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**The Social Politics of Social Work:
Anti-oppressive social work Dilemmas in
21st Century Welfare Regimes**

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The Social Politics of Social Work:
Anti-Oppressive Social Work Dilemmas in 21st Century Welfare
Regimes

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Abstract

This article sets controversies surrounding Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) theorisations in British social work debates in an international welfare regime framework. The article suggests that those authors on both sides of the pro and anti perspectives have consistently shared an empirical agenda to establish and respond to the perspectives of social service users for public policy debates concerning social work reforms. However, rather than dodging the ideological controversies surrounding AOP, the article adopts an international comparative framework to contrast and compare how social work practice ideologies are shaped and influenced by welfare state ideologies. Specifically the article illustrates that in liberal welfare regimes such as Great Britain and Ireland, professional social work practice identities

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and ideologies have developed in a context of residual selective welfare ideologies and asymmetrically from social care work and training. On the other hand in universal welfare regimes such as Norway and Sweden professional social work practice identities and ideologies have traditionally been embedded or closely allied to social care practices identities and ideologies. We contend that it is in the interfacing of welfare regime ideologies and social work/social care practice ideologies that in our view the breadth and possibilities of AOP can only be located.

Keywords: Anti-oppressive practice, Welfare regimes, Practice ideologies, Participatory research, Public policy advocacy.

Introduction

This article reviews the case for and against the promotion of Anti-oppressive Practice (AOP) as a central tenet of social work education and training. The article suggests that the strong divisions of opinion that exist on this topic in the literature reflect historical legacies in the politicisation of British social work; first from the politics of feminism and anti-racism in the 1970s and second by the politics of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism from the mid 1980s. By setting the early theorising of anti-oppressive practice alongside the empirical realities of the reform of British social work from the late 1960s to the late 1980s, we illustrate the contemporary resonance of earlier arguments for social work legislation and anti-oppressive practice theorisations to draw empirically on the opinions and experiences of social service-users in families and communities.

However, we argue that what is missing in the literature is a wider international debate of the issues relating to AOP and social work that is located within a comparative welfare regime framework. This article offers such a perspective. Specifically, the article explores social work practice ideologies in Norway, the Netherlands and Sweden (countries that exemplify or share features of Scandinavian-type social democratic welfare regimes with universal personal social service systems) and contrasts them with an exploration of social work practice ideologies in the Republic of Ireland (an Anglo-Saxon liberal welfare regime with selective personal social service systems). The article arrives at a two-fold model for international comparison. The Anglo-Saxon type welfare regimes, exemplified by Great Britain and Ireland, are associated with 'selective social work practice ideologies' that

operate in welfare systems characterised by highly selective personal social service/care provision earmarked for poor residua of the population. The Scandinavian type welfare regimes, exemplified by Norway and Sweden, are associated with ‘universalist social work practice ideologies’ that function in welfare systems characterised by universal personal social service/care provision designed to provide egalitarian welfare outcomes for all social citizens, particularly children. Our thesis is that the type of welfare regime in which social work is embedded both enables and constrains the manner in which social work is practiced. An anti oppressive social work perspective therefore requires setting within a comparative welfare regime framework of analysis.

In offering a comparative welfare regime framework for a discussion of anti-oppressive practice and social work, this article also engages with pertinent questions previously raised by Mclaughlin about the extent to which AOP social work in Great Britain has been defeated, publicly ridiculed, co-opted by the state and transformed into an agency of punitive social control (2005). In other words, we engage with questions concerning the disconnection between the rhetoric and the reality of AOP social work. However, as Singh and Cowden point out, “the fact that social workers across Europe share common concerns and constraints associated with the promotion of human well-being and development, neo-liberalism and globalisation, means there are possibilities of developing progressive and shared agendas” (2009:481; Hatton, 2008).

The International Definition of Social Work and its Relationship to AOP

“The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.”

This international definition of the social work profession, adopted by the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) at its General Meeting in Montréal, Canada, July 2000, is so familiar to social workers around the globe that many could recite it in their sleep. The suggestion that social work promotes the liberation of people in a context of social justice resonates strongly with the idea of anti-oppressive practice (AOP). However, while not without its sceptics (Gilbert,2009), the IFSW definition of social work has tended to be embraced by a large number of the social work academics and practitioners around the world,

whereas the case for Anti-Oppressive Practice has caused strong divisions and disunity, especially in British social work debates, where debates surrounding AOP seem to be more robust and divisive (for further discussion see Appleyard, 1993; McLaughlin, 2005; Phillips, 1994; Pinker, 1993, 2000; Wilson and Beresford, 2000). At the heart of these debates in Britain lie conflicts in British social work research communities about “practice ideologies” (Smid and Van Krieken, 1984:16), or in other words, the social politics of social work.

British Social Work and the Early Theorising of Anti Oppressive Practice

We begin our discussion of AOP and social work by setting the development of anti-oppressive practice alongside the empirical realities of the reform of British social work from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. This was a period book-ended on the one end by the publication of the Report of the *Committee on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services* (Seebohm 1968), and on the other by the Griffiths Report on *Community Care: An Agenda for Action: A report to the Secretary of State for Social Services* (Griffiths, 1988), with the Barclay Report (1982) published in the interim. The influence of these reports was accompanied in British social work practice and research communities by academic disillusionment with the demise of the Community Development Projects (CDP). Deakin captured the mood when he observed that the nationwide CDP programme in relation to poverty collapsed “in a splutter of reports defiantly declaring their belief in the futility of locally-based action” (1993:87). At the same time these reports were also seen to herald important changes, such as when Peter Townsend expressed a sense of optimism in the concept of community social work that underlay Seebohm’s vision of having community-based family and children’s social services under one local authority departmentt (1970). Townsend suggested that the aims of local authority community programmes for families or “Seebohm departments” should be fourfold: i) the equalisation of resources locally, ii) the reduction of isolation, iii) family support and iv) social integration. He labelled these four aims as “the meat and drink of socialism (1970:16-22). Nonetheless, Townsend labelled the Seebohm report “a great opportunity”.... “missed”, in part because “the opinions of those utilising the services were not collected...(and thus)...some far reaching criticisms of professional activity may be undetected or under-estimated” (1970:11).

Two decades later, Pinker (1990) was scathing of the Barclay Report on *Social Workers: Their Role and Tasks* (1982), which he viewed as sealing a dormant approach to social policy in disadvantaged communities. He also attacked the Central Council for Education and

Training in Social Work (CCETSW) for transforming social work into a new hybrid of multi-purpose social intervention labelled Community Social Work (CSW). His criticism with the CCETSW concept of community social work fixed on what he perceived as a complete absence of any robust anthropological research into the concept of community (1990:273). Pinker believed the Barclay Report (1982) and the subsequent CCETSW conceptualisation of community lacked the empirical authenticity associated with more seminal social policy expositions such as Richard Titmus's *Essays on the Welfare State* (1955). Pinker characterised the goal of British social work policy during these years as 'quest for community' (1990). In many respects, the promotion of AOP reflected what Craig termed the 'In and Against the State dilemma' of British community development perspectives (1998).

However, in their influential study, *Anti-Oppressive Practice: Social Care and the Law* Dalrymple and Burke were less critical of this history of social work reform and argued that "at the heart of community care legislation is the provision of better services for those who need them" (1995:164). Nonetheless, at the heart of their theorisation lay the argument that "Anti-oppressive practice is about ensuring that people are never silenced" (1995:162). On the other hand, Dominelli adopted a more structural perspective and argued that the law and social policy through legislation such as the Children Act 1989, and the Community Care Act 1990, had "fundamentally altered the statutory environment within which practitioners operate" (1998:12). For Dominelli, AOP theorisation was therefore essentially a product of British social work experience, which developed as a necessary response to changing welfare ideologies, at a time when the British government was seen to be "using social policy and legislative instruments to restructure the context within which social work has to operate" (1998:12). In essence, Dominelli argued both implicitly and explicitly that the institutional, pedagogical and socially polarised context of AOP theorisation in British social work was underpinned "at the ideological level" by "the developments, which flow from the restructuring of the welfare state," which she viewed as being progressed by free-market advocates (1998:12).

Dominelli also located the seeds of AOP in the development of emancipatory theorizations of social work in the 1970s and 1980s and to "long-standing traditions of humanism" based on "egalitarian principles" (1998:3-7). She classified three prevailing approaches to social work. First there were therapeutic approaches, mainly those associated with Carl Rogers (1980). Second there were "maintenance" approaches, mainly associated with Martin Davies (1994)

and third there were emancipatory approaches, mainly associated with community development beliefs and the conscious-raising ideas of Paulo Freire (1972). Therapeutic approaches and maintenance approaches were seen to focus largely on the individual, the former on psychological functioning and the latter on the pragmatics of personal social service provision (Dominelli, 1998:4). In contrast to both these approaches, emancipatory social work theorization was not focused exclusively on the individual but on the social and the political. Emancipatory social work was associated with a challenge to social injustice and to the promotion of social change at an individual, social and political level. The emancipatory approach was understood to reflect the perspectives of radical social workers in the 1970s and feminist and racially sensitive social workers in the 1980s, all of which culminated in the development of anti-oppressive practice theorisations in social work in the 1990s.

Research, Theory Building and the Anti-Oppressive ‘Cause’

In essence, Dominelli theorised anti-oppressive social work practice as a ‘new practice paradigm’ that went beyond a casework, control or maintenance focus towards becoming a social work paradigm that helped individuals and “oppressed groups...to adjust the existing power relations” (1998:7). However, the idea of “adjusting the existing power relations” which is at the heart of Dominelli’s AOP has been taken up differently by other theorists, as we will see later, giving rise to division, misrepresentation, misunderstanding and dissent.

In addition to an over-arching emphasis on AOP in professional social work practice there were also theorisations of the anti-oppressive “cause” (Dominelli, 1998:20). The anti-oppressive cause was conceptualised as the advocacy of anti-oppressive practice in the media and in social commentary by anti-oppressive social work practitioners. Dominelli sought to advance this cause for “social justice and its capacity to challenge exiting social relations” through strategic collaborations with other like-minded professionals (Dominelli, 1998: 7). To summarise Dominelli’s argument, the success of the anti-oppressive cause would rest on winning ideological debates and influencing public policy outcomes through academic research, publishing, theory building and the promotion of evidence-based practice. There was an implicit suggestion by Dominelli that social work education needed to balance

practice focused training with a greater emphasis on research output as demonstrated by the following quote:

The anti-oppressive cause can be strengthened if its adherents can become more involved in research and theory-building to develop a theoretical base that emanates from oppressive practice carried out in the field...social work practitioners acting as anthropologists who have strong research orientation can amass the data for arguing in defence of an anti-oppressive practice which responds to the needs of service users as they see them. Were they to succeed social workers acting as intermediaries between policy makers and ‘clients’ could more powerfully serve the needs of the disenfranchised groups they purport to represent.”
(1998:20)

The above quote explicitly suggests an empirical and anthropologically grounded research-based, public policy advocacy or intermediary role for social workers, combined with a greater commitment to theorisation, research and publishing.

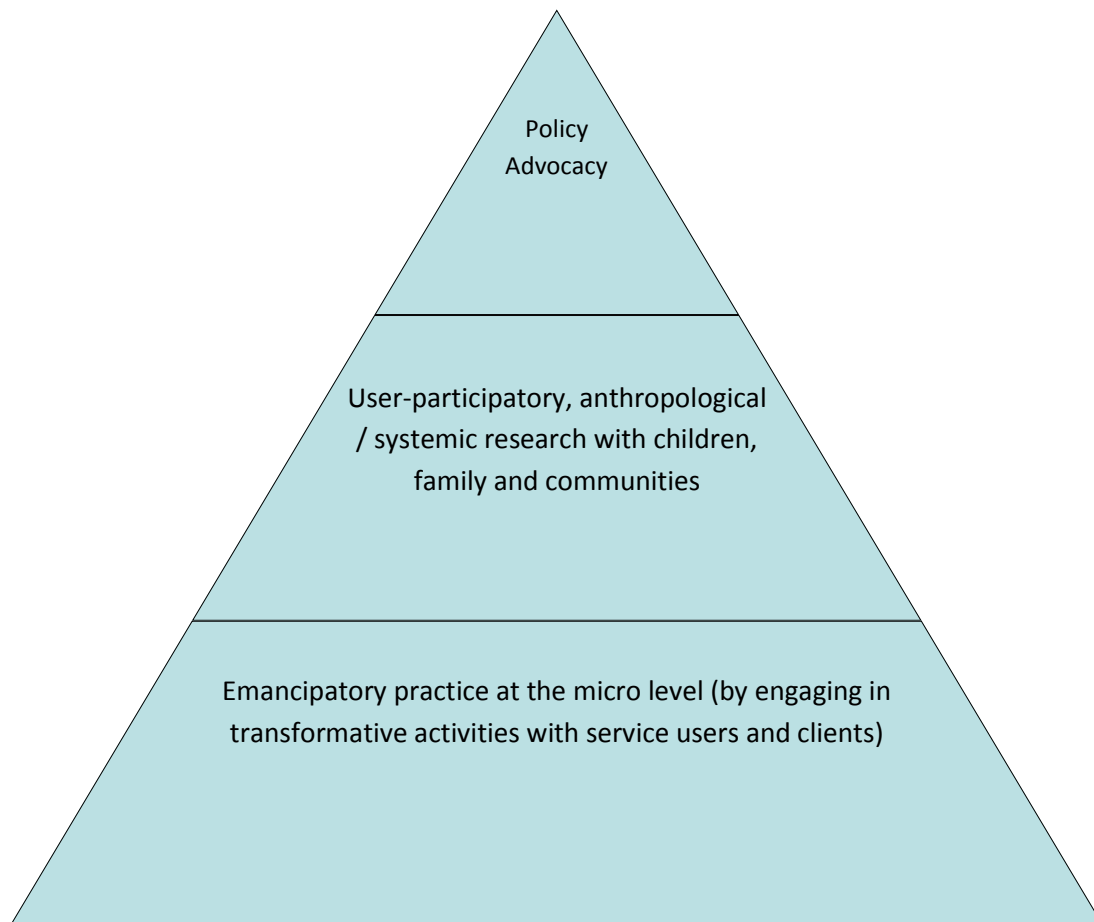
In promoting this aim Dominelli placed a strong emphasis on “experiential knowledge as an important source of data” (1998:7). However, the interpretation of “experiential” gave also rise to some dissent within the academic community. While Dominelli proposed a form of research and evidence-based practice in which clearly established empirical or ‘hard’ facts were essential on which to base service provision (1998:8), some academics interpreted her call for evidence based practice research to mean that the voice of the worker or academic researcher would be privileged, while those of the “clients” and “service users” would be marginalized or excluded in this attempt to professionalize social work research as an academic discipline (see for example Wilson and Beresford, 2000). In their critique of AOP from a “psychiatric system survivor” and “user of mental health services” viewpoint Wilson and Beresford also argued that while AOP was taken up within social work education in the main as an “unquestionable good...there appears to have been little critical debate about anti-oppressive practice itself” (2000:559). Wilson and Beresford concluded after a review of the debates surrounding AOP and social work that

“the social work literature confirms the prevalence and continuing popularity of ideas of anti-oppressive practice amongst social work academics...these ideas dominate

contemporary social work (theory and education). Indeed, an outsider could be forgiven for thinking that anti-oppressive practice is synonymous with, or even compromises social work (theory and practice) ” (2000:559-565).

Wilson and Beresford argued further that social workers were being “epistemologically disadvantaged” through “their apparent failure to acknowledge either the oppression associated with being, or having been, a social work client” (2000:567). However, Wilson and Beresford were not against AOP but they advocated a re-evaluation of the methodologies and epistemologies underpinning social work research, theory building and practice. In the diagram below we (re) illustrate a conceptualisation of social work as a professional practice that includes: (1) interventions with children, families and communities at the points where their lives interact with their social environment, (2) practice-based, user-validated, anthropological and systemic/ecological research and (3) public policy advocacy at the structural level through involvement in trade unions, professional associations and gender equality activism. This framework gives AOP a practice, research and public policy imperative. Ideally the anti-oppressive social work intellectual practitioner actively engages at all three levels simultaneously.

A Three-fold Taxonomy of Transformative Social Work Practice



The “Backlash” Against AOP

By the late 1990s the emancipatory narrative of the social work profession as an anti-oppressive cause was coming under fire for being what Jones labelled as no more than “social works own in-house appreciation of itself” (1998:35). The anti-oppressive cause was also understood in the late 1990s to be faced with a Herculean task in countering what was seen as the ‘anti-oppressive backlash’ (rather than healthy critique), as its most forceful opponents were dismissed as representing an influential neo-liberal or right wing backlash comprising individuals who were “powerful ideologically, socially, economically, and politically” (Dominelli, 1998:19). However, rather than being faced with a Herculean, and by suggestion an almost insurmountable task, we suggest that Dominelli, other AOP proponents (Wilson and Beresford, 2000), and Pinker, one of the main AOP critics, shared a common cause.

Despite their disputes, lay a common principle, that user-validated anthropological / systemic social science research with children, families and communities was imperative to the theorization of social work and community. In essence, the failure to operationalize social work as combining structural activity at (1) the macro level (by engaging in public policy advocacy), with (2) rigorous, user-participatory, anthropological / systemic research with children, family and communities and (3) emancipatory practice at the micro level (by engaging in transformative activities with service users and clients), appears to have been central to what was problematic about AOP and it still is (for further discussion see Appleyard, 1993; Dent, 1999; Humphries, 1997; Mclaughlin, 2005; Molyneux, 1993; Penketh, 2000; Phillips 1993 and Pinker, 1993). Our reading of Dominelli's call for evidence-based practice is one in which the voice of the client or the welfare user is central to social work researcher, with the aim of influencing social policy and social work practice. However, whether this aspiration was ever grasped with integrity by social work academics and practitioners remains open to empirical validation.

Like Dominelli (1998), Mclaughlin (2005) suggests that the politicisation of social work in the 1970s criticized the way social welfare and social work individualised social problems, a critique which in turn influenced anti-racist and anti-oppressive theorisations of social work practice in the 1980s and 1990s. However, while this historical underpinning is seen as strength in the development of AOP by some, Mclaughlin sees it as a weakness. The main charge levelled against AOP by Mclaughlin is that its birth represented the "politics of defeat" and it was born not from a "confident belief in radical change but from disillusionment with the prospect of wider social change" (p. 299). Here Mclaughlin critiques the work of Dalrymple and Burke (1995:3) for seeing the goal of AOP as "minimising the power differences in society" (2005:299). Mclaughlin argues that by adopting this position towards power relations, early AOP theorists Dalrymple and Burke (1995) implicitly suggested that "power differences are beyond resolution, so the best we can do is minimise their impact" (2005: 299). Mclaughlin also suggests that social work theorisation reinforced the individualisation of social problems and fell short of seeking radical social change and social justice. From his perspective, despite the rhetoric, anti-oppressive practice became part and parcel of a new-right economic and moral consensus, dedicated to emphasising agency and promoting individual personal change over egalitarian social relations based on welfare ideologies dedicated to economic redistribution and social justice.

By embracing a version of AOP based on “the politics of defeat” McLaughlin suggests that the social work profession left itself open to ridicule by conservative politicians and the popular press before becoming co-opted as an agency for “personally policing, not politically empowering the disadvantaged” (2005:300). We think McLaughlin’s account has validity, but not for the reasons proffered by McLaughlin in his “politics of defeat” argument. First, Dominelli made clear that the goal of social work was to intervene with “oppressed groups... to adjust the existing power relations” (1998: 7). Second, we believe the “failure” of the Anti Oppressive cause should not be universalized. Third we believe the “challenge” of the Anti Oppressive cause has more to do with the way social work practice ideologies are embedded in and shaped by different welfare regimes, which contextualize social work practice in a continuum of welfare ideologies and regimes, from social democratic egalitarian welfare ideologies on one end to neo-liberal free market values on the other. The former, exemplified by Scandinavian welfare regimes, aims to reduce poverty and gender inequalities while the latter, exemplified by Anglo-Saxon welfare regimes, is in the business of controlling growing residua of the poor and the marginalised. The challenge for social work in these latter welfare regimes is that on the one hand social workers aim to maintain anti-oppressive, emancipatory and social justice values, while on the other hand the economic-liberal welfare systems in which they work have been shown to socially engineer endemic pauperisation of families through the hollowing out of redistributive post-war WWII welfare settlements (King and Ross, 2010). The challenge for social workers lies exactly in the extent to which they practice ‘in or against’ these residual welfare ideologies.

Social Work Practice Ideologies in a Welfare Regime Context

Hallstedt and Hogstrom (2005) utilise a welfare regime framework of analysis to develop a comparative European perspective on the broad concept of social care education in Norway, Netherlands, Ireland and Sweden. This includes a focus on social work. Hallstedt & Hogstrom argue that social care and social work curricula are part and parcel of national social policies and that “social policies are dependent on how the responsibilities of welfare are distributed between state, civil society and the market” (2005:17). Hallstedt and Hogstrom draw on Esping-Andersen’s *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) model to explain that social policy systems in northern and central Europe, the USA, Canada and the Antipodeans are classified into three different welfare regime types: (i) the Anglo-Saxon liberal welfare regimes, (ii) the Central European corporatist welfare regimes and (iii) the

Scandinavian social democratic regimes. Hallstedt and Hogstrom incorporate social work within a broad conceptualisation of social care; complying broadly with the approach taken by Dalrymple and Burke who used the term 'social care' to cover "all the activities of caring that are undertaken by health and welfare workers and informal carers" (2003: xvii). However, when it comes to definitions of social care which also embrace social work, there are national variations (Hallstedt and Hogstrom, 2005:25, Hesse, 2002, Lorenz, 1994).

In Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands Hallstedt & Hogstrom (2005) found a strong dichotomy between social care/pedagogy and social work did not exist, whereas in Great Britain and Ireland it did. In Norway, for example social workers are educated in three-year study programme that in the first year includes child welfare workers and welfare nurses. Hallstedt and Hogstrom emphasise the importance of this joint first year of training for social workers to develop a critical understanding of the welfare regime context in which they practice.

The context of the Norwegian curricula is the Norwegian welfare society with its own distinct qualities. According to Esping-Andersen (1990), Norwegian welfare state belongs to the social democratic regime-type. In short, this means that social rights are universal – they encompass all citizens without any prior means testing (Hallstedt and Hogstrom, 2005:21). In the Norwegian welfare regime social work students learn the legislative "principle of normalisation", which "states that the abnormal should be given the same rights as the normal" (Hallstedt and Hogstrom, 2005:21). However, students also learn about empowerment; "an ideology that aims to tilt the division of power in favour of the client" (Hallstedt and Hogstrom, 2005:21). On graduation, child-welfare workers, welfare nurses and social work students are all awarded the professional status of 'welfare navigators'. However, Hallstedt and Hogstrom also noted that there are forces amongst the different categories of workers themselves which seek to preserve their separate professional identities. Interestingly, the desire for distinct professional status among social workers is regarded as a threat to the more general solidarity and power of the welfare professionals by the Norwegian trade unions, which are influential in ensuring that child welfare workers, welfare nurses and social workers are educated to a common level in 17 institutes across Norway:

The workers' trade unions bring pressure upon the colleges to educate one category of social workers, not three. From the point of the view of the professional in the work

field, this is a logical step, as the three groups of social workers (social workers, welfare nurses and child welfare workers) are united in one union (2005:22).

In Sweden, another state whose welfare regime is classified as a social democratic welfare state, there is no national curriculum for social work and according to Hallstedt and Hogstrom “this results in great variety in the organisation of and content of study programmes” (2005:24). Using the social work programme at Malmo University as an example, Hallstedt and Hogstrom identified an underlying trend whereby the Social Pedagogy programme launched in 1970 gradually metamorphosed into an “academic social work discourse...at the expense of vocational and professional discourses” (2005:24). Thus in Malmo, four specialist areas of multi-cultural aspects of social work, social work education, social work specialising in social care (of the elderly and people with a disability) and social work administrative specialisation were taught under the core subject of social work from 2001.

In the Netherlands, (a conservative-corporatist welfare state, albeit one with “significant features of its welfare policies that bring it closer to the social democratic welfare state”), Hallstedt and Hogstrom focused on ‘social education work’ study programmes in Nijmegen as an model example of the dichotomy that exists between social care/pedagogy and social work training and practice (2005:19). The Nijmegen social pedagogy study programme of ‘social education work’ trains the ‘care worker’ to be ‘on the same side as the client’ and to take the ‘client’s request for help’ as a starting point for ‘navigation’ through the “distinctive features of Dutch social provision” (2005:19). What emerges here is “a discourse of professionalism” “mixed with discourses of marketization” within a type of social pedagogy/care discourse of social work combined (2005:20).

Turning to Ireland, Hallstedt and Hogstrom (2005) were particularly critical of the social care/social work demarcation, where they suggest that welfare politics, which have their effect on social care education, have been influenced by Catholic and nationalist ideologies rather than as in most EU member state by considerations of social class. In Ireland they focused on the social care curriculum at the Athlone College of Further Education and suggested that “the curriculum has a tendency to form a special category for people referred to as ‘clients’. Moreover, the student is on a different level from the client. The potential relation between the two is mostly asymmetrical” (Hallstedt and Hogstrom, 2005: 23).

The strong historical and institutionalised demarcation between social care and social work training in Ireland was also elaborated by Share and McElwee who explained that social care practitioners train in higher education institutes of technology whereas social workers are educated in the university system (2005: 15). Share and McElwee observed that “social work training was always at degree level whereas the social care degree came into being only in 1995” (2005: 15). Share and McElwee argued that in Ireland like Great Britain, “the social workers role is to typically manage the ‘case’” whereas the social carer provides the day to day care (Share and McElwee, 2005:15, Anglin, 2001:2). Writing about social work in Great Britain, Singh and Cowden also noted the strong demarcation that exists between social care and social work, when they argued that while the “distinction between social work as a formally regulated titled profession and other ‘social’ professions, such as community work may be clear in the UK, ...in other European countries there isn’t the same clear dichotomy” (2009:481, Cannan, *et al* 1992).

Pulling together their findings, Hallstedt and Hogstrom (2005) found significant distinctions between the social work and social care curricula in Norway (where students graduate to become ‘welfare navigators’) and the social work and social care curricula in the Netherlands (where students emerge with a ‘professional identity’, albeit one that has a strong emancipatory aspect). By contrast, students in Sweden and Ireland, emerge from their separate social work or social care training with less fully-fledged identities, particularly in relation to the macro / micro challenges of their discipline. The Swedish, Norwegian and Dutch professional social work curricula however, were all historically embedded in broad social pedagogy/care discourses, whereas the curricula for professional social work training in Ireland developed asymmetrically and independently from the more recent introduction of social care/pedagogy training.

Hallstedt and Hogstrom suggest that the Norwegian welfare navigator’s mission is “to guide the clients into societal norms as well as to be initiator of changes in individual behaviour and of societal structures” (2005:21). This represents a practice ideology that has a psycho/socio/political framework that is representative of an emancipatory ‘universalist practice ideology’ in a welfare regime context of universal social service provision, designed to provide beneficial welfare outcomes for all social citizens, particularly children. Through involvement in their trade unions and professional bodies social workers serve to influence the shape of welfare regimes and welfare societies in Norway.

The Swedish social care system, which is generally taken to epitomise the Nordic social ‘care model’ is characterised like the Norwegian system by a strong role for the trade unions and by a strong role of women in the political public policy-making process (Rostgaard and Lehto, 2001:166). Pettersson’s historical account of the development of social services and community care systems in Sweden located social work and social care within high degree of universalism across pre-school services, services for the elderly and people with disabilities, in addition to more established individual and family services, child welfare services and services for the treatment of substance abusers (1995). Hobson *et al* located gender politics centrally in Swedish approaches to welfare and social work practice ideologies by suggesting that Swedish welfare regime development relied on the potential for women to “mobilise themselves as a constituency that cuts across class, ethnic and party lines with a shared vision of the women-friendly state” (1995:20).

Hallstedt and Hogstrom (2005) suggest that in Ireland “no particular identity” is promoted in the social care curriculum. Rather the curriculum is characterised by an effort to make the social care worker ‘employable’. This suggests to Hallstedt and Hogstrom that the potential employers set the standard for social care training and practice, in what they classify as a liberal welfare regime with conservative corporatist aspect “where a large part of social work is fulfilled by the family, the church and private organisations” (2005:22-24). However, although social work training in Ireland has developed independently and asymmetrically to the more recent social care training, both co-exist within the same mixed economy of welfare.

In summary, the Nordic literature suggests that social work practice ideologies in universal welfare regimes combine emancipatory social work ideologies with public policy advocacy through trade union movement and gender equality activism. By contrast, and as Mclaughlin was at pains to illustrate in the British context, there is a lack of social work influence on the public policy stage in the British welfare regime (2005) and the same can be said in the Irish case.

Social Work and Inter-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Welfare State

Muncie’s critique of neo-liberalism, from a social work perspective, traced the contemporary demise of social policy and social work influence all the way back to the rise of economic-liberal critiques of welfare state interventions, beginning with the publication in 1944 of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* and culminating in approaches to welfare that offered “prescriptions of individual responsibility, an active citizenry and governing at a distance”

(2006:771). This he pointed out was also accompanied and influenced by a hollowing out of the welfare state in favour of 'big society' notions of civic governance. However, the understanding that neo-liberalism has been undermining post World War II welfare states as a social settlement between capital and labour since their very inception is not confined to social work debates. More recently a similar understanding was proposed by King and Ross (2010) for comparative welfare state analysis and by Garland (2001) for an analysis of crime and penology. King and Ross argued that the rise of neo-liberalism has been the "silent revolution" destabilising welfare regimes from within, through the articulation of ideas and visions in universities, think tanks and by right wing politicians since the foundation of the state. However on a more optimistic note King and Ross (2010) suggest that the welfare state is always a nation building project and that comparative social policy perspectives will more than likely be called upon again to repair social relationships in the wake of this pro-market 'silent revolution' and its prevailing apparent dominance.

"Cracks will emerge in the market dominant paradigm as the social and economic costs of these ideas take their toll or a 'big-bang' unifying event again serves to elevate social justice above market price on the European agenda. These actors will seek to conduct their own 'silent revolution' from within and be poised to diagnose the inherent problems with the status quo and supply a credible alternative when post-industrial societies confront the crisis of market orthodoxy" (2010:57).

The 'silent revolution' of neo-liberalism in the social sciences was introduced by Hayek (1944) and disseminated through conservative think-tanks across several countries. Neo-liberal market orthodoxy was advanced by Friedman (1962), and later conservative theories about notions of 'under-class' and 'welfare dependency' were advanced by Murray (1984) and Meade (1986). The latter is widely understood as the architect of welfare-to-work policies for lone-mothers in the USA, which have served to pauperize children and subject women to 'paternalistic regulation' through the implementation of 'punitive sanctions' (Rainford, 2004:289).

Writing from a social policy and social work perspective on the welfare state from the USA, Robert Moroney offers a welfare typology that typically distinguishes between liberal residual conceptualisations of the welfare state and universal social democratic models suggesting that social services are operated along a continuum of 'social development and social control' depending on which model of welfare is seen to apply (1991:125). However,

Moroney argues that for the purposes of social integration, “services should be available to all as a right of citizenship and not earmarked for a residual of the population, the former emphasises common need, the latter is divisive in that it labels people as capable or incapable, normal or deviant, we and they” (1991:125). More recently, Orloff suggests that welfare regime theory and gender analysis provide the two ‘big bangs’ of welfare state theorization and argues for the central significance of the concept of ‘care’ in social policy analysis (2010: 252). We concur, but in addition argue for the central significance of care and welfare state theorization in social work training and education.

Conclusion

It is in the interfacing of welfare regime ideologies and social work practice ideologies that in our view the breadth and possibilities of AOP can only be located. Instead of accepting the ‘theoretical stripping out’ of social work by managerial and de-intellectualising agendas, we are persuaded by Singh and Cowden’s promotion of the concept of social workers “as transformative intellectuals who do not succumb to power, but engage in uncovering, confronting and resisting power” in the tradition of Giroux (2009:492, 1988). To advance this agenda we (re) illustrated an anti-oppressive or transformative taxonomy of social work. In this conceptualisation of social work we suggest that social work is a professional practice involving: (1) interventions with children, families and communities at the points where their lives interact with their social environment, (2) practice-based, user-participatory, anthropological and systemic/ecological research and (3) public policy advocacy at the structural level through involvement in trade unions, professional associations and gender equality activism. Ideally the anti-oppressive social work intellectual practitioner actively engages at all three levels simultaneously, not leaving “practice” to the practitioners, research and theorisation to the academics, with public policy advocacy as an unresolved and neglected systemic dilemma.

We maintain that the theorisation of social work as an anti-oppressive practice, or as a transformative profession, requires national case studies focused on social workers uncovering, confronting and resisting free-market or residual welfare ideologies that label people as vulnerable or strong, capable or incapable, normal or deviant, we and they. These case studies would provide anti-oppressive social work theorizations with explicit empirical examples of AOP in action, where and if they exist. In addition we maintain that the theorisation of social work and the role-casting of social workers as ‘transformative

intellectuals' cannot flourish in splendid 'case-work' isolation from (a) anthropological/systemic user-validated research and (b) public policy advocacy through professional associations, trade unionism and gender equality activism. In conclusion, we suggest that national case studies of social service and social care systems be utilised for comparative analysis to shed light on the way in which welfare regime ideologies shape social work practice contexts, and more progressively on how social workers, through practice, research and public policy advocacy might help to shape or transform welfare regime systems or structures by challenging existing power relations and existing welfare regime ideologies.

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