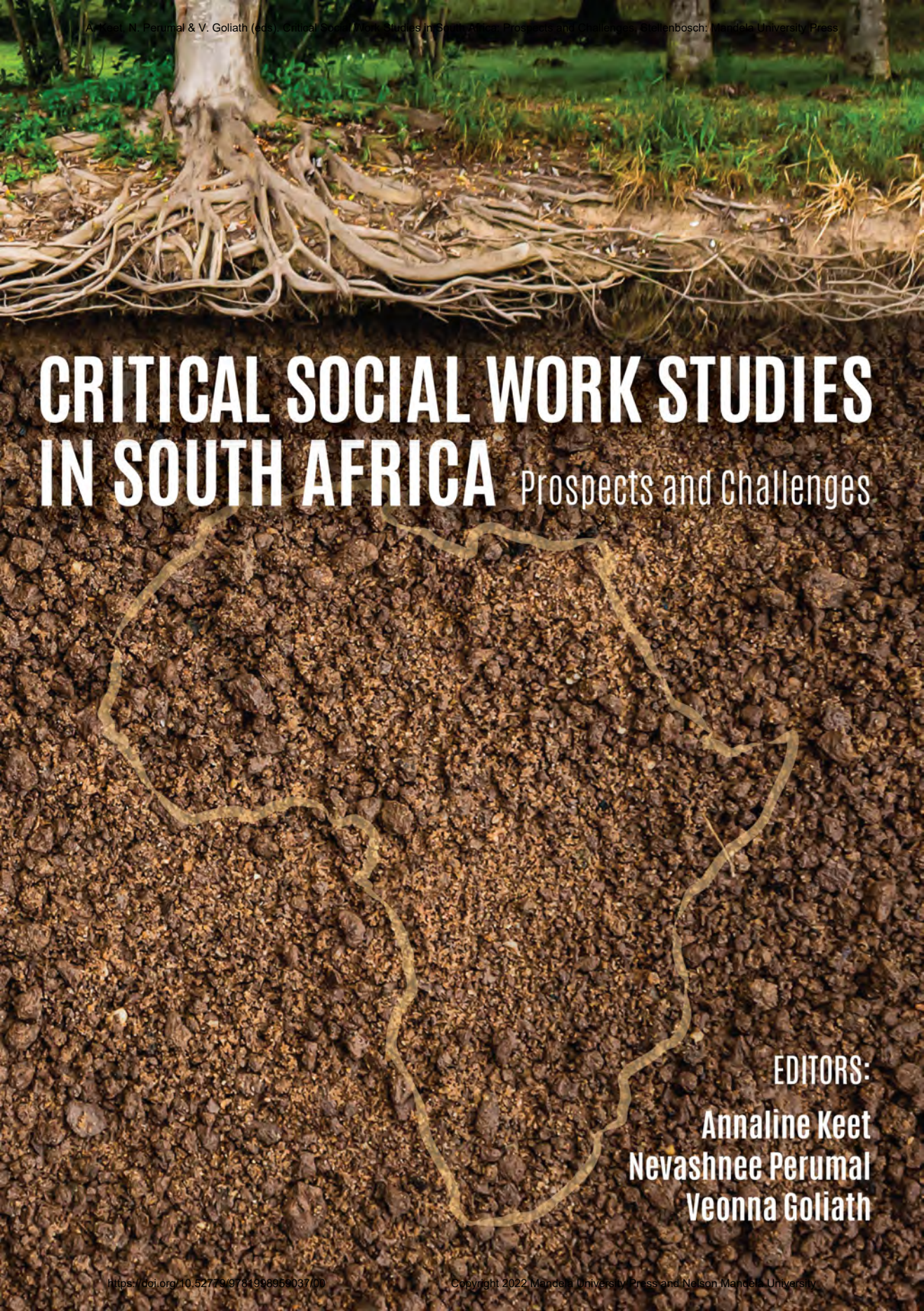


The background of the cover is a photograph of a forest floor. In the upper half, the thick, gnarled roots of a large tree spread out across the ground. Below the roots, the soil is dark and textured, with a yellowish-brown outline of the map of South Africa superimposed on it. The title text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Prospects and Challenges

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INTRODUCTION



The invitation for our Department to develop a decolonial social work text as part of a series of books evoked two distinctly opposing feelings. Firstly excitement, especially as it afforded us an opportunity to address the frustration experienced with decolonial texts being spewed out without any empirical evidence to support how the authors arrived at its new knowledge claims. Secondly, a contrasting feeling of trepidation and the all-too-familiar self-doubt, which have become part of our multi-layered default response to questioning the legitimacy of our voices and views. The latter was deeply entrenched in the intergenerational heritage of being an echo to the voice of the colonial master, which largely retains supreme positioning, measured in academic terms by the number, consistency and speed of publications.

One of the editors of this publication reflects:

I therefore set off on the journey questioning whether I can truly just stand in my truth and like the late Steve Biko “write what I like”. Will I do justice to the responsibility of being co-editor and write my own chapter, whilst simultaneously managing the complexity of the multiple roles of spouse, mother, sibling, academic, community member, neighbour, friend and spiritual partner? The doubt and fear about not delivering a product that was “academic enough”, eroded all forms of logical thinking and instead reminded of the possibility of losing credibility; blinding me to what I already had in my possession (which is my lived experience and a completed empirical product).

The impetus grew when we were together as editors, and the most powerful contributions to knowledge were constructed in our togetherness (as authors), where we reflected on our individual and collective experiences of how we challenged the carefully orchestrated strategies of the oppressors to retain us in positions of despair, hopelessness and inferiority. Surely, our social work students deserve prescribed texts that would unmask these strategies and serve as a map of how to support individuals and communities, unlearn the westernised conditioning and relearn tried and tested indigenous practices and ways of being. We hope that this text can make a contribution in this regard.

It is important to state that all the authors in this book are Black academics working in South African universities. Many of us are not well known in the academic arena. These are two significant criteria that we used to curate this book. We selected

Critical Social Work Studies in South Africa: Prospects and Challenges

authors whom we were sensitised to as having critical and transformative thoughts in social work education. Although we undertook to drive this project, as editors, we had no prior experience of editing a book. This was frustrating at times but our determination to see the book make a contribution to critical social work studies kept us moving forward. Many disagreements emerged among the editors. When we ponder the reasons, we acknowledge the stark realities of the moulds we were forced into in our own academic journeys, as well as the need to remain self-critical of how we inevitably participate in the constraints of these moulds. One of us was consistently very adamant about the need to deliberately exclude contributions from seasoned and over-published academics, even as reviewers. The thought was that the book must not be forced into a shape that academia traditionally subscribes to. To do this would not be transformative, but rather pander to the Eurocentric traditions of academic writing that often keeps new Black authors out of the publication arena. Hence, authors were given the brief to just write in the field of social work in South Africa. It could be empirical, conceptual or reflective in nature. The writing process was collaborative and we often had to reflect on our tendency to move back into known moulds, even creating new moulds, masked as transformative processes. We came together, spoke about our proposed chapters, went back and wrote.

Next, we formed peer review pairs among the authors. The review process was intended to enhance and strengthen what we were each writing. We can say that this project is the formation of a community of free (working towards unmoulded) social work writers. However, because this book is part of a series, the several layers of review had the potential to either push writers back into traditional Eurocentric moulds or to be an opportunity for critical engagement embodying our own critique of the reviews provided. As editors, we encouraged authors to retain their freedom and to respond to feedback that would build the criticality of their chapter and deepen their own self-reflectivity only.

The book forms part of a series on higher education transformation. Embedded in this is the need for academic text that is emancipatory and rooted in the notion of social justice. To do justice to this brief is to remain self-reflective and challenge the limitations of our discipline and of our own thoughts and actions. This book is hopefully a reflection on the circular process of critiquing the dogmatic frameworks of the discipline, the higher education space and those embedded in ourselves that are often overlooked in our critique of the others. In the last decade, social work academics in South Africa have been confronted with the need to challenge the Eurocentrism of the discipline. Increasingly colleagues are contributing to academic text that foreground the local context and argue for social work strategies embedded in the historical and socio-political realities of the people. As a result, it has become increasingly easier to use locally-produced resources in our university courses and

this is encouraging. Yet, after many years of a predominantly Eurocentric focus in our curriculum, it is not surprising that students continue to raise concerns around a misalignment between their lived experiences and the curriculum they engage with at higher education institutions. These concerns tell us that much more needs to be done and the journey is only in its beginning phase. The editors and contributors trust that this book will contribute to the local knowledge creation in Social Work.

These 14 chapters are a collection of conceptual and empirical papers, each telling a unique story with common themes that characterise decolonial knowledge. This includes the value of relationships (including traditionally misrecognised ones); the importance of revisiting the lived experience of people and the meaning they derive from deconstructing ways of being and doing that do not serve them anymore; untangling the claws of intergenerational trauma that keep communities in a grip of fear and daring to co-construct strategies that can help restore ownership to the dispossessed. The chapters that emanate from this exercise are not located within any set of pre-determined themes and the flow of the chapters were organically generated through the focus of the various authors. Below follows a synopsis of the different chapters. However, we urge the reader to experience the richness of the authors' thoughts by engaging the chapters in their entirety.

The first three chapters address issues around legislation and family life. Chapter One addresses restorative justice as hierarchical and unpacks how it impacts and limits parental involvement of children in conflict with the law. These limits are ironic and contradictory to the policy intentions of the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, which promotes a collaborative and participatory approach. The author argues that the retributive foundation of the criminal justice system is noticeable in the child justice system and, as a result, the shift in long-standing power imbalances that is the intention of the restorative justice system is not being achieved. The hierarchical arrangements embedded in the system continue to be Eurocentric and perpetuate a system that hogs power in its historical arrangements and excludes parents from essential decision-making, thus going against the intentions of the child justice system.

In Chapter Two, the author argues that the term 'family' and the application of the Eurocentric interpretation of the word in non-European contexts creates some conceptual confusion between people's lived experiences and the literal meaning of the word. He argues that the over-reliance on the Western world view makes it impossible for earlier studies to effectively tap into the lived experiences of Africans and, as a result, stifled the development of authentic theoretical constructs that is grounded in the local realities. Reporting on a phenomenological study that uses the lived experiences of African clans who raised children with Down syndrome, he argues that the African clan system serves as a foundational social institution and

Critical Social Work Studies in South Africa: Prospects and Challenges

should be the cornerstone of interventions for Afrocentric and decolonial social work. He challenges language and the meaning it carries to misconstrue the African notion of family and thus invalidate the African concept of being and knowing.

Chapter Three interrogates the role of unmarried fathers in the mediation process where there are disputes regarding the care of children. The author argues that while progress has been made in the South African context, there continues to be tension between culture and the law, with the latter continuing to be largely Eurocentric. The mediation practice in the South African context seems to be largely based on Western models and approaches and, as a result, it fails to take the demographics of South African families into consideration. The author argues for mediation practices in South Africa that is generated from the local context and can respond to the diverse family demographics of the country.

Chapters Four and Five discuss issues of land and landlessness and interrogate the social work position on issues of land ownership as central to human development. In Chapter Four, the authors provide a strong critique against the depoliticisation of the profession and argue that this paralyses the profession to speak to issues of power relationships and how social and economic forces intersect to produce unequal societies. Using Black children's right to play and the role of play in their development against the contours of the urban township, the authors argue that social work has largely been silent on how these historical and current inequalities infringe on the rights of children and their families. They suggest that for social work to be impactful and make a decolonial turn, they should engage and theorise around the intergenerational dehumanisation of Black people generated through their status as landless.

Chapter Five continues to address issues of land ownership. The author, like the authors in the previous chapter, critique the historical development of social work as caught up in paternalistic welfare policies. He argues that social work continues to be aligned to state priorities and challenges the profession to respond to and make meaningful contributions to the discourse of racially-skewed land ownership. He argues that land for Black ownership is not only an issue of economics and agriculture, but with the enhancement of careers in industry and commerce, the provision of peri-urban land for people to own and live on is important. The author proposes ways that social workers can participate in issues of land ownership, using a social justice approach.

In Chapter Six, the author moves us to the social worker as the person and what the social practice environment should offer to support the authentic development of the person as the professional. She deals with the importance of supervision in social work with specific reference to the relational aspects of it. Essential to effective supervision is the maintenance of a healthy supervisory relationship where elements of trust, collaboration and mutual accountability can develop. She critiques the

neoliberal focal point of supervision at the expense of the humanistic supervisory function that foregrounds the emotional life of the social worker as human being. The author presents a set of strategies that can guide the supervisor and supervisee to foreground relationship-based supervision practices that would be more responsive to the diverse context of the country.

In Chapter Seven, the author discusses African spirituality and argues for spiritually sensitive social work approaches. He discusses the centrality of spirituality in human existence and unpacks how the changes in the social work qualification in South Africa missed the opportunity to build spirituality into the curriculum, despite the role that it plays in the African context. A shift is seen in the recently developed Standards for Social Work education where spirituality is incorporated. The author provides a description of African spirituality that is different from the Western notion of being. He foregrounds interconnectedness of individuals and their environment without centring individualism. He argues that the exclusion of the spiritual domain in social work education and practice limits the ability of social work to holistically respond to the needs of South African communities.

Chapter Eight engages with the decolonisation of knowledge formation in social work education. The author argues that while students engage with knowledge formation at universities, they are not drawn in as carriers of existing knowledge systems. Academic staff continue to be the producers of knowledge and students the consumers thereof. The author presents a specific course at her university where this traditional way of academic engagement between student and lecturer is disrupted and the lecturer as assumed knowledge holder is decentred, using the four agreements for courageous conversations as presented by Singleton and Linton (2006). In a process of decentring historically privileged knowledge, seminal work of Biko (1978), Freire (1972), Fanon (1963, 1972), Hook (2004), Ferguson (2008) and Garret (2013) underpin the discussions that students engage with. The author argues that the methods used in this course allows students to bring their knowledge systems into the classroom and as topics of race, inequalities, stance on social movements, past injustices and structural disadvantages are discussed, a deeper connection evolves as students grapple with their own discomforts.

In Chapter Nine, the author also interrogates the power of the lecturer to shape students' epistemologies, including her own power, by using the pedagogy of discomfort. In line with her passion to decolonise the social work curriculum, she unpacks the notion of decoloniality as the deep process of freeing the colonised being from the power of predominantly Eurocentric knowledge sets. She argues against knowledge generation that is not authentically created from those it is intended for. Using critical self-reflection as proposed by Mezirow (1990) and consciousness-raising as projected by Biko, she engages with strategies for academics to free their own minds as part of the decolonial project.

Critical Social Work Studies in South Africa: Prospects and Challenges

Chapter Ten challenges the deficit-oriented views held about students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in the higher education space. The authors acknowledge and discuss the conditions that hinder academic success for students, however they argue that the assumptions locked up in the deficit view of these students create a sense of othering for them and undermine their capacity for resilience, agency and self-determination. Their research provided valuable learnings generated from students identifying themselves as coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Large classes in school are highlighted as limiting the ability to attend to different students' academic needs, English as medium of instruction is highlighted as a barrier for students who do not use it as a home language and alienation based on their social class is also identified as aspects that impact their adaptation to university. Students highlighted their own determination to break out of poverty and identified financial support through funding, supportive academic staff, family and peer support as supporting their resilience. Using the person-in-environment theory, the authors argue for recognition of entire fields of events that impact students' lives and goes on to say that a deficit view perpetuates negative views and undermine students' inherent capacity to exercise agency and self-determination.

Chapter Eleven focuses on the positioning of women in society and the author makes a strong argument for women economic empowerment. The author unpacks historical contributions of women in political and social spheres and juxtaposes this against their ongoing challenges in current-day society. She interrogates government approaches that do not sufficiently change the lived experiences of women and poses that government spending on women empowerment is a human rights mandate. She examines cultural and traditional marginalisation of women while highlighting the value of women economic empowerment for the overall growth of the country's GDP, for families and their ability to break the cycle of poverty. The author argues for a multifaceted approach to address the challenges women experience at grassroots, cultural and political levels and engages the five strategies as suggested by Bokoyeibo (2018) for the empowerment of women.

The work done by the authors in Chapter Twelve resonate with those of the various authors in this collection as they argue for the indigenisation of social work education. They describe and illustrate indigenous knowledge as rich, contextual and people-centred. They acknowledge that progress has been made by local scholars to build a body of local, indigenous knowledges, but that much more needs to be done. Contextualising knowledge is seen as essential. With knowledge from the Global North foregrounding the individual while those of the Global South foregrounds the communal, there is a risk of misalignment of intervention strategies. The use of indigenous systems, interventions and approaches should be used to fight against social ills that present themselves in a particular context. The authors also touch on the

Fourth Industrial Revolution and its implication for contextual interventions. They propose four pillars to strengthen indigenous social work education and practice: political, economic, education and practice and socio-cultural.

Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen engage with issues of historical trauma and how its cultural disruptions continue to play itself out in intergenerational transmissions of trauma. In Chapter Thirteen, the author interrogates the stereotyping of certain racial groups with a particular focus on substance abuse issues. Using historical trauma theory and social constructionist theory, she argues that it is important to understand historical manifestation of traumatic events in the broader trauma discourse as it is multifaceted with events and implications over a wide range of human indicators, negatively influencing people over generations. She argues that drug abuse is a manifestation of historical trauma and as a result prevention and treatment approaches must address this association to be successful. She rightfully argues that culturally sensitive drug prevention guidelines have the potential to move drug users from the internalised view of inadequacy and help them to understand the impact of adverse experiences while growing up. This shift in focus can result in the emotional and psychological release of guilt and blame, and can be emancipatory.

In Chapter Fourteen of this collection, the author also makes an argument for a historical understanding of trauma and the large-scale cultural disruptions that often carry a cross-generational collective experience of trauma. Social workers work largely in communities where people are economically and socially trapped and where they have few safeguards against the present-day manifestations of these historical disruptions, namely substance abuse, family and community violence resulting in ongoing adverse experiences. Through a narrative engagement with social workers working in communities around the Nelson Mandela Metropole where these trauma inscriptions are visible, the author gained perspectives on their encounters and their need for social work training that prepare them for a better understanding of the experiences of and the work with historically marginalised communities. The author argues that a trauma-informed social work practice with a specific focus on historical disruptions resulting in cultural trauma of large groups of people are better placed to play a role in the field of cultural healing that is contextual to the experience of people in the particular society.

Critical Social Work Studies in South Africa: Prospects and Challenges

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