Introduction

Mel Gray, James Midgley, and Stephen A. Webb

Welcome to the stimulating and engaging world of social work. The contexts for social work are often complex, usually demanding, and always challenging. Social workers today need to be knowledgeable, reflective, ethical, accountable, and professionally competent. As agents of change they are often involved in transformative roles that impact both socially and economically on service users. Most importantly, perhaps, social workers often take an ethical stance in defence of certain human rights, issues of social justice, and antidiscriminatory practice. The themes and content of social work knowledge are equally broad, diverse, and contestable.

The SAGE Handbook of Social Work is a one-stop reference work that captures and presents contemporary material in a comprehensive international collection. It is the world's first major reference work in the field with such a generic focus. It aims to provide a definitive benchmark by addressing new developments alongside more traditional ones in social work. This *Handbook* is a vital compendium that any researcher, student, practitioner, or policy maker can pick up and use for a number of different topics related to social work. It provides an authoritative guide to the theory, method, and values of the profession and pays close attention to the primary debates of today impacting on social work. Indeed, the uniqueness of this large volume is not only that it serves as a major reference work for students and practitioners

but that it also provides the most comprehensive and authoritative survey of contemporary social work.

This international reference work is partly occasioned by the significant increase of worldwide interest in social work, leading some to consider that it has now reached global proportions. Increasingly, the social work knowledge base is drawing on international experience, through access to the variety of overseas research and practice examples. The movement towards developing a profession more confidently grounded in research has been one of the most significant international trends in social work during the past decade (Beddoe, 2011). It is also suggested that the problems experienced by service users are caused as much by global as by national forces, and local problems cannot be understood without reference to global economic, political, and cultural circumstances (Ife, 2000). This has led some to try to develop a common base of global social work practice. The volume is also occasioned by the growing awareness that very significant changes have taken place in social work in recent years. The net effect of new knowledge, policy, and rapid legislative changes in social work, coupled with shifting values around social justice, inclusion, and cultural recognition has been the proliferation of new approaches in social work. Social work has evolved greatly as both a field of professional practice and an academic discipline since its

inception in the late 19th century. In addition, social work has had to confront new challenges from changing policy agendas, transitions in welfare, the shift of interest towards service-user involvement, the rise of evidence-based practice, the advent of globalisation and neoliberal politics, and the 'professionalisation' of frontline practice by a range of risk performance and regulatory regimes. It has done this while retaining a core set of values focusing on social justice, anti-oppressive practice, and the ethics of recognition. One of the distinctive features of social work is its continuing adherence to a set of progressive social values and ethical principles.

In undertaking this ambitious project, three leading international figures in social work, Mel Gray, James Midgley, and Stephen A. Webb were selected as editors to bring together the foremost international exponents of the different strands that contribute towards the makeup of modern social work. The editors were greatly assisted by a carefully selected group of associate editors, namely, Robert Fairbanks II (Section 1), Pamela Trevithick (Section 2), Sue White (Section 3), Lena Dominelli (Section 4), Brian Taylor (Section 5), Stan Houston (Section 6), and Paul Michael Garrett (Section 7). Each of these assistant editors provided essential expert evaluations of each chapter providing feedback to the editors on individual contributions. Drawn from an international field of excellence, the contributors were commissioned to use the most up-to-date research available to provide a critical, international analysis of their area of expertise. The result is this essential resource collection that not only reflects upon the condition of social work today but also looks to future developments.

Social work research and practice have changed enormously over the last 40 years or so, with the values, knowledge base and language constantly evolving. While this emerging diversity of practice approaches appears quite striking, there continues to be something of a 'mainstream' even though it is navigated by fewer than before.

Internationally, social work has grown in stature and influence, making important contributions to the social sciences. Social work holds special research promise because it explicitly attempts to cut across diverse social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. Within the contemporary situation, social work also addresses many of the pressing problems facing people across the globe. In some key respects, social work is more than a field of interventions or set of ideas. It is, in effect, a response to and possible solution for the maladies of a postmodern world and hence, by implication, an ethical stance in contemporary societies. Perhaps this is a consequence of the fact that the emergence of social work in many countries has been explicitly tied to forms of political activism and community engagement. To a great extent, the pathways and procedures for developing social work follow not only from attention to a particular subject matter, modes of intervention, or theoretical perspective but also to a set of moral commitments. This *Handbook* seeks to identify the dimensions of social work and its varied effects, to discuss social work in relation to its intellectual history, its varying definitions and roles, its current affiliations and leanings and diverse objects of intervention, and its possible futures. The uniqueness and originality of contemporary social work is reflected in the sections into which the chapters have been grouped. These important dimensions were identified by carefully gathering together some of the most highly cited, influential, and seminal authors in social work as well as several new authors making promising contributions. This then is a presentation of international researchers' significant and original contribution to the field of social work today. In bringing together highly influential authors, and a range of contemporary concepts, methods and values, it is our intention that this major international reference in social work will be a valuable addition to students, researchers, practitioners, policy makers, government and nongovernment organisations, and specialists and

nonspecialists in the fields of social work, human services, welfare, social pedagogy, community work, and social development. It is hoped that the reader will find *The SAGE Handbook of Social Work* a state-of-the art guide and invaluable reference work on the contemporary scene in social work as it is practised in diverse geopolitical contexts around the world.

NATURE AND ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK

Over recent years there has been extensive work from professional associations, key stakeholder organisations, researchers, and service-user groups in trying to identify the nature and role of social work. For example, a number of core principles have been identified as underpinning social work:

- it is a problem-solving activity;
- the focus is on the whole of a person's or family's life, their social support network, their neighbourhood, and community;
- the value system is based on human and civil rights;
- the social model is the framework for practice;
- social workers work with individuals, families, groups, or communities to define together the outcomes they are seeking;
- the process and the relationship are a core part of the service and can represent a service in itself;
- the purpose of social work is to increase the life chances and opportunities of people using services by building on their strengths, expertise, and experience to maximise their capacities (Brand et al., 2005, pp. 2–3).

It is generally agreed that any adequate understanding of the role of social work must take account of the interlocking nature of values, principles, and tasks. It is also recognised that, in order for social work to have legitimacy and currency, it has to have a balance between essential rules, principles, and professional expertise. However, as previously noted, it has proved enormously difficult to reach agreement about the nature and role of social work in modern societies (Gray & Webb, 2010). Indeed, the above core principles are partial and likely to provoke criticisms about various emphases, use of language, and coverage. For instance, some would strongly contest the claim that the value system is based on human and civil rights, arguing instead that these are just one small component of the core values (Webb, 2009). Establishing just what legitimate role social workers play will always be problematic in the absence of an agreed basis for the development of the 'profession' of social work. As long ago as 1915, Abraham Flexner (2001) raised the thorny question of whether social work constituted a profession in the strict sense of the term:

> Consideration of the objects of social work leads to the same conclusion. I have made the point that all the established and recognized professions have definite and specific ends: medicine, law, architecture, engineering – one can draw a clear line of demarcation about their respective fields. This is not true of social work. It appears not so much a definite field as an aspect of work in many fields. An aspect of medicine belongs to social work, as do certain aspects of law, education, architecture, etc (Flexner, 2001, p. 161).

Social work's disparate nature and loose boundaries have long plagued attempts to consolidate it as an enclosed configuration with a specific professional identity. However, though the roles attributed to social workers have changed and continue to be subject to review, the values and principles on which social work is based have remained relatively constant. Nevertheless, debate about the function and purpose of social work remains healthily contestable. As Askeland and Payne (2001) suggested: 'Social work has always been subject to competing claims of definition and practice, as social workers, politicians, service users and policy makers have struggled to lay claims on what social work is, and what it might be' (p. 14). This has much to do with the diverse and multidisciplinary nature of its concepts, methods, and values as well as it regional specificities and local determinations. It also has to do with

debates, disputes, and sometimes irreconcilable tensions within the field of social work and beyond. So how one might one make sense of the nature and role of social work? As a professional field of intervention, it is characterised by specific forms of knowledge and method, and exhibits an internal logic which helps to define its main parameters. Indeed, the chapters in this volume provide a systematic resource to the leading perspectives and trends in social work. As discussed below, social work is not conceived as belonging to any one discipline, since the very nature of social issues stretch and form across the social sciences. However, in surveying the language, knowledge, research, purpose, professional affiliations, roles, practice interventions, and mandatory responsibilities, it might be asked whether it is possible to identify a particular logic or root rationality that finds a complex meaning in social work and moves it beyond its simple manifestation: Is there a single line of meaning or an essential rationality that structures the nature of social work? Put another way, is there a meta-rationality at work in all forms and aspects of social work that structures it to mesh in a particular way? It is possible to ask what is the underlying presuppositional logic that typically characterises social work? Through the important new texts gathered together in this volume, it is possible to discern an underlying logic to social work that is understandable as a sort of glue which holds it together. What is being sought here is structural similarity across fields in social work. There is a level of integration which underpins social work such that its constituting formative rationality can be accurately identified. There is a peculiar knot that social work posits between a two-level structure: a logic of regulation and a logic of security that when read dialectically shows the relation is part of a larger move in which each term is inscribed reciprocally in the logic of the other. The launching pad for this reflection concerns the principles on which social work is founded. The underlying logic of regulation and security explains the essential rationality of social work. As a result, all transformation in the internal mechanisms and function of social work should be understood as an inter-related process between the twin logics of security and regulation. These are, in fact, coterminous with the rationality of social work.

This Weberian reading of social work maintains that it is best explained both developmentally and functionally as part of the wider historical rationalisation of modernity. With this caricature, it is plain to see social work as a significant feature in the project of modernity. If this analysis is correct in identifying and isolating the twin logics of regulation and security as doubly constitutive of social work, the knot that binds them points towards a Weberian *theory of rationality*. In this way, it is possible to trace the interpretive key in the field of social work that is inscribed at the intersection of two linked logics, constituting its overarching rationality. The task of explication is to account for and outline the conditions that structure the action-orienting logic of regulation and security in social work as they conform to the ordering of rationality in modern societies. Broadly, along foundationalist lines, it is easy to see how these two logics conform to Max Weber's distinction between instrumental and substantive rationality. Weber reconstituted rationality by introducing a social dimension and developing sophisticated distinctions between different kinds of rationality. They hinge on differences in the relationships among values, goals, beliefs, and action. One such distinction is in the relationship between means and ends, which differentiates formal or instrumental rationality from substantive rationality. Weber defined instrumental and substantive rationality as a logical relationship between means and ends based on assessing the impacts of projected actions. The former is means–end driven, calculating, self-interested, predictive, and regulative, with the latter focusing on broader expressive values, affects, and meanings. While instrumental rationality is limited to means, taking ends as given, substantive rationality includes

'the actor's own rationally pursued and calculated ends' (Weber, 1922, p. 12). This sort of rationality does not lend itself to procedure, or rigid or scripted methods. It is a moral–practical rationality, whereby an action is oriented towards understanding, while the former is a calculating rationality (Habermas, 1984). Social work is determined, on the one hand, by an instrumental rationality, as complicit in calculating and regulatory practice and, on the other, by a substantive rationality, in security, affect, and safety, through dialogic and expressive face-to-face work (Webb, 2006).

Logic of regulation

The rationality of regulation is constitutive of modern social work and an increasingly pervasive aspect in its reach and depth of influence. As a mode of ordering, it is frequently achieved by legal rules, procedures, policy guidelines, and regulatory mandates that are likely to be backed by behavioural sanctions and standards. Hood et al. (2001) explain that successful regulatory regimes must possess three linked components to be effective: information gathering, standard setting, and behaviour modification. These activities sit at the centre of many of social work's tasks. Indeed, regulation penetrates all aspects of social work whereby professional interventions are increasingly controlled, monitored, and audited. In many respects, these are risk-management systems that focus on the requirement of regulatory objectives, records of compliance, the quality of performance management systems, and their capacity to comply. To regulate is to govern and control through a set of rule-bound actions or procedures, which adjust behaviour in respect of some time or quantity to some prescribed standards. This is often referred to as the normative function of social work. As a form of determinate judgement, the logic of regulation monitors specific targets, measures their performance, and tries to adjust their behaviour. For regulation to work successfully, it requires benchmarks and rules to be standardised and repeated in achieving the same results. Regulation is one important way in which risks are managed, with systems-based risk management as a form of self-regulation. With this trend, the introduction of more external regulatory processes can be seen in the mixture of competitive, quality assurance, performance management, and bureaucratic processes. The predominant regulatory tendencies that underlie social work are mirrored in many of the most notable features of the last two decades, that is, the prominence given to regulation as a technique of governance and the rise of a 'new regulatory state', especially in Western democracies. With this shift, marketised public policies are given prominence with the regulatory state acting essentially as a controlling form of governance over people's lives. These trends are evident in Part 1, where the impacts of neoliberalism on frontline social work practice become abundantly evident.

Logic of security

The second rationality underlying social work is the logic of security. Drawing on the work of Francois Ewald (1991), significant shifts in the relation between welfare and social work can be identified, not only in terms of the maintenance of social order and national productivity but also as a mode of protection based on the creation of security and safety for vulnerable citizens. To be secure is to be free from fear, harm, apprehension, contamination, or doubt. How safe is safe enough is a crucial question for social workers in their work with children and vulnerable adults. The focus is not on closed circuits of control and regulation, but on calculations of the possible and probable in terms of an individual or community's protection from harm. In this sense, the concrete experience of security in the daily lives of people is crucial. It is within these parameters that the significance of face-to-face relationships in social work becomes most

apparent. These involve relationship building and maintenance, shared meanings and empathy, and establishing trust, reciprocity, and confidence between practitioner and client. This might be expressed as the 'we-relationship' between social worker and client that takes places in a shared spatio-temporal domain. Only in face-to-face encounters is the other person – the social worker or client – apprehended as uniquely individual within a particular situation. The essence of the face-to-face encounter is simultaneity – the recognition of getting or coming together – to build relationships for change or continuity. This is often referred to as intersubjectivity, understood as a fundamental category within the social worker–client dynamic, the foundation for relationship building at the core of direct work with clients. Therefore, the rationality of security can be stretched to include safety, vulnerability, coping strategies, social support, and care and protection. Expert mediating systems, such as social work, are crucially caught up within the logic of security with 'we-relationships', trust, and empathy as key markers of direct work (Webb, 2006). Social work acts as a kind of social guardian that is forward looking as well as providential in protecting against risk and harm.

In summary, it is contended that an essential rationality of modern social work is to be found as it is ambivalently configured through the twin logics of regulation and security, which work in and through one another. On the one hand, the interplay between the two logics shows how risk regulation has come to dominate social work while, on the other, an increased sensitivity to security, trust, and vulnerability also significantly shapes the contours of social work. This results in the development of expert forms of protection with social work increasingly acting as an immunisation function in modern societies.

FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL WORK

Having identified the twin logics constituting social work, the discussion now turns to the way they are historically shaped and determined, that is, how they manifest as 'social work in action' and are conveyed as a field of interventions forming part of the State apparatus within modern societies. What are the underlying components of social work as a materiality, as series of material practices that legitimate its place and function within the contemporary landscape? In a sense, the function of social work is primarily an exercise in immunising those sectors of society that are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. In this way it is possible to uncover the 'functional imperatives' that provide a useful description of the targets towards which social work orientates or aims its operations under specific conditions. Social work is composed of functions – discourses, practices, or effects – which produce a designated or latent consequence in a given social context with immunity as its central, overarching function.

Immunity is both a legal and a medical term that implies the negative protection of an agent who, for purposes of that protection, ceases to be bound to certain obligations. This is the dimension at which human life is inscribed, constituted, recognised, and defined within a given sociopolitical order. Modernity witnessed the entrance of human life into the domain of national politics as an object of care (Bazzicalupo, 2006). Thus it is possible to conceive social work's function as a protective, safety regime keenly involved in the governance of human vulnerability within the State apparatus. The institutions of the State are all premised on the idea of the need to protect humans from the excesses of capitalist greed and social exclusion. The administration of poor relief in late-Victorian charity organisation was emblematic of this original immunity impulse at work. Developing this historical lineage, Abbott (1988) located the construction of personal problems to the rising concern with social order in the last quarter of the 19th century. This is exactly the same period in which social work emerged on the modern landscape as charity work. He identified the professionally defined epidemic of 'nerves' – bad nerves and nerves

ailments – as central to the need for intervention in personal affairs during this period. Psychiatry emerged later in the 1920s and psychoanalysis in the 1930s. Abbott (1988) noted, by 'the 1930s, a firm subjective structure was created that would not require serious attention until the renewed competition of psychology and social work forced a rebiologizing of personal problems in the 1970s' (p. 303). Nevertheless, social work was heavily dependent on psychiatry for its increased professional status and legitimacy:

> Social workers were finding individual approaches to personal problems far more congenial than the social diagnosis approach bequeathed on them by Mary Richmond. The individual approaches, which they borrowed directly from psychiatry offered therapeutic answers that casework did not (Abbott, 1988, p. 302).

Abbott (1988) showed how the normalising role of social work increasingly individualised personal problems by borrowing heavily from the more authoritative field of psychiatry:

> How much more attractive to deal with the individual or family as a self-enclosed unit to be adjusted to society, rather than society to it [and] . . . Psychiatric social work flourished during the twenties, becoming the most prestigious of the social work specialities (Abbott, 1988, p. 303).

Social work takes place in this paradoxical movement of separating or dividing life from itself in order to protect it (Giorgi & Pinkus, 2006). It provides a shelter of immunity from the excesses of politics and economics but, in turn, demands a regulative and legal role in the governance of vulnerability and need. It is for this reason that the juridico-moral character of the service user is so critical for social work in attempting to install its normative regime. In immunising the service user against risk, social work temporarily breaks the circuit of social production placing the social worker and service user outside of it. The immunity dispostif might be seen at work most acutely in social work's preoccupation with risk, where it is increasingly cast as a part of a risk-management regime. It is as if, rather than adjusting the level of protection to the effective nature of the risk, what is adjusted is the perception of the risk to the growing demand for protection, which is to say risk is artificially created in order to control it, as insurance companies routinely do (Esposito, 2008). Thus social work as a State apparatus continuously performs the reciprocal strengthening between risk, protection, and insurance. This preoccupation with self-protection as immunity is distinctive in characterising the nature of social work. From this point of view, the immunity function is more than a defensive apparatus superimposed on the individual or community, but a core internal mechanism for social work practice. The normative immunising character of social work is an *ethos* of governance from the inside, by the inside: As a core component of social work's internal architecture, the system of immunity must also simultaneously immunise itself from those given care and protection under its auspices. It is best to think of this as a form of autoimmunity. It is under these conditions that expert systems, such as evidence-based practice, risk management, and new communication technologies for casework emerge. Their purpose is precisely to formally 'bracket off' the service user within a regime of professionalised expertise. Care technologies, like evidence-based practice, help procure social work's very own immunity defence against the increasing demands of the reflexive service user.

It is, however, the societal immunisation function of social work that most clearly situates its location within the regulative and security logic of modernity. This line of thought is indebted to the work of Roberto Esposito who pursued this project in *Communitas* (2010) and *Immunitas* (2011), where he developed the argument that the modern subject or self, with all of its civil and political rights, emerges as an attempt to attain immunity from the contagion of that which is extra-individual, namely, the possibility of radical community. For Esposito, immunity conceptually allows us to envisage a common ground for practices of protection, such as epidemiology, the hygienic movement

in urban design and education, and eugenics. It has a very similar meaning to the logic of security discussed above. Indeed, the novelty of Esposito's project resides in his characterisation of the convergence of the legal and biomedical fields in configuring the twin logics of security and regulation discussed above. From plastic bicycle helmets, the refrigeration of food, unemployment benefits, and immigration laws to US post-9/11 states of emergency, immunity functions are to be found everywhere. With the latter it is precisely the ordinary laws that are being used exceptionally in order to re-establish the conditions of their normal application. Such is the case of the Immigration Law after the enactment of the US Patriot Act. By stretching Esposito's theorising of modernity as a series of complex, biopolitical processes of immunisation, social work can be located as the fold that, in some way, separates community from itself, sheltering it from the often unbearable excess of politics and economics. Social work's biopolitics cannot be separated from the political economy of life. It is thus inscribed at the tangential line where law and the conditions of life intersect. Life and law emerge as the two constitutive elements of social work in action, in its material practice. Perhaps it is for this very reason that there are such huge public and media outcries at the death of children under the care of social workers. With child deaths, law and life are abruptly confronted in the most shocking way. In providing immunitary declension from the excesses of politics and economics, social work is literally given the power to preserve life, social life. As part of the State apparatus of governing vulnerability, it is a negative form of the protection of life. It saves, secures, insures, and preserves the individual, family, or community to which it pertains. Enacting the immunity logic in social work is two-fold: real and symbolic, and constitutional and normative. Here immunisation as a normalising process is most apparent: as a praxis, which regularises while containing, and secures while engineering. It controls, regulates, prohibits, and disciplines

lifestyles by winning the cooperation of those who are being controlled with all attracted by a biopolitical project to which they cannot say no (Bazzicalupo, 2006). This allows a further step in tracking the developmental nature of social work in relation to modernity. Modernity typically refers to the post-traditional period, which is marked by the move from feudalism towards capitalism, industrialisation, secularisation, rationalisation, and the nation-state. Conceptually, modernity relates to the modern era. In this historical task, social work can be coupled to modernist regimes and institutions, as it constitutes a particular articulation or tonality of modernity, one that ultimately coincides with politics, economics, and a culturally conditioned morality (Webb, 2007). The immunity function of social work drives its governance role in a historically determined grid relating to the unfolding logics of security and regulation as part of the project of modernity and its adjunct capitalist-state formation. It is this situatedness of social work to which the next section turns.

SITUATING SOCIAL WORK

In recent years, various fields within social work have been subject to a number of major government reviews, public inquiries, special commissions, and in-depth policy analyses. These have helped identify, appraise, and synthesise important aspects of social work in context. In some important respects, these sorts of analyses help attenuate the immediate and most pressing issues faced by social workers while, at the same time, provide an independent and objective assessment. One such review undertaken in England is Eileen Munro's (see Chapter 14) independent review of child protection which began in June 2010. It makes some very far-reaching and sweeping recommendations for improving this area of social service practice. It is one of the most comprehensive, sophisticated, and analytically refined reviews ever undertaken

in the area of child protection. Munro (2011) recommended, for example:

> the Government revise statutory, multi-agency guidance to remove unnecessary or unhelpful prescription and focus only on essential rules for effective multi-agency working and on the principles that underpin good practice. For example, the prescribed timescales for social work assessments should be removed, since they distort practice (Munro, 2011, p. 7).

The Munro Review clearly identifies problems with the deeply embedded 'tick box' culture in social work agencies. Munro (2011) argues:

> The demands of bureaucracy have reduced their capacity to work directly with children, young people and families. Services have become so standardised that they do not provide the required range of responses to the variety of need that is presented (Munro, 2011, pp. 6–7).

Most strikingly, the review recommends 'a radical reduction in the amount of central prescription to help professionals move from a compliance culture to a learning culture, where they have more freedom to use their expertise in assessing need and providing the right help' (Munro, 2011, p. 7).

These high levels of prescription have, according to the Munro Review (2011), 'also hampered the profession's ability to take responsibility for developing its own knowledge and skills' (p. 8). Public sector services in all developed economies have been continually subject to new demands for accountability and transparency, leading to the creation of complex audit systems. This is often referred to as the impact of public sector 'managerialism' on social work. Munro (2004) has consistently drawn attention to the negative effects of an auditing culture arguing that social work presents particular challenges because of the nature of its knowledge base:

> Improvement in services to users cannot be achieved just by managerial changes but requires rigorous research to increase our understanding of what works. The process of making social work 'auditable' is in danger of being destructive, creating a simplistic description of practice and focusing on achieving service outputs with little attention to user outcomes (Munro, 2004, p. 1075).

One common characteristic of all attempts to define the nature and role of the profession is an explicit acknowledgement of the inter-relationship between social work and the context in which its tasks of regulation, risk management, and protection are carried out. Social work is inevitably shaped by the changing policy, legislative, and political contexts in which it operates. Perhaps owing to the persistence of its core values and progressive ethical principles, social work has consistently sought to locate itself within socially liberal as opposed to socially authoritarian positions. As an established professional discipline, it has a distinctive part to play in protecting and securing the well-being of children, adults, families, and communities. Social work makes a particular contribution in situations where there are high levels of complexity, uncertainty, vulnerability, conflicts of interest, and risk. It is always situated on the moving border between process and event, between the real and the possible. This border, this limit, or frontline is the site of intervention. The task of social work is inherently interventionist, located as it is within a wide range of contexts and geographies. How these shape the function and purpose of social work is critical to understanding its changing dimensions. Crucially, the tasks relate to the way in which social work is caught up in winds of change and determined by shifting political ideology, economy, public attitudes, and government policy. The impact of the Global Economic Crisis and economic recession is likely to have profound and long-lasting effects on social work. Public spending austerity cuts are taking place across the globe, with Europe hit particularly hard in countries like Britain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Spain, and Ireland. This is most dramatically shown in the huge public sector cuts in Britain announced by the Liberal–Conservative Coalition Government. These cuts began to

bite in April 2011 with thousands of publicly funded services across Britain being lost, with devastating consequences. At the time of writing, the aftermath of the London Riots in predominantly ethnically Black areas of Tottenham and Hackney are being diagnosed against a backdrop in which youth offending teams and outreach services are being cut by 30% in the very same inner city areas (*Guardian*, 25 March 2011). In the context of the riots and the British government's 'Big Society' agenda, some of these decisions are most perplexing. Many of the organisations that will close down are small community groups or local charities previously supported by central or local government grants to provide important neighbourhood services for the mentally ill, disabled, older, and young people:

> The cuts affect a wide spectrum of projects: youth offending teams will shrink, probation staff numbers will dwindle, refugee advice centres will halve in size, Sure Start services will disappear, domestic violence centres will have to restrict the number of people they can help, HIV-prevention schemes will end (*Guardian*, 25 March 2011).

Social work is at the hard end of neoliberalism and the transformation of society into an 'enterprise society' based on the market, competition, inequality, and the privilege of the individual. As Venn and Terranova (2009) state: 'The core strategies of individualization, insecuritization and depoliticization are used as part of neoliberal social policy to undermine the principles and practices of mutualization, solidarity and redistribution that the Welfare State had promoted' (p. 9). The strategic aim of neoliberal politics is the restoration of the power of capital to determine the distribution of wealth and establish the enterprise as the single dominant form. This requires that it target society – and by implication social work – as a whole for a fundamental reconstruction, putting in place new mechanisms to control, regulate, and govern individual conduct (see Chapters 3 and 4). Increasingly, social workers are required by the apparatus of the State to perform a central role in controlling individual conduct or the 'enterprise of self' (McNay, 2009). A critical question remains in lieu of these dramatic effects on social work. How does it fashion a new political imaginary from fragmentary, diffuse, and often antagonistic practitioners and clients, who may be united in principle against the exigencies of neoliberalism and capitalism but diverge in practice, in terms of the sites, strategies, and specific natures of their own oppression? Exposing social work activity to a critical stance enables the exploration of relations of power and forms of domination. It also involves identifying how commitments to integrated models of social justice and core progressive principles such as empowerment and anti-oppressive practice can be attained. Some have argued that there is a necessity to recast Critical Social Work drawing on recent post-Marxist approaches, such as the writings of Alain Badiou and Slajov Zizek, and in mobilising social work as vehicle of social justice (Gilbert & Powell, 2010; Webb, 2011).

TERRITORIES AND BOUNDARIES OF SOCIAL WORK

In the long struggle for demarcation, the tasks and roles of social work, the relation to other professions, and the links between them change continually. As already seen, in situating social work these changes often arise because of things external to the profession: technology, politics, and other social forces, divide tasks and reconfigure them. It is, however, difficult to evaluate the external effects on social work without first examining its own internal dynamics and the relation it has to nearby social science disciplines. If assessment, intervention, and case management are important aspects of professional practice, this work is closely tied to a system of knowledge that formalises the skills on which this work proceeds. Like other professions, such as teaching and nursing, professional

knowledge in use is significant for social work because application is its main purpose. Gambrill (2000) identified the importance of connecting knowledge with doing, suggesting that critical thinking is an important component of the ethical problem-solving process and of understanding practitioner decisions and the interventions they provide. Social work, as a practical endeavour, requires knowledge beyond theory alone (Larrison, 2009). The knowledge base must also connect to what social workers do. However, social work develops abstract, conceptual, and formal knowledge, such as research on organisations, policy analysis, methods of intervention, and ethical principles. Abbott (1995) conceived of the professions as living in an ecology in which there were professions and turfs, and a social and cultural mapping – the mapping of jurisdiction – between those professions and turfs. If the notion of boundaries is a most fertile thinking tool for understanding social work, it is, in part, because it captures a fundamental social process, that of the relationality between professions, institutions, and locations. Abbott (1995) came to regard social work's jurisdiction as a contested turf war, with its functions emerging as a continuous process of conflict and change. Professions like social work, teaching, psychology, and nursing compete with one another for jurisdictional monopolies, and for the legitimacy of their claimed expertise, thereby constituting a constantly changing system of professions. In mapping the territory constituting professional social work, Abbott (1995) developed the notion of enclosure to demonstrate the way in which it was shaped by conflicts at its boundaries, rather than internal mechanisms of purpose and function. He showed how social work's enclosure was continually contested by psychologists and psychiatrists in child guidance clinics in the USA. In a highly original analysis, Abbott (1995) examined future prospects for social work in the face of interprofessional turf wars and its dependence on the State and associated nongovernmental agency funding.

According to Abbott (1995), the dependence on government funding, along with the dispossessed low status of many of its clients, put social work in a precarious position. Altruism does not sell in the contemporary neoliberal political climate.

In part, a related issue at stake here is the view that social work's jurisdictional problem is that it has never developed a distinctive, widely shared, research paradigm. Social work has constantly and consistently been dogged with the enduring problem of generating an identity as a specialist discipline. In some important ways, *Handbooks* such as this neatly rebut this longstanding view that social work has not been able to develop a distinctive knowledge base.

Research increasingly demonstrates the changing relationship between social work and the growing interdisciplinary area of applied social studies known as a form of knowledge production referred to by Gibbons et al. (1994) as 'Mode 2' in contradistinction to discipline-based Mode 1 knowledge development. Mode 2, as practical and user driven, is becoming the preferred form of government knowledge in contemporary audit cultures (Gray & Schubert, 2011). It is apparent that, while disciplines such as sociology and economics 'export' concepts, methodologies, and personnel, social work is very much an 'importer', since it lacks the internal disciplinary integrity of other 'exporter' disciplines, such as economics, political science, and anthropology (Abbott, 1988; Holmwood, 2010). In this respect, social work researchers and practitioners *are* successful 'adapters', and what they adapt shapes the discipline. In spite of attempts in the UK and USA to ratchet up the quality of social work research, the consequence is an increasingly blurred distinction between social work as a discipline and the interdisciplinary area of applied social studies with a potential loss of disciplinary and, indeed, professional identity (Gibbs, 2001; Sharland, 2011). It may well be the case that this loss of professional identity in social work – and the blurring, for example, with social care and human

services – is associated with a reduced ability to reproduce a critical sensibility within social work and makes it docile to the impacts and constraints of audit culture with its flexible adaptation of interdisciplinary knowledge. On top of this is social work's vulnerability to external pressures and inability to constantly demonstrate its relevance to professional practice. These pressures come from left-wing social movements as well as from regulative state authorities and right-wing neoliberal critics. These external pressures inevitably contribute to internal disagreement, but social work has been at war with itself at least since the 1960s.

Shulman (2004) argued that professional pedagogy is compromised when all the dimensions of practice – the intellectual, technical, and moral – are out of balance. In some respects, social work has encouraged a standoff between more technical forms of 'research for practice' and speculative theoretical concerns, which means it often finds it difficult to offer more sustained, methodological elaboration or intellectual advance. This tension has especially been amplified by the changing and expansive repertoire of practice learning options of professional training courses, with the increasing emphasis on certain anodyne notions of 'practice competencies'. Social work is constantly searching for its own professional knowledge jurisdiction and defending its professional boundaries. This involves the profession in complex processes of competition with rivals, and searches for particular kinds of niche expertise (Abbott, 1988). The legitimating force of 'scientific knowledge' is arguably one of the reasons why it was so quick and canny to grab hold of the coat tails of medicine's evidence-based practice regime.

In line with other social science disciplines, over the past decade, there has been a determined push to move social work outside of the boundaries of the nation-state as its implicit unit of intervention and source of funding to a much broader field. In some quarters, this has invoked notions of global social work and transnational joined-up practice and the development of what can be called a 'cosmopolitan social work'. To speak of a cosmopolitan social work in this context means broadening the horizon to include a variety of Western and non-Western cultural modernities. The conceptual challenge for an expansive cosmopolitan social work is to identify the patterns of variation, their origin, and ethical consequences across a range of cultures and geographies (Beck & Grande, 2010; Held, 2004). Two editors of this *Handbook*, Mel Gray and James Midgley, have made significant contributions to this emergent cosmopolitan social work agenda. They have shown how it is impossible to talk meaningfully about methodological cosmopolitanism without pulling down the walls of Eurocentrism. They have shown how social work needs to open up perspectives on to the world beyond Europe, on to the entanglements of histories of colonisation, racial domination, and indigenous practices as well as on to border-transcending dynamics, dependencies, interdependencies, and intermingling of modernities at different stages of development. This requires a shift away from thinking about social work in the *singular*: social work neither national nor global but social work absolutely understood in universal terms, whereas thinking about social work in the *plural* refers to the very different paths and contexts of social processes. This is no longer sufficient, if it ever was. It inevitably leads to the category error of implicitly applying conclusions drawn from *one* form of social work to social work in general, which then becomes a universal frame of reference (Gray, 2005; Gray & Fook, 2004). This is not to suggest that universal principles for social work are impossible but rather to criticise the hegemonic short circuit from *one* form of social work to a social work in general. The two leading international professional bodies, the *International Federation of Social Workers* and the *International Association of Social Workers*, would do well to heed the significant criticism raised against their universalising agenda. This defective mode might be called the self-provincialisation

of social work whereas the advent of cosmopolitan social work is accompanied by the idea that society as a totality is an impossibility. The chapters in this *Handbook* attest the diversity of social work and its variability across contexts in the belief the wealth thus engendered adds to rather than detracts from the rich complexity of social work.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE *HANDBOOK*

There are seven sections to the *Handbook*. The section divisions provide an intellectual map not only to the overlapping subject matter of social work but also to the significance of, and the major themes in, contemporary social work. They are divided as follows:

- welfare, social policy and social work;
- social work perspectives;
- social work practice;
- social work values and ethics;
- social work research;
- social work in context; and
- future challenges for social work

Each section is introduced by a summary of the main content, themes, and arguments developed by the international contributors to this handbook. The diversity of approaches presented and the range of ideological and normative perspectives they entail is indeed the main strength of this collection. Not only is it a systematic resource on the leading traditions and trends in contemporary social work for an international audience, but it also shows that social work does not belong to any one discipline but is rather an interdisciplinary field of research, study, and practice, for social issues and the needs of people stretch across the social and behavioural sciences, and some would argue the arts and humanities too.

The *Handbook* is aimed at readers interested in contemporary social work. To this end, it provides a useful guide and reference work on the present state of social work as a crucially Western phenomenon which is practised in diverse contexts around the world. Despite its international reach, the profession continues to draw the bulk of its knowledge from the two centres where it originated, namely, Europe and North America. The international significance of the contents spanning a diverse range of professional approaches as well as normative and ideological perspectives herein is indicative of the maturity of the field and the way in which social work has increasingly taken a global position whereby research steadily moves from a domestic sphere to an externally led one. Research agendas have become more nuanced and integrated at an international level. Hence our aim is to reach an international audience – keen to debate on the challenges and possibilities confronting contemporary social work –who will find a diverse range of ideas that resonate with or challenge their day-to-day experience of social work whether they are students, educators, researchers, practitioners, managers, or policy makers.

REFERENCES

Abbott, A. (1988). *The system of professions: An essay in the division of expert labour.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Abbott, A. (1995). Boundaries of social work or social work of boundaries? *Social Service Review*, *69*(4), 545–562.

Askeland, G.A., & Payne, M. (2001). What is valid knowledge for social workers? *Social Work in Europe*, *8*(3) 13–23.

Bazzicalupo, L. (2006). The ambivalences of biopolitics. *Diacritics*, *36*(2), 109–116.

Beck, U., & Grande, E. (2010). Varieties of second modernity: The cosmopolitan turn in social and political theory and research. *British Journal of Sociology*, *61*(3), 409–443.

Beddoe, L. (2011). Investing in the future: Social workers talk about research. *British Journal of Social Work*, *41*(3), 557–575.

Brand, D., Reith, T., & Statham, D. (2005). *Core roles and tasks of social workers: A scoping study for the GSCC.* London: General Social Care Council.

Esposito, R. (2008). *Bios: Biopolitics and philosophy.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Esposito, R. (2010). *Communitas: The origin and destiny of community.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Esposito, R. (2011). *Immunitas: The protection and negation of life.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ewald, F. (1991). Insurance and risk. In G. Burchell, Gordon, C., & Miller, P. (eds), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp.197–210.

Flexner, A. (2001). Is social work a profession? *Research on Social Work Practice, 11,* 152–165.

Gambrill, E. (2000). The role of critical thinking in evidence-based social work. In P. Allen-Meares & Garvin, C.D. (eds) *Handbook of direct practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 43–64.

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P., & Trow, M. (1994). *The new production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies.* London: Sage.

Gibbs, A. (2001). The changing nature and context of social work research. *British Journal of Social Work, 31*(5), 687–704.

Gilbert, T., & Powell, J.L. (2010). Power and social work in the United Kingdom: A Foucauldian excursion. *Journal of Social Work, 10*(1), 3–22.

Giorgi, G., & Pinkus, K. (2006). Zones of exception: Biopolitical territories in the neoliberal era. *Diacritics, 36*(2), 99–108.

Gray, M. (2005). Dilemmas of international social work: Paradoxical processes in indigenisation, imperialism and universalism. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 14*(2), 230–237.

Gray, M., & Fook, J. (2004). The quest for a universal social work: Some issues and implications, *Social Work Education, 23*(5), 625–644.

Gray, M., & Schubert, L. (2011). Sustainable social work: Modelling knowledge production, transfer and evidence-based practice. *International Journal of Social Welfare.* Article first published online: 16 May 2011 doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2397.2011.00802.x.

Gray, M., & Webb, S.A. (eds) (2010). *International social work,* vol.1. London: Sage Library of Social Welfare.

Habermas, J. (1984). *Theory of communicative action: vol 1.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Held, D. (2004). *Global covenant: The social democratic alternative to the Washington Consensus.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Holmwood, J. (2010). Sociology's misfortune: Disciplines, interdisciplinarity and the impact of audit culture. *British Journal of Sociology, 61*(4), 639–658.

Hood, C., Rothstein, H., & Baldwin, R. (2001). *The government of risk: Understanding risk regulation regimes.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Ife, J. (2000). Localized needs and a globalized economy: Bridging the gap with social work practice. Social Work and Globalisation. *Special Issue of Canadian Social Work, 2*(1), 50–64.

Larrison, T.E. (2009). *Capturing the space in-between: Understanding the relevance of professional 'use of self' for social work education through hermeneutic phenomenology.* Dissertation submitted for degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. http://gradworks.umi.com/3363133.pdf.

McNay, L. (2009). Self as enterprise: Dilemmas of control and resistance in Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics'. Theory, Culture and Society, 26*(6), 55–77.

Munro, E. (2004). The impact of audit on social work practice. *British Journal of Social Work, 34*(8), 1075–1095.

Munro, E. (2011). *The Munro Review of Child Protection: A child-centred system.* London: UK Department of Education. Retrieved on 8 September 2011 from http://www.education.gov.uk/munroreview/downloads/8875_DfE_Munro_Report_TAGGED.pdf

Sharland, E. (2011). All together now? Building disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research capacity in social work and social care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 1–19 doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcr061.

Shulman, L.S. (2004). *The wisdom of practice: Essays on teaching, learning, and learning to teach.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Venn, C., & Terranova, T. (2009). Thinking after Michel Foucault. *Theory, Culture and Society, 26*(1), 1–11.

Webb, S.A. (2006). *Social work in a risk society.* London: Palgrave.

Webb, S.A. (2007). The comfort of strangers: The emergence of social work in late Victorian England (Part One). *European Journal of Social Work, 10*(1), 39–54.

Webb, S.A. (2009). Against difference and diversity in social work: The case of human rights. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 18*(2), 307–316.

Webb, S.A. (2011). (Re)Assembling the Left: The politics of redistribution and recognition in social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 40*(8), 2364–2379.

Weber, M. (1922). *Economy and society.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.