• Postmodern ‘Turn’ in Social Work: The Challenges of Identity and Equality
• Lena Dominelli
   – Durham University /UK

lena.dominelli@durham.ac.uk
Identity

• A contentious issue
  – Essentialised or fixed and unitary identities
  – Postmodern or fluid and multiple identities

• Social Workers tend to focus on fixed and unitary identities
  – Problematic in responding to diversities
  – ‘Other’ or dehumanise those that are *different*
  – Engage in oppressive practices
Challenges to Essentialised Identities

• New social movements
  – Challenge unitary assumptions and exclusion from public life, social resources and decision-making
  – Demand recognition of equality, entitlements (human rights) and actual citizenship
  – Tactical alliances around identity and enforced unity within categories
  – Identity politics

• Radical professionals, scholars and researchers (overlaps)

• Voluntary sector workers
Marchers demand head scarves for students be mandatory

More than 250 women and students rallied in the Islamabad capital of Islamabad, Martin, Saturday, the demonstration.
Voices from Below

• Voices of many tones and hues
  – Status quo
  – Cacophony of sound
  – Exclusion
  – Harmonious differences
• Identity-based groups
  – Emphasize similarities
  – Emphasize differences
  – Look for similarities and acknowledge differences
Emphasizing Differences

Politicising Differences
- Submerging or Amplifying Difference
• Key aspects of identity-based differentiation that impact upon social work practice (and theories)
  – Class
  – Gender
  – ‘Race’ and Culture
  – Disability
  – Age
  – Mental Ill Health
  – Faith
Looking for New Solutions

Those involved in identity-based politics

• Critiqued oppressive practice in social work, especially by women and minority ethnic groups

• Developed alternative services that were developed by and run by those concerned, e.g., feminist provisions around domestic violence, homes for black elders
Organising for Change

• Changing practice in the field – service organisation and delivery, especially in social services and health
• Changing laws and policies
• Bringing new theories and practice methods into the academy
• Changing the curriculum
• Changing assessment criteria
• Producing new teaching materials
European Dimensions

European identity remains to be created

– Can be ‘unitary’ and fixed
  • Would require the imposition of one on diverse peoples to achieve this
  • Americanisation would help in that task

– Could develop as unique, multiple, fluid identities that share values and attitudes to the world in common
  • Would require an agreed common political purposes and some similar institution
  • Maintain both uniqueness in identities and find commonalities
Key Concerns

- Racism and Fortress Europe
- Failure to integrate diversity in the existing mix
- Structural inequalities continue to impact on people in differentiated ways that make some more equal than others
- Focusing on values as solution to structural inequalities like poverty is inadequate
- Redistribution of resources is necessary (but this needs the values of equality, solidarity and reciprocity to be share)
- Lacking a vision that goes beyond neo-liberalism
Neo-liberalism is a Key Challenge

Neo-liberalism as the current form of globalisation is a key challenge

- Capitalist social relations permeate all aspects of social, political, cultural and economic life
- Market-based solutions dominate
- Individuals become consumers or non-consumers
- Loss of social solidarity
- Competition over scarce resources and lack of social cohesion as exemplified in rising crime rates and increased numbers facing exclusion
PEACE WILL COME WHEN THERE ARE PEACEKEEPERS

PEACEKEEPERS WILL COME WHEN THERE'S PEACE
Activation State: Friend or Foe?

The activation state has adopted neo-liberalism as an economic strategy, but thinks it can keep a political commitment to social solidarity

- Doomed to fail as presupposes all can engage in the labour-market
- Devalues forms of work that are not waged, e.g., women’s work in the home, volunteering
- Has written off those sections of the population who are without money or paid employment, e.g., the ‘underclass’
E-COLI?

BOTULISM!

SPINACH

CARROT JUICE

Vancouver Sun 16/10/96 P. A10 Steve Noon
What Can Social Workers Do?

• Do research on the impact of neo-liberalism on local communities and individuals, to highlight the diverse forms of social exclusion that are evident
• Mobilise local communities and groups to reverse their disempowerment, develop new visions of how they want to live
• Lobby governments and international organisations to move away from profit-making at any cost towards caring for people and the planet’s physical resources/environment
• Contribute to mobilising civil society organisations that promote egalitarian social relations and globally redistributed resources
• Can we all be ‘wealthy’ together?
Canada "pleased" to be part of new UN body - McKay

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Wow, what an honour...

S. ARABIA  |  CHINA  |  CANADA  |  PAKISTAN  |  CUBA

JF McCullough  Tri-City News  14/5/66  6:10