Making sense of African thought in social work practice in Zimbabwe: Towards professional decolonisation

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Abstract

The problem with current social work practice in Africa is that following its development in the West, it came to Africa grounded in values and ideologies stemming from capitalism, social Darwinism, the protestant ethic and individualism, all of which are un-African. Western ideas permeated social work institutions despite the ethical conflicts between traditional African cultures and values and the Western Judeo-Christian norms on which social work was based. Despite the political independence of most African countries, the profession has remained stuck in Western methods, values, principles and standards. Some of the traditional social work principles seem alien in African contexts. The social work principle of individualisation, for example, is un-African as it promotes individualism and yet life in Africa is communal. The content used in social work education and training in most institutions in Zimbabwe originated from elsewhere outside the African continent and as a result does not respect Africana values, beliefs, mores, taboos and traditional social protection systems. As it stands, social work in Zimbabwe in particular is a 'mermaid' profession based on Western theory but serving African clients. If social work in Africa is to decolonise, practitioners should have an understanding of and respect for African beliefs and practices. This is mainly because there is no clear separation between the material and the sacred among indigenous African people. This article therefore challenges African scholars to generate Afrocentric knowledge that should be imparted to African students for them to be effective in the African context. Afrocentric social work should be based on, improve and professionalise traditional helping systems that were in place prior to the coming of the Whites to the African continent.

Keywords

Afrocentric social work, Afrocentricism, indigenisation, social work

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Introduction

The problem with current social work practice in Africa is that following its development in the West, it came to Africa grounded in values and ideologies stemming from capitalism, social Darwinism, the protestant ethic and individualism, all of which are 'un-African'. Gray et al. (2014) argue that the situation was worsened by the United Nations, which pushed colonial administrators to import social work education and practice to Africa. Thus Western ideas permeated social work institutions despite the ethical conflicts between traditional African cultures and values and the Western Judeo-Christian norms on which social work was based (Gray et al., 2008). According to Gray et al. (2014), it was due to these foreign influences that social workers in Africa completely disregarded traditional cultures and support systems based on collective values. As contended by Thabede (2005), the conventionally accepted paradigms and approaches of Western thought do not provide an adequate understanding of African people. Social work in most African countries, Zimbabwe included, does not acknowledge the relationship between the living and the departed ancestors. Midgley (1983) corroborates this by arguing that social welfare policies, theories and methods used in most third-world countries are almost carbon copies of those of the imperialist countries. It is sad to note that social work training institutions in Zimbabwe have been oblivious to the need to indigenise social work methods. Social work practice needs to be much more contextually oriented. Gray and Fook (2004) acknowledge that 'there is room for many types of social work across widely divergent contexts united by human rights and social justice goals' (p. 627). They argue that dialogical processes with local contexts are more likely to create relevant models than imported ones. Ejaz (1991, cited in Gray and Fook, 2004) notes that there are differences in the cross-cultural application of the principle of self-determination, which makes universal social work unrealistic. Thabede (2008) further notes that it is inappropriate to apply European theories of human behaviour to explain the behaviour of Africans. It is at this juncture of paramount importance to unpack the word Africa. For the purpose of this article, the term African will refer to Black indigenous people residing on the African continent or Black people of African origin in the African diaspora. This will exclude coloureds, Whites, Indians and Arabs residing on the African continent.

As Makhubele (2011) notes, with the emergence of Western systems of knowledge, indigenous knowledge systems have been regarded as inferior practices and have been relegated to lower levels. Gray (2002, cited in Gray and Fook, 2004) notes that in Africa, it can be argued that colonisation destroyed much of what was good, right and just in an African context. If social work in Africa is to be indigenised, practitioners should have an understanding of African traditional religion (ATR), which is the fountain and springboard of African life. African worldview(s) differ from other worldviews across the globe. Unlike African thought, which values the spiritual dimension of phenomena, Western thought focuses on the visible and physical reality, which is not relevant in African thought. For Africans, supernatural causes are the explanation for everything (Thabede, 2008). This is mainly because there is no clear separation between the material and the sacred among indigenous African people. As Mbiti (1975) argues, '… in traditional African communities, life is religion and religion is life' (p. 12).

Thabede (2005), a key proponent of Afrocentric social work, indicates that practising social workers in Africa should understand the concepts of traditional healing, ancestral worship and other rituals key to traditional African life as well as appreciate the differences between Western and African ontologies. This article, which argues for the decolonisation of social work in Africa, was set up against a background of professional imperialism. The article demonstrates how social work in Zimbabwe is an invention of her colonial masters and suggests indigenisation of the profession. Just like in many parts of Africa, indigenous models of helping and natural

kinship networks were overlooked in forums of professional and educational development. Gray and Fook (2004) question what African social work would be like if colonisation had not destroyed African helping modes.

It is important to unpack the terms decolonisation and indigenisation. Decolonisation is the process of a colonised people releasing themselves from collective oppression and asserting their right to self-determination (McNabb, 2017). In the context of social work practice, it may refer to replacing Western social work methods with endogenous helping methods that have always been in place among Africans prior to the coming of the Whites. Indigenisation is one of the processes of decolonisation and it refers to the extent to which social work fits local contexts (Gray, 2005). According to Shawky (1972), indigenisation refers to adapting imported ideas to fit the local needs. Midgley (1992) notes that the exportation of knowledge and technology reflects the complex process of colonialism and professional imperialism.

This article focuses on the African worldview in the context of the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe was colonised by Britain from 1890 to 1980. The country is located in Southern Africa, and according to the 2012 census report it has a population of about 13 million people. The country used to have a thriving agriculture industry, which has since dwindled due to poor governance and poor relations with the international community. It is characterised by high poverty and unemployment rates. It is made up of two major distinct ethnic groups, namely the Shona and the Ndebele. The Shona comprise about two-thirds of the estimated 13 million national population (Central Zimstats, 2012) and are known to have settled in Zimbabwe long before the Ndebele. There are various sub-groups under the umbrella name Shona, which include the Zezuru (the main or largest group), Ndau, Manyika, Karanga, Korekore, Tonga and Nambya.

Afrocentric social work

This article argues for the adoption and advancement of Afrocentric social work as a step towards decolonising the profession. Schiele (1996) defines Afrocentric social work as an approach of social work practice that is based on traditional African philosophical assumptions that are used to explain and solve human societal problems. Afrocentricity is described as both a social work theory and a perspective, though it is popularly used among African American clients. The primary objective of Afrocentricity is to liberate the research and study of African people from the hegemony of Eurocentric scholarship. According to Williams (1993), 'an Afrocentric perspective is congruent with the values and ethics promulgated by the social work profession: the right to self-determination; the emphasis on strengths rather than weaknesses; and the appreciation and value of all human experiences' (p. 2). Afrocentricity will continue to evolve as more information on African people comes to light and as greater demands are placed on African people (Bangura, 2012). Afrocentrists seek advocacy agency in every given place where examination, critique or analysis of African people happens (Asante, 2014).

Schiele (1996) identifies three fundamental assumptions of Afrocentric social work: that individual identity is hinged on a collective identity; that the spiritual aspect of human is as legitimate as the material aspect; and that the effective approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid. It is implied in Afrocentric social work that one cannot affect one member of the society without affecting others. In Africa, there is no clear separation between an individual and others (*Ubuntu*).

Afrocentric social work believes that if there is more emphasis on spiritual development, there will be less social problems and human misery. It acknowledges the linear materialistic understanding of reality and also draws heavily on the affective and holistic means of knowing and understanding the world. Afrocentrists do not believe in social science universalism. This means social work intervention strategies should be tailor-made to suit specific African contexts.

According to Ross (2010), Afrocentric social work's educational curricula should be respectful and appreciative of African worldviews even if this runs counter to the social workers' value systems. She went on to indicate that the educational curricula should expose students to traditional healers and leaders so that graduates may work in unison with them and include them in their referral systems. African languages are critical in Afrocentric social work. Thabede (2005) argues that it is important for social workers to be able to communicate through at least one African language. The language of instruction in all social work training institutions in Zimbabwe is English. Students' proficiency in vernacular languages is not considered important. This is despite the fact that students should understand the proverbs, idioms and avoidance of taboo topics for easy communication with clients. Social work students in Zimbabwe should be exposed to more than one indigenous language, especially those of marginalised communities like Tonga, Ndau, Shangani and Kalanga. Social work training institutions should also see to it that a significant number of students take up their fieldwork practice in these communities to avoid urban bias.

Indigenous theories of help-seeking should be acknowledged in Afrocentric social work. These include the significance of family members, the community, traditional leaders and neighbours. Social workers should thus understand traditional social safety nets (Ross, 2010). In Afrocentric social work, social research should also focus on traditional cultural practices. Afrocentric social workers are also encouraged to familiarise themselves with the material cultures of African communities (Thabede, 2005). These include clothing, shelter and food, among other things. Beliefs central to African life should also be recognised. These include the belief in witchcraft, ancestors and the Supreme Being. Social workers should also understand traditional cultural rituals such as circumcision and rites of passage.

Traditional African worldview

People do not see things in the same way; their worldviews are dependent on their culture. A worldview is the way a person tends to understand his or her relationship with social institutions, nature, objects, other people and spirituality (Barker, 1999). ATR is at the core of African life. Despite the intrusion of other religions, ATR still influences indigenous African life to a great extent (Chavunduka, 2001; Mabvurira, 2016; Mbiti, 1990; Thabede, 2008). At the highest level of African cosmological thought is a Supreme Being or God. He is the creator of the world. He is the keeper of life and the source of all power. Awolalu (1976) concurs with this statement when he says that the world of Africans is theocratic, one ruled and governed by the Supreme Being. Below God are deities who function in the same way as angels in the Jewish or Christian religions (Mbiti, 1969). At the lowest level are ancestral spirits. According to Turaki (1999), 'these are souls of our forefathers who walked in this world' (p. 4). Ancestors live in the realm of the spirit world. They serve as intermediaries between their families and divinities. They preside spiritually over the affairs of the family. The African worldview recognises the centrality of the spiritual feature of all elements of life. Mbiti (1990) notes that Africans believe in a spirit world that is densely populated with spirit beings and spirits of the ancestors. Although Zimbabwe has been invaded by foreign religions, mainly Christianity, many Zimbabweans who become Christians do not withdraw from the African religion nor do they completely abandon African culture; they maintain dual membership (Chavunduka, 2001: 4). This is supported by Thabede (2005), who argues that some Africans have adopted Christian values without completely forsaking their beliefs in the Supreme Being or their ancestors.

The Shona people of Zimbabwe also believe in a host of other spiritual entities that populate their traditional cosmology. One such type is *mashavi* (alien spirits). These are wandering spirits that are alien to a given family (Chirongoma, 2013; Machingura, 2012). They are spirits of people who died away from their homes and were not accorded decent burials. These spirits roam until

they find someone to possess and express their ego. Once the *shavi* spirit identifies its host, it can cause illness that defies treatment (Chirongoma, 2013). Another kind of *mashavi* is *majukwa*. These are spirits of ancestors who no one remembers or honours anymore. Sometimes distinction is made between good and bad wandering spirits (Shoko, 2007). The good spirits can be responsible for singing, dancing or hunting, no wonder the statements such as '*shavi rekuvhima*' (hunting spirit). The bad spirits are responsible for bad things such as stealing or witchcraft.

The subject of witchcraft creates controversy in many parts of the world. It abounds with difficulties. This is mainly because some people believe in its existence while others do not. Witchcraft has been an object of anthropological and sociological investigation in Africa since the early decades of the discipline (Rodlach, 2005). This is so because many Africans believe that there is always somebody responsible for illnesses that persist over time, especially when the sufferers do not respond positively to medication. Since prehistoric times, illness has elicited witchcraft beliefs. According to Foster (1976), one can hardly avoid dealing with witchcraft and related issues when analysing medical beliefs and practices in African communities. Witches (*varoyi*) are believed to be responsible for illness and other misfortunes haunting people. Their powers are passed from generation to generation through spirit possession. They keep and use familiars such as animals, birds, insects or objects to harm people. They travel at night on the back of a hyena or they are believed to fly (Nyabwari, 2014). These are usually people known to the target as they have to know the person's totem for them to be able to mislead the guardian spirits (*vadzimu*) of the targeted person. As Taringa (2009) notes, the Shona people often explain disease and sickness in terms of witchcraft.

Ngozi (avenging spirit) is an evil spirit of someone who was murdered and is avenging their murder by attacking the murderer or the murderer's family. The *ngozi* can attack the victims in various ways, such as causing sickness, death or disaster in the family. The *ngozi* is appeased by first discovering the cause of its anger. *Ngozi* is the most terrifying spirit among the Shona. According to Bosman (n.d.), the spirit of a murdered person is believed to become a *ngozi* who would avenge their murder on the murderer or the murderer's family. Masaka and Chingombe (2009) suggest that it is important to note that among the Shona people, it is not always the case that the wrongdoer is the one who is killed or cursed by the avenging spirit; any person who is a blood relative of the wrongdoer is subject to the anger of the spirit. The attack of a *ngozi* is fiercer or more savage than the punishment of a mildly angered *mudzimu* (Bosman, n.d.). Another type of avenging spirit is *botso* (Benyera, 2014; Chirongoma, 2013; Muchinako et al., 2013), which occurs when a child wrongs a parent and the parent dies without reparations from the child. Its vengeance usually results in some form of mental illness. However, Benyera (2014) argues that this is not common as intra-family disputes are usually resolved amicably.

Taboos (*zviera*) form part of Shona morality. They are understood to be specific rules that forbid people from carrying out certain actions, the performance of which may result in the negation of the moral conduct that governs human behaviour (Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010). Breaching of *zviera* is thought to invite misfortunes such as bad luck, drought or death (Tatira, 2000). Violation of Shona taboos is thus said to invite an angry reaction from the spirit world. Taboos are understood to be fostering desirable conduct in human behaviours. An example of a Shona taboo is *Ukachera mvura nechirongo chitema tsime rinopwa*, which means if you fetch water with a sooty black pot, the well will dry up. Such a taboo was meant to discourage polluting water sources. The taboos play an important role in maintaining human relations, promoting human and environmental health as well as environmental conservation (Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010). There are certain taboos that are relevant to health issues, for example *ukaseka murwere unirwara* (if you scoff at a sick person you become sick). This taboo dissuades Shona people from teasing ill people and instead encourages them to assist them in their times of need. It is also believed that breaching certain taboos would result in long-term illness.

The use of totems (*mutupo*) among the Shona is a prehistoric tradition that goes back centuries. According to Hodza (1979), the totem is an animal that a clan takes up and expresses certain values and virtues. Each totem is buttressed by a string of myths and folklore. The *mutupo* serves as a social bond and is an expression of collective identity for a clan or family that carries that totem. It is believed by the Shona people that if a person eats his or her totem animal, misfortunes such as illness will haunt them or their family. Totems are critical in Shona relationships. The assumption is that people who share the same totem are related and they may help one another in times of need. Each totem has a totemic poem (*madetembo*), which is used for praising and respecting the ancestors. Totems are thus used when communicating with one's ancestors during rituals and libations.

Social work education and practice in Zimbabwe

Development of social work in most African countries has strongly been influenced by and modelled after Western countries (Hall, 1990). Development of social work in Zimbabwe has been heavily influenced by its colonial legacy in that it reflects a wholesale transfer from the British experience (Chitereka, 2010; Chogugudza, 2009; Kaseke, 1991). Social work education in Zimbabwe was introduced by the Catholic Jesuit Fathers during the colonial period. Traditionally, social work in Zimbabwe was generally remedial in nature with limited services offered to Africans who stayed in urban areas. However, since independence in 1980, there has been a gradual shift towards developmental social work that is aimed at addressing poverty and social ills. Social work education was offered by the School of Social Work alone from 1964 until 2010, when more universities started to train social workers. The School of Social Work was an affiliate college of the University of Zimbabwe from 1969 to 2016. Social work qualifications currently on offer include a 1-year certificate in social work, a 2-year Diploma in Social Work, a 4-year Honours degree and a Master of Social Work degree. Social work curricula in most Zimbabwean universities have a British orientation. Most of the textbooks used are imported from Western publishing houses such as SAGE and Allyn & Bacon, and they lack an African flair. There is a lack of indigenous theory that can empower social workers to be effective in practising with African clients (Thabede, 2005). Textbooks recommended do not have content on African culture and indigenous theories of helping. According to Thabede (2005), social work curricula should incorporate the cultural elements and nuances that influence the culture of people in a given country.

The largest employer of social workers in Zimbabwe has always been the government, through its various ministries (Chogugudza, 2009; Kaseke, 1991; Mupedziswa and Ushamba, 2006). Social workers in Zimbabwe specialise mainly in child welfare, medical social work, counselling, rural development, relief work, housing and social amenities. Social work is a profession perceived by most Zimbabweans as a Western concept (Mamphiswana and Noyoo, 2000). Chogugudza (2009) argues that social work education in Zimbabwe took longer to be appreciated as a formal profession compared with traditional disciplines such as psychology, nursing and teaching. Social work treatment methods that were imported to the continent during the colonial era are still in place decades after Zimbabwe's independence. In Zimbabwe, social workers have pushed Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to the periphery despite calls to indigenise the profession (Mupedziswa, 1993). There is a lack of sensitivity to African culture in social work practice. A qualified social worker may experience cultural shock when practising in a different ethnic group, such as the Sotho of Matebeleland South or the Tonga of Matebeleland North. This is mainly because African thought is not given its due space in social work education in Zimbabwe. Makhubele (2011) also notes that in some countries, such as South Africa and

Zimbabwe, official propaganda depicts indigenous cultures and methodologies as backward and out of date and simultaneously promotes one national culture at the expense of minority cultures. However, social workers are encouraged to embrace many ways of knowing, especially when working with indigenous peoples (Phillips, 2010). Until 2001, there was no legally recognised piece of legislation to govern social work practice in Zimbabwe. Relief came from the Social Workers Act Chapter 27:21, which was ratified in 2001. The Act provides for the establishment of a Council of Social Workers. The Council, which is a statutory body, was established but is not functioning to capacity due to poor funding. The major functions of the Council are (1) to register social workers, (2) to conduct examinations to qualify persons for registration as social workers, and (3) to define and enforce ethical practice and discipline among registered persons. In line with the third function, the Council has developed a code of ethics to govern social work practice in Zimbabwe.

Indigenisation of social work, an overdue process

Knowledge transfer from Western countries has been found to be associated with a number of problems, hence the call for indigenisation. A major indictment against African social work practice is the gap between Western theory and practice in response to local needs (Osei-Hwedie, 1993). Osei-Hwedie (1993) notes that it is pertinent to define social work in an African context, conceptualising an appropriate mission that captures the indigenous worldview. Opposed to indigenisation are the concepts of universalism and imperialism. Universalism is defined by Gray (2005) as trends in social work to find commonalities across divergent contexts such that it is common to talk about a social work profession with shared goals and values wherever it is shared. Gray and Fook (2004) further define universal social work as 'a form of social work that transcends national boundaries and which gives social work a global face such that there are commonalities in theory and practice across widely divergent contexts' (p. 628). Imperialism on the other hand is defined as trends within social work that promote the dominance of Western worldviews over diverse local and indigenous cultural perspectives (Gray, 2005). According to Wong (2002), indigenisation challenges universal knowledge and the cultural hegemony of the dominant discourses locally and globally.

There is a quest in the universalism of social work to find an agreement on the universal definition of social work (Gray and Fook, 2004). However, social workers across the globe do not agree on the universalism of social work values. Cossom (1990) argues that in the developing world, social work should free itself from the inbuilt assumptions and cultural biases of first-world theories and models of practice and come up with indigenous education and practice. Social work practice must be contextually oriented. Instead of hinging on Western literature found in libraries, students could spend a significant time in the field in order to be exposed to the African context. The fieldwork component of social work practice should also expose students to rural contexts, especially the remote parts of African countries. As shown earlier, Gray and Fook (2004: 627) believe that there is room for many types of social work across widely divergent contexts united by shared human rights and social justice goals. Dialogical processes within local contexts are more likely to create indigenous and relevant models of social work practice than imported ones, since they directly address the needs of the country, respond to the culture of the people and focus on pertinent social issues (Gray and Fook, 2004). It is therefore of paramount importance for social work researchers in Africa to engage traditional leaders and the elderly in generating knowledge that may be useful in indigenising the profession, as they have been found to provide valuable insights in Afrocentric studies (Mabvurira, 2016; Mkabela, 2005).

Colonisation has destroyed much of what was good, just and right in most African cultures. Indigenous modes of helping one another and natural kinship networks were overlooked (Gray, 2002). Menand (2001) argues that any model of philanthropy premised on top-down is false. African people should be active in generating knowledge to be used in social work education. There is a need for wide consultation of grassroots people to get a feel of what they want social work services to be. True social work should be culturally competent. Cultural competence in social work is a lifelong, ongoing process that includes the importance of religion and spirituality in the lives of clients (Wiedmeyer, 2013). Social workers are encouraged to comprehend cultural contexts specific to their clients and how that knowledge is used in the everyday lives of their clients in order for meaning to be known and revealed (Wiedmeyer, 2013).

Implications for social work practice

Several African belief systems and practices may be exploited in social work processes with various client groups. However, there is confusion over the usage of the term African religion(s). Scholars do not agree on the use of the term African religion, with some preferring to talk of African religions. The basis of the latter is that Africa is a vast continent with notable differences among its various ethnic groups. Thabede (2008) corroborates this by arguing that many Western scholars deny the unity of African cultures. He accused these scholars of making sweeping generalisations based on the vastness of the continent. According to him, the Arabs of North Africa and the Whites found all over the African continent are not Africans but Asiatics and Europeans, respectively. It is pathetic to note that minor differences are used to split Africans while the same does not happen to Europeans. Inasmuch as there are ethnic groups in Africa, there are also ethnic groups in Europe (Reve, 1995, cited in Thabede, 2008). It is the position of the scholar that there is one African traditional religion with variations inasmuch as there are variations in Christianity. Some scholars would want to talk of African religions and will never talk of Christianities (Thabede, 2008). The starting point in the indigenisation process should be for social workers to understand the religious aspects of African life.

Belief in the afterlife has a bearing on indigenous social work practice in some African communities. Social workers practising in hospice environments may find it easy to practise with members of ATR. Death and dying may easily be accepted by a sick person as they are sure they will be migrating to another world where they still remain members of their families (they become ancestors). Issues to do with death may not provoke the same fear that it provokes among Christians as there is no fear of hell among members of ATR. Social workers who are members of end-of-life care teams may find it easy to discuss issues to do with death and inheritance of estates with their clients.

The Shona people of Zimbabwe interact very much with their ancestors. For them communicating with the spirit world can strengthen a person amid challenges such as illness. Some perform rituals to communicate with the spirit world to intervene in the healing of a sick person. The *vadzimu* are believed to live in invisible communities parallel to the communities of the living. They watch over the living in their everyday lives. Social workers working with aboriginal communities in Africa should ensure that their clients are in harmony with their ancestors and that all the necessary rituals to appease the ancestors are performed. Even in cases where clients come to hospitals for treatment, social workers should be have the freedom to discuss spiritual issues with their clients, especially things that pertain to the illness.

As alluded to earlier, most indigenous African communities believe in witchcraft. Witchcraft is dealt with using traditional methods, and social workers should ensure that such methods do not interact with allopathic medicine where clients may be using both traditional and scientific medicine. It is therefore important for medical social workers to discuss traditional explanations for

illness and ways that are used to manage illnesses so that they may discuss these with other health professionals.

Some traditional medical practitioners in Africa practise bone divination. Bone divination forms part of a branch of psychology that has come to be known as African psychology. In Southern Africa, African psychology is advanced by the Forum of African Psychology (South Africa). The social work curricula for most universities in Zimbabwe require students to undertake foundational courses in psychology. It may be necessary for social work students to be sensitised to this branch of psychology through their foundational courses. Social work practitioners may also have to further their studies in such a way that they understand the psychology behind some African phenomena like bone setting and *kurasira* (scapegoating).

African life is communal, hinged on the *Ubuntu* philosophy (I am because we are). When providing support, social workers should consider the assistance clients may get from other members of the community. The community should therefore be included in the helping process. Social workers should always look into the resources that surround clients, and these include other members of the community who may provide emotional and material support. If a person becomes critically ill, it is not uncommon to find community members staying with the person among the Shona people. Where social workers are dealing with anxieties that result from problem situations, they may also have to include other community members who were with the client during the problem situation. For example, grief and bereavement counselling in African communities may also include significant others in the community rather than targeting clients and their immediate families only.

Social workers practising in indigenous African communities should understand the taboos found in such communities. They ought to understand how these influence the helping process of individuals in need. Despite how unfamiliar the taboos may be, social workers should also respect them. Totems form a part of the Shona mythology. People do not marry someone they share the same totem with as it is considered to be taboo. Some social service providers may assist clients wholeheartedly when they discover that they share the same totem and may run the risk of discriminating against those they do not share the same totem with. Inasmuch as social workers should understand the importance attached to totems among some African communities, they should also be alert to the bearing totemism has on their own lives as this may influence social service provision. Totems are an asset that social workers may consider exploring during the helping process. Social group work sessions, for example, may have people who share the same totem. Group conflicts may be limited as the members may feel that they are the same people who ought to respect one another.

All having been said, it is important to note that due to mixing of different cultures, it is now difficult to talk of a purely African thought. People now access the globe and tend to behave in the same way, such that it is difficult to talk of indigenous cultures (Gray and Fook, 2004).

Conclusion

Social work education and practice in Zimbabwe were heavily influenced by the British social welfare system. Many years after the political independence of the country, the social work profession continues to suffer from imperialism. Knowledge imparted to students and methods and techniques used in practice reflect a European face. This goes against a call for indigenisation of the profession. Prior to the colonisation of Zimbabwe, there were indigenous helping approaches that were in place and these were neglected when professional social work was introduced. In order to indigenise the profession, social work practice in Africa, and in Zimbabwe in particular, should be sensitive to African belief systems, taboos, values and cultures. Instead of criticising African

practices and beliefs, these should be explored for the benefit of clients. Chief among these is ATR, which has been found to influence almost every facet of indigenous African life.

This article has argued for the adoption of Afrocentric social work.

The following may be done to effectively make use of African thought in social work education and practice in Zimbabwe:

- More emphasis should be put on African spirituality in both social work education and practice.
- Local teaching materials should be developed and used for social work education and training.
- Familiarity of local languages and cultures should be emphasised in social work education.
- Indigenous African beliefs should take centre stage in social work practice.
- Social work practitioners should value and respect collectivism in African communities.
- African taboos and totems should be valued and taken advantage of when working with Black Zimbabwean clients.
- Beliefs in witchcraft, ancestors and avenging spirits should never be overlooked.

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