

Social Work with the Black African Diaspora

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This book, *Social Work with the Black African Diaspora*, is a welcome addition to the library of emerging African social work scholars in western societies. It is a well-overdue contribution to combatting age-long racial and political knowledge in social work. Although the book is focused on Ireland, its theoretical terrain has significant resonance for the profession, society and, most importantly, policymakers worldwide. In addition, the two Black diaspora social work authors are courageous to have clearly connected social work theories and practices from a Black African diaspora perspective, which has not gained prominence in Black African social work scholarships. Therefore, the book has questioned the existence, quality, and amount of engagement of western social work ideologies with the Black African population in countries like Ireland. Very importantly, the authors of this book have articulated how Black Africans are “othered” during service utilisation, provision, and policy implementation across western societies.

Another strength of the book is that it touched upon diverse essential issues within the breadth of social work, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), the Covid-19 pandemic, climate issues, migration, and the United Nations’ proclamation as the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). As a Black African social work scholar in Canada, the introductory section of the book was insightful for me to reflect on the Eurocentric education and practice experience I was exposed to as a medical social worker in Nigeria. Chapter

Two offered critical engagement and succinct ideas into nine key concepts: “race”; Black anti-racism; capitalism; cultural competence; Afrocentrism; multiculturalism; diversity; diaspora; and acculturation.

Notably, decolonisation has been an essential discussion concept in social work and other disciplines in recent years. The third chapter of this book discusses how the inception of colonisation was catastrophic. Yet, after the ending of European colonisation, it was still described as destructive and exploitative and was marked by looting of products and raw materials. Interestingly, cultural genocide, as described in the book, drained the essence of traditional African institutions and Indigenous knowledge. Relatedly, the Europeans’ trinity of knowledge has blindfolded Black African social work scholars from thinking within their knowledgebase. Readers will find the contributions of African philosophical writers beneficial to reflect upon, for example, Paul J. Hountodji (a Beninese French writer). The book is critical in examining the knowledge production, ownership and utilisation in social work theory and practice, which scholars have considered universal “truth”. The authors offer genuine interrogation of what we consider truth as social work scholars and the utilisation of diverse epistemological perspectives (Franz Fanon and Aime Cesaire). The authors relate strongly to the relational power ideas of Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe. The book delves into the implication of critical race theory and critical whiteness theory, which is far from a monolithic entity. The book offers possible

messages of liberation for Black Social workers in the diaspora by acknowledging and uplifting African Indigenous approaches to teaching and practice in social work.

Chapter Four of the book delves explicitly into Afrocentric theory and provides critical analysis, including the work of a female African American author named Marimba Ani. While Afrocentricity is studied and acknowledged by scholars in different ways, Afrocentricity offers a lens for recognising the bias of Euro-American ways of thinking. Examples of primary definers of Afrocentricity include Marimba Ani and Molefi Asante. At the same time, in the field of social work, prominent scholars like Jerome Schiele, Mekada Graham, and Dumisani Thabede have utilised Afrocentricity for the promotion of African culture, beliefs and values. Readers of this book should be critical of themselves, as suggested by Ani, that by viewing everything outside of the *self* as an *object*, people can gain power over others. Molefi Asante believes that if African people are going to start healing from the damage caused by staying connected to European views of the world, they must put African ideals and values at the core of their exploration and use those values to understand their own culture. As a Black African scholar, I resonated with the book by the ways they described the use of ancestors, spiritual beliefs, traditional healing practices, and rites of passage, which are all part of their “common sense”.

The book’s fifth chapter focuses on how social work practice is navigating its way in the neoliberal multicultural setting of Ireland, from social service provision to Black communities to the assimilation struggles of Black African social work students who would eventually become service providers in the social service settings

in Ireland. The book is an appreciation of the struggles, pains and successes of Black African social work students and service providers in Ireland and other parts of the world.

Connecting this book’s theoretical and philosophical underpinning, the qualitative exploration presented in chapter six offers a lens into navigating new life, systems, laws, policies and regulations by social work educators and practitioners in Ireland. The practitioners and educators interviewed acknowledge that their Eurocentric views often disadvantage the Black Africans they work with. There is a lack of Black African social work professionals in Ireland, leading to experiences of racial judgement and cultural deficit. The book successfully combines research with arguments about European power structures.

This book, *Social Work with the African Diaspora*, is an essential text for diaspora social work scholars’ libraries. However, there was minimal discussion on other critical issues, such as Black African social workers’ perception of older adults, LGBTQIA concerns, and other invisible populations in a highly neoliberal and westernized society like Ireland. The author does not explicitly discuss the impact of technological advancement in social work practice, especially how they navigate various tools daily as a diaspora social worker. I also noted occasional tangents in some places, yet the book’s unique approach as the first of its kind made it stand out. Hence, social work scholars are strongly encouraged to have this book on their reading list.

References

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