To all those fighting injustice and inequity in its many forms and on its many fronts, large and small.

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Chapter 1

An Overview of Anti-Oppressive Practice

Roots, Theory, Tensions

Donna Baines

This introduction explores the historical roots of anti-oppressive social work, the theory it draws on, and on-going tensions in both theory and practice. In addition, it discusses ten core insights that have stood the test of social justice social work practice.

As you read this introduction, ask yourself the following:

1. What are the roots of anti-oppressive practice (AOP) and social justice approaches, and how can we draw on these roots today?
2. What are some of the gaps in the historical and current writings on AOP and its predecessors? What are some of the points of agreement?
3. What is the difference between more mainstream approaches and AOP?

An Indigenous social work student spends her week comforting neighbours traumatized by events on the barricade at Caledonia, Ontario. She asks for extensions on her final papers, wondering whether her professors will see the links between anti-oppressive theory and her involvement in the frontlines of activism.

Initially full of enthusiasm, a student doing a placement in a child welfare agency soon becomes disillusioned. She feels that she does little more than fill out forms and complete computerized assessments. She never has time to challenge oppressive practices, or even think about them. Workers in her agency are sympathetic, but tell her to get used to it because "there's no room for theory in the real world."

An anti-oppressive therapist who doesn't use the title "social worker" is told that she will lose her job at a family counselling centre because she hasn't registered with the Social Work College. Primarily providing services to very poor women of colour, many of whom are survivors of abuse and torture, she wonders whose needs are being served by the College.

Oppression

Oppression takes place when a person acts or a policy is enacted unjustly against an individual (or group) because of their affiliation to a specific group. This includes depriving people of a way to make a fair living, to participate in all aspects of social life, or to experience basic freedoms and human rights. It also includes imposing belief systems, values, laws, and ways of life on other groups through peaceful or violent means. Oppression can be external, as in the examples above, or internal, when groups start to believe and act as if the dominant belief system, values, and life way are the best and exclusive reality. Internal oppression often involves self-hate, self-censorship, shame, and the disowning of individual and cultural realities.

Charity and Band Aids versus Social Justice and Transformation

The vignettes above describe real-life conflicts and tensions that social work students and practitioners experience in everyday frontline practice. Although details have been changed to protect confidentiality, these vignettes are based on real events and people. They highlight the complexity of struggles in the world of social work practice, the need for models that advance social justice at multiple levels, and the kinds of struggles in which social workers find themselves. Social work is a unique field in many ways. It contains a number of distinct approaches and philosophies regarding care, what constitutes care, and how to stop or slow the social problems that generate the need for care. Social work is generally thought to have first emerged from charitable roots (for example, Carniol 2010; Mullaly 2002; Abramovitz 1988). Employed by groups such as the Charitable Organizations Society, Victorian-era social workers frequently provided the poor with enthusiastic lectures on morality and hygiene, as well as infrequent but much-needed food baskets or clothing boxes (Abramovitz 1988). These interventions did little more than place leaky band aids on deeply rooted social problems, failing to challenge systems that exploited the poor and sustained the wealthy (Carniol 2005; Withorn 1984). This tradition continues today in social work in the form of interventions aimed at providing a subsistence level of support to clients while leaving social systems that generate such problems untouched.

Fortunately, more social justice-oriented approaches to social work also exist. Throughout the history of social work, workers, clients, and average people have asked, what are the causes of social problems and, crucially, what can we do to address those causes and prevent social problems rather than merely treating the victims? These questions have been central to the development of a strand of social work emerging from social movements and aimed at fundamentally transforming the political, economic, social, and cultural

Social Movements

Social movements are one of the major roots of politicized, transformative social work. Social movements are groups of people who come together to enact change on specific political, economic, cultural, or social issues. While they are normally thought of as progressive in nature, they can also be regressive and work to halt or revoke social reforms and transformative policies. The authors in this book use the term social movements to refer to the collective action of individuals with reform and transformative agendas of social justice, equity, and fairness.

factors underlying and generating inequality and injustice. Groups such as the Rank and File Movement, the Settlement House Movement, and the Canadian League for Social Reconstruction called on social work to serve those in need, while simultaneously working to fundamentally reorganize society (Hick 2002; Withorn 1984; Reynolds 1963, 1951, 1946). In other words, politicized, transformative approaches to social work have a long history. Within the field of social work, social justice-oriented practice happens in a number of ways, including education and consciousness-raising among clients and co-workers; the development of social justice-based therapies such as feminist therapy and First Nations interventions; community development and organizing; political activism and workplace resistance; and broad-based organizing around policy changes, world peace, international equity, and the development of social systems based on fairness and social justice.

Transformation

In this book, transformation refers to ways of relieving people's emotional pain and immediate difficulties while simultaneously working to change the larger forces that generate inequity, unfairness, and social injustice. These forces include racism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism, ableism, ageism, and other hierarchical, authoritarian relations. With somewhat different emphases, these forces are often referred to interchangeably as social relations, social forces, social systems, social structures, and social factors. These social relations are shaped by and shape the social, political, economic, and cultural norms, structures, systems, discourses, forces, policies, organizations, and practices of our everyday lives and societies. Anti-oppressive practice and other social justice-oriented social workers seek to transform these larger social relations through direct practices that incorporate liberatory approaches within specific interventions and interactions, as well as through larger actions aimed at structural or macro-level change such as activism, scholarly work, resistance, advocacy, collective organizing, mass actions, and long- and short-term mobilization of individuals, groups, and societies.

Anti-oppressive practice (AOP), which will be discussed in greater detail later in this and the following chapter, is one of the main forms of social justice-oriented social work theory and practice today. It is a promising and exciting approach to the complexity of today's social problems, operating in the context of multiple oppressions and the growing need for fundamental reorganization of all levels of society. Anti-oppressive practice attempts to integrate the search and struggle for social change directly into the social work experience. This can take the form of new practices, new sources for and ways of understanding and building knowledge and practice, and new ways of building activism and opposition. Rather than a single approach, AOP is an umbrella term for a number of social justice-oriented approaches to social work, including feminist, Marxist, postmodernist, Indigenous, poststructuralist, critical constructionist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist. These approaches draw on social activism and collective organizing as well as a sense that social services can and should be provided in ways that integrate liberatory understandings of social problems and human behaviour. As part of larger movements for social change, AOP is constantly refining its theory and practice to address new tensions and social problems as well as underlying structural factors.

Broadly speaking, anti-oppressive social workers try to provide service to people seeking it, but also they help clients, communities, and themselves to understand that their problems are linked to social inequality — to understand why they are oppressed and how to fight for change. AOP does not claim to be an exclusive and authoritative model containing every answer to every social problem. Instead, consistent with its emancipatory heritage, AOP is a set of politicized practices that continually evolve to analyze and address constantly changing social conditions and challenges.

Core Themes

While a number of social justice-oriented frameworks exist and disagreements continue at the level of theory, there are ten common themes or core insights that stand the test of frontline practice in terms of promoting social justice at the level of everyday frontline social work.

1. Macro- and micro-social relations generate oppression.
Social relationships are enacted by human beings and generate the ongoing oppression of many groups and individuals. That they are enacted by people means that these oppressive relationships can be changed by people. Macro-level social relations are also known as social structures, social forces and social processes, or the so-called larger forces in society, such as capitalism; governments and their economic, social, financial, and international polices; religious and cultural institutions; and international trade and financial bodies. Micro-level social relations include social norms, everyday practices, workplace-specific

policies and processes, values, identities, and so-called common sense. Using the term "social relations" highlights that these relations are organized and operated by people and can be halted or reorganized by them as well; they are wholly *social* processes, not inevitable conditions of modern life or ones that we cannot change.

2. Everyday experience is shaped by multiple oppressions.
Macro- and micro-social relations shape, perpetuate, and promote social ideas, values, and processes that are oppressively organized around notions of superiority, inferiority, and various positions between these two polar opposites. These multiple oppressions, including gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, and race, do not just lie quietly alongside one another, rarely compounding one another or interacting (Collins 2000; Baines 2002; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). Instead, multiple oppressions overlap, contest, undermine, and/or reinforce one another in ways that depend on a variety of factors in the immediate and global environment.

3. Social work is a contested and highly political practice.
"Politicize" and "politics" refer to small "p" politics — everyday struggles over meaning, resources, survival, and well-being. Using this definition, everything is political despite the relatively widespread sentiment that most of everyday life is completely apolitical. Small "p" politics is different from big "P" politics, which assumes that politics occurs mainly during elections in which parties and individuals run for the right to govern. From the big "P" political perspective, only a very few issues are thought to be political. For example, social problems are conventionally understood to be the result of individual difficulties and poor decision-making rather than unequal distribution of power, resources, and affirming identities. People holding the big "P" politics perspective seek solutions by tinkering with the existing social system, applying managerial techniques to most or all social questions, or encouraging individuals to seek medical or psychological intervention for the problems they experience.

In contrast, people holding the small "p" politics viewpoint see social problems and their solutions as shaped by one's access to power and resources, as well as by one's ability to use and expand this access in ways that are socially just and promote equity. In order to determine whether we have power in any given situation, we can begin by asking what we would like to see changed, who else would like this change, and whether we can make the change happen. Our answers to these questions usually show us how much power we have and can access, what the available means and strategies are by which we can wield power, who else holds power, and how such people can wield, barter, extend, or redistribute their power. As we try to bridge practice and social activism, it is important to ask who benefits from the way things operate at any given point in time, who can help make the changes we want, how we can help ourselves

and others see the many ways in which issues are political, and how multiple strands of power are operating in any given scenario.

To politicize something or someone is to introduce the idea that everything has political elements; that is, to introduce the idea that nothing is neutral, and everything involves an overt or covert struggle over power, resources, and affirming identities. This struggle may be very calm and easily negotiated between two people in banal, everyday conversation, or it may bubble more explicitly to the surface as people challenge the way they are spoken to or about by others, the opportunities provided to or denied them, and the ways they can access and experience the positive aspects of life such as employment, arts, social involvement, and so forth. When an issue is politicized rather than just thought of as an unfortunate social problem or individual shortcoming, individuals and groups can more easily analyze and act upon it. At the very core of social work's existence are conflicts between competing social-political groups and forces over defining needs and how to interpret and meet needs. These groups can be comprised of communities, classes, cultures, age groups, a certain sector of the workforce or those excluded from the workforce, and so forth. These competing groups represent a wide range of political perspectives and strategies for change. Social workers differ deeply over whether to support the status quo, what political perspective to adopt, whether strategies for change are justified, and if so, which ones and to what degree.

4. Social work is not a neutral, caring profession, but an active political process.

There is no "politics-free-zone" (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1980), nor are there ways to avoid power and politics in social work, especially when we are trying to meet client needs in the context of an increasingly pro-market, corporatized society that supports and benefits from war, colonialism, poverty, and injustice at the local level and worldwide (see Chapter 2 and Akua Benjamin's Afterword). Every action we undertake is political and ultimately about power, resources, and who has the right and opportunity to feel positive about themselves, their identities, and their futures.

5. Social justice-oriented social work assists individuals while simultaneously seeking to transform society.

Rather than an exclusive emphasis on changing individuals, social justice-oriented social work assists individuals in meeting their needs, whenever possible, in participatory and transformative ways, and simultaneously focuses on challenging and transforming those forces within society that benefit from and perpetuate inequity and oppression.

6. Social work needs to build allies and work with social causes and movements.

Social workers cannot resolve larger social, economic, and political problems on their own. Social work must join with other groups to organize and mobilize people to make larger-scale, transformative changes. Social movements and activist organizations offer some of the best options for building lasting social change and provide the best "fit" with social work values and ethics (see Baines' Chapter Six in this book).

7. Social work's theoretical and practical development must be based on the struggles and needs of those who are oppressed and marginalized.

As Bertha Reynolds (1946) noted, "Social work exists to serve people in need. If it serves other classes who have other purposes, it becomes too dishonest to be capable of either theoretical or practical development." Social work knowledge and practice need to be grounded in the lives of those we serve, assessed in relation to critical approaches in order to ensure that we are building lasting change and not unintentionally reproducing various kinds of oppression.

8. Participatory approaches are necessary between practitioners and "clients."

Clients are not just victims, but can and need to be active in their own liberation and that of others. Their experience is also a key starting point in the development of new theory and knowledge, as well as political strategies and resistance. Their voices must be part of every program, policy, planning effort, and evaluation. Participatory forms of helping tend to be those that offer the most dignity as well as far-reaching and lasting impact (Moreau 1981; Reynolds 1963, 1946, 1951).

9. Self-reflexive practice and ongoing social analysis are essential components of AOP.

Social workers should constructively criticize their own participation in and link to social processes (de Montigny 2005; Miehls and Moffatt 2000). We lose an invaluable source of information when we fail to use our own insights, frustrations, disappointments, and successes as entry points into improving theory and practice (see the Chapters Twelve and Fifteen by Massaquoi and Kumsa, respectively, in this book).

10. A blended, heterodox social justice perspective provides the best potential for politicized, transformative social work practice.

Rather than claiming any single social justice-oriented model as the complete truth, a heterodox approach, involving and incorporating the strengths of a variety of critical approaches, provides the greatest vibrancy and potential to deliver emancipatory theory and practice. Rather than locking itself into

defending the boundaries of a particular perspective, this approach provides the greatest potential for ongoing development and refinement of theory and practice. The authors in this book discuss, use, and clarify a healthy spectrum of overlapping, though sometimes contesting, perspectives (including feminist, Marxist, postmodernist, Indigenous, poststructuralist, critical constructionist, anti-colonial, and anti-racist).

The Roots of Anti-Oppressive Practice

As noted earlier, is it commonly thought that social work emerged first as a profession among groups providing charity (Carniol 2005; Mullaly 2002; Abramovitz 1988), such as the Charitable Organizations Society in the Victorian era. The interventions of these early professionals did little more than place leaky band aids on social problems, failing to challenge systems that exploited the poor and sustained the wealthy (Carniol 2010; Withorn 1984). This tradition continues today in social work in the form of interventions aimed at providing subsistence to clients while leaving social systems that generate such problems untouched. For example, employment services push unemployed people to accept any job regardless of wages, working conditions, or match with skills and life goals. The wages on most of these jobs are too low to support an individual, let alone a family, and are usually short-term — in short order throwing people back into a depressed and unstable job market. These solutions fail to address deep problems in an economy that simply does not create enough jobs for everyone and benefits from low wages and desperate job-seekers. It also fails to look at possible long-term correlations between race, gender, dis/ability, or region and access to or systematic exclusion from better jobs.

Fortunately, more social justice-oriented approaches to social work also emerged at the same time, reflecting the conflicts that rocked Victorian society, namely struggles between those who work for a living (or would if employment was available to them) and those who live off the wealth produced through the labour of others. By the late-1880s social workers participated in and led social justice-directed organizations such as the Rank and File Movement, the Settlement House Movement, and the Canadian League for Social Reconstruction (Hick 2002; Withorn 1984; Reynolds 1963, 1946). An early social justice social worker and educator, Bertha Reynolds (1946, 1951, 1963), was a member of the Rank and File as well as an active socialist and communist who wrote several pivotal books describing egalitarian approaches to social work. Like those who take anti-oppressive approaches today, Reynolds and these groups called on social work to serve people in need, while simultaneously working to fundamentally reorganize society.

Though social justice-oriented social workers continued to develop their practice knowledge, academic publishing was fairly limited prior to the 1970s. Work from England during this time, such as Bailey and Brake's *Radical Social*

Work (1975) and *Radical Social Work and Practice* (Brake and Bailey 1980) and Corrigan and Leonard's *Social Work Practice under Capitalism: A Marxist Approach* (1978), was rooted in Marxist models of class struggle, while the U.S. version of radicalism is reflected in Galper's *The Politics of Social Services* (1975). Works emerging in the late- and middle-1980s reflected a broadening of class analysis to include other key bases of oppression, particularly race and gender, as exemplified in *Feminist Social Work* by Dominelli and MacLeod (1989; see also *Anti-racist Social Work*, Dominelli 1988 and *Serving the People: Social Service and Social Change*, Withorn 1984 in the United States). A number of important feminist social work writings emerged through the 1980s and 1990s, including *Gender Reclaimed: Women in Social Work* (Marchant and Wearing 1986a); *Social Change and Social Welfare Practice* (Petruchenia and Thorpe 1990) in Australia; and *Social Work and the Women's Movement* (Gilroy 1990) and *The Personal is Political: Feminism and the Helping Professions* (Levine 1982) in Canada. In Canada, early versions of a multiple-oppression analysis emerged as "structural social work," emphasizing the way that everyday problems are social in nature; that is, they are shaped by social structures and relations interacting with individuals, their personalities, families, and communities, which are also social in nature. These social structures include patriarchy, racism, capitalism, heterosexism, ageism, and ableism. The structural approach is epitomized by the work of Moreau (1993, 1981, 1979) and Mullaly (1993). In his social work classic, *Case Critical*, Carniol (1987; now on its 6th edition) analyzed social work practice from a similarly structural perspective. Fook (1993) and Rees (1992) used social justice-oriented social work framing to undertake similar work in Australia. By the mid- to late-1990s much of the multiple voice, multiple oppression focus had turned to postmodernism and poststructuralism, as seen in works by Pease and Fook (1999), Leonard (1997), and the Canadian collection by Chambon and Irving (1994). In the 1990s and into the new millennium, social justice-oriented work shifted anti-oppressive or critical social work, exploring a blending of critical postmodernism and intersectionist, class analysis (Mullaly 2002, 2007; Allan, Pease and Briskman 2003; Lundy 2004; Dominelli 2004; Carniol 2010; Hick, Fook and Pozzuto 2005). Although this blending of theories is often less than straightforward and many debates continue, it produced new generations of social justice-oriented practitioners and academics (for detailed summaries and analyses of these theoretical perspectives and debates see McDonald, 2006; Dominelli 2004, 2002; Allan, Pease and Briskman 2003; Fook 2002; Pease and Fook 1999). Postmodernism and poststructuralism offered ways of understanding multiple oppressions such as identity, social location, voice, diversity, borders, anti-essentialism, inclusion, exclusion, and difference, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of everyday experience (definitions for many of these terms are included in various chapters as well as listed in the index at the end of the book). Some argue that the use of postmodernist and poststructuralist

concepts represent a decisive break with older theories such as feminism, Marxism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism. For example, the older theories contain a clear sense of who the oppressed and oppressor groups are in society while postmodernism challenges the notion of oppression, who is oppressed, and the multiple ways that oppression may or may not be sustained and reproduced. Others argue that postmodernist concepts are extensions of issues tackled by the older models and add useful complexity to debates that have raged through the years. For example, some argue that older theories failed to discuss overlapping oppressions, difference, diversity, or identity. However, starting in the early 1980s, Heidi Hartman (1981) and others working from a Marxist-feminist or socialist-feminist perspective produced pivotal articles exploring overlapping oppressions. Similarly, Black feminists such as Angela Davis (1981) and Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1989, 1990) were addressing class, race, and gender before postmodernism promoted the notion of multiple identities. Rather than the exclusive domain of postmodernism and poststructuralism, context and everyday practice were an early focal point for theorizing by feminists such as Dorothy Smith and others (1987; Smith and David 1975; with Burstyn 1985). While real differences exist (see, for example, discussions in Pease and Fook 1999 or Hick, Fook and Puzzuto 2005), significant similarities predominate in the work of most anti-oppressive scholars. For example, both the older and the newer frameworks explore the individual and his/her place in the world recognizing, for example, that one's identity is shaped by their class, race, gender, etc. — in short, that we all have multiple and socially constructed identities. The older and newer frameworks also recognize that the ways that we interpret our identities and experiences are also buffered and shaped by class, race, gender, etc.

While real differences exist (see, for example, discussions in Pease and Fook 1999 or Hick, Fook and Puzzuto 2005), significant similarities predominate in the work of most anti-oppressive scholars. For example, both the older perspectives such as Marxism and feminism and the newer theoretical schools such as critical postmodernism and poststructuralism argue for ongoing refinement of theory in response to changing social conditions; versions of each type of theory have struggled with the complexity of multiple axes of oppression and all are concerned with power. As Steve Hick and Richard Puzzuto (2005) note, the mingling of postmodern and critical theories is debated across many fields, cannot be rigidly defined, and is a necessary aspect of theorizing today's world of social work.

It is not just theoretical progression that underlies the development of AOP. Global capitalism, neoliberalism, and managerialism generate practice environments in which social workers encounter new kinds of challenges and issues. To address these challenges AOP social workers find themselves asking many questions, some the same as those asked by workers during much earlier periods. These questions include:

- How do we provide resources to and act in solidarity with exploited groups?
- How do we nurture local leadership and encourage social justice initiatives?
- How do we sustain ourselves and analysis in alienating and sterile environments?

In the new contexts of practice, social work practitioners also find themselves asking questions such as:

- How do we understand and work across multiple and intersecting differences (intersecting and interlocking oppressions; see Hulko 2010; Baines 2002)?
- In building oppositional analyses and resistance, how do we draw on the voices of marginalized people and their everyday knowledge as well as practice knowledge, research, and theory?
- How can resistance strategies promote a clear political program of change while remaining open, fluid, and inclusive (that is, embrace both certainty and uncertainty; see Adams, Dominelli and Payne 2009; Stepney 2009; Mullaly 2007)?

Attempting to engage with these and other questions, recent writing on AOP reflects a new phase in its history. Rather than establishing itself and drawing on its links with other types of social work, such as feminist or structural, AOP is sufficiently established that much of its writing focuses on taking AOP into new practice areas, analyzing the changing context of AOP, and extending and refining AOP theory. One of the most challenging tasks is the translation of theory into frontline practice, and fortunately there is a great deal of new writing in this area. Given that much of social work practice is particular to the distinct area in which it operates, summarizing these developments is difficult. However, in broad strokes, this work highlights clients' strengths while being keenly aware of the ways that their experiences and life chances have been limited and shaped by larger, inequitable social forces. While addressing service users' concerns in the most robust and respectful way possible, it links individual problems and individuals to others in the same situation, drawing links between personal pain, political inequities, social policies, and economic forces. In terms of new writings on AOP: Carniol and Del Valle (2007) provide practice insights into AOP with immigrant women; Danso (2009) does the same for de-valued, skilled immigrants; Fish (2008) provides a theoretical foundation for AOP with lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual people; Pollack (2010, 2004) delves in AOP with women in prison; Parrott (2009) extends understandings of AOP in the context of cultural diversity; MacDonald (2008) discusses AOP with chronic pain sufferers and people with disablities; Brown and Augusta-Scott (2006) critically engage with narrative therapy to produce more empowering outcomes

for clients; Aronson and Smith (2009) explore resistance among social justice-oriented managers and supervisors; and Todd and Coholic (2007) analyze the challenges of teaching AOP to diverse and resistive students, including Christian fundamentalists.

The impact of new global management models and social policy frameworks has also been analyzed from an AOP perspective, helping practitioners understand and take creative actions against the further integration of neoliberal work practices and forms of organization. As discussed in Chapter One, neoliberalism is a global system that emphasizes individual responsibility and the private purchase of services rather than shared social responsibility and public services. These philosophies are introduced in the workplace in the form of standardized, alienating work practices such as New Public Management (NPM) and other performance management models or as so-called scientific approaches such as evidence-based practice that provide tight prescriptions for social work practice, replacing workers' discretion with pre-allotted amounts and types of interventions (see Bates' chapter in this book). Analyzing and theorizing the operation and impacts of managerialism as well as specific policy and funding reforms, Garrett (2009, 2008) writes convincingly of restructuring in child protection in Ireland and the U.K.; Baines (2010a, 2010b) provides an analysis of similar changes in non-profit social service work; Carey (2009b, 2007, 2006) discusses changing labour process for public sector social workers under policies that claim to challenge social exclusion but seemingly only perpetuate it; and McDonald (2006) analyzes the context and possible futures for social work in the context of constraint, a heavy emphasis on self-regulation, individualized and competitive professionalism, and NPM.

Finally, numerous authors have taken on theoretical refinement of social justice-oriented practice. Much of this writing focuses on specific and thorny questions that continually arise in social work aimed at liberation. Many of these questions pivot on the issue of power, what it is, how and when it is used, and what are more equitable and fair ways of conceiving of and using power in society at large and social work in particular. Some important discussions include Adams, Dominelli and Payne (2009) on complexity and uncertainty; Gilbert and Powell (2010) on knowledge and power; Mullaly (2007) on oppression; Tew (2006) on power and powerlessness; and Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) on critical consciousness.

Ongoing Tensions and Gaps

There is never a one-to-one direct translation of theory into practice in any situation, and the rapidly changing, multi-level world of AOP is no different. At the level of frontline practice, an amalgam of theories and practices generally works quite well, opening up and guiding possibilities for new ways to understand and act upon social problems and keeping theories growing, constantly

expanding, or turning in new directions and fluid. At the level of theory, this amalgam is not always quite so happy (Tester 2003; Rossiter 1996). There are a number of tensions.

Epistemology

As a heterodox, umbrella term, AOP borrows bits and pieces from the various theories mentioned earlier in this chapter. These theories each have a somewhat different epistemological base or basis on which they can claim that their knowledge is credible, or in more simple terms they can claim that they know what they know. Structural, feminist, anti-racist, and Marxist social work draw on (modernist) epistemologies emphasizing the existence of social structures that shape, but do not determine, everyday experience. These structures, even something as seemingly concrete as the private market, are a series of social relations that have been put together and can be dismantled and rebuilt by human beings.

Moral or normative knowledge and projects contain a ballast or central tenet that assists in distinguishing better from worse or right from wrong. Structural, feminist, anti-racist, and Marxist theories all identify a key oppressed group or groups (e.g., women, racialized groups, working class, and poor people) who require liberation through the fundamental reorganization of social relations (i.e., social structures). This central tenet provides the moral-political project of each of these theories, or ways of knowing right from wrong and how to proceed with liberatory practice. In more everyday terms, this central tenet provides a moral compass for those using these theories and a set of projects or values that need to be pursued in order to create a more just and ethical way of being in the world.

In contrast, postmodernism *is* an epistemological theory about ways of knowing and how language and discourse exercise power — not, as Fook (2002) notes, a moral theory for political action. In other words, postmodernism does not have a moral project or group of people it is trying to liberate. Instead, it is a project aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of knowledge itself and how power operates through the words we and others use and the ways that language is used in professional and technical practice to define problems and in the process limit more complex and dynamic ways of understanding and acting

Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory or study of knowledge itself. It asks questions such as what is knowledge and therefore what is not; how do we know what we know; how is knowledge acquired; and, given the answers to the first three questions, what do people actually know? Epistemology is important in evaluating whether our claims about something are credible and something on which we feel we can base actions and interventions.

Ontology

Ontology is the study of being, existence, or reality. Our sense of reality shapes the ways we understand and act on the world. Some social work theories such as Marxism, feminism, and most of AOP believe that there is a real world that we can change in positive ways. Other theories, such as some versions of social constructionism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, are ambivalent about how and whether positive change can be enacted. They argue that because we can only draw on existing constructions and discourses to build new ones, there is little hope of building social relations free of oppressive discourses and social constructions.

on them. In order to avoid constructing oppressive discourses, postmodernism avoids moral projects, preferring to deconstruct and reveal the operation of oppressive uses of language and knowledge rather than developing roadmaps for liberation. Mullaly (2007) argues that despite this epistemological disagreement between these approaches in terms of what knowledge is and what it is for, critical postmodernism, Marxist, feminist, and other social justice-oriented approaches can be jointly mobilized to develop social theory and address social problems.

Stepney (2009) is less optimistic about this melding project, pointing out that the ontologies that underlie each framework draws are very different and largely incompatible. He and others (Pease 2007; Fook 2002) have advanced a perspective known as critical realism within social work. Critical realism embraces Marxism, feminism, and anti-racism's recognition of the existence and impacts of social structures (and hence its moral project and capacity to judge better from worse practices and processes), as well as postmodernism's sensitivity to the social construction of knowledge and the "multiple realities of subjective experience" (the idea that all knowledge is created socially, that is, by people, in order to serve a particular purpose or many purposes, and the recognition of the many social and individual perspectives and interests that make up individual and social experience). It does this without the "abyss of relativism" that accompanies projects that lack moral or normative bases (Stepney 2009: 18). (As noted above, lacking a moral project or group to liberate, postmodernism and poststructuralism tend to view all issues and viewpoints as valid and each solution as legitimate as the next, making it nearly impossible to develop social justice strategies and interventions.) Drawing on the strengths provided by structuralism and critical postmodernism, Stepney argues that critical realism offers a viable basis for social justice-oriented social work.

At the level of everyday practice, it is doubtful that critical realists do anything differently than an anti-oppressive practitioner, and using their own arguments it would seem that globalization and managerialism are more likely impediments to emancipatory practice than minor ontological differences between postmodernism and the more structural-based critical theories. The

Social Construction

The theory of social construction asserts that all knowledge, including taken-for-granted common sense, and all concepts, such as oppression and social change, are socially constructed by human beings on the basis of shared, though frequently changing, social understandings. Critical social constructionists believe there is a reality on which we can act; pure social constructionists argue that the concept of reality itself is a constructed social convention.

lively debate that critical realism has introduced to social work helps to expand and refine both theory and practice, and as such it is a welcome addition to the multiple perspectives informing social justice-oriented approaches. In short, AOP and critical realism seem to cover the same ground and can draw usefully on each other's contributions.

None of the disagreements discussed above are unique to AOP or particularly new to struggles for social justice. Disagreement is part of the landscape when the stakes are high, as they are in the case of social work practice. Fortunately, it is not necessary to have complete agreement on all aspects of theory and practice in order to move ahead with agendas for social justice (Mullaly 2001, 2007). Indeed, the kinds of conflicts mentioned above are best worked out in frontline practice and within the struggle for social justice, with social movements and marginalized groups acting as the final arbitrator of the strengths and weaknesses of any given approach.

The State

Mullaly (2007: 25) notes that in order to deal with the current crises facing the world, social workers need to understand the state (elected government, civil service, policy apparatus, funded services, and so forth) and social work's relation to it. That is, social work needs to theorize its connection and operation within, against, and in support of the state. Many social workers are employed directly by governments (such as welfare employees, workers' compensation services, employment services, housing, school boards, policy analysts and so forth). A large portion also work in government-funded and mandated services such as health care and child welfare. A third very large group works in the non-profit or voluntary sector, which receives most of its funding from government and must therefore meet government-required reporting standards (such as outcome and performance measure), accreditation standards (how many employees require professional accreditation, what kind of credentials, etc.) and other contract requirements. Social workers are employed in the larger state apparatus and by implication work *for* the state; many also organize lobby briefs, policy analysis, activist groups, and protests *against* the state, while others rally *in support* of government policies and direction. Of course, social workers often occupy more

than one, or even all, of these roles simultaneously — employed by one arm of the state, protesting cuts in another, and rallying in defense of politicians trying to make a difference. This makes the state a very complex but important set of relations for social workers to understand and theorize.

Most people think of the state as an arm of government that develops policies and programs in more or less neutral ways, trying to reflect the interests of the many groups that make up society. A more structural analysis argues that the government and the state reflect and extend the interests of dominant groups while attempting to appear neutral and even-handed. For example, governments claim that tax cuts benefit everyone though they tend to benefit the rich far more. Also, by reducing the amount of tax dollars coming into government coffers, cuts reduce the amount available to spend on social programs aimed at alleviating inequality and poverty, relegating these programs to the back burner of government and social priorities.

Given their claim that power is diffuse (that is, power does not operate against people but simultaneously through, against, in support of, and alongside them, as well as other possible variations), postmodernists and poststructuralists have not developed a comprehensive theory of the state per se and do not tend to view the state as having a pivotal or central role in social life. Instead, various forms of power (discourses or debates/discussions of social issues, professional bodies of knowledge and practice, and language itself) operate through individuals, such as social workers, who work within, against, and in support of the state. This very open-ended understanding of power reminds us that power is complex and contradictory, but it also makes action or the development of strategies for social justice difficult: if power always simultaneously oppresses and resists oppression, one may find it hard to believe that any social change effort or strategy will help more than it harms, and that these kinds of social change will improve things rather than just recreating existing injustices in new ways. This means that on the frontlines of practice, or when social workers are trying to develop new social policies and programs, it is not possible to know with any confidence that new strategies will empower or liberate people; and when the implementation of such strategies leads only to the status quo, or when it makes things worse, hope for improvement will be diminished. These issues become particularly acute in discussions over whether the state, which employs or funds most social work services in most industrial countries, helps its citizens, reflects the interests of dominant groups, or simply reproduces inequities/resistance in an endless circle.

In contrast, more structural approaches to power — Marxist, feminist, and anti-racist — assert that power is something that individuals and institutions can use to promote their own and others' interests and that these interests can be oppressive, productive, or both. Within a Marxist, feminist, or structuralist analysis the state is seen a set of *processes* that *can* assist oppressed population

interests and even remove the cause of their maltreatment. This does not mean that the state always or even often does promote social justice through its policies, because at the same time that it can reduce oppression, the state *can* and *often does* sustain and extend oppressive relations reflecting the interests of dominant socio-economic groups (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1980). For example, major state programs such as welfare in Canada may appear to be helping those receiving payments, but a growing body of evidence suggests that the strongly negative stigma associated with and the bare subsistence rates of these programs ensures a supply of desperate people compelled to take any job regardless of its rate of pay, permanence, workplace safety, and so forth (Lightman, Herd, and Mitchell 2010; 2009). In short, rather than addressing the poverty caused by a system that is driven by profit and needs a pool of low-cost workers, most state-sponsored welfare programs meet the needs of the business sector by ensuring an endless supply of cheap labour.

Rather than being neutral or non-aligned, the state reflects an unstable equilibrium of struggles between those who benefit from inequity and those who strive to eradicate or reduce it (Wetherly 2008; Sassen 2003; Panitch and Leys 1999). The state also reflects the intended and unintended consequences of policies developed in response to the aforementioned struggles as well as the individual priorities of influential politicians, civil servants, and intellectuals (Wetherly 2008). This dynamic but grounded formulation of the state permits AOP social workers to see that, as employees within a larger state or state-funded system, they often inadvertently play a part in legitimizing, perpetuating, and benefiting from ongoing injustice. On the other hand, though they are part of the state machinery (that is, the state provides funding to most social services and mandates parts of it as well), social workers work within complex sets of policies that reflect not just the interests of dominant groups but also those which progressive forces have been able to stake out. As noted earlier, social workers often challenge or protest these policies while simultaneously employed within them to provide services to those in need. Many social justice social workers also build new services and ways of understanding social problems that may operate outside of government, or they cautiously draw on government funding, ever aware of the ways that this funding may compromise (or enhance) the services. Social workers of all political stripes are also active in elections and new policy development.

Most structural approaches (Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, etc.) assert that the state reflects the interests of dominant groups, making it a partriarchal, racialized, classist force in society. However, this assertion can make it seem that little can be done to change the state, that our only recourse is to capture it. The notion of the state as a constantly changing, unstable equilibrium of struggles and counter-struggles permits AOP social workers to recognize that there are spaces in this instability in which to resist oppression and to build new practices, relations, and solidarity with others doing likewise. Indeed,

many of the most cutting-edge, innovative, politicized social services carefully adhere to the accreditation and documentation requirements of state funders even as they simultaneously push back the boundaries of how to engage with highly marginalized client groups, draw them in to receive and participate in services, integrate their insights into practice models into front-line approaches, and build new kinds of social relations and structures in the process of service development, delivery, and evaluation.

A few years ago, one of my students was involved in developing an anti-racist, feminist collective to address the needs of recently arrived immigrant women experiencing violence from a male partner, often their sponsor for immigration. The collective carefully and thoughtfully developed ways of working and of organizing services in order to draw in the community, share knowledge, challenge racism and sexism, and deliver services respectful of both service users and providers. Though funding was difficult to get and the state funders' reporting requirements were challenging, the collective continued to operate differently from more established hierarchical, bureaucratic agencies and to defend their more politicized and liberatory practices and methods of service delivery, on the grounds that these approaches provided users with respectful, engaged staff and a constructive, rewarding work environment.

Managing and Supervising Social Work

Managerial and supervisory issues are largely underdeveloped in the social justice-oriented social work literature. Frontline social work supervision used to be characterized by learning and development and included practices such as support, trouble-shooting, problem-solving, brainstorming, and case-by-case review. Liz Beddoe (2010: 1280) argues that under managerialism there is increasing pressure to use supervision as an opportunity to micro-manage practitioners and their "outcomes" in order to minimize risk to the agency and transfer responsibility for potential problems to frontline staff. Beddoe observes that this shift in supervisory practice is an aspect of the "risk society" that promotes increased surveillance of many groups and practices, including professional practices, not with an eye to strengthening social justice mandates but in order to exercise greater control of practice (by reducing professional discretion and standardizing) and to minimize costs.

It is not surprising, given this context, that many social justice-oriented social workers tend to avoid managerial positions, perhaps assuming that managerial power is exclusively an oppressive form of power. This means that these positions and skills often end up in the hands of more conservative workers. Rather than simply avoiding these positions, social workers need to remake and re-theorize this level of practice (incorporating politicized and transformative values and knowledge), and ultimately the positions need to be filled by critical, activist social workers. Particularly given the current popularity of business-based

management models, anti-oppressive social work needs to seriously examine management practices and to promote alternative models that share workplace power, drawing on the expert knowledge of practitioners and services users while simultaneously providing leadership, protection, and support to the staff, service users, the wider community served by the agency and joining in shared activist campaigns to defend and expand human rights and social programs (see Aronson and Smith 2009 for an example of this). As Healy (2002) notes, while tensions have increased between social justice mandates and new management techniques, opportunities for liberatory practices still exist.

Indigenous Knowledge, Practice, and Theory

A notable gap in AOP is the question of the role for Indigenous knowledge and practice. As a "post-colonial" country, non-Indigenous Canada continues to have an oppressive relationship with Indigenous people at the levels of policy and everyday practice (Brant 1990; Morrissette et al. 1993; Navigon and Mawhiney 1996; Duran et al. 1998). First Nations social work, as discussed in Bonnie Freeman's chapter in this book, directly addresses the challenges facing Native people, drawing on Native knowledge and traditions. What are and what should be the connections between anti-oppressive and Indigenous social work practice? What are the similarities and differences? What role should First Nations knowledge play in AOP theory and practice and vice-versa? Currently, the two forms of practice have been developing alongside each other but with less interaction than most AOP practitioners think is appropriate. What are the best ways to go about developing a lively dialogue and constructive critique between the two bodies with an eye to strengthening both?

Differences from Mainstream Practice

On the surface, it is sometimes difficult to discern good mainstream social work practice from AOP. Skilled practitioners from both traditions use respectful and consultative approaches with service users, and both include advocacy and policy critique in their repertoire of good practices. However, mainstream social work draws on a number of theories that see social and economic systems as politically neutral (Payne 2000) and that fail to recognize the serious inequities in our society or the way these injustices are embedded in the profit-model of patriarchal, racialized, homophobic, colonial capitalism. Though many social workers mix mainstream, AOP, and other perspectives in their everyday work, the term "mainstream" is used in this book as a general term; it refers to approaches that may, to some extent, ease people's suffering or difficulties, but that depoliticize social problems and fail to see the larger dynamics shaping social work practice or to imagine alternative solutions that can be undertaken with and for our clients.

Mainstream Social Work

Although often claiming the opposite, mainstream social work tends to view social problems in a depoliticized way that emphasizes individual shortcomings, pathology, and inadequacy. Interventions are aimed largely at the individual, with little or no analysis of or intent to challenge power, structures, social relations, culture, or economic forces. Mainstream approaches such as the ecological, psychoanalytic, and systems approaches emphasize professionalism, career advancement, and the authority of experts, often having little or no space for the struggles of clients, communities, and larger social justice causes.

AOP differs from mainstream social work in a number of ways. Child welfare and hospital social work are often referred to as mainstream practice sites. However, mainstream social work is not a type of workplace or a series of places in which social work is practiced; it is a way of looking at social problems and their solutions. A comparison of AOP to mainstream social work practice highlights some important differences. Though they may not agree entirely with a particular approach, mainstream social work does tend to accept existing narrow, individually focused interventions as the best that can be done at this point in time. In contrast, social justice-oriented social workers attempt to keep in mind the bigger picture of oppressive policies, practice, and social relations even as they address immediate crises and emotional pain. For example, anti-oppressive practitioners argue that what we call "clinical depression" cannot be fully addressed separate from the poverty, sexism, racism, social alienation, and other oppressive forces experienced by many people bearing this label (see Catrina Brown's chapter in this book). Temporary relief may be provided in the form of medications and verbal therapies, but the social problems and struggles experienced by many sufferers of clinical depression must also be analyzed and addressed through actions such as critical consciousness-raising, advocacy, radical therapies, mobilizing for policy and economic change, and broader reorganization of society and social relations.

Secondly, while mainstream approaches usually accept the status quo, AOP tries to repoliticize issues and to understand the problems that clients experience as emanating not only from individual choices but also from socially conditioned, limited choices and the interplay of social, political, cultural, and economic factors over which service users generally have little awareness or control. For example, it is not uncommon in child welfare and pediatric social work for families to be labeled "dysfunctional," a label that fails to recognize the strengths that have kept such families afloat during difficult circumstances and the ways that overlapping layers of class, gendered, and often cultural, racialized, and regionalized systems have worked against their success in life, leaving them marginal, excluded, and with few resources to draw on.

Labelling the family as dysfunctional places the blame on them and makes them seem almost exclusively responsible for making changes in their lives. It also depoliticizes the situation by obscuring the complex web of inequities that have shaped their opportunities and disadvantage. If something is hidden from view, it is very difficult for social workers to discuss with co-workers and others — much less act on. *Depoliticization* refers to processes that take politics and political awareness out of issues in order to control these issues and those seeking social change. In our society, access to power, resources, and affirming identities are unevenly distributed along the lines of class, race, gender, ability, and so forth; and this maldistribution is fiercely defended, legitimized, and normalized through social, cultural, political, and economic practices. As noted in the example above, in many social work situations, social problems resulting from maldistribution are generally depoliticized; they are seen as the failings or shortcomings of individuals rather than what they are: the consequences of attempts to cope with difficult situations generated by society.

Another common way that social problems are individualized and depoliticized is by giving them medical or psychiatric diagnoses, or criminal labels. While mainstream social work tends to accept medical and criminal labels, often uncritically embracing the power to diagnose and define others, social justice-oriented perspectives recognize the power of language to shape identities and opportunities (Hick, Fook and Puzzuto 2005; Mullaly 2007). They remain skeptical of diagnoses and labels and try to use these designations in strategic and critical ways. For example, many people were harmed for many years when queer sexualities were labeled as criminal or a form of psychiatric illness. Once a largely unquestioned professional norm (Morrow and Messinger, 2006), this labelling, as well as social work's role in perpetuating the oppression such labelling caused, are now seen as deeply wrong and destructive.

Thoughtful critique and skepticism are important reflexive practices to employ when addressing any of the social problems on which social workers act. Social justice-oriented social workers may choose to use medical or psychiatric diagnoses to describe a set of problems encountered by an individual or group, while simultaneously maintaining an awareness of the ways that medical and psychiatric labels shape, oppress, and marginalize people. However, if housing, social assistance, child care supports, or counseling are available to individuals based on a given diagnosis and will be denied to them otherwise, AOP social workers may encourage people to use their diagnosis strategically to improve their lives and access needed resources.

Another way that social work has been depoliticized and remade as a neutral profession is by taking struggle out of practice, remaking it as an apolitical, technical form of professional work undertaken by well-educated and kindly people. In actuality, social work is a series of acute, ongoing, political struggles over what services and resources will be provided, to whom, by whom, in what

amount, and to what end. Linked to this, mainstream social work tends to promote the idea that social work is a united, apolitical body of expert knowledge. In reality, social work is a number of distinct, disparate, and intensely political *bodies* of knowledge which have a long history of conflict based on real-life struggles within our everyday worlds.

In workplaces that are closer to state power and coercion, such as the correctional system, welfare provision and child welfare services, and many for-profit settings, the deployment of a full AOP model may seem nearly impossible. Indeed, sometimes a practice setting is so narrow, conservative, and limiting that it is difficult to do more than enact the beginning phases of anti-oppressive practice. However, even within these settings it is possible to promote ideas, ask questions that encourage critical thought, draw co-workers together to share concerns and experience, and approach work in a more holistic and critical matter that expands the space for AOP thought and practice (see for example, Gary Dumbrill's chapter on child welfare, Michelle Bates' chapter on evidence-based practice, or Kristin Smith's chapter on mental health practice). The chapters of this book highlight the diversity and richness of contemporary social justice-oriented social work practice, the kinds of possibilities that can be exploited, as well as the kinds of practice dilemmas encountered by progressive social work practitioners, leading us to conclude that it is possible to practice social justice-oriented social work, in some form, in any organization.

Names and Labels

Language is always a force in political struggles, and the struggle for First Nations self-determination has used language and labels in strategic ways to name "problems" and their "solutions," reclaim sovereignty in the lives of First Nations people, and gain public awareness. Recently, Taiaike Alfred (2005) advanced an argument concerning "aboriginalization" or processes that continue and deepen colonialization, assimilation, and integration. While Alfred's argument focuses on processes of domination rather than advocating particular word choices, his arguments reaffirm the power of language to perpetrate harm. In solidarity with this struggle, terms used interchangeably in this book include First Nations, Native, Indigenous, Aboriginal, and words in indigenous languages.

Respecting a similar politics of language issue, a lively debate recently occurred in social work journals, particularly in the UK, concerning the terms used for people who make use of social work services (Carey 2009a; McLaughlin 2009; Scourfield 2007; Hefferman 2006). Though seemingly "constructive and altruistic" (Carey 2009: 179), these terms are not neutral; rather, they label individuals and are part of a process of constituting identities, possibilities, and power differentials. Most of the authors involved in this debate also note that these terms reflect changing relationships among service users, governments, and markets, emphasizing individual rather than social or governmental responsibil-

ity and management of one's own services (if entitled) and difficulties (if not). These new self-managed models work best if service users are entrepreneurial (Scourfield 2005) and tied closely to agendas of New Public Management (Heffernan 2006: 139). Alternative, non-oppressive terms are not readily available, hence the chapters in this book use terms such as "client," "community member," "women," and "service user," with no particular discourse or intended set of power relations attached to any. While some may claim that this diversity of terminology lacks rigour, it may also reflect the strength of heterodox methods and the authors' thoughtful and respectful approaches to naming and categorizing people. The diversity of terms used in this book also highlight the authors' ties to social movements and the messy but constantly changing way that language gets challenged and mutates within these struggles.

Does It Always Work?

AOP is not a formula or a prescription that works every time in every situation. Like social problems, AOP is a messy, uneven process that requires ongoing critical reflection, debate, and refinement. AOP practitioners will find themselves struggling in rapidly changing contexts with social problems that are not easy to address and for which there is very little social support and fewer resources. However, there are also many rewards and successes possible with an AOP approach, among which the foremost are that we can contribute to social care and the greater social good rather than regretfully but passively accepting injustice and oppression. Rather than approaching AOP as something that has all the answers, we ought to approach social justice as a lens through which to view the world and ask questions about who is benefitting from this problem or issue, who is harmed, who may be on the same side or provide support for a particular struggle or solution. AOP social workers also need to remain open to new ideas and to continue to evolve their practice in the nitty-gritty of frontline practice as contexts change and new challenges arise. Building and sustaining respectful, supportive relationships with service users, their allies, and others active in social justice is key to high quality AOP. Of equal importance is the capacity to endlessly question and learn more about the social world we wish to emancipate.

A Radical Agenda

> Radical means to be rational and direct in the search for social peace; it means to go to the roots of a problem and not just deal with symptoms ... in the struggle against injustice one cannot be moderate. That's why (we need) a radical agenda, in the deepest, most humanist and most committed sense of the word. (Alejandro Bendana 1995: 5)

Social work operates at the nexus of social structures and human pain. If we are

genuinely to assist people with the kinds of problems they encounter in today's neoliberal, globalized world, radicalism is a necessity. It is not enough to be highly skilled and professional, dealing efficiently with immediate problems, as compelling as they may seem. We should be passionate about the need for social justice and work continuously to provide a full range of caring interventions; continuously develop new, radical, liberatory therapies; draw on alternative knowledge bases that dislodge oppression; and at the same time, advocate, agitate, and organize in order to fundamentally challenge the forces that generate and benefit from the pain and oppression we address every day in social work practice. As Bendana notes above, we cannot afford to be moderate; we need to go to the roots of the problem and to be active and direct in the search for social peace.

It is also important to remember that social workers who want to build a better world are not alone. As Ben Carniol (2010: 141) notes, "They have allies everywhere in the movement for social justice, both locally and globally," including clients, anti-poverty activists, unions, the women's movement, anti-racist groups, Indigenous organizations, and anti-globalization activists. Carniol also notes that social workers have professional allies in other occupations facing similar conditions, such as nurses, teachers, child care workers, and academics as well as policy analysts, community development workers, public officials, and those working in progressive think-tanks and research institutes (see also Baines 2007d: 195). The struggle for social justice has always been global, but now more than ever we need global strategies and inter-connections. Often the developed world thinks it has provided and will provide all the solutions to today's problems. However, we can gain a great deal by looking to "Third World" and Indigenous experiments in participatory democracy, participatory budget and policy making, and new forms of collective social support. Some of our best hopes for social justice lie in finding common ground and internationalizing our struggles — that is, in finding ways of supporting and working in solidarity with the struggles for self-determination, peace, and sustainable development taking place around the world.

At the end of our careers, I am betting that few of us will remember how many ticky box assessment forms we completed or how often we got our statistics in on time. But I am absolutely positive that we will remember the times we advocated for and with clients and found a way to improve things, the times we helped build campaigns to resist cutbacks, the participatory processes we helped to develop for program evaluations, and the many times we marched, advocated, petitioned, sang, laughed, cried, and dreamed about a better future with our clients, co-workers, and fellow activists. As social justice-oriented social workers we can humanize ourselves, our work practices, and our communities, liberate and politicize our workplaces, and transform and dignify our existence through the creative, collective, and ongoing pursuit of peace, equity, and social justice.