

# Social work in the '21<sup>st</sup> Century'<sup>1</sup>: the case of social workers interventions in Azania<sup>2</sup> [South Africa]

*"Until the lions have spoken,  
the only history will be that of the hunters"* (Hawi, 2005:6)

- Ntokozo Mthembu -

Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal – Howard College, MTB,  
Durban, 4001  
mthembun@ukzn.ac.za

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## Abstract

This article will review the interventions that are adopted by the social practitioners especially those based in Azania. It looks at the changes that have taken place in the post apartheid era that signaled the new epoch in the country's welfare history. The paper will scrutinize various approaches of interventions in relations to meeting changes that are taking place in the country. In understanding various approaches, the paper will look at Vexliard (1968) theories such as the *autoplastic* and *alloplastic* notions. Lastly, the paper will examine the current practices and their implications towards the development of social welfare policy for social work in general especially in Azania, social-work education in meeting community daily livelihoods in view of poverty and the unemployment that is ravaging the vulnerable communities in the country.

## Introduction

In order to understand the impact of political change or settlement-1994 that is highly celebrated by mostly the previously advantaged individuals from across the different races in the country. This paper attempts to scrutinise the functioning of the social work practitioners in line with the changes that are taking place which are regarded, as the good model that need to be followed by the former colonised people around the world. In doing so, the paper looks at the type of development that the current social practitioners operate under and its

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<sup>1</sup> It is worthy to note that / Aethiopia –(referring to whole of Africa) has recently celebrated its Millinium 2000 in September 11, 2007 and that will mean that the 'current 21<sup>st</sup> Century' refers to the western world civilization. This continuous denial of western civilisation to acknowledging the true historical settings in Africa, will clearly indicate the continuous subjugation of the black African civilisation (See Mthembu - <http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/files/Aethiopian%20REASONIN.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Azania refers to a total liberated state from a white rule to the indigenous populace – (Buzan and Nazareth, 1985).

impact towards delivering the current development that remains exclusive as possible. The paper also looks at the various theories that stipulate different modes of practice with their contenting outcomes. Lastly, the paper suggest a relevant theory that will be able to meet the aspirations – (to decide and usage of theories that define themselves and enhance their values) of the former disadvantaged, when it comes to practice.

As, the winds of change have swept across the valleys and the shores of the great continent – Africa in particular Azania, which others call it South Africa. These changes were expected by the mostly the previously disadvantaged populace to bring about change that will be meaningful in altering their livelihoods from the point of being followers and decision taken about them for them to a point of being champions of their destiny. In order for one to be able to understand better what in this paper is discussing, it is advisable to start looking at background of the sociopolitical setup that currently dictates terms on various interventions

## **Background**

For one to be in better state of what is under discussion hereto, it will be wise to start looking at different phases of development that influenced knowledge systems. Mumford (1930) argues further that vocational knowledge has never been static, as it considers the relationship between maker, materials and tools or sources of power as a variety of ‘technical complexes’, which inter-penetrate and overlap even today. For example, the Eotechnic phase, extending from about AD 1000 to 1760 was a ‘water-and-wood complex’ (Callinicos, 1990). Lest we forget that the indigenous people of this country were involved in *bartering system*, an exchange trading system, that is a guided by the *theocratic values*<sup>3</sup> among themselves (Callinicos, 1990: 2; Fuze, 1979:10). Again, when looking at the historic transformational phases of the industrialisation in Azania, generally after the Imfecane period; it is noted that the Paleotechnic phase (1750-1900) of the industrial revolution was a ‘coal-and-iron complex’, succeeded by the Neotechnic phase (1900 to present) (Mumford, 1930), which was an ‘electricity-and-alloy complex’. The last phase, the microchip and non-materials, where tiny particles of materials are utilised d to consolidate previous economic phase (Gamble, 2004:180). Before, we endeavor much on the values perpetuated by the Eurocentric notion, it will be wise to start by defining development, as the manner to ascertain whether this notion (Eurocentric) brought civilization that once told to be bringing to the colonised people or not.

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<sup>3</sup> See Magera (1979:9-11 & 90) where he argues and reaches a conclusion that the origin of African people in this southern part of Africa are the branch of Israelites that believed and lived theocratically - theocracy means the rule of people, by people, for the Creator. Therefore, I will argue further that theocratic values are normally documented in ‘totality’ in the Bible. For example, the Zulu people used to practice ceremonies that resemble those documented in the Bible (Jeremiah 2:3) like the ceremony of the First Fruit.

The term “development”, is a term used by the economists, as when referring to the development that is designed for “economic development”.

According to Hawi (2005:2), this type of development tended to bring about the “*new independent countries to the living standards of the Western developed world*”. In other words that means the newly independent countries would reproduce the development experienced by their colonising countries – (or sometimes referred to as industrialised countries), which was the model that they should strive for. This type of development has its bases on the strong theoretical roots in western world capitalist practices in the economics. The theoretical basis, were laid by Rostow (1960) where he expands his famous “stages of development”: traditional society; preconditions of growth (rationality, economic calculus, and scientific knowledge); take-off (radical alteration of existing structures, increase of saving rate); maturity (leading sectors); society of mass consumption.

These stages are leading from tradition to modernity that is western oriented in nature, as it continues perpetuate foreign values and at same time excluding the indigenous people. In arguing further, that means Azania cannot be the exception in this set-up that is clearly illustrated by the fact that the current education system of trades training is directly descended from the English system of technical education, which differs markedly from systems of technical education that developed on the European continent. The type of development tends to impacts differently to various social structures of people. Since, this country adopted the elitist aspects of liberal democratic theory, that makes the alliance of reformers and moderates commits itself to a form of politics that preserve the central pillars of capitalist society (Ginsburg et al, 1997:113). Statistics in various social settings shows that about 10 percent of the population earned more than 50 % of the income whilst about 40 percent the poorest (the majority remains the previously disadvantaged group) estimated to be less than 7% (Statistics S.A., 2008 ). In addition, there is also a rise in income inequality, as Gini coefficient rose from below 0.6 in 1994 to 0.72 by 2006 (Joffe, 2008). The economic growth averaged five percent growth in the past four years (Macanda, 2008); poverty levels are higher amongst the Black population and estimated to be over 60%. Although education system has ‘changed’ and all citizens now have access to education, but about 7.5 million African people are still literary illiterate(Statistics S.A., 2008 ).

When looking at health services, the most people that have problem in access to public facilities mostly come from the previously disadvantaged community. At the same time, the public facilities are under-resourced and unable to meet demands and situation tends to be no exception to genocide especially when looking at conditions that are presently experienced. For example, about **30,000 children die everyday** due to diseases that relates to water-borne and other factors that claims **one child every three seconds** and malnutrition (ILRI, 2006).

The very challenging issue is the failure for the government to link citizens with the institutions and processes of the state, that tended to affect the quality of life and resulting in reduced accountability on realities on issues of proper service delivery and confirm what Hicks (2006) the “democracy deficit”.

## **Interventions and challenges.**

Since, there are changes of emphasis over time, that need also to reflect the shifting political and social context within which social work takes place, changing expectations on the part of the people using social work services and the public, growing understanding of the professional task and developments in the knowledge base for practice. The type of challenges facing the previously disadvantaged populace tends to demand a vigorous intervention that will be able to eradicate the ills that encountering them. That is why this paper attempts to look at various options that can be of help in addressing the past injustices, as the country is still celebrating a ‘miracle’ of 1994 political settlement in the ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century’.

Let us start by trying to look at definitions that define the appliers or practitioners of social work for a better understanding on what this paper is arguing. When defining social work, it a profession that presently is practiced all over the world and its fundamental principles are well established with core purpose. In looking at core purpose, one start asking questions such as: *‘Is it care and welfare of individuals? Is it protection of vulnerable people, whatever their vulnerability? Is it promotion of social inclusion? Is it about enabling people to fulfil their potential and make the most of their talents?’* Other questions that emerge are about whose *need is met* by social work intervention. Is it a person or family’s need for support, protection or access to a service? (<http://www.socialworkscotland.org.uk/resources/pub/NeedforSocialWorkIntervention.pd>). Is it the state’s need for acceptable ways of safeguarding vulnerable people and rationing scarce resources? Is it the public’s need for a welfare system, which is also a means of exercising social control? In view of the challenges Azania is facing, that raises a concern on what social work can contributes towards making improvement in people’s quality of life and delivering policies for their well-being and the public good. Another concern is the manner the social work interventions are conducted, as they are not neutral or value free because almost all social work takes place within a framework of government policy and statute (<http://www.socialworkscotland.org.uk/resources/pub/NeedforSocialWorkIntervention.pd>).

Various approaches that have been adopted by the social work practitioners like any profession, which are grounded and perpetuates a particular ideals that propel certain values. It will be detrimental if this paper ignores the fact of historical developments that have impact in the functioning of various practitioners in their different field of specialisation. The paper argues that the current various practitioners operated under the auspices of Eurocentric tendency, as the country such as Azania faced the yoke of colonisation that

stripped the indigenous people of the country their rightful standing when it comes to perpetuation of the ideals in favour colonisers morals.

Before scrutinising the current practices of the social workers, the paper will look at the theories that are normally associated with development, the Vexliard (1968) theories such as the *autoplastic* and *alloplastic* notions. Various human services professionals have debated what is termed as the *autoplastic-alloplastic dilemma* that raise need to know the limit should the beneficiary be encouraged to adapt to a given situation, and the extent should be encouraged to change? (Henderson,1994). Henderson argues that western helping attributes have a strong autoplastic preconception; clients (in this case the previously disadvantaged people) are encouraged to discard their traditional beliefs, values, and behavior in order for them to fit into a dominant society's mainstream. Whilst one side, the loss of cultural identity is also personally devastating, the ability to change is a precondition for survival in the modern societies. At the same time, people need connection of values and life-style and these differing expectations mostly restrained the forces of change. On another side, Afrocentric scholars tend to be alloplastic, as they encourage new behavior on condition that tally well with traditional ways of doing things (Henderson, 1994). This approach, like the autoplastic approach, can lead to some challenges that can emanates from danger of tradition-oriented beneficiaries becoming too restricted in their culture and fail to effectively adjust to technological and social changes (Taft, 1966). In addition, that suggests that efficient helping involves interventions in which beneficiaries are able to stop or adjust to challenges whenever they wish to do so and maintain their cultural identity (Henderson, 1994:169).

Therefore, the current transformation process that is sweeping in Azania raised the need to scrutinise all avenues of development and social work practice will be not exception inn this regard. The failure to adopt a relevant approach in the interventions by social practitioners in Azania necessitated the need for a serious scrutiny in general sense, passive versus active coping mechanisms, which links alloplastic and autoplastic orientations. In other words, that means the willingness to transform the subjective environment or to accommodate oneself to a specific situation changed passively or actively. In line with the French social psychologist – Vexliard (1968), when comparing the Eurocentric and Afrocentric approaches, show that the developmental symptoms in South Africa tends to lean more towards passive autoplastic approach (Draguns, 1974). Whilst the Afrocentric approach, I argue that it will swerve towards the conjunction of active and alloplastic course. In this regard, the issue of values, the elements of the symptomatology of the two contrasting cultural bases that are initiated by transformation of capitalism, which increased the scope of possible and practical change in the external world and make our environment the possible ground for our achievements (Draguns, 1974:122).

This manifests itself in the development of Africa and her people especially in the so-called independent state that shows that there is a need for an alternative

development approach to the current development practices that have produced poverty and inequality. Therefore, I argue that currently the human services beneficiaries (such as independent states and its population) need a sensitive personnel more than ever before, as they see themselves capable of liberating themselves from fears posed by colonialist personal, cultural demeaning, and effectively communicate, helping becomes a socially and psychologically effective emancipatory battlefield. In addition, if human services professionals are not able to place themselves in the minds of their clients, there will be miniature help for colonised persons (Henderson, 1994). Maybe, this recommends that there is need to adopt an alternative development theories that consider the “basic needs approach<sup>4</sup>” to human development. This approach move from a promise that about 40 percent of the people in the south lived in absolute poverty that leads to inability to meet their basic needs. Therefore, that will mean that developmental priorities should be directed to satisfy basic needs and beyond. In addition, the basic needs approach emphasises the objective of human development, such as the provision of conditions for a full human life (i.e. - material, social, cultural and political). On practical terms, it focuses on a minimal decent life, that includes issues such as health, nutrition, literacy and the goods and services needed to be realized , i.e. shelter, food, health services, sanitation, safe water, primary education, housing and relevant infrastructures. This in return it introduces a multi-dimensional and non-monetary conception of wellbeing, however, it is also still has a dynamic meaning similar to permanent changes depending on the moral values of diverse people in different times and places.

So, community interventions attempts to bridge the gap between the western hospital –based approach in dealing with diseases and African-centred approach – (preventative mechanism and caring for the sick that will include actions of traditional healers, self initiatives, income generating projects and participation in setting up- initiatives) only in case where the western methods are absent (Nash et al, 2005 :57). The recent, "Human development" approach by the UNDP, which was published for the first time in the human development report in 1999, where a human-centered definition highlight that human development is regarded as “both the process of widening people’s choices and the level of their achieved well-being<sup>5</sup>”. "Human development" approach adherents argue that is the multidimensional method that “enables all individuals to enlarge their human capabilities to the full and to put those capabilities to their best use in all fields – economic, social, cultural and political”. Although human development approach focuses on people's preferences and we also need to note that have different

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of "basic needs" first appeared to denote “the minimum standard of living which a society should set for the poorest group of its people”.

<sup>5</sup> A state of level of well-being refers to the environment that enabled individual to access to things such as the income and all other resources that are necessary for achievement for a decent standard of living, a long healthy life, education and access to knowledge, political freedom, guaranteed human rights, concern for the environment, and concern for participation (Haq, 2005).

choices that have some connotations to their ideologies, culture, norms, traditions, and aspirations.

In responding to the parameters suggested by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) that advocate the development that does “not” imitate or stereotyping western methods of development (Haq, 2005). The revisit of the usefulness of the interventions applied by the social practitioners is vital in particular Azania and Africa in general, as decolonising processes are still high on the agenda. Therefore, that demands the review of the various approaches that are currently utilised in addressing problems, which different communities encounter. In this instance, we look at some of the observations made by Oliver (1988), the case of two pre-service teachers that used different approached in parting knowledge to their particular racially mixed English classes. The *first teacher* applied methods that kept students to a passive state, whilst the *second teacher* used methods that excited students. Although lesson objectives for the two classes were similar and that proved that one method did work and the other failed because of its alienating nature to the pupils.

Therefore, for Azania and Africa’s need for alternative development that will have to start considering applying multiple approaches that operates under the tutelage of *Afro- centered approach*<sup>6</sup>. I will argue that a turning a blind eye in adoption of the relevant Afro-centric approach will continue with same old pattern of development that alienate indigenous people of this country to the state of devaluation of their value. This is visible through the development programmes that implement western methods and theories of development that eventually lead to a methodological crisis to Africa and Azania lagging behind in the spheres of development. Therefore, I argue that the need to link and elevating of students with language and literature of various cultures and approaches of development will benefits the students. Additionally, the incorporation of several ethnocentric positions and traditions of literature into the curriculum is significant, as the true literacy is multi cultural (Oliver, 1988). When we deal with atomistic measures and evaluations of the social work practitioners approaches, we need to move away from the exclusive use of a Eurocentric perspective when teaching literature and the language arts. Therefore, this situation calls upon the need to start addressing the true needs of students – from dominant and marginalised cultures and implementation of a realistic, practicable strategies to teach them(Oliver, 1988:49).

When we talk of people centred development in Africa in general, it will be immature to ignore the experiences of the people in the continent for the development programme to be relevant. The continuous failure to acknowledge deficiencies in presenting the accurate information to students and refusal to

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<sup>6</sup> Asante (1987), *Afrocentric* notion argues on the same par as the Eurocentric philosophy that pretense to be a universal philosophy, linguistics, psychology, education, anthropology, and history (Oliver, 1988:50).

include Afro-centric approach in the curriculum will not be a solution to the problems that our so-called poor communities – (mostly black Africans) are experiencing. But that type of development will not enhance the subordinate state Africa and her children, "*until the lions<sup>7</sup> have spoken, the only history will be that of the hunters<sup>8</sup>*" (Hawi, 2005:6). Instead of rolling, back the relevant indigenous knowledge system and considering the concerns of the black people. This suggests that currently various scholars; view Africa as the subject and not object and the need not to train students' primarily in western ideas but in worldview. Furthermore, there is a need for curriculum planners to recognise that black studies, of course all ethnic studies are interdisciplinary and incorporated into all spheres of learning (Oliver, 1988:50).

The denial of Afrocentric approach in the world academia led to the production of academic outputs that speaks about modernity, rationality and scientific methods that are hostile to traditionalism, values, norms, believes and indigenous knowledge systems- (IKS) which are the basic necessities of the primitive stage of development that is bypassed by the scholars of modernity. The forced adoption of such systematic methods by African researchers to reject African values, believes, traditions, and norms resulted in production of a superficial alien knowledge in African environment and subordination to the west (Oliver, 1988). This suggests that Africa should make its history own history by itself by using its own culture<sup>9</sup>.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

There is a need for social work practitioners to revisit their interventional approaches especially those who operate in Africa generally, as the continent's people and the world in general acknowledge the need to decolonise Africa. Since, Azania and Africa in general faced the same issues of poverty, diseases and literacy that demand for interventions that will be relevant to people are being served/ helped and people that are groomed to serve them that consider their experiences. For that process to be realised in the world of academia in faculty such as the social work, it need to consider the adoption of Afrocentric approach in their practices to avoid the repetition of the previous weaknesses and failures of various interventions that were applied.

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<sup>7</sup> I will argue that in this case that *lion* is depicting the ruler of African jungle – African people that have been hunted with intention of extinction, as this happen in the world of knowledge – where African knowledge systems are literally denied acknowledge as the means to destroy it.

<sup>8</sup> Again, I will argue that *hunter* refers to the pioneers of the so called primitive accumulation – a process that is characterised by the force removal of indigenous populace from their land and hunting of African people to force them to slavery and to become workers of today.

<sup>9</sup> Culture refers to a far more than literature, music, dance, art, sculpture, theatre, film and sport and goes beyond than the arts, as it is about shared patterns of identity and how social values are conveyed and individuals are made to be part of a particular society (Oliver, 1988).

The mammoth task is left upon the shoulders of the African scholars who are genuinely committed in eradicating problems that engulf African continent and her children to ensure that is a success. In addition, to redesign its decolonising self-images and create a new science-led and culturally aware of its future is more than just a need (Roach, 1994). Continuous failure to adhere to African norms by the relevant stakeholders will be adding to what Abdullah and Low (2005) noted, as the intellectual imperialism that has resulted in diverting attention from issues that should be of critical concern to black African societies. Lastly, such act will be tantamount to what Welsing (1991) defined as the same circular thought approach to problem solution instead of following the linear thought approach.

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