

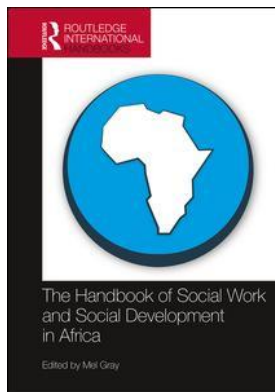
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Has social work come of age? Revisiting the authentication debate 25 years on

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Has social work come of age? Revisiting the authentication debate 25 years on

Ibrahim A. Ragab

Attending the 1974 Association for Social Work Education in Africa workshop on social work teaching and field work was, at the time, like a breath of fresh air (see Umbrach & Yimam, 1975). The indigenisation of social work permeated the sessions. The participants were young academics from 11 African countries who, when they compared notes, found that they were all unknowingly grappling with the same issues. They had all been puzzling for years over the issue of the incongruence, in many ways, of the Western model of social work with the local realities in their respective countries. And, they were searching earnestly for a way out. The late Professor Abdul Muneim Shawky of Egypt inspired in the participants a strong spirit of confidence in their reading of the situation, and encouraged keen critical examination of what many thought had indisputable validity (Shawky, 1972). He was indeed unique among his generation of pioneers in Egyptian social work education, all of whom were well-respected scholars who had graduated from renowned US universities. They were content in carrying out their responsibility to bring the latest US social work literature into the Arab world, writing textbooks and teaching their ideas to their trusting students. They were hardly disturbed by expressions of dissatisfaction by frontline workers on the incongruences between the transplanted model and local conditions. Those leading educators generally viewed social work as a solid scientific profession, with global applicability, no questions asked. They hardly entertained the ideas that it might require critical examination or need modification to fit local conditions elsewhere in the world. But, to their credit, they succeeded in instilling in their students a deep devotion to their *noble* profession, inculcating in them a profound feeling of mission (a cause, not a function).

The conviction those Egyptian social work educators held in the universal applicability of Western social work seemed to have been pervasive among US social work scholars of the time. It is hard, for example, to understand how authorities of the calibre of Daniel Thurz and Joseph Vigilante failed to appreciate the existence of glaring cultural and structural differences between the industrially developed and developing countries of the world. Even more incomprehensible was the way in which they interpreted issues surrounding the 'transplantation' of the Western model, or the negative reactions of its beneficiaries to its incompatibilities with the conditions of the importing countries (Ragab, 1978). They first asserted that transplants were not only possible but desirable, although they admitted that transplantations might be met with what they called *difficulties* in the process. However, they saw such difficulties as temporary, stating that,

‘in our view, there are ways by which transplants can work through particular adaptations . . . In time, *the rejection phenomenon* . . . will be solved just as it will be solved in the transplant field in medicine’ (Thurz & Vigilante, 1976, pp. 11, 15 emphasis added). What was needed, they told their audience, was ‘*controlled procedures for assimilation*’ to counter the rejection phenomenon. In response to views such as these at that time, I commented that what was needed instead was an emphasis on ‘encouraging *originality* rather than blind imitation of the developed world’ (Ragab, 1978, p. 26 emphasis added).

The indigenisation odyssey

Just as social work was eagerly received in Egypt in the 1930s as a *scientific* profession, capable of helping in the reconstruction of a country ravaged by decades of colonial rule, the *indigenisation* of social work was heartily embraced in the 1970s as a *course-correction mechanism* to help salvage the noble profession by freeing it from the shackles of ill-advised loyalty to imported models. It turned out, however, that the warm reception with which indigenisation was met stemmed mainly from the *liberating* power of the concept, rather than from any *intrinsic* characteristics it possessed. The concept powerfully appealed to long-suppressed, antihegemonic sentiments. Non-Western professionals adopting the indigenisation approach felt free from the self-imposed dutiful compliance with the ‘standard’ imported model. Not only did it justify their questioning of that model’s appropriateness for local practice, but it also made the questioning of that model a professional duty. Nevertheless, indigenisation was a vague concept mainly referring to the desirability of making some ‘adjustments’ to help make *the imported model* more fitting to the local scene, potentially making interventions more effective. Indigenisation did not specify areas needing alteration, nor a methodology to make the needed changes happen.

From its inception, indigenisation took on a life of its own. Different scholars, in different countries, embarked on making the concept what they saw to be fitting, according to how they understood it, and in line with their estimations of the situation extant in their respective countries or region. Some understood the term merely as ‘sensitivity to local customs’ to avoid being disrespectful or offensive. Others believed it implied the increased use of local cases and teaching material in social work education. Many thought that the major issue with the transplanted model lay in the realm of its general priorities. For them, Western social work emphasised casework and therapeutic approaches, whereas mass interventions and developmental work were more relevant to the problems normally faced by developing countries. Many approved of the concept out of a genuine feeling of relief from the straight jacket of foreign conceptualisations. Some were merely satisfied to go through the motions of seeming to be independent in their outlook, and not just slaves of foreign products. And a few undaunted and unyielding traditionalists still preferred the security of sticking with the familiar rather than venturing into uncharted territory. This last group continued to preach the idea of international social work as a *scientific* profession, and continued using the good old imported conceptualisations, now being codified in Arabic textbooks for their students. A leading Egyptian textbook (in Arabic) defined indigenisation as:

the *scientific* efforts to effect changes in *some* components of the culturally diffused social work, originated in foreign lands, aiming at the achievement of *some* innovations and renovations to make it fitting for *some* [certain] cultural conditions and factors characteristic of that society, which are *somewhat* different from those characteristic of the exporting countries that initiated social work. In this way social work is expected to be more

effective in developing the society in which it is being practiced and in solving its social problems.

(Osman, Ismael, Reda, & Tawfic, 1984, p. 290 *emphasis added*)

Osman et al. (1984) declared that indigenisation would thus help the profession attain a higher degree of national recognition and esteem. However, note the repeated use of the unspecified 'some' in qualifying the basic components of the definition, which was symptomatic of the vagueness and indecisiveness of the concept as presented. But vagueness tilted towards misunderstanding when the authors attempted to convince their readers of the need for 'continuous indigenisation' in any one or the same country, infinitely. They illustrated this by claiming that social work's leading country of origin of (i.e., the USA) had done just that. Osman et al. (1984) declared that 'we can say that American social work had *evolved* throughout its professional history, changing itself in response to societal changes, which means that it [American social work] is *indigenizing itself continuously with its society*' (p. 290 *emphasis added*). That logic generalised the term 'indigenisation' to mean any changes accrued by the profession in response to its changing environment, in the same country, forever.

In any case, it appeared that indigenisation perennially invited misinterpretation. Indeed, a particularly serious flaw, causing much confusion, was that the concept remedied the incongruence issue from the wrong direction. Many proponents of indigenisation did not seem to appreciate the fact that it effectively *starts with* the US (American) model, presumed to be *inherently sound*, needing only of *minor alterations* here and there. Consequently, the US model was effectively assumed to be the original point of reference, and the arbiter for what was to be considered 'truly' professional social work. Thus, all that the indigenisers had to do was to suggest skin-deep adjustments to the already perfected model, no real questions asked. Basic issues relating to the truth value of its *practice theories* themselves were not in doubt. The even more profound issues of the validity of the *epistemological* and *ontological* presuppositions on which theory and practice were built was, for long, beyond exposure to critical questioning.

In Egypt, the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed impassioned debates over the real value of indigenisation as a solution to the transplantation issue. Academics and graduate students at the Higher Institute of Social Work in Cairo, the oldest institution for social work education established by the Egyptian government (now the Faculty of Social Work, Helwan University) helped the social work community in Egypt bring the issue to the fore. Many participants in the debates adopted the viewpoint alluded to above. They held the position that the indigenisation of social work had an incurable built-in flaw as it took, as its *starting or reference point*, the US model and considered it to be inherently sound, needing only a few unspecified adjustments so as to fit local conditions. They expressed wonderment at the facile wholesale adoption by professionals of a foreign ready-made 'social' technology as if they were buying a new car or a material product. All keenly felt that social work as a profession dealt with human beings, living in a society with its unique history and a culture with its religion and distinct worldview. How could a foreign model – as advanced and desirable as it might have been – be irresponsibly adopted *in toto* with only a few alterations and deal with these myriad factors without undergoing a full *reformulation*? It was felt that this question had to be confronted. The general atmosphere throughout the debates was critical and self-assured, although also appreciative of the US contribution. There was a sense of confidence that Egypt, with both its history and rich cultural heritage and its apprehension of the latest professional developments abroad, would certainly be up to finding its way out of the dilemma.

It soon became evident that revitalising social work in Egypt, and indeed in any other developing country, required nothing less than *reversing the direction assumed by the indigenisation*

enterprise. Instead of starting from *without*, it had to start from *within*. But everybody realised that this was a formidable task requiring whole-hearted commitment and tireless hard work on two fronts: the internal and the external. On the internal front, it was realised that before we could use any valued contributions conceived in foreign lands, we would first have to be clear as to who we were, how we saw the world and ourselves, what our specific societal problems and hopes for the future were, and how we might tap our own valued resources to deal with the situation. On the external front, it was also evident that we had to undertake a thorough examination of the components of the US model. Furthermore, we had to fathom out how that particular model was a function of its local determinants and a response to its changing environment. Special attention would need to be given to the two core elements considered to be central to its distinctive constellation of professional components: value and knowledge. Critical evaluation of theories and methodologies should not distract us from identifying and critiquing the foundational epistemological and ontological assumptions on which they were built. But it was becoming increasingly evident that such an effort was not just an extension of the indigenisation approach, but represented a comprehensive *reconceptualisation* of social work. It not only transcended indigenisation, but also reversed its direction, which constituted a *break* with it. And thus the *authentisation* of social work was born.

Authentisation of social work initiated

The term 'indigenisation' translated into Arabic as *tawteen*, derivative of *watan*, which means 'homeland'. So, it sounds benign enough to the Arabic-speaking ear, as it evokes images of settling down into a local habitat. Conversely, when the English term 'indigenisation' is heard, it has an unpalatable ring since it still carries the colonialists' condescending, patronising overtones. This term evokes images of primitiveness and backwardness, of natives cut off from the civilised world. Thus, when the shortcomings of the concept itself became visible, not many felt sorry for the abandonment of the term. None volunteered to help resuscitate it. This abandonment contrasted with the position of the English-speaking scholar (even of the most benevolent type) who, having no viable English substitute for the term, still continues to use it today, even after it was recently declared 'an outmoded concept' (see Gray, Coates, & Yellow Bird, 2010, p. xxv).

A different Arabic term reflecting the spirit of the *reformulation* of social work, *taaseel*, was floated during these searching days. The late professor Kamal Agha of Helwan University first suggested this Arabic term, which connoted originality, identity, genuineness, and fidelity to one's own roots. The term *taaseel* was warmly received and, when writing a paper on the subject (Ragab, 1982), I had to coin an English translation of the term. This proved to be a difficult task since no known word could be found that conveyed its exact meaning, while strictly following canonical English-language derivation rules. The term '*authentisation* of social work' came closest to the meaning of the Arabic concept.

The defining characteristic of the idea of the *authentisation* of social work in developing countries is that, 'it starts with the authentic, local determinants of practice' (Ragab, 1990, p. 44). The main elements of that process were described as follows:

A conscious effort is to be made towards a clear identification of the socio-cultural background of the country concerned; its political, economic, and social-structural arrangements; and the particular configuration of social problems resulting therefrom . . . On the basis of [this], attempts are then made to delineate the parameters of the appropriate practice models capable of addressing the specific local problems and needs of the population . . . The basic question . . . is: what are the prerequisites and the components

of a genuine local practice which is embedded in a particular country's cultural values, congruent with its historical development, relevant to its economic, political and social realities, and tuned to its future aspirations?

(Ragab, 1990, p. 44 *emphasis added*)

However, starting from 'within' does not mean ending there. To be viable, authentication purposes can never be served by narrow egoism, self-flattery, or xenophobic adulation of local idiosyncrasies. A major ingredient in building the authentic model is a requirement for apprehending 'compatible' elements found useful in any other models developed anywhere. The rationale on which authentication is built is that, if it guarantees originality and the profession's fidelity to its own peoples' identity, as well as corresponds to local realities, it would be futile to ignore 'compatible' contributions of others who shared comparable social-structural conditions or cultural and religious identities. And for that matter, it would be just as futile for authenticisers to ignore the contributions of others who shared and were invested in addressing 'real' common human needs.

In contrast to indigenisation, the authentication of social work came with specific guidelines and systematic procedures to engage in the formidable challenge of the *reformulation* process. The following heuristic steps were suggested a quarter of a century ago (Ragab, 1990). They were meant to provide a general outline for the process, the details of which would be spelled out, and would be further developed as our fund of experience accumulated:

- 1 Serious efforts would be directed at a methodical identification of the core *societal values* with a bearing on the workings of the social welfare system of the country.
- 2 Simultaneously, well-planned efforts would be directed at the specification of *relevant facts* pertaining to the contemporary realities of the country's socioeconomic, political institutions.
- 3 Major *social problems* impinging on the lives of the people would be systematically studied and analysed in relation to the functioning (or malfunctioning) of those socioeconomic and political institutions.
- 4 In-depth studies would be conducted to identify local, *indigenous* 'alternative' practices and arrangements traditionally serving to fulfill the same functions performed by their imported counterparts. Those practices would be evaluated as to their appropriateness for dealing with contemporary conditions.
- 5 The above measures should pave the way for the creative task of the *integration* of these valuable 'genuine' practices and arrangements, steeped in the country's history, its values and its societal make-up with whatever was found to be compatible in other nations' experiences.
- 6 The results from the above would be expected to help in the design of *authentic professional practices* and programs.
- 7 These should then be *field tested* by local practitioners and allied researchers through field demonstrations and experiments, and then rigorously *evaluated*, before being adopted and widely *disseminated* through social work educational institutions.

(Ragab, 1990, pp. 46–47)

As the authentication of social work literature became widely known within the ranks of the social work establishment in Egypt, theorists became sensitised to the need for rigorous examination of the epistemological and ontological presuppositions of the imported practice theories or models they recommended. Previously venerated theories, such as Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviourism, lost their lustre, while cognitive approaches were gaining ground. Academicians

tended to give more attention to providing their students with critiques of theories and models, along with presentations of the formal elements of these constructs. Practitioners and their supervisors were explicitly busy devising ways for dealing with local practice incidents using their interpretation of the situation authentically flowing from a local cultural ethos. However, no formal studies were conducted, to my knowledge, to assess the impact of the authentication movement in Egypt.

But as serious authentication of social work proponents became deeply immersed in the task of identifying the local so-called 'sociocultural and religious' aspects in detail, they discovered that the 'religious' component of that aggregate had much more to offer the innovative 'authenticated' model than was previously thought. That dramatic deficit seemed to be part of a general trend to underestimate the role of religion within social work. As Askeland and Døhlie (2015) recently declared:

while culture has become an integrated topic in social work, religious issues seem to fall outside the concept of culture and are consequently less explored. We will maintain that religion is more important for many people and in many societies than what is discussed in Western social work literature . . . Religion may create meaning and identity for the individual as well as creating common values and ethics in a society, and rituals for important events in people's lives.

(pp. 262–263)

That statement applies most significantly to Muslim countries in particular, because Islam is not only a religion but also a comprehensive way of life, as is often said. This signifies that the authentication of social work, when applied to Muslim countries, would mean giving far more attention to the religious aspects than usual. Or indeed, it means that authentication would need to be transformed into what might be correctly labeled an *Islamic reorientation* of social work.

Authentication applied: the Islamic perspective on social work

As a consequence, those involved in the authentication of social work movement knew that they had to get serious enough to deal with these issues in depth, as required, if they were to live up to the expectations of the profession and society. It was emphasised as long ago as 1995 that:

Islam . . . has a lot to say about social work, because it has a lot to say about humankind, societal arrangements, and the universe in which humans live . . . *The Islamic reorientation of social work* movement sought a synthesis between [the Islamic] conception of human beings and their place in the universe on the one side, and the best of what the behavioral/social sciences have to say in this regard, on the other.

(Ragab, 1995, p. 291 *emphasis added*)

By that time, both a systematic *methodology* for the synthesis or 'integration' of insights derived from Islamic revelation and the relevant concepts of the behavioural and social sciences was already in place (Ragab, 1993). That general methodology for integration was based on the well-established notion of the 'dialectic of theory and research', in which innovative theoretical frameworks, combining Islamic and social science concepts, were rigorously tested in the total reality. When that general methodology was applied to social work, innovative practice theories and models informed by relevant Islamic tenets were field-tested for their effectiveness in dealing with client problems. On the basis of the results, authenticated theories and models were duly

modified, in cycles of theorising and testing, until they proved robust enough to be codified in manuals and then to be widely disseminated.

The 'Islamic reorientation of social work' movement was indeed a reflection of more general intellectual trends pursuing the systematic 'integration' of the spiritual and religious factors in the behavioural and social sciences undergirding the helping professions. These trends were the offshoots of the marvellous 20th century revolutionary developments in science (cosmology, subnuclear physics, and neuroscience) which dramatically changed the way we see reality, the world around us, and ourselves. These developments had a deep impact on the philosophy of science, ushering in an era of antireductionist post-positivism and post-materialism. Fuller accounts of these exciting developments can be found elsewhere (see, e.g., Augros & Stanciu, 1984; Capra, 1982; Ragab, 1993).

Two pioneering movements influenced, directly or indirectly, by those developments were of particular interest to social work in Egypt. They were instrumental in the construction of a coherent conceptual framework for the integration of religious concepts and social science theories as applied to social work. These critically important movements were the:

- Islamisation of knowledge movement.
- Spirituality in social work movement.

The role of these movements in the maturation of the Islamic reorientation of social work into a fully fledged *Islamic perspective* on social work is discussed here only in brief.

The first movement took place within the general area of public and higher education in the Muslim world. In 1977, an International Conference on Islamic Education was convened in Saudi Arabia. The conference was attended by 130 Ministers of Education and notable scholars from 40 Muslim countries to discuss education conditions in the Muslim world. The idea of the *Islamic reorientation* of education, from grade school to university levels, loomed large in these discussions. The conference papers were published under the title *Social and Natural Sciences: The Islamic Perspective* (Naseef & Faruqi, 1981). A different conference was convened in Islamabad, Pakistan, which resulted in the publication of a work plan for the Islamic reorientation of all branches of knowledge in the Muslim world (Faruqi, 1982). The Islamisation of knowledge program suggested was basically one of the *integration* of:

- The best of modern science, sifted out for congruence with the Islamic worldview.
- Relevant Islamic scholarship, based on the two authoritative Islamic sources: the Holy Quran and the Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad's sayings and deeds).

This program gave a new momentum to the movement for the inclusion of Islamic concepts in social work practice by giving it additional broad-based, formal academic support, along with outlining the essentials of a systematic methodology for integration.

The second movement which contributed valuable theoretical insights came from psychology, psychotherapy, sociology, and social work in North America. Social work had, for decades, based its practice on Freudian and behaviourist formulations, despite harsh criticism being directed to both formulations, as well as among them. Abraham Maslow sharply criticised both Freudian and behaviourist (and positivist) theories calling them *nontheories* (Maslow, 1971). His distinguished work, along with that of others, pioneered 'humanistic' psychology, which pushed the mentalistic or cognitive factors up in the causation hierarchy of variables determining human behaviour. But Maslow asserted that humanistic psychology was only a harbinger of *transpersonal psychology*, which he described as a psychology and philosophy of the 'person-transcending

(transpersonal) and of the humanness-transcending (transhuman) . . . which is born from within Humanistic Psychology, generated out of its own theoretical and empirical necessities' (Maslow's Foreword, cited in Goble, 1970, p. 6). Nobel Laureate neuropsychologist Roger Sperry, was also describing a 'theoretical turnabout' in psychology, as a:

new view of reality [which] accepts *mental and spiritual qualities as causal realities* . . . Instead of excluding mind and spirit, the new outlook puts subjective mental forces near the top of the brain's causal control hierarchy and gives them primacy in determining what a person does.
(Sperry, 1988, pp. 608–609 *emphasis added*)

Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (1998) summarised the thrust of the theory, saying: 'In short, transpersonal theory *focuses on the distinctively spiritual aspects* of human experience and development' (p. 360 *emphasis added*).

The *spirituality in social work* movement in North America helped consolidate the theoretical foundations of the movement for integrating Islamic spirituality in social work practice. This movement had succeeded in legitimising the inclusion of the insights of faith and belief in practice, even giving them salience among factors that determine humans' behaviour and emotional life. The idea of social work *from an Islamic perspective* was thus corroborated, and was seen as just the natural thing to do when working with Muslim clients. Some Egyptian purists preferred to use the term *Islamic social work* as a label for the movement. But others thought such an overemphasis would be too limiting and parochial; it may even have the unintended consequence of insulating the innovative contributions from mainstream professional exchange. Closer to target was the understanding that social work from an *Islamic perspective*, while firmly safeguarding its identity, emphasised an openness to use other social work models and theories available internationally.

Last, but not least, the *integralist approach* pioneered by the great sociologist Pitirim Sorokin substantiated, in its way, the epistemological and methodological base for the integration of Islamic concepts in social work theory building and research. Sorokin (1941) derided the dis-integrating sensate culture's 'exclusive empiricism', which he saw as catastrophic to all aspects of our lives. In his book *The Crisis of Our Age*, he described how modern culture with its sensate *system of truth and reality* had 'led inevitably to the growth of materialism . . . more radical mechanisticism . . . growing hedonism . . . in the world of values . . . flat empiricism, superficial positivism and vulgar utilitarianism' (Sorokin, 1941, pp. 252–254). He emphasised that the way out of the crisis of our age basically lay in a transformation to an '*integral system of truth and knowledge*' (see Sorokin, 1941, pp. 255–260 *emphasis added*). Johnston (1999) explained integralism's understanding of human nature as follows:

humans are three dimensional creatures possessing a body, a mind, and a soul. Each dimension knows the world differently . . . The body learns through the senses and knows the world empirically. The mind seeks knowledge through reason, and understands the world rationally. The soul or supersensory capacity exists independent of reason and the senses. It develops from intuition, grace, and God's revelation. Through it humans grasp the sublime or transcendent truths of their existence.

(p. 27)

Indeed, that particular integral paradigm helped provide the blueprint for the 'general methodology for integration' of Islamic revelation and the behavioural and social science constructs alluded to above (Ragab, 1993).

The *Islamic perspective on social work*, equipped with a robust theoretical base and a general, well-defined methodology, gained wide support among social work educators in Egypt. Six national conferences have been convened since 1991, where a substantial number of empirical research reports and theoretical papers informed by that perspective have been presented. Scores of master's theses and doctoral dissertations have been completed in four Egyptian universities. Most empirical work done was, naturally, of the 'intervention research' genre, mainly using field experiments as their preferred design. Ideally, a researcher would start by putting together an intervention program, in which practice theories were modified with Islamic content. The innovative program would be implemented in working with clients of a social agency for the appropriate duration of time required. Then, the impact of the program would be assessed, with considerations allowed by the field conditions. Supposedly, the proposed programs would be modified in accordance with the results, and subsequent studies would be performed to test and build on such innovative programs. But that goal has yet to be achieved in reality, because most studies and innovative experiments have been done by single researchers working for their degrees or for presentations at conferences with the aim of publishing. This has not helped achieve the needed accumulation and solidification of the findings, leaving only isolated islands of still-to-be corroborated aspects of the 'integrative model'. What is lacking is institutional planning and support of a serious 'research program' capable of carrying out such a task.

Authentisation: key to 'true' universalisation?

Gray and Coates (2010a), after a roundup of Indigenous social work around the world, declared that the most important conclusion of their work was possibly their '*realization of the centrality of culture in social work services . . . [and] the reality that social work is not monolithic and, in fact, there may be many "social works"*' (p. 273 emphasis in original). The logical question to ask would be what, then, holds the profession together as one; whether there are "universals" in social work which are "relevant across cultures"?' (see Gray & Fook, 2004). They simply answer by suggesting the existence of a shared universal, i.e., '*a desire to help others, variously expressed as seeking social justice for all; a quest to improve people's quality of life; or to empower people to take control of their own lives . . . This intention is commonly shared but expressed in various ways*' (Gray & Coates, 2010a, p. 273 emphasis added). In the same vein, Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie (2011) wrote:

social work is an idea of helping that can be molded to suit different cultures. Thus, the practice of social work should be different under various cultural circumstances. It is in this light, that social work, though a universal idea, must be operationally different.

(p. 138)

When we carefully examine these somewhat lengthy quotes, it dawns on us that social work may indeed be reaching an important milestone in its history. The quotes above seem to be ushering in certain welcome signs indicating that *social work is coming of age*. After decades of puzzling and 'waving' between misplaced trust in the appropriateness of imported models, complaints about their irrelevance, denial and hedging behind 'science' and internationalism, and suggesting minor amendments to make them fit, now the profession is finally coming to terms with the realities of the world as it is, and then creatively responding at last. That is, culture is decisive in shaping social work; the Western model may be good for its own culture, even with variations between Western countries; the profession does have a commonly shared core of universals; social work is mature enough to be comfortable with variation and differences; and there indeed exists much for all to learn from one another.

The authentication of social work movement has been pursuing equivalent understandings since its inception. It is on the basis of such a framework that it sought to tackle the problem of dependence on imported models, with modifications or without. The authentication approach was instrumental in the development of the 'Islamic perspective on social work', which itself is open to mutual exchange of content with other models as deemed useful to all parties. Innovative interventions embedded in this perspective were credibly applied in serving Muslim clients effectively in scores of field experiments.

But rightly, some writers have cautioned against adolescent excesses associated with the *coming of age*. Gray and Hetherington (2013), for example, warned that:

One can easily see tensions emerging here between models that are *exclusive and singularly dedicated to a particular culture* . . . Merely increasing the number of Indigenous case studies . . . or research on *what is unique and different in Indigenous cultures*, does not lead to Indigenous social work . . . A theorist or researcher . . . may research culturally unique habits, concepts or practices without regard to how commonly they occur, how widely they are accepted, how they integrate conceptually, or how meaningful they are for contemporary research, education and practice.

(p. 28 *emphasis added*)

That forewarning, once again, is another sign of the progression of social work toward maturity, as it puts a high premium on cross-enrichment and insists on steering away from self-righteous encapsulation. The burgeoning literature informed by the authentication philosophy, aware of these issues, has always adopted an *inclusive* stance. An early work calling for an 'urgently needed scientific revolution in social work' addressed the task of combining 'insights derived from *transcendental sources* with those gained through empirical observations' (Ragab, 1992, p. 21 *emphasis added*). That model was meant to be generally applicable, for use within any and all spiritual and religious traditions. Yet when addressing the specific case of Islam and Muslims in the 'Islamic perspectives on theory building in the social sciences' (Ragab, 1993), the reference shifted to the specific case of that religious tradition. And when again generalising the proposed integrative methodology to the behavioural and social sciences, that same inclusive stance was adopted, referring to the 'incorporation of *religious insights* into the normal scheme of theory development [in the social sciences]' (Ragab, 1999, p. 39).

An even more promising sign of the profession *coming of age* is the call for indigenisers to direct their attention to the *knowledge* component of social work. The proponents of indigenisation have long focused mostly on devising culturally appropriate *skills, practices, and priorities*, which may be befitting for short-run purposes. Today, it is being convincingly argued that 'indigenisation' should address 'knowledge development', which is essential for long-term ends. Gray and Coates (2010b) report that:

a new field of *knowledge development*, namely, indigenized social work, could be emerging which 'independent of its imported origins . . . stands on its own in addressing local problems and in providing its own local training and textbooks' (Adair, 1999, p. 415) . . . A current understanding of 'indigenization' holds that social work *knowledge* should arise from within the culture, reflect local behaviours and practices, be interpreted within a local frame of reference and thus be locally relevant, that is, it should address culturally relevant and context-specific problems.

(pp. 614–615 *emphasis added*)

Knowledge is one of the two core components (along with values) on which the profession is built. Knowledge is the main repository of conceptualisations that guide practice. Hence 'true appropriateness' requires that knowledge building and research be unequivocally oriented towards cultural relevance, done in a systematic and verifiable fashion. But that, then, would indeed result in changing the character of the knowledge base of the profession, change that renders the label 'indigenisation' inappropriate as a descriptor of the radically changed product. Gray and Coates (2010b) seem to imply a similar position in their statement telling us that 'in this literature "indigenization" is seen as a process of adaptation. But *beyond this narrow and limited view of the "indigenization" of practice and education lies the broader realm of a truly culturally relevant practice and scholarship*' (p. 614 emphasis added). However, that position, as progressive as it is, may be attempting to overstretch the features distinctive of indigenisation beyond recognition. That emphasis on knowledge building brings the issue of devising a systematic *methodology* for the creation of this innovative culturally relevant scholarship to the fore. The authentisation movement had to assign a high priority to the development of a *systematic methodology* for the integration of spiritual and religious and other culturally relevant content into the knowledge edifice of the profession (see, e.g., Ragab, 1992, 1993, 1996).

Conclusion

The social work profession has been with us in Egypt for eight decades. This chapter has tried to follow its development and progression through the years. It showed how the US (American) model of social work practice was wholeheartedly embraced and appreciated as representing the most 'modern', scientifically based 'social technology'. Then how gaping incompatibilities between that respected model and the country's religious and cultural heritage began to be exposed and decried. Still trusting in the intrinsic soundness of the imported model, but for a few aspects needing modification to make it fit, indigenisation of social work seemed just the right solution. That movement was enthusiastically adopted. Over the years, however, it began to be clear that the differences between the 'Western' model and the local culture were much deeper than could be treated by sedatives. Incongruence ran deeper than the issues relating to any specific practices or practice theories, not only to their underlying methodologies, but also to the epistemological and ontological assumptions on which the whole edifice was built. It was clear that minor repairs could not be the solution to the transplantation problems, but a thorough overhaul was needed, a reconceptualisation of social work. This translated into the emergence of the authentisation of social work movement, calling for the reconstruction of the profession in each country, starting from within, before it could safely and validly benefit from foreign models.

The authentisation of social work, when applied in Muslim countries or working with Muslim clients, could not ignore the Islamic worldview. Thus the 'Islamic perspective on social work' was the appropriate answer to the cultural relevance issue. A general methodology for the systematic inclusion of the cultural and religious content into research and practice was created, adopted, and used in scores of field experiments in four Egyptian universities. That general methodology was designed to be inclusive, allowing it to be applied within any cultural or religious tradition. In that authentisation-informed, integrative methodology, elements of local and foreign-born concepts or practices were combined and then field-tested. Findings which withstood rigorous field testing would then be added to the existing repertoire of professional knowledge, becoming part of the new *genuine* conceptualisation. The qualifier '*genuine*' here is meant to replace the label 'authentised' (the more so for 'indigenised'), because the product

would then be *ready to be part of normal, mainstream social work*. In this way, genuine conceptualisations – originating in any country, guided by the core universals of the profession, and faithful to its people and to their worldviews – would be pooled together in rich variety, open for exchange and mutual enrichment, representing a mature profession that had *come of age*. But to reach that desired goal, the profession still has a long way to go to be part of the universalised profession. National professional communities, now free from artificial constraints, clear about their destination, and harbouring high hopes of success and effectiveness, would find successful completion of this tough assignment gratifying. At that point, the ‘truly’ universalised profession could simply be called ‘social work’, without the need to precede the term with any particular qualifiers.

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