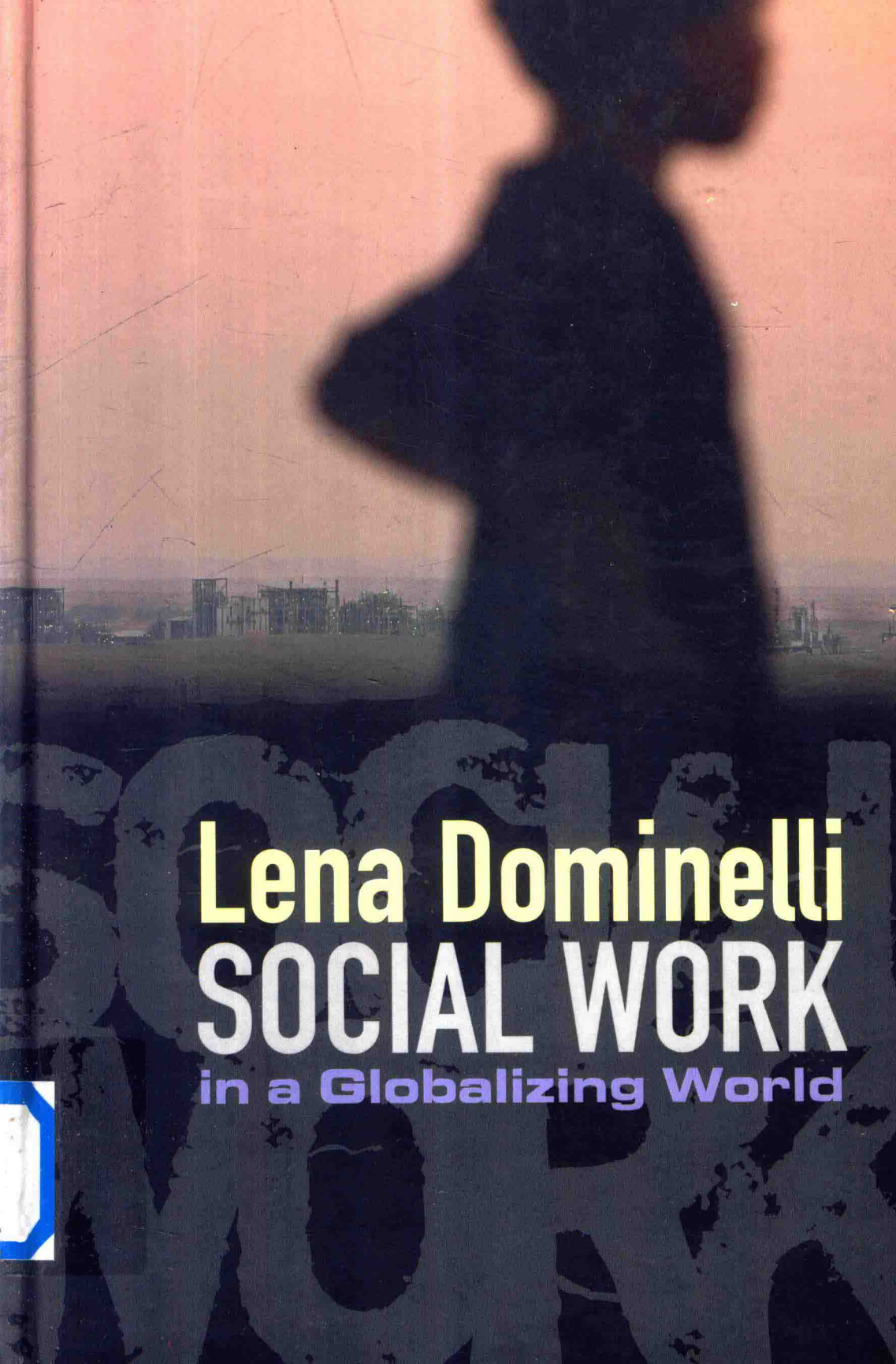
Lena Dominelli
SOCIAL WORK
in a Globalizing World

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Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly complex as the spread of hitherto unknown diseases, disasters both (hu)man-made and natural, poverty, and migratory movements of people pose new challenges for social workers. These co-exist alongside the traditional challenges of dealing with human well-being, child protection, social welfare, older people's needs, disability issues and offending behaviour, among others. Social workers' responses are significant, although sometimes not the best that could be offered. Social work, practised in diverse settings through a multitude of approaches across the world, has at its heart a commitment to serve people. For some, this involves enabling people to achieve their goals. For others, it is about social change within a context of social justice, human rights and citizenship. This gives social work an incredible heterogeneity. Among a diversity of theories, approaches, settings and contexts within which it operates, there are commonalities especially in purpose and methods. These similarities and differences create contested space filled by service users, policy-makers, academics and practitioners according to the worldviews, ideologies and belief systems that underpin their concepts of what social workers should do, with whom, and how.

Questions about its roles and purpose are crucial in (re)configuring the boundaries of what constitutes professional social work. The answers are often controversial. If these are critical of current practice, they can undermine the morale and confidence of social workers in their profession. Attacks on their professionalism, especially those made in the context of cases that have resulted in the non-accidental injury to and

sometimes the death of children, are particularly distressing. It is usually not the social workers who have killed the child. But the failure of social workers to prevent their assault or murder by carers ensures that little comfort is gained from such knowledge. Additionally, issues of confidentiality about specific situations mean that social workers rarely engage in public debates in the media about what may have gone wrong. And the many instances of excellent practice in serving others are seldom given space on television, on radio or in newspapers. Hence, the public is unaware of what social workers do, day in and day out, to protect children and other people requiring assistance. Nor does the general public know about practitioners' heroic and innovative interventions in some of the most horrendous situations brought about through natural and (hu)man-made disasters, where they are among the many professionals who provide emergency relief responses.

A profession worth having

Social work is a profession with roots in caring for others. Since caring is an integral part of the human condition, individuals feel entitled to hold a view about the contours of the profession, its role and its purpose. Many constantly ask whether it is a profession worth having. My answer is 'yes', as emancipatory practice. Emancipatory social work is person-centred, empowering, and critical of power structures and systems of resource distribution that undermine the well-being of the many. It also wants egalitarian changes in these through collective, participatory, democratic action. And it asks awkward questions such as whether individuals should pay taxes for personal social services to ensure appropriate coverage for all, be encouraged to become consumers purchasing what they need in the marketplace, or look for different alternatives. I acknowledge that there is much work to do to realize a democratic, emancipatory vision of social work.

In neo-liberal Britain, the push towards the market has been powerfully articulated through policies that have promoted the expansion of private provision whereby concerns rarely surface about who is excluded. Thus, alternative views about solutions offered by the social market, often considered in great depth among those supporting the 'new' social movements and the anti-globalization movements, exist on the margins of proposals currently propounded in the media. Present-day discourses about who should pay for old-age pensions and why public-sector wages and services should be cut to deal with the latest fiscal crisis favour the market and indicate attempts to silence opposition to market-based framings of the options available to people living in Western countries.

That this does not work is evidenced by market reactions to the high levels of debt in Greece, Spain and Portugal.

I write this book to argue that social work as emancipatory practice is worth having and that it has significant things to say about some of the intractable social problems faced by contemporary societies. I also wish to encourage debate about social work's history, the enormous contributions made by the profession to improving human well-being in diverse contexts and settings, and confidence in its future development as an important, life-enhancing profession. I do so from a social justice, human rights, citizenship-based perspective, while exploring how this approach developed in response both to critiques from various sources about the inadequacies of mainstream practices during specific historical conjunctures and to service users' demands for more emancipatory interventions under their control. The history of emancipatory social work is one of different struggles to bring it into being and to gain its acceptance among service users and ruling elites, who also shaped its potential boundaries. A key emphasis of this book is social work in the UK. However, I describe its evolution in the global context and draw connections as appropriate between developments in different parts of the world – the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, China, and parts of Africa and Latin America – and what happens in the UK.

In undertaking research for this book, I have consulted with a range of people in different regions of the world, examined policy documents and research and writings by others, and also undertaken my own investigations. Although the names and circumstances of individuals have been rendered anonymous, their activities have added to the store of knowledge available to me in developing my thoughts and insights into the environments and contexts in which people are located and practitioners practice. Some have challenged my attempts to answer the question of how social workers can contribute to creating a world that promotes human well-being while acknowledging that people are only one of the many stakeholders on planet earth and that our interdependencies require us never to lose sight of this reality.

As a result, social work, as the profession charged with enhancing people's well-being through formal social institutions that enshrine caring relationships within socially acceptable norms, is in a state of flux and constantly evolving in response to the many challenges it faces. From its inception, its development was linked to its claims to being a profession. While its status remains a matter of controversy, current discourses are associated with the extent of its professional remit and whether certain elements within it are appropriately defined as falling within social work itself, or whether they are more appropriately situated within other related disciplines, such as health, psychiatry, psychology

and criminology. Addressing these challenges complicates social work as a dynamic, fluid and constantly changing entity that seeks to adapt to demands from many quarters – legislative diktats, social policies, service users' expectations, professional aspirations, economic demands, social developments, political ideologies as articulated primarily by policy-makers, and research.

I argue that, in rising to the demands made of it in the twenty-first century, social work is being shaped by a number of forces, among them:

- globalization;
- its spread as a global profession recognized in at least eighty-four countries;
- the settings in which it takes place now, and how these link to its own historical past as a profession and its development and strengths in the future;
- the fiscal crises in the state and the market;
- the technological revolution, including that of informatics and the internet, as these collapse time and space and raise new opportunities for practice as well as training – e.g., SWAP (the Higher Education Academy: Social Policy and Social Work Subject Centre, based at the University of Southampton);
- the interdependence of people within and between countries;
- the growing numbers of natural and man-made disasters (including climate change) that open new areas for practice;
- the profession's uncertain and porous borders, which can be encroached upon by other more organized and powerful professions;
- rising demands for its services at both ends of the age spectrum – children and older people – as life chances change;
- contested egalitarian ethics and values;
- its commitment to human rights and social justice;
- spreading examples of good practice from within and outside the profession;
- learning from the past, especially in ending oppressive forms of practice;
- the influence of international organizations representing professional social work internationally – e.g., the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW); and
- the profession's persistent optimism and sense of renewal, including the formulation of locality-specific theories and models for practice.

I invite readers to reflect upon these issues and consider their relevance for the work that practitioners undertake in their daily practice; learning about concepts and skills that can renew the profession; moving beyond the most pressing problems in the in-tray of policy-makers and middle-level management while addressing them; strengthening social work education and training; and supporting students to engage with emerging areas for practice.

The structure of the book

The book is structured around the idea that social work is a meaningful profession across all regions of the world. However, the primary focus of practice is the nation–state that operates within the international arena, and that those living within its borders prefer forms of practice consistent with their specific locality and traditions.

An array of initiatives to engage in mutual exchanges between local and global players in the profession exists alongside those dressed in neo-colonial garb whereby dominant groups impose their views about social work on those in other countries, particularly in the Global South and among aboriginal peoples (Gray et al., 2009). Nonetheless, service delivery in practice remains distinctly heterogeneous and local. The tendency towards locality-specific versions of social work is gathering pace as 'indigenization' becomes an international preoccupation, largely as resistance to the homogenizing trends embedded in social relations driven by profit motives and the desire of entrepreneurs to appropriate other people's labour, material resources, geographic spaces and intellectual property. I lay the foundations of this premise in chapter 2. In chapter 3, I consider the terrain of 'the social' as part of the project of creating the new profession of social work, initially in Europe. I also consider the contradictions that lie at the heart of professional practice – ethical dilemmas that practitioners might encounter while helping people and/or subjecting them to various forms of social control.

The continuing struggle of social work to be accepted as a fully fledged profession forms the core of chapter 4. A number of ideas have been exchanged across the Atlantic to influence social work developments in countries on both sides of the 'Big Pond'. I highlight the ambiguous nature of these exchanges because not all have been adopted with sensitivity to local cultures. Moreover, a concern in many European countries with being taken over by the larger American market, practice opportunities and academy has created tensions concerning local autonomy.

Contemporary emancipatory social work has been formulated as an alternative to mainstream services as a result of pressure, lobbying and practice initiatives instigated by the new social movements. I explore this development in chapter 5 and show how the concepts of social justice and human rights underpin these new forms of practice, including those designated as feminist social work, anti-racist and black perspectives in social work, and the social model of disability. Because these took the part of the underdog, their development often occurred against the bitter opposition of those on the right of the political spectrum – academics, government ministers and corporate entrepreneurs who felt that social workers should be above politics and remain strictly neutral. While these critics were oblivious to their own political rootedness in maintaining the status quo, they argued that, by adopting explicitly political positions and advocating for those who were alienated and disenfranchised, such 'radical' social workers were exceeding their professional powers and ignoring the requirement of the state and other funders for neutrality in relation to their policies for regulating entitlements.

The state's position as a provider of services, right-wing ideologues argued, placed it beyond reproach by professionals, even when many of those using the services deemed them unfit for purpose. Complaints about inadequate services had rendered the state the object of many protests. Matters were exacerbated when social workers engaged in industrial action, either to protect services or to dispute their own pay and working conditions (Simpkin, 1979). Strikes have featured in localities across the UK since the 1970s. These have ranged from a few hours or days to lengthy ones like those that began in Liverpool in 2005 and 2007.

An early example was in Northern Ireland in the 1970s, when social workers and community workers supported the rent and rates strikes mounted by tenants in public housing. Their protests were fuelled by the Debt Payments Act of 1971, which deducted monies from strikers' benefits even though the latter were intended to support their families (Rollston and Smyth, 1982). The first prolonged national strike of social workers in England took place during 1978–9, primarily in local authorities with a high proportion of newly qualified staff. Watson and Lee (1982) claim that this was because these workers were astounded by the disparities they found between the values they had learnt in the academy and those they found being practised on the ground. Their activism resulted in employers disparaging the training of social workers as being too radical and not sufficiently rooted in day-to-day routines. Yet, when asked to provide evidence to back their assertions, the same employers would say that social workers from 'radical' courses such as those from Warwick University at the time were fully capable of 'doing the day job'

and often represented their most 'innovative and thoughtful workers' (personal communications).

The values of human dignity and worth are central to people being treated with respect and receiving the services they need. Their violation in both the social and the physical domain lays the foundation for degrading treatment in both spheres. Human, social and environmental degradation are becoming increasingly common despite government rhetoric about equality of opportunity. The elimination of poverty – particularly among children within the UK, and on a global scale for 2.8 billion people – expressed in the commitments agreed at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) later pronounced at the United Nations, appears to be receding from reach (Correll, 2008).

In 2000, 189 countries signed up to the MDGs, which cover poverty, health and education and the stipulated targets to be reached for each by 2015. With the exception of China's pledge to address rural poverty and the goal of enabling children to access primary education, it is unlikely that the MDGs will be met (Correll, 2008). I examine these issues in chapter 6 and consider the significance of climate change and the pollution of air, water and land as legitimate arenas for social work interventions, particularly those linked to social and community development. Holistic practice in these matters involves social workers engaging with people and contextualizing their present and future growth amid the spiritual, physical and socio-economic environments in which people live. The roles of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) are important in promoting cross-border solidarity in matters of this kind. Their endeavours are referred to at relevant points throughout the book because they have been crucial in developing the voice of the profession for over eight decades.

The important context of globalization, and understanding its evolution as a combination of activities that integrate localities to the global and the global to the local, is examined in chapter 7. This demonstrates the need for complex understandings of the processes of globalization and their impact on social work practice, service development and delivery. The 'benefits' of globalization are contested, not least by those involved in what have been termed 'anti-globalization movements', which have demanded that economic growth should sustain human beings and the environments in which they live rather than gathering profits for the few. Social workers have been implicated in such activities on both sides of the divide between those who think globalization benefits poor people and those who do not. Additionally, practitioners have had to respond to the