Historical Trauma of Slavery : Implications for Decolonisation

Dr Shanaaz Hoosain

Senior lecturer at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies, Compres, Wellington, NWU

COMPRES
Community Psychosocial Research

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Innovation through diversity ™

Background

- Transmission of intergenerational trauma (historical trauma and displacement)

- Postcolonial indigenous paradigm (Fanon and Foucault)

- A qualitative study based on 7 families where 3 generations of each family were interviewed

- Life histories, semi-structured and focus groups

- Thematically analysed

Intergenerational Trauma

- When trauma is ignored and there is no support to deal with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next

- Transgenerational transmission of trauma - unresolved trauma of the past is transmitted from one generation to the next and thus develops the potential for fuelling future conflicts.

- Transmission occurs mostly unconsciously

Intergenerational transmission of trauma

- When trauma is not resolved or worked through in one generation, it will be transmitted to the next generation

- Limitations of DSM definitions of trauma

- Also, traditional theories on intergenerational trauma and trauma transmission do not take into consideration the dominant discourse of colonialism, where memory and knowledge of the past have been subjugated. This has resulted in limited discourse on the historical trauma of slavery in social work

Historical Trauma

- Seminal research on historical trauma was carried out by Duran and Duran (1995) and Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998). They referred to the historical legacy of chronic trauma, the massive loss of lives, land and culture that Native Americans experienced over generations through colonisation as historical trauma.

- According to Evans-Campbell (2008:321), historical trauma is conceptualised as a collective complex trauma, inflicted on a group of people who share the same group identity, affiliation or ethnicity. It is the historical legacy of numerous traumatic events that are experienced by many people in the same community, and it is therefore collective in nature.

- Slavery therefore be viewed as a form of historical trauma

Historical Trauma of Slavery

- Since 1994, various studies have examined slavery and its connection to current-day social conditions experienced in black families, particularly families in the Western Cape (Trotter, 2009; Worden, 2009; Loos, 2004; Van der Ross, 2005). However, this research is sporadic and has tended to focus on the construction of post-apartheid identities and recognising slave heritage in the Cape (De Costa, 1994; Worden, 2009; Trotter, 2009).

- Slavery entailed a relationship of domination, and the slaves were violently dominated by their masters (Mason, 2003). Violence and the threat of violence were also means of social control, reminding the slaves of their powerlessness. The punishment of whippings and beatings had psychological consequences (Mason, 2003:146).

Slave family experiences

- Slave families were particularly vulnerable due to the laws of the Cape Colony, which included that slaves were not allowed to be legally married and that slave parents had no legal claim over their children.

- Slave families were often separated due to the parents being owned by different slave owners. Mason (2003) reports that often slave parents tried to prevent their children from being sold to other slave owners.

- The punishment and conditions described in DeBroey (1989:75) include execution by hanging, being mercilessly whipped, and the mutilation of runaway slaves where they lost their ears and noses. Slaves therefore did not only have to deal with the trauma of violent domination but also the trauma of family separation. Mountain (2004:7) alludes to the fact that the psychological wounds may have been passed on to generations today.

Long term effects of slavery

- Enduring racial hierarchy

- The Western Cape has the highest prevalence for substance abuse as a result of 300 years of paying slaves and farm workers with alcohol and tabacco

- Highest rates of homicide ad 5 times global average

- Collective amnesia and silence, shame

- Internalised oppression (substance abuse, family and community violence)

- When historical trauma of slavery becomes a public narrative we can explore the connection between historical trauma and present-day experiences, related narratives, which could function as a source of present-day distress as well as resilience.

Construct complexities

- The transmission of intergenerational trauma is a social construct theory that cannot be observed .

- Contemporary ways of getting people to narrate their personal stories is problematic for oppressed people because most of the forms of violence or trauma committed against oppressed groups and people have been implicit or structural and may remain hidden in personal accounts of trauma Menzies(2007)

- Individual stories of personal trauma form part of the larger historical formations

- One cannot separate each family and participant's story from the structural context of the historical trauma of slavery and colonialism.

- Memories of the displacement and slavery are fraught with ambiguity

Remembering slavery

- If you look at the movies, and you know that's probably the ... only time where we can really see what slavery meant, because we never lived through that you know. But whether it's now fact or fiction I don't know. (Jacobs, second generation)

- I am not really interested in what they say about slaves and stuff, because it's not a good topic for me to speak about or to hear even about. I avoid that topic being a slave (Jacobs third generation)

Chronology of Slavery in West. Cape

Year	Event
1652-1808	Approximately 63 000 slaves were imported from India, North West Africa, Madagascar and Indonesia. The Cape becomes a Dutch Colony.
1653	The first slaves arrive in the Cape.
1657	Slaves from Angola in West Africa arrive at the Cape.
1690	The first slave uprising is aborted.
1754	The Tulbagh Code sets out rules to control slaves, which included being put to death if the slave "lifted a hand" to his owner (Mountain 2004:44).
1806	The British take control of the Cape.
1832	Slave trade is legally abolished but many slaves remain with their owners as they had to buy their freedom.
1838	Emancipation is implemented.
1852	The Governor at the Cape, Glen Gray, forces territorial segregation.
1901	The first forced removal takes place and the bubonic plague breaks out. "Using health legislation, an outbreak of bubonic plague was a pretext for the removal of Africans from District Six and set the pattern for future residential segregation." (Field et al 2001).
1905	White areas are created in Natal. Africans were not permitted to own land. Poll tax was introduced for Africans, forcing them into employment.
1910	The unification of the Cape, Natal, Free State and Transvaal into South Africa takes place.
	The Union of South Africa was established under the British Empire with political and property rights only given to whites.
	Katie Jacobs, the last slave, was interviewed.
1912	The African National Congress (ANC) was formed.
1913	The Native Land Act was passed, reserving major fertile lands for whites only.
1914	The Nationalist Party was formed.
1919	White racism intensifies.
1922	Race-differentiated curricula are introduced in schools.
1927	The Riotous Act is introduced to suppress African resistance.
1934	The last election in the Cape, where both non-whites and whites voted together, is held.
1936	Cape blacks lose the vote and the Native Land Act is enforced.
1948	The Population Registration Act is passed, requiring all citizens to register according to the race stamped in their identity books. This was decided by officials based on an individual's skin colour and hair texture.
1950	The Group Areas Act is passed, segregating all residential areas according to race.
1953	The Bantu Education Act limits access to higher education for blacks.
1954	'Coloured' voters are removed from voting lists.
1958	Africans are forced to move from District Six. Windermere/Kensington is declared a whites only area and non-whites are forced to move.
1959	The University Education Act prohibits blacks from attending "white" universities without permission from the internal minister.
1960	A state of emergency is declared. Resistance is controlled with arrests.
	The "dopstelsel" of paying farm workers with alcohol is made illegal after 300 years.
1961	South Africa becomes a republic and leaves the British Commonwealth.
1962	Detention without trial is instituted, allowing police to hold suspects for 12 days without charging them or taking them to court.
1966	District Six (an area in Cape Town where some of the families in this study originate from) is declared a whites only area.
1967	Harfield Village in Claremont (an area where a family in this study originates from) is declared a whites only area.
1975	Teachers, parents and students protest against Mathematics and Social Studies being taught in Afrikaans.
1976	The state violently suppresses protests including the Soweto uprising.
1985	The Group Areas Act end the forced removals related to the Group Areas Act. Political violence increases.
1994	The first free elections officially end apartheid.

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Global debates about slave memory

- Slavery is a space to engage with traumatic memory and identity

- A way to engage with postcolonial discourse

- Important for identity

- Important for the future of a creating a multicultural society

- The grand narratives of slavery – either as only traumatic and a pathology and therefore remains an uncomfortable and a taboo subject to engage with.

- Essential part of decolonisation is reclaiming history

Fanon made quite clear his feelings about slavery in his remark,

'slavery? It was no longer even mentioned, that unpleasant memory… I forgot it all' (Fanon 1967, 115)

Remembering "warred with the will to forget" (Harman 2008)

So much of contemporary crises in multicultural societies have to do the past.

Implications for Decolonisation

- Decolonisation as defined in Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird and Hetherington (2013: 334) refers to "the undoing of the more pernicious aspects of colonialism that resulted in unequal power relations between people and nations whereby one people or nation established and maintained dominance over another". It is also the long- term struggle to overcome the ideologies that have been used to exploit and oppress people. Some of these ideologies such as racial oppression, may have become internalised as a result of historical trauma.

- We explore how the slave past impacts on present day descendants

- Engaging with slavery provides a tool to practically apply decolonizing methodologies

- Research – meaning in context –narratives, counter-narratives

- Decolonising methodologies are not so concerned with the actual techniques of selecting methods, but with the context in which these research problems are conceptualized and designed (Smith, 2012). The research took place in the Western Cape which has a history of colonialism.

Social work practice

- Social service providers must support the recovery of Indigenous peoples from the effects of colonization (Tamburro, 2013)

- Dealing with the pandemic of substance abuse in the Western Cape

- What appears to be pathology may be the result of multiple generations of trauma (historical) and oppression resulting in internalized oppression

- Application of postcolonial theory where social workers need to engage with indigenous groups to understand their strengths and abilities and view social problems from their own perspective , this can often lead to appropriate interventions which honours the dignity of oppressed groups

Social Work Education

- Classrooms do not becoming a space for perpetuating colonialism and hegemony by critically reflecting on normative values and beliefs and embracing different ways of being

- Decolonizing pedagogy includes theories and understandings from postcolonial studies, and spatial and critical race theory.

- Include history in order to engage in a discourse on pedagogy and provide theoretical constructs to examine and critique the reactions to these stories.

- Oppressed people's knowledge and history have often been subjugated resulting in the silence and 'amnesia'

- There is 'silence' and shame globally about slavery because of what it evokes , it engages us in a discussion of different forms of oppression and priviledge

Conclusion

- Social work is concerned with social justice , slavery with its legacy is a form of injustice

- Memory and other forms of representation are framed by social contexts. Collective memories and representations perform some form of cultural work for those in the present that address such issues as community and identity (Irwin-Zarecka 1994; Schwartz 1996; Zelizer 1995).

- Decolonising social work is reclaiming a history that has been subjugated and silenced, memories that have been oppressed.

- Re-remembering slavery plays a critical role in dismantling racial oppression

- Produces counter-narratives where oppressed groups can reclaim self-determination and identity , re-imagine the present

Hendrick , my grandmother's husband. He was part of the historical events, the slavery part. How do I cope with it? I overlook it, I have to overlook it now. You see. there's better things to look at. Things to read, understand that's how I have to cope with it. It makes me stronger. I try not to fight them[white people], always try to avoid an argument, if you say something then I say sorry I didn't mean it. You know. Rather be the weak one. Or pretend to be the weaker. Rather be submissive, that's ok, you know you can be strong, just leave it. (Valentine, first generation)

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Thank You