



# Critical reflections and views of social work students on decolonization and indigenization of social work education & practice

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# Structure of the presentation

-  Background information
-  Research question
-  Aims
-  Methodology
-  Results (Student's reflections)
-  Recommendations

# Background information

-  2015/2016 RMF & FMF movements: HE sector criticised for maintaining an education system shaped by colonialism.
-  Curriculum perceived to be dehumanising to African students as well as undermining African thinking
-  Students calling for curriculum that focuses on appropriate, locally relevant indigenous knowledge & practice

# Questions raised...

-  What does decolonization mean from students' perspectives
-  Why the need to decolonize?
-  What would a decolonized curriculum look like?/  
what will it entail?
-  What are the implications of decolonizing the curriculum

# Research Aim

To examine students' perceptions on decolonization and indigenization (of social work education & practice).

# Methodology

 Qualitative research approach

 Purposive sampling technique

 Interviewing: Semi-structured



# Student's understanding of Decolonisation

Rejection of Eurocentric content

A call for Culturally inclusive education system

Education system that recognises African knowledge and African forms of

# 6 broad areas



Perceptions of current knowledge and ways of knowing



A disconnect between curriculum and context realities



Perceived loss of identity and indigenous ways of being



Experiences of practice



Perceived power dynamics (Language)



Recommendations

# Perceptions of current knowledge and ways of knowing

## Perceptions of lack of recognition & 'betrayal' of students' knowledge and histories

- Current curriculum not reflecting values, norms and ways of life of all
- indigenous knowledge is negated - colonization is represented as civilization, other knowledge (African & indigenous is seen as inferior and therefore not recognized”
- Students are calling for recognition and inclusion of personal histories and lived experiences in the curriculum

# QUOTES FROM REFLECTIONS

*“ We do not see ourselves in the content of the curriculum”*

*“ The curriculum represents western views, the knowledge and ideas of the suppressed group is ignored”*

*“ We are in Africa, what of an African child is in the curriculum?”*

# Perceived disconnect between content of the curriculum and local environments/practice contexts

 Curriculum relevance - it does not lead to economic liberation (cycle of poverty continues)

 Perceptions that curriculum does not equip them to help communities/societies to deal with the aftermath of colonization

 Curriculum is not radical enough - focus on “soft approaches”

# Reflections...

*“ We are not making meaningful contributions to our communities”*

*“The ultimate goal for an African child for going to school is so that they can contribute towards socio economic liberation of their communities, so whatever you study as an African child, you must be able to translate as to how it’s going to go back and address the injustices of the past”*

*“I am trained to work in a particular context” how do I apply what I know in a rural context where there is extreme pain and poverty?”*

# Reflections...

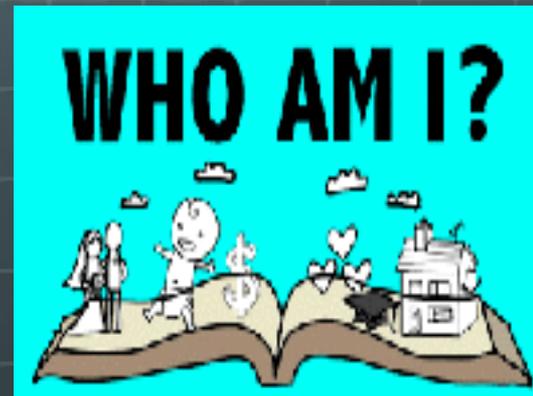
*“ The curriculum teaches me a certain way of doing things - it is not preparing me to be adaptable. The theories that we are learning and the ideas that come to the table ignore the African ways of life. The theoretical approaches/models we are learning in social work are shaped by the individualistic view, Africans believe in a collectivist approach - I need to learn about that...”*

# Perceived loss of Identity and indigenous ways of being

- ◇ Students believe that as soon as they walk into the classroom, they are ‘stripped’ of their cultures, values & lived experiences
- ◇ Students want to learn about African histories and indigenous ways of life as this defines who they are

# Quotations...

*When I am in the classroom, do you see me as an African child? Do you recognise me as worthy to be listened to? Do you recognise my different values and unique ways of doing things?*



# Quotations...

*“ I am not allowed to bring who I am in the classroom. I am told that as a social work student I need to uphold certain values and principles and these should guide my behavior - does this mean I must lose who I am?”*

*“Being in the classroom does not mean I am empty - that I need to be fed*

Students are asking us to Move away from the banking model. Questions regarding *Whose knowledge do you validate? Whose knowledge is correct?*

# Quotations...



*“ I live in poverty, I experience poverty and I have my own ways of defining poverty. In the classroom, I cannot bring that because there is that correct way of defining poverty - Poverty which comes from a certain text book that is written by a western scholar, therefore, whatever I comment is judged according to what is in the text book”*

# Experiences related to social work practice

 Students are asking for theories and approaches that recognize cultural values, norms & ideas of indigenous people

 According to students, current models and theories that should guide their interventions do not recognize traditional, cultural norms and values of African people

## Students' quotes

*“ our culture is now diluted by the views of the western society, this results in confusion. We do not know who we are anymore or where we are going”*

*“ What does confidentiality mean in an African context where sharing is key, where there is community care?”*

*“In an African culture, when two people come together in marriage, the relationship is formed between the 2 families. When there is conflict, the elders must resolve it. Who do we involve in our interventions?”*

# Power dynamics (Language)

-  Language seen as a key barrier to learning
-  Language is seen as perpetuating superiority of a certain group
-  Students want African languages to be recognized

“ As an African child coming from rural areas I have to keep up with the language - bearing in mind that I have to keep up with foreign concepts as well”

# Questions raised

1. How do we give students agency to see themselves in the curriculum?
2. How to we enhance skills that are transferable to different contexts
3. How do we create conducive spaces for student voices and sharing of personal histories?
4. How do we facilitate processes that acknowledge the dignity of the pain of the past
5. How do we strive for not only social justice but also cognitive justice?

# Decolonization is a long process, but we must be willing...

It requires willingness to:

- Expose the dominance of Eurocentrism in SW education & practice
- Challenge practices that encourages students to be customers and consumers - they must be co-creators & co-producers of knowledge
- Our curriculum therefore must bring forth that which has been pushed aside
- Through rigorous research and continuous efforts that encourages students' voices

# Last words...

“Educators are called upon to play a central role in constructing the conditions for a different encounter, an encounter that both opposes ongoing colonization and that seeks to heal the social, cultural and spiritual ravages of colonial history”

(Gaztambile-Fernandez’ 2012)