

land and our ways are gifts. Using a "cultural paradigm" he explores the gifts from the four sacred directions, the search for harmony, the role of the Elders as essential for individual and community healing in the transition from colonialism to nationhood.

Hearing Aboriginal voices is also essential to cultural revitalization, to reclaim our own history, tell our own stories. No academic analysis, regardless of how thought-provoking or pro-empowerment of First Nations, can any longer be understood as speaking for us. In these days of identity politics, a paradoxical aspect of this publication is the amount of space that appears to be taken up by non-Native theorists. Let us continue to break free of academic colonialism, and tell our own stories, the whole story, the full details, no edits please.

This book is documentation that First Nations community revival, self-determination, is happening at all levels: spiritual, social, political and economic. There is beauty and hopeful vision in the words gifted in this book, from those who struggle and tell of the wisdom gained through experience. As Arthur Solomon, Elder, who opens and closes the book with his words of inspiration says, "[i]t is beautiful to see after all these many years of struggle. Gitchi-meegwetch" (p. 147).

Robert Mullaly, *Structural Social Work: Ideology, Theory and Practice*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993, pp. 240, \$17.95 (paper).

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Marxist and radical social work theorising gained currency in many European and North American schools of social work throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and on into the 1980s. A vast literature addresses the nature of the welfare state, social policy emanating from the state and social work practice within capitalism. It is within this tradition that Robert Mullaly sets out to advance the argument for a social work practice that will contribute to transforming relations of dominance and inequality. He and others engaged in this project call this approach "structural social work".

Structural social work theory as it has emerged in some Canadian schools of social work is a reconceptualization of earlier Marxist and radical social work paradigms. Contained in these earlier schools was a blistering critique of the social control function and outcomes of the modern day welfare state. Indicative of this theorising was a characterising of social workers, to paraphrase Sheila Rowbotham, a socialist-feminist writing in

the 70s, as capitalism's "soft cops who picked up the casualties [of capitalism] and dusted them off after they had been worked over." The framework for radical and Marxist social work practice was distinctly an anti-poverty practice, with capitalism "the enemy".

However, as Mullaly points out, structural social work theory is unlike those earlier Marxist/radical paradigms which saw the state as monolithic; which privileged class exploitation over all other forms of oppression; which reduced explanations of exploitation to the single "cause" of capitalist social relations; which saw women and men as dupes, domesticated into false consciousness through dominant ideologies, and which scoffed at social work practice with individuals and families as "maintaining the status quo". These positions have been roundly criticised, particularly by feminist and anti-racist theorists and activists, who have generated an impressive body of empirical, theoretical and social work practice of their own. The result of this work has been an acceptance of the limitations of these earlier explanations of the lived experience of black men and women, First Nations men and women, disabled men and women, and most white women.

Structural social work theory has taken much of the criticism levelled at earlier Marxist and radical schools of thought on board, while maintaining the central concern of theorizing individual troubles by locating and understanding them in the broader economic and political context in which they occur. According to Mullaly, structural social work theory distinguishes itself from earlier Marxist and radical thought in that there is no privileging of oppression. Rather there is recognition of a wide range of institutional practices that give way to a structuring of experiences that disadvantage, exploit and oppress members of particular groups along lines of sex/gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, disability, age and so forth.

In light of a more nuanced understanding of oppression, structural social work theory calls for a generalist model of practice, with individuals, families, groups and communities. Such a practice, it argues, would both address the particular impact of structural disadvantage experienced by individuals, families and groups, while seeking to expose and transform, through consciousness-raising and collective action, the institutional practices that seek to maintain the power and privileges of domination.

Mullaly is critical of the anti-theoretical stance that has been and continues to be a cause of tension between practitioners and intellectuals within social work and the social welfare field. Here he argues that social workers must first develop analytical skills to unpack assumptions about human nature and human need. Analytical skills are also required to understand social relations of oppression which are masked by the dominant ideologies on which welfare provision is based. The dominant ideologies of neo-conservatism and liberalism are reflected in competing discourses of

individual responsibility, individual pathology and dysfunction which inform the main body of social work theory or "conventional social work" as Mullaly designates it. For Mullaly this ambitious project requires a clear understanding of the ideologies surrounding the development of the welfare state and within which social policy is carried out as social work practice.

Against his outline of a progressive social work vision with ideals and beliefs embracing humanism, equality, an interventionist state and participatory democracy, Mullaly devotes half the contents of this book to a critique of the ideological underpinnings of welfare provision since the post-war period. In doing so, Mullaly provides a comprehensive synthesis of much of the Marxist and radical social work theory of the 60s, 70s and 80s. Unfortunately in contrasting neo-conservative, liberal, social democratic and Marxist paradigms he offers no new insights to those familiar with this literature. Moreover what is astounding about his "search for a paradigm" on which a transformative social work practice could rest is the absence of a feminist/anti-racist paradigm that offers perhaps the most profound challenge to the other four ideological frameworks and perhaps the most hope for a transformative structural social work practice.

In this taxonomy of paradigms Mullaly adopts an "economic beliefs" category, in which he then adopts a definition of "the economic" that reflects main/male/stream labour market definitions of economic production. This treatment renders women's unpaid work in the household and in the community as unimportant and outside the social relations of a capitalist economy. Yet we know that women's work in the household is essential to economic and social life. The adoption of narrow definitions of economic activity do not speak to the lived experience of Black men, many First Nations people, and disabled men and women whose economic activity in "hidden economies" has been an important source of resistance and survival.

Although structural social work theory claims to take on a broader understanding of oppression along sex/gender, and race/ethnicity, as well as class lines, throughout the book I found myself facing the same old "malestream" theoretical preoccupation with a unifying account of capitalism. Even many of the examples Mullaly uses from agency practice tended to fall into this reductionist dogma. For example on several occasions Mullaly clearly located child welfare practice inside the social relations of class. While I accept that child welfare continues to be located mainly in the communities of the poor it is also located in the domain of male dominance and female dependence and exploitation. The explosion of sexual abuse work in this field is as much a testimony to the structured relations of male privilege as "child neglect" is to issues of class and poverty.

Many social work students with whom I work are grappling with questions such as "What is structural social work?", "What is the argument for

this theoretical perspective in contrast to other perspectives?" and "How in practice is structural social work theory operationalized and different from other forms of social work?". Answers to these questions are not readily apparent in this book.

The main thrust of Mullaly's argument seems to suggest that those of us who labour in social work are unaware of the ideological assumptions and interests in which our work is located and to which our work contributes. Through clarifying for us the ideological paradigms we can begin to see differently than through the neo-conservative or liberal ideologies we operate within and are unaware of. The result will be that we will turn our efforts to progressive and transformative ends in our agencies through how we relate to our clients, in taking on our managers, in working in our unions, in our professional associations and indeed in our lives.

Unfortunately, I am unconvinced that the contradictions between the dominant ideology and practice are so unclear for many social workers. Perhaps I am overly optimistic but I sense that there is more insight and resistance on the part of social workers and clients than has so far been acknowledged. This is why a more detailed examination of dialectical process in social work, which Mullaly has taken up in other writing, would no doubt be useful. In this text that discussion is much too short.

Finally, the actual outline and discussion of operationalizing structural theory in practice is lean. Like earlier Marxist and radical social work literature the critique makes sense, but what do we do differently as a result?

While there are some obvious weaknesses in this text as it relates to sex/gender and race/ethnicity, this book on structural social work is significant in continuing the theory building needed for a progressive and structurally transforming social work practice. Those of use engaged in this project need this book and others like it in order to advance this discussion.

Christopher A. Sarlo, *Poverty in Canada*. Vancouver: The Fraser Institute, 1992, pp. 242 \$19.95.

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The back jacket of Sarlo's, *Poverty in Canada*, proudly proclaims this book to be "a provocative challenge to current approaches to defining and measuring poverty". The book was written to be a serious discussion on how poverty is defined with a proposed definition based on minimal "necessities" (Sarlo's word). Although the topic and his approach deserve the attention