

Interfacing of Folklore as Societal Cultural Capital and Social Welfare: Implications for Practice Initiatives

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Abstract

Societal cultural capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange that includes accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status, whereas social welfare is a nation's system of programmes, benefits and services that help people to meet social, economic, educational, and health needs that are fundamental to the maintenance of society. Cultural capital is a non-economic factor in education and includes characteristics such as attitudes, characters and customs. The aim of this study, which informed this article was to examine relationships between cultural capital and social welfare towards practice initiatives. The authors reviewed and analysed literature as research design and adopted Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. This theory proposes ways in which people would use cultural knowledge to undergird their place in the social hierarchy. In this article the analysis of the interface between folklore and social welfare has been limited to the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, mutual co-existence (symbiotic relationship), *letsema*, sharing and togetherness. We conclude that practitioners in the welfare sector have neglected the significance of cultural capital insofar as initiatives towards their interventions are concerned.

Keywords: cultural capital; folklore; social welfare



Introduction

Social work is a profession designed to help people receive the help and services that they need in order to be functional members of society (Zastrow 2009; Horner 2012; Farley et al., 2012; Hepworth et al 2013). A large framework of social work has evolved to use a combination of two approaches—residual and institutional. These paths provide either preventive or responsive support to members of society. The mechanism of their differences is based on many factors (Zastrow 2009; Ambrosino et al., 2011; Segal et al., 2015). Social welfare care system and social work are inseparable as they are part and parcel of national “social policies that are dependent on how the responsibilities of welfare are distributed between state, civil society and the market” (Hallstedt and Högström 2005, 17). Gray, Plath, and Webb (2009, 37) contends that social work is a highly context-based profession and Patel and Hochfeld (2012, 691) posit that social work cannot be detached from the wider dynamics of development. Social workers have an ethical obligation to promote social justice (Lombard 2015, 484) which is defined by Barker (2003, 404) as “an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations and social benefits.” These benefits are directed towards people who are also attached to their indigenous knowledge systems including societal cultural capital. However, indigenous knowledge systems that impact on social welfare and social work services as directed to clients have to be carefully examined. Hallstedt and Högström (2005, 17) emphasise the importance of joint training for social workers to develop a critical understanding of the welfare regime context in which they operate.

The call of this article is to merge the societal-cultural capital and social welfare because they both affect social work practice and the service recipients. In other words, the article discusses how indigenous knowledge interfaces with the social welfare system when directed to service users, and how this impacts on social work practice. The equitable distribution of social welfare services in South Africa started in the last 22 years with an emphasis on people’s attachment to the indigenised social welfare system of *Ubuntu* (Patel 2005; Nicholas, Rautenbach, and Maistry 2010). The interfacing of the current South African social welfare system has to incorporate indigenous or social-cultural capital such as *Letsema* (“Working together”), which is based on the principles of *Ubuntu*, which is a way of providing people with social welfare services.

There is an apparent need to examine the relationship between interfacing societal cultural capital and social welfare in order to respond appropriately and contextually to service users. Poverty alleviation and eradication in Africa is a three-dimension challenge that raises the need to provide people with social welfare services (Mkabela and Castiano 2010). However, this discussion focuses on the two dimensions of societal cultural capital, as well as the impact of social welfare in practice. Poverty is

defined as the lack of basic commodities such as food, water, knowledge, shelter and health facilities, which are embedded within the social welfare system (Barrientos 2010). Social welfare policies in South Africa are generous and have broad coverage best suited to reduce poverty. However, they still need to be interfaced with the societal-cultural capital and indigenised knowledge systems (Ulriksen 2012). South Africa's developmental social welfare policy depends largely on non-profit organisations (NPOs) to deliver social welfare services to poor service users, vulnerable persons and populations at risk (Patel 2012). However, this developmental social welfare services policy lacks the interface between the societal-cultural capital and social welfare.

South African Constitutional Provisions to Safeguard Cultural Rights

In the South African arena of social welfare services, a significant majority of clientele are people with historical socioeconomic deprivation as well as those who are less likely to be cognizant of their own rights. The clientele of social welfare services may not be aware that their own cultures and practices should be respected even by government authorities. These cultural practices may include the choice of language to be used, right to access of information and the ability to make personal decisions. Due to these aforementioned challenges, as well as historical problems of racial discrimination and oppression, there have been conscious efforts to ensure that cultural rights are respected and monitored to avoid possible abuse. In furtherance of the need to protect rights, Section 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) states:

Every person has the right to use their own language and to follow the culture of their choice. A person has the right to enjoy their culture, use their language and form their own cultural associations in civil society. However, people are not allowed to infringe on other people's rights. To ensure that such rights are fully realisable through proper monitoring, the SA Constitution (Act No 108 of 1996) provides for The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL), which is mandated to promote respect for all communities in South Africa with regard to culture, religion and language.

Residual Social Work

The approach institutes social welfare spending cuts through austerity measures to achieve minimal state intervention (Tellmann 2015, 37). Social workers employing residual approach may also assist people in distress by providing services such as food parcels so that these individuals are able to survive temporarily until they are back on their feet in order for them to be self-sustaining even in future. The model advocates for limited state intervention in the provision of social welfare services. Social welfare

services are provided only to an individual when other means such as the family and market economy could not meet people's needs. The nature of residual approach is reactive or gap-filling and through this approach needs are dealt with as they come (Green 2012, 29).

Residual Social Work Applications

Owing to the fact that residual social work is reactive, social workers respond only when the problem is causing some social dysfunction and requires quick consideration and intervention. According to this approach, social welfare focuses on problems and gaps in order to render benefits and services to the client (Kirst-Ashman 2017). The residual model of social welfare is based on the notion of the capitalist ideology of neoliberalism, which rejects welfare rights and views the market as the main mechanism through which individuals should meet their welfare needs (Cunningham and Cunningham 2012, 66). With regard to the residual social work approach, the deprived and needy members of society who could not be assisted through their families or market economy, are provided with social welfare services which are funded by middle and upper-class philanthropic individuals. Residual social work services may range from counselling, restoration and rehabilitation services to help children, youth, women, as well as vulnerable populations, amongst others. The model puts the responsibility for meeting the human needs on individuals through the private market where they purchase services to meet their own needs (Kirst-Ashman 2013, 7).

Institutional Social Work

Kirst-Ashman (2017) contends that the institutional perspective views people's needs as a normal part of life with the society's responsibility to support its members and to provide benefits and services. For instance, in foster care services, a designated member of the family has to take care of foster children at the expense of the state. Only in extreme cases can children be fostered by people who are not relatives and this has to happen after all means have been explored to locate their significant others/immediate family members and could not be found or are not capable due to criminal cases such as being declared unfit and improper persons to foster children or live with children. Another example would be adoption, as cultural capital needs to be done amongst the relatives of the person giving a child away for adoption. Institutional approach holds that the problems faced by people are caused by conditions beyond their control; as such, it perceives people's needs as a normal part of life and the provision of welfare service as a right (Kirst-Ashman 2013, 7). This approach is non-discriminatory and endorses universal access to services by all members of the society, regardless of their financial status (Patel 2015, 19).

Institutional Social Work Applications

Segal et al. (2015) aver that an institutional approach in social work focuses on giving each person an equal opportunity to be supported, whatever their circumstances. Government-funded social services are some of the best examples of this type because they are offered to everyone who passes the means test. Makhubele and Qalinge (2008, 37) aver that “successful realisation of social development goals and objectives requires the effective harnessing, harmonising and rationalising of indigenous community based groups within their indigenous cultures.” In the same breath, the successful realisation of social development intentions necessitates active synchronisation and interfacing of folklore as societal cultural capital and social welfare. These key elements of cultural capital have to be identified, embraced and appreciated as they add value to, and improve the quality of people’s lives in their localities. Most people in South Africa are still assailed by health and social pathologies, and as a result, remain under-fed, under-housed, under-educated and vulnerable in spite of government’s considerable investments in socioeconomic development. People are still trying to break away from the entanglements of poverty, disease, famine, inequality and lack of opportunities.

Residual and Institutional Approaches of Social Welfare

The residual and institutional models characterised the South African welfare system prior to the new political dispensation in 1994. The “residual model” refers to the concept that each person is responsible for his own welfare and so is each family. Midgley (1996, 59) asserts that

The institutional model favours large-scale state intervention, collective involvement, the universality of coverage and long-term provision. The residual approach of social welfare services is grounded on the notion that governments should play only a limited role in the distribution of social welfare. The supposition is that the majority of the population will be able to locate their own sources of assistance, whether through the market mechanism of work or from family and perhaps the church or charities. The state ought to only step in when the normal sources of support fail and individuals are unable to help themselves.

For instance, there are children on the streets who are not cared for, who left their families as a result of different reasons such as abuse—and the state, through the institutional approach intervenes to protect and care for these children. To this end, it is evident that the social capital of collectively raising a child or children has been left to the care of a particular family, and not the entire clan or community as the old adage articulates that it takes the whole community to raise a child. The philosophy of *Ubuntu* has diminished and everyone is left to fend and care for themselves—hence there are cases of children on the streets. In reference to the delivery of social welfare services, the point is that social welfare service practitioners have equally lost the

essence of cultural capital, and are guided by, and apply Eurocentric worldviews in their interventions. The application of these worldviews in social welfare interventions does not respond appropriately to issues in context, as it essentially regards cultural capital as unnecessary, barbaric and time-wasting. In addition, it is worth noting that the South African framework for social welfare service delivery is a hybrid system—wherein both residual and institutional elements are embedded. For instance, although in the past children were being cared for by members of the kinship, currently foster care cases have been monetised to encourage caring of one another or those who are less-privileged.

Stark (1996) maintains that development alone is not a solution for health and social problems. A holistic approach, which involves the integration of African values and knowledge with Western knowledge is required. This is a challenge to the social work profession.

Discussion on Human Needs

Human problems arise when people's needs are not met. The different levels of needs by Martin and Joomis (2007) are also crucial in interfacing of Societal Cultural Capital and Social Welfare which includes the following:

- **Physiological needs:** physiological needs are also known as biological needs and include the need to have oxygen, food, water, and a moderately unceasing body temperature.
- **Safety needs:** After their physiological needs have been met a person needs to feel secure and safe. Safety and security needs are met when provision is made for people to have houses to protect them from the sun and to be afforded some privacy.
- **Need for love, affection and a sense of belonging:** Every individual needs to be loved, taken care of, and enjoy a sense of belonging. In this regard, people always work hard to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation.
- **Need for esteem:** Each person somehow has a need to be important and to be recognised as such. This involves needs for both self-esteem and for the esteem that a person gets from others. This goes together with self-respect, as well as the respect from others. Immediately a person self-respects and realises that other respect him or her as well, the person feels self-confident and valuable. When these needs are denied, a person feels inferior, weak, helpless and worthless.
- **Need for self-actualisation:** "Self Actualization is the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or more accurately, of what the organism is. Self-actualization implies the attainment of the basic needs of physiological,

safety/security, love/belongingness, and self-esteem” (Maslow 1968, 155). It is in the context of meeting basic human needs that the dearth of cultural capital at the level of service delivery by social welfare professionals leads to unsustainable and poor services as they are not accommodated within a particular context. For instance, if the basic needs are met, challenges of having children on the streets, domestic violence such as sexual and physical abuse and poverty, amongst others, would be averted as social welfare professionals would have internalised cultural capital values such as the philosophy of Ubuntu, sharing and togetherness and symbiotic relationship.

In the view of Maslow (1968) self-actualisation means that man has a natural inclination to attaining a state of healthiness. Basically, it means that man has an inside common drive to ultimately be the most ideal individual he can be. According to Maslow (1968, 155) a person

... has within him a pressure toward unity of personality, toward spontaneous expressiveness, toward full individuality and identity, toward seeing the truth rather than being blind, toward being creative, toward being good, and a lot else. That is, the human being is so constructed that he presses toward what most people would call good values, toward serenity, kindness, courage, honesty, love, unselfishness, and goodness.

The current social welfare system has been influenced by Western culture and is therefore, not applicable to all contexts in Africa (Richard 2000). The authors believe that in order for basic human needs to be realised, societal cultural capital should be grounded within the social welfare context to enable social welfare service practitioners to address social challenges brought about by the neglect of socio-cultural values and practices.

What is Indigenisation?

The question of the indigenisation, contextualisation or Africanisation of education was, and is still a vital question in the social sciences, educational and behavioural fraternities. Debates about the significance of Africanisation, Afrocentric identity, cultural relevance, and the indigenisation of social work practice represent some of the key issues in the social sciences, behavioural and educational debates.

An analysis of some of these issues is important because these issues pertain to the improvement of the social functioning of the people, and address health and social pathologies. The above issues also form part of the current discourse inside and outside the education sphere. This suggests that there is a fundamental need to re-define and understand the current situations affecting human beings, and to assist in the indigenisation of social work education and practice.

According to Osei-Hwedie (1996, 216), indigenisation

Implies finding new ways or revisiting local ideas and processes of problem solving and service delivery. This involves understanding and articulating local indigenous resources, relationships, and problem-solving networks, and the underlying ideas, rationale, philosophies or values.

In essence, indigenisation relates to the appropriateness and relevance of theories, values, norms, and philosophies which undergird practice. For social work practitioners, consideration has to be given, not only to the values, philosophies and norms which guide practice but involvement and synchronisation of the local practices and values of people in which these values and philosophies are founded and being practised. According to Osei-Hwedie (1996), the indigenisation of social work education and practice must be based on values, norms, traditions, and customs of the people in a particular cultural environment.

Yang (2005, 68) states that “indigenisation means to integrate one’s reflections on the local culture and/or society and/or history into her/his approaches.” Gray (2005, 231) defines indigenisation as an “an effect to bring out multiple voices and ways of knowing situated in particular socio-historical and cultural locations so as to establish a solid foundation for meaningful cross-cultural communication in international encounters.” On the other hand, Tsang and Yan (2001, 435) defines indigenisation as “a process and political standpoint in reviewing imported knowledge and hence the assertion and positioning of the local intellectual and professional autonomy of Third World or local social work academics and practitioners in local and particularistic contexts.” Again, Osei-Hwedie (2001) argues that in indigenisation postulations and theorisation should include theories, values and philosophies of social work practice influenced by local factors such as cultures, beliefs, cosmology and social milieu. This shows that indigenisation is a process of self-reflection in relation to cultural values, norms and practices—in response to long-term Western cultural domination. For example, through the process of indigenisation, a social work practitioner, as an observer and an active participant in the socio-cultural life of the people he/she provides services, will develop and, or gain first-hand cultural and historical experience, that will enable him to express an empathetic understanding of the world in which he lives and works. It is through indigenisation that cultural sensitivity in concepts, topics and methods could be highlighted and increased (Adair and Diaz-Loving 1999). Yacat (2005, 22) avers that the meaning of indigenisation is contested and proffers the description by Sinha (1997), who recognises four “threads” and that “knowledge should: (a) arise from within the culture, (b) reflect local behaviours, (c) be interpreted within a local frame of reference and (d) yield results that are locally relevant”. The aspects mentioned above are the levels of indigenisation and would be useful when contemplating indigenisation.

In light of the above definitions, indigenisation can be seen as twofold: one as resisting Western domination, and secondly as striving for lingui-cultural independence, which has an epistemological significance. This implies that the domination of African ethos by Western ethos should be limited, and that the provision of social work education and practice should be conveyed using local languages, and by recognising local cultural values, customs and practices. Furthermore, with regard to epistemological significance, social work education and practice have theoretical frameworks and knowledge bases, which have to be adopted and applied in local contexts. One main difficulty in the universal collective of using social science knowledge is that contemporary conventional theoretical notions and approaches are entirely deep-rooted in a Western knowledge base. Such universal and Western knowledge is honestly general rather than parochial. Deep-rooted Western social science theories and approaches cause serious problems in their application to other societies and/or cultures as there are incompatibilities in terms of cultural values, customs and practices to the people they are supposed to be practiced on. Nonetheless, indigenisation stresses local relevance and compatibilities with regards to people's values, customs and practices. Alternatively, developing an academic programme that is methodically and contextually diverse from current Western social sciences, indigenisation as the process should challenge the universal application of western knowledge and support the integration of local experiences, values, philosophies and practices by exposing and reflecting on the past and neglected indigenous knowledge (Yang 2005). Indigenisation in social work is a complicated process since local indigenous knowledge should guide the understanding of one's own experiences and must be aided by the experience of others. In this sense, professionals need to be culturally or contextually sensitive in every encounter with a client and need to change or adjust the approach with every client. In other words, one aspect of being a professional is to conceptualise cultural or contextual sensitivity in every practice encounter.

Indigenisation and Social Work

Social Work is a practice-oriented profession within a particular social context. Therefore, its training programmes and practice should be informed by and anchored in the cultural milieu, traditions and practices of targeted communities (Mogorosi 2012; Thabede 2005).

Thabede (2005, 46) argues that the indigenisation of social work has to do with the recognition and application of local knowledge, values, customs and practices of clients so as to provide the foundation for intervention. In order to be relevant to the lives of the service consumers, who are social work clients, social work theories and methods ought to be consciously contextualised and adapted to the cultural values, customs and practices in which they are practised. Indigenisation initiatives must

highlight localised approaches to practice for them to be culturally appropriate. Nimmagadda and Cowger (1999, 263) pointed out that "The term indigenization is used to reflect the process whereby a Western social work framework and or Western practice technology is transplanted into another environment and applied in a different context by making modifications" Thabede (2005, 46) traces the genesis of the problem of importation of most Western ideas into training curricula for social work in the African continent and then points out the following:

The kind of social work education that was designed by these Western educated social workers is inappropriate for addressing Third World social problems. Thus many educators have argued for the indigenisation of the social work knowledge base and practice. Indigenisation refers to the adaptation of imported ideas to fit local needs in order to be useful.

Nimmagadda and Cowger (1999, 262–3) indicate that efforts to accelerate the indigenisation of human service professions such as social workers in developing countries are fully justifiable and are based on factors listed below. These are:

- Social work is a contextual profession; it takes place within a cultural context;
- Models of social work in developing countries have been imported and reflect Western social work practice, values and culture;
- Cultural incongruences and issues occur in the day-to-day transactions between the worker and the clients when practice models developed in another culture are utilised;
- American urban models have been adopted, although the developing countries are predominantly rural;
- The profession's value orientation of self-determination and self-reliance has been influenced by American liberal values that are not suitable for other countries;
- Efforts towards indigenisation have been particularly slow in developing countries;
- Practice cannot be accultural¹ and ahistorical²;
- In a multicultural society, there must be a multicultural social work curriculum.

¹ Without culture, customs or values.

² Lacking historical perspective or context.

The incorporation of local content and experiences into training and service programmes assists with indigenisation efforts. In turn, such efforts contribute immensely towards the cultural competence of professionals such as social workers. The American National Association of Social Workers (NASW Standards for Cultural Competence 2001) describes cultural competence as follows:

This is a process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity forms in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each.

To enhance the quality of service delivery, professionals such as social workers and others working within the social welfare field ought to endeavour to understand the cultures of communities that they serve. This will ensure they are more “culturally competent.” NASW Standards (2001) recommends that social workers, particularly those working in culturally-diverse communities, endeavour to appreciate, accommodate and comprehend the clients’ cultural practices and values and their functions in dealing with and controlling human behaviour—specifically and society in general. Social workers should try to accept and understand their clients’ cultures by being culturally sensitive and demonstrate this through professional service delivery. For such professionals to be “culturally competent”, they would require specific knowledge and skills. Adapting from the work of Diller (2007), Mogorosi (2012) summarises these skills as follows:

- Awareness and acceptance: active and creative usage of knowledge of cultural differences and their reality, and value in helping others;
- Self-awareness: appreciation of the impact of own ethnicity and racial attitudes on potential clients, and conscious efforts to try and limit their impact on others;
- Dynamics of differences: awareness and anticipation of possible misconceptions, miscommunication, misinterpretation and misjudgement on the basis of cultural differences;
- Knowledge of clients’ culture: being actively interested in knowing, understanding and seeking information of the cultural practices of clients being served; and
- Adaptation of skills: the ability and readiness to adapt own generic helping skills to accommodate cultural differences for better services in a culturally-diverse environment.

Key Institutions/Organisations and Functions

The table below presents the types of institutions, their primary functions, their social welfare functions as well as cultural capital.

Table 1: Institutional character

<i>Type of institutions</i>	<i>Primary functions</i>	<i>Social Welfare functions</i>	<i>Cultural capital</i>
Family	Procreation, intimacy, support	Care, financial support, socialisation, mutual support	<i>Ubuntu</i> , mutual co-existence (symbiotic relationship), <i>letsema</i> , sharing and togetherness
Churches	Spiritual development	Counselling, social services	<i>Ubuntu</i> , mutual co-existence (symbiotic relationship), <i>letsema</i> , sharing and togetherness
Work organisations	Employment	Employee benefits	<i>Ubuntu</i> , mutual co-existence (symbiotic relationship), <i>letsema</i> , sharing and togetherness
Producers and consumers (social entrepreneurs)	Exchange of goods/services for money	Commercial social welfare goods/services	<i>Ubuntu</i> , mutual co-existence (symbiotic relationship), <i>letsema</i> , sharing and togetherness

Support groups, voluntary Agencies	Mutual aid, philanthropy	Volunteering, community social services.	<i>Ubuntu</i> , mutual co- existence (symbiotic relationship), <i>letsema</i> , sharing and togetherness
National/ Regional/local governments	Mobilisation and distribution of goods for collective goals	Anti-poverty, economic security, health, education, housing, etc	<i>Ubuntu</i> , mutual co- existence (symbiotic relationship), <i>letsema</i> , sharing and togetherness

Conclusion

Societal cultural capital is the cornerstone for social welfare services and should be embraced by social workers working in culturally diverse communities. Cultural capital is a non-economic factor in education and includes characteristics such as attitudes and customs. The scrutiny of the interface between folklore and social welfare should be limited to the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, mutual co-existence (symbiotic relationship), *letsema*, sharing and togetherness. Sadly, practitioners in the welfare sector have not fully appreciated the significance of cultural capital insofar as initiatives towards their interventions are concerned. The colonial experiences and languages are presently not easily changeable in Africa. Therefore, the indigenisation, contextualisation, decolonisation or Africanisation of the education of social workers and social welfare education and practice thereof, are still problematic. Human needs should be met within people's social contexts and situations, rather than simply being imposed from elsewhere.

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