression of the need to develop indigenous education and practice (Brigham, 1982). This literature continues to grow. In Asia, as in Africa, there is increasing acceptance that "a discursive space" needs to be created "for the emergence of indigenous models" (Tsang, Yan & Shera, 2000). Tsang *et al.* (2000:149) call for a grounded approach involving "critical examination both of Western and local articulations" in order to establish a common basis for conceptual engagement. The challenge, as Cossom (1990) saw it, was to draw the best from international influences while developing models of social work education and practice relevant to local and regional contexts and cultures.

Ife (2000) warned against seeing Western social work as an entity over which there was universal agreement pointing out that there were differences even in Western contexts. For example, Wyers (1991)[1] shows how clinical practice predominates in the USA and policy is not generally recognised as a domain for direct social work practice. In the UK social work fits Bar-On's (1999) description of anti-oppressive practice and there are similar trends there, as in South Africa, marginalising social workers (Gray, 2000). An article in the *Guardian*[2] on Friday 9th August 2002 revealed the experience of a New Yorker working in the social services in the UK, where social workers comprise only 10% of the total workforce, feel helpless to change anything and morale is at an all time low. He says, "What is passed off as social work here would be regarded as casework or case management in the US. Casework is basically overseeing a case, looking after your clients, and moving it from A-Z in a bureaucracy. You don't have time to do social work interventions such as counselling, family work, advocacy, skills training, community work, etc". Social work in the UK has become a cog in the wheel of a form-filling bureaucracy (Leveridge, 2002). In Australia there is an increasing literature on critical social work, reflective practice and narrative therapy (Fook, 2002; Healy, 2000), and Sweden possibly offers the best models of rights-based practice.

Penna, Paylor and Washington (2000:110) provide a different perspective. They argue that "it is time to think globally about social work and consider how professional social work can develop political and practice intervention strategies that can adequately react to … circumstances at a transnational level". International social work bodies, like the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work, share this perspective. Clearly there is thus a relationship between the literature on indigenisation (aimed at finding local solutions) and internationalisation (aimed at identifying commonalities shared across diverse

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1 This article shows how terms in North American literature about policy and direct practice are very different to the way in which they are understood in Southern Africa (see Mazibuko, 1996).

2 http://society.guardian.co.uk/socialcarestaff/story/0,1141,771997,00.html

contexts), specifically, debates about the nature and compatibility between international social work, universal social work values and indigenous social work practice.

Over the past thirty years social work writers have been trying to raise awareness of the dominance of Western influences on social work and have been stressing the need for social work in the developing world to free itself from the "in-built assumptions and cultural biases of first world theories and models of practice" (Cossom, 1990:3) and to develop indigenous education and practice (Brigham, 1982). Recognising the challenge to draw the best from international influences while developing local models of social work education and practice (McKendrick, 1990), some have suggested social development as an alternative (Midgley, 1995), as the case of South Africa shows.

South African literature on indigenisation

International discourse on indigenisation, localisation, authentisation, acceptability, relevance, and appropriateness began to permeate the South African literature during the 80s. The indigenisation movement gained momentum through the 90s, as the transition to a democratic South Africa became a reality. At the beginning of the 90s there was agreement among some progressive social workers that the South African welfare system was irrelevant to the needs of the vast majority of South Africa's population. It was "based on First World models of social welfare, largely British and American, and (was) also primarily urban-based" (Taback, 1991:268). It was divided and discriminatory and unsupportive of national development (McKendrick, 1990). Describing welfare services as essentially curative, specialised and reliant on highly trained professionals, Patel (1991) called for a future welfare policy that promoted *appropriateness* and the development of an *authentic* social welfare system based on the unique features of South African society. Louw (1991:23) highlighted the challenges to transformation, not least "the abject poverty of the vast majority of South Africans ... one of the most disastrous consequences of ... apartheid". Thus the policy of social development was chosen as the one most likely to redress past imbalances and steer South Africa towards a just and democratic welfare system (Ministry of Social Welfare and Population Development, 1997).

This new developmental welfare system provided the context for the transformation of South African social work, the history of which had been intertwined with the institutionalisation of apartheid. It was therefore not surprising that the civil servants running the bureaucracy were white and conservative (Patel, 1991:162) and that to achieve the desired change, the government had to play an active role in restructuring the social services, including "social work education and personnel development which will have to include the use of community development workers on an extensive scale". Rural development, multi disciplinary training and the upgrading of existing care personnel working in childcare, advice and information services, and programmes for the aged and disabled became a central focus (Patel, 1991). The impact on social work was profound for its practice was "in the main a response to white needs, largely through therapeutic intervention. Blacks, the most needy section of the population, (were) minor recipients of services, and much of the service they (did) receive (was) *inappropriate*" (McKendrick, 1990:13, *italics added*). Hence social workers found themselves responding to people's needs in ways that were neither *relevant* nor *acceptable*, perpetuating a system in which the causes of social problems were largely ignored.

The transfer of social work knowledge, theory and practice from the UK and USA to South Africa generally involved the processes of transmission, indigenisation, authentisation, and localisation. *Transmission* refers to the imitation of Western models of social work in education and practice (Cossom, 1990). *Indigenisation,* which appears to have entered social work discourse following

the 16th International Congress of Schools of Social Work in The Hague in 1972 where it was defined as "the process of relating social work function and education to cultural, economic, political and social realities of a particular country" (Resnick, 1976:22). Shawky (1972:3) defined it as a process of "adapting imported ideas to fit local needs". *Authentisation* involves "the creation or building of a domestic model of social work in the light of the social, cultural, economic characteristics of a particular country" (Walton & Abo El Nasr, 1988:136). *Localisation* was a term used by McKendrick (1990) to mean adapting universal models and theories to local contexts while retaining international standards of excellence. In postmodern terms it has a different meaning, namely, to develop practice models and responses within local contexts – of the people, by the people and for the people.

The themes that permeate Southern African literature on indigenisation include references to a "colonial past", "wholesale transplant of British experience", "urban bias", "curative and remedial orientation", "inappropriate American textbooks", "need to develop indigenous training materials" and so on (Kaseke, 1998; Mupediswa, 1992, 1997; Osei-Hwedie, 1995; McKendrick, 1990; Midgley, 1996, 1998). Osei Hwedie (1993, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 2001), perhaps the most prolific African writer on indigenisation, maintains that it "implies finding new ways or revisiting local ideas and processes of problem-solving and service-delivery. This involves understanding and articulating local indigenous resources, relationships, and problem-solving networks; and the underlying ideas, rationale, philosophies or values" (Osei Hwedie, 1996b:216). Mabetoa (1999) attempted to apply this process to school social work in rural communities. While her model is responsive to the context in which it is being applied, there is little hint as to what makes it unique or indigenous to local culture. Likewise Engelbrecht's (2001:347) "indigenous social work field practice education: an ecosystems perspective". Although community development has been touted as the method of choice in poverty eradication, there are many writers who point out the importance of working with individuals even in under-developed contexts (Jacques, 2000; Midgley, 1991; Silavwe, 1995; Sturgeon, in Gray, 1998). Relevant practice clearly remains a matter for discussion and debate.

Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk, the major South African journal of social work, and the *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, offer perhaps one of the best records of attempts to document ways in which social work has attempted to respond to the Southern African context. However, there is still little evidence to show how social work practice in Southern Africa differs from that elsewhere. At best, these journals provide a record of practice and perhaps this is a good example of adapting Western models to fit local contexts which, after all, is what indigenisation is about or is it? What is at the heart of the continuing call for indigenous theory and practice? At this juncture there are still many unanswered questions. Is indigenous social work practice even possible given the dominance of Western social work thought? Rather than seeing indigenisation as the adaptation of international models to local contexts, why not see it as the evolution of indigenous practices that are transferable from local to international contexts? Midgley (1991:97) believes that African social workers have much to teach the rest of the world about social development and multicultural social work practice. Operating as they do in situations of widespread poverty where "they often deal with cultural beliefs that challenge conventional social work wisdom … they have sought to integrate multicultural and social development concerns". While some writers have examined sociocultural factors in working with people with AIDS in South Africa (Bernstein & Van Rooyen, 1994; Van Rooyen & Engelbrecht, 1995), there are few such examples. Most of the literature proclaims the importance of indigenisation but tangible examples of culturally sensitive practice reflecting the diversity of Southern Africa's people and the uniqueness of its problems is needed. South Africa offers a beacon of hope. It has much to teach the world on peace and reconciliation (Gray & Mazibuko, 2002). Changes of this nature are truly indigenous solutions that ought to be documented with pride for

"South Africa is part of Africa, not a little bit of Europe" (McKendrick, 1990:245) or the USA or the UK.

Beyond multiculturalism: Indigenisation as cross-cultural practice

Relevance of Western models

The thrust of the indigenisation debate comes from the perceived irrelevance of Western culture, values, knowledge, and practice models to African contexts. Thus says Osei-Hwedie (2001:8) indigenisation refers to "the idea that the theories, values, and philosophies that underlie practice must be influenced by local factors" because "indigenisation emphasises a cultural dimension, a cross cultural aspect in and approach to social work". Because social work in Africa is a product of Western colonisation and Western ways of doing things, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that indigenous social work practice is central to postmodernity (or late modernity according to Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Habermas, 1994; and the like). Hence, what Osei-Hwedie omits that is crucial to our view of indigenisation as a postmodern notion, is that it must *include local cultures*. Thus a more useful definition would read, "Indigenisation refers to the idea that the theories, values, and philosophies that underlie practice must be influenced by local factors *including local cultures*".

Emphasising the cross-cultural dimension of indigenous practice raises the question of whether Africans and Westerners have the same understanding of culture or whether their respective understanding of culture differs. In other words, how do Africans conceptualise, understand and articulate culture given that even in the West there are different ways of understanding culture? The Enlightenment has influenced definitions of culture in the West for a long time (Coleman & Higgins 2000:55-76; Parekh, 2000:68-69; Taylor, 1994:25-73; Tully, 1997). Today, many people still use an Enlightenment notion of culture as "separate, fixed and internally uniform" (Tully, 1997:10). Others share the postmodernist view of culture as *inter alia* fluid, interactive, overlapping, negotiable, resisting, changing, and redefining, not necessarily confined to national borders, but also located in a diaspora.

A good example of Enlightenment thinking about culture is found in liberalism. It denies the importance of culture in terms of its explanation of human identity, that is, its ontological foundations. Bar-On (1998:155) hints at this when he argues that "in the West assumptions about the meaning of life revolve around the individual. Derived from the Christian ethos and capitalist mode of production, these assumptions hold that people are independent moral entities, free of historical context". But what he omits from his analysis is that in the West, with the help of liberalism and naturalism (rather than Judeo-Christian origins), the individual is conceptualised not only as free of a historical context, but also as free of a social and cultural context. Liberal individuals are not viewed as cultural creatures, that is, they are not seen as having a culture or being culturally embedded. If culture is recognised at all, as Will Kymlicka (1995) points out, it is in the private arena, never in the public, professional, or social work arena.

This question is all the more relevant if what Osei-Hwedie (2001:8) asserts is true, namely, that "culture … does not refer to the past". In Western understanding the past, or history, is an integral aspect of culture. It is also a feature of one's identity. Does Osei-Hwedie (2001) use an African adaptation of the Western Enlightenment notion of culture? What are the origins of this cultural understanding? What are African scholars saying or writing about culture? Is there an appreciation that the differences between Western and African notions of culture impact on indigenous social work theory and practice?

Osei-Hwedie (2001:9) points out that "Western models of social work are indigenous, but only to the West". Here he touches on the pivotal notion that rethinking values requires not only defining African and Western values, but moving towards the possibility of adopting cross-cultural values in a multicultural society and rethinking values for indigenous social work practice in Africa. Values are like culture, though, they can be changed and redefined and it is important to understand that values often clash and conflict even in the same political, cultural or professional context. Isaiah Berlin (1969) points this out in *Two Concepts of Liberty*.

Multiculturalism

The basic premise of the policy of multiculturalism is acceptance and celebration of cultural diversity within the nation-state. As already mentioned, multiculturalism is part of a liberal framework based on the usual liberal values of the primacy of the individual and his/her autonomy and rights. As such it is a private rather than a public morality. These values are not too dissimilar from those underpinning social work practice. Moreover, the policy of multiculturalism varies slightly in different contexts. In Canada, for example, the policy originally meant a commitment to racial and ethnic equality. In Australia, it originally meant maintenance of cultural identity, equality of opportunity and preservation of social cohesion. Today, the policy has shifted its emphasis to inclusion of all Australians. This has been a response to the nation's demands for greater social cohesion in the wake of Pauline Hanson's "One Nation" party. Citizenship is, in fact, the new focus of the policy of Australian multiculturalism. So, while the fundamental principles of the liberal policy of multiculturalism have changed in the last 30 years, the values are still the same, an emphasis on the individual, freedom, basic human rights and loyalty to the liberal principles of Australian society.

Bar-On (1998:150) takes a peculiar spin on multiculturalism by arguing that social workers are "urged to propagate multicultural values actively and directly" when they are, in fact, encouraged to consider the liberal policy of multiculturalism and recognise the principle of respect for cultural diversity underpinning this policy. He misses the point that multiculturalism is a policy designed and implemented by individual states. It is erroneous to assert that multiculturalism is a new term for "multi-racialism" and "multi-nationalism" (Bar-On, 1998:150). As suggested earlier, multiculturalism is a policy implemented by governments to deal with the increasing cultural diversity of nation-states brought about by immigration. In Africa, the situation may be different. If so, this needs to be spelled out. What is the basis of multicultural policy there? There is a distinct lack of a historical framework in Bar-On's (1998) perspective. History is an important vehicle or medium for conveying what happens locally and globally. Further, Bar-On's (1998) theme of culturalism versus universalism, with his spin on cultural relativism versus moral relativism, is an intellectual exercise in logic and argumentation rather than a sociologically accurate reflection of the relationship between social work and the policy of multiculturalism. Rather than making a contribution to the dialogue between social work and multiculturalism, he engages in an exercise in deontological theorising on democracy, social justice and recognition of cultural diversity, which is discredited in the postmodern literature. Social work is possibly closer to universalism than culture because it is essentially a liberal profession. Finally, Bar-On's ideas about values are laboured and one wonders whether people still consider the notion of absolute values today. Ideas about "absolute values" were rejected in Australia in the 1970s. That "social workers find themselves in a position akin to many so-called liberals who claim to respect people's way of life *provided these people abide by their, the liberals', rules*" (Bar-On, 1998:154) might be true but interestingly, the policy of multiculturalism makes the same demands on citizens. Multiculturalism respects one's right to maintain one's cultural identity in Australia

provided one abides by the liberal's rules. It is possible that in some cases, the values of social work and those underpinning the policy of multiculturalism converge.

Multiculturalism needs to be situated in a historical context in Africa. Every culture has different values and morals. Today this is recognised and well known. Policies, such as multiculturalism, are put into place so that people will not always be "at each other's throats" (Bar-On 1998:160). This example reflects a Social Darwinism of the worst kind and ignores the postmodernist discourse on "cross-cultural dialogue" and the "ethical challenge of living with others" (Yeatman, 2000:95-103; Habermas, 1994:107-148); living "together-in-difference" (Young, 1999:245); or the idea of "civic pluralism" (Kalantzis, 2000:99-110) as the basis for intercultural living. Postmodernism takes us "beyond the ethnic awareness school of multiculturalism ... (and) challenges simple solutions which offer cross-cultural competence through pre-packaged and formulaic techniques" (Husband, 2000:231).

The role of culture in countering the universalising effects of globalisation

As Marden (1997:38) rightly points out, "the age in which we live ... is having an immediate impact on collective identity" and "the distinction between the global and the local is ... becoming quite complex". We are hemmed in between "the power of nationalism and its persistent hold over political consciousness" and the "emergence of a "cosmopolitan" culture and a global civil society" (p. 39). In Africa this is possibly least felt since Africa appears to lag behind the rest of the world in information technology. For example, according to Bissio (in Marden, 1997:43), relative to the 30 million email users worldwide, the total number in Africa "can be counted in hundreds"43).

Further, it is widely recognised that "the struggle for economic existence and cultural identity is most pronounced" (Marden, 1997:48) today. This includes African countries. One might speculate about reasons for this. African nation-states provide conflicting messages about the role of the state and appear to vacillate between individualist, statist, populist, and collectivist approaches (Midgley, 1992). The case of Zimbabwe shows a peculiarly individualist (or could it be statist) approach while embracing the rhetoric of populist and collectivist discourse. Here the power of the state predominates despite global human rights charters and both African and international opposition to its treatment of white farmers. Thus the "cultural pretensions of modernism" embodied in "problematic statist conceptions of sovereignty" (Marden, 1997:53) like nationalism, fundamentalism and the powerful centralised state prevails. Consequently, new international social movements concerned with human rights, the environment and the like have little impact on authoritarian African nation-states like Zimbabwe.

Against this backdrop, clearly those engaged in the indigenisation debate in Africa do have access to the international media and are concerned about attempts to define cultural expression and impact on "ideas of "the nation" and their strong cultural associations" (Marden, 1997:56). How does the indigenisation movement in Africa counter global processes that are impacting on local practices and transforming the traditional world? Is this their central concern or are they still attempting to deal with "the Eurocentric heritage of colonialism?" (Habermas, 1994:116; cf Bar-On, 1999). Either way, Marden (1997:56) points out that the very concept of culture is particularistic and that defining cultures is inexorably linked to defining political boundaries. Yet even within the political boundaries of the nation-state there is cultural differentiation and complexity. Thus the state uses its "power to offset the anarchical tendencies of this cultural landscape". Within this modernist view of the state, if indeed colonisation remains a major factor, indigenisation might be seen as "reactivation of tradition".

Where do we begin to define African culture?

The international literature on globalisation suggests that "the essential features of daily life" and with "sites where people accommodate themselves to and construct their everyday lives" (Marden, 1997:57) are important for most people. These include the media, literature, informal associations, and the like. Therefore, the first step would be to identify the features of daily life for Africans.

Secondly, we need to accept that reactivating tradition means simultaneously reconstructing the past and attempting to construct new traditions (Marden, 1997). Advocates of indigenisation can take heart in the knowledge that despite the forces of globalisation, perhaps least felt in Africa, nationalism and national cultures continue to thrive.

Thirdly, we need to deal with notions of cultural identity, diversity and difference, especially in South Africa where culture and race were so intertwined in the apartheid era wherein "the national culture was imposed and sanctioned by means of authoritative cultural institutions, the school system being central to these" (Yeatman, 2000:96). Colonialism and systemic dispossession were other divisive features in Africa's history. Given this troubling history, how are they going to devise a future in which diverse cultures can live together in harmony? The international literature on cultural diversity tells us that every nation has a historical "Other" (Bauman, 2001:181; Beck, 2000; Benhabib, 1992; Yeatman, 2000). Who is the "Other" in Africa? After the media coverage of the recent Tri-Nations rugby match between South Africa and Australia in South Africa, one might not be far wrong in concluding that Australia had become a safe "Other" for the white dominated rugby public of South Africa. In Zimbabwe Blair and his UK is the "Other". But who constitutes "the Other" on a daily basis? The flip side of this question might be what constitutes African-ness? Is citizenship a right by birth or race? Is culture and belonging linked to place? Or do people locate their cultural roots in their country of family origin? For many white Southern Africans their cultural roots would be in Europe. Others identify their culture, identity and belonging with people (Read, 2000).

Marden (1997:60) suggests, "individuals invest in places and thereby empower themselves collectively". According to Zizek (in Marden, 1997:60), "society's loss of identity and lack of fulfillment is not attributable to this imagined Other, but to its own antagonism which remains largely obscure because of the propensity to transfer this internal negativity onto the Other". Could this be one dynamic at work in the indigenisation debate in Africa? Could it be that construing colonialism or globalisation as the "Other", masks the confusion Africans feel with their own changing cultural identity?

TOWARDS AN INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK MODEL

First, *a dialogical approach is needed*. As the international literature on cultural diversity shows, an extensive dialogue is needed between cultural groups on principles, ethical norms and appropriate practice if a truly cross-cultural world is to take shape. Therefore, a cross-cultural (or intercultural) dialogue needs to precede any ideas of cross-cultural practice. In this process "cultures" are articulated by those very people interested in developing indigenous social work theory and practice in Africa. There are many cultures in South Africa's "rainbow nation" as Nelson Mandela affectionately called it. What did he imply by this? Did he view multiculturalism as tolerance of difference or was he proclaiming South Africa's commitment to multiculturalism as central to its civic nationalism? Given that civic nationalism implies that "social order is made to be contingent on a shared cultural identity" (Yeatman, 2000:98), will "socialisation and acculturation into this culture" (Yeatman, 2000:96) of multiculturalism become a condition of South Africa's fledgling democracy? What does President Mbeki convey in his notion of African Renaissance? Is he calling for a rebirth of African culture? Will this become the shared national

culture? Discussion of the meaning and implications of this discourse will help clarify the African perspective on and understanding of culture.

Secondly, to progress the debate on indigenisation as inclusive of and responsive to local cultures, it is imperative that *a clear definition of African culture is offered* and that a comparison of African and Western understanding of culture is a necessary corollary. In fact, this comparison needs to underpin the whole indigenisation debate. It may be that the difference between Western and indigenous social work practice hinges more on the different interpretation of culture rather than of values for, after all, culture gives rise to values. What is needed is a working definition of the different ways in which culture is conceptualised in Africa. Language too is central to culture. Where is the discussion on language and culture in the indigenisation movement? Language is central to the postmodernist discourse and its reaction against the universalising forces of globalisation for, with the dominance of English in global cultural products, local languages - the principal tools of cultural expression - acquire the image of inferiority. It is not surprising, therefore, that "an indigenous language disappears every two weeks. It is estimated that by the end of the 21st century, 5,500 of the current 6,000 languages now spoken will simply be as dead as Ancient Greek and Latin" (Sardar & Wyn Davies, 2002:126). How many African languages will end up on the cutting floor?

Thirdly, the definition of *indigenisation as a reform process*, part of which is the *reactivation of tradition*, might be useful. There is no doubt that the influence of colonisation still impacts on African social work practice, hence the push for indigenisation of social work. But on the other side of the historical coin is globalisation. So the project of indigenisation might be hemmed in by two historical influences: colonisation and globalisation. It might be more useful to recognise that we are living in a "post-colonial global society" where there is "legitimacy of difference"[3] and "the development of transnational standards of citizenship and rights" (Yeatman, 2000:95). Within this context, the debate needs to focus on the differences between Western social work and the proposed indigenous model. How would the latter differ from, and hence improve upon, the Western model? One suggestion is to strengthen the indigenous notion of social work as a local practice by linking it with the global notion of social work for, as Hwedie (2001) notes, knowledge is becoming increasingly international. Another is to link the movement or project for indigenisation with "indigenous particularity" and become part of "the rapidly growing network of indigenous peoples concerned with land rights, political organisation and solidarity" (Marden, 1997:42).

Fourthly, it might be helpful to see *indigenisation as a form of resistance*. Marden (1997) adopts a postmodernist analysis that allows us to focus on indigenisation as a form of resistance to notions of cultural homogeneity through global transformation of industrial capitalism and mass-market consumerism and, in so doing, provides a useful argument for locating the question of indigenous social work practice in Africa in the context of globalisation. He points to the tensions between culture (particularism) and globalisation (universalism), an old dilemma in Western philosophy. These tensions raised by postmodernism are important in view of Bar-On's (1998) perspective, which seems to argue that "if values are incompatible, it won't work". The idea of "the ethno-historical" (Marden, 1997:56) is important to ideas of indigenisation. Bauman's (cited in Marden,

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3 It is important to recognise that the 'politics of difference' is tied to recognising minority groups. It represents a challenge to liberal individualism with its homogenising effects and has implications for health and welfare provision. It denotes a multiculturalism that respects cultural diversity in both the private and pubic spheres. It requires structural pluralism, a system that is responsive to people's special needs, even if they constitute a minority group (see Husband, 2000).

1997:60) notion of the stranger, or "the Other", is an extremely important point in the postmodernist literature on cultural diversity. Every society has "strangers". The stranger "comes in uninvited and invades my life-world" (p. 60). In Africa, who is the stranger, who is "the Other"? Marden (1997:60) argues that "in facing the Other we are brought into an ethical relation". This is a vital point. It points to the fact that all social and cultural relationships need to consider and explore "the ethical demands of coexistence"(Yeatman, 2000:94). The issue of ethical living relates to Bar-On's (1998) claim that strangers are always at each other's throats (a Hobbesian notion going back to 16th century English liberalism) and hints that there are ways of living with strangers from other cultures as Benhabib (1992), Bauman (2000), Habermas (1994), and Taylor (1994) indicate. Engaging in "ethical-political discourses in which" cultural groups "attempt to reach agreement on their self-understanding"(Habermas, 1994:126) could be a beginning.

Finally, since African writers on indigenisation are particularly interested in impacting on social work education (see for example, Mupediswa, 1992, 1997; Osei-Hwedie, 1995, 1996b), it might be useful to *write and teach from indigenous case studies* (Cossom, 1990; Nagy & Falk, 2000). This works best within a problem or experience based model of experiential learning but can be employed within other pedagogical models (Goldstein, 2000; Gibbons & Gray, 2002; Gray & Gibbons, 2002). Built into the experiential curriculum might be tasks for students to construct case studies from practice experience emphasising cultural aspects and focusing on appropriate culturally sensitive interventions. Students need to understand, however, that they need to "start from a critical reflection upon the current context of the politics of ethnicity and citizenship ... and reflect upon the current construction of national and ethnic identities ... (Hence) social work education must provide coherent insight into the history and current formulation of ethnic identities and multicultural policies in the state in which their students will practice" (Husband, 2000:232). The mass media can be useful both in helping students to understand this broader context and in providing case studies as stimuli for culturally sensitive approaches. Lastly, students could be encouraged to read African literature, which teachers could integrate into classroom learning, looking at how African stories reflect African culture and experience. As Cossom (1990:23) noted, "the introduction of indigenous cases into the curriculum is one step in helping a school of social work address local issues and realities, and freeing its curriculum from dependence on a literature produced in a different context".

CONCLUSION

In this paper we argued that social work was a Western invention and a product of modernity while indigenisation was a postmodern notion, a form of resistance to the cultural homogenising and universalising effects of globalisation. While several African writers are making an interesting contribution to the important debate on indigenisation in the social work literature in Africa, their work is at an exploratory stage in that these writers have introduced and probed questions relating to indigenisation but not developed fully the way in which Western social work differs from relevant indigenous social work practice in Africa. Further, we argued that the difference between Western and African understanding of culture is an integral aspect of the indigenisation debate. To progress the debate further, it is necessary to establish a framework for a clear and logical articulation of the values located in each set of cultures. Thereafter, we explored the notion of "indigenisation as cross-cultural practice" drawing attention to the international literature on cultural diversity which shows that there needs to be an extensive dialogue between cultural groups on principles, ethical norms and appropriate practice if a truly cross-cultural world is to take shape. A cross-cultural (or intercultural) dialogue needs to precede any ideas of cross-cultural practice. Thus there is still a long way to go in developing indigenous social work practice in Africa.

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