Reframing des Sozialen **Reframing dell Sociale**

Symposium of ECCE and SW&S
in Kooperation mit der Abteilung Sozialwesen
der Autonomen Provinz Bozen - Südtirol
Haus der Familie in Oberbozen/Soprabolzano: 07. - 10. Juni 2007

- **Postmodern 'Turn' in Social Work: The Challenges of Identity and Equality**
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Identity

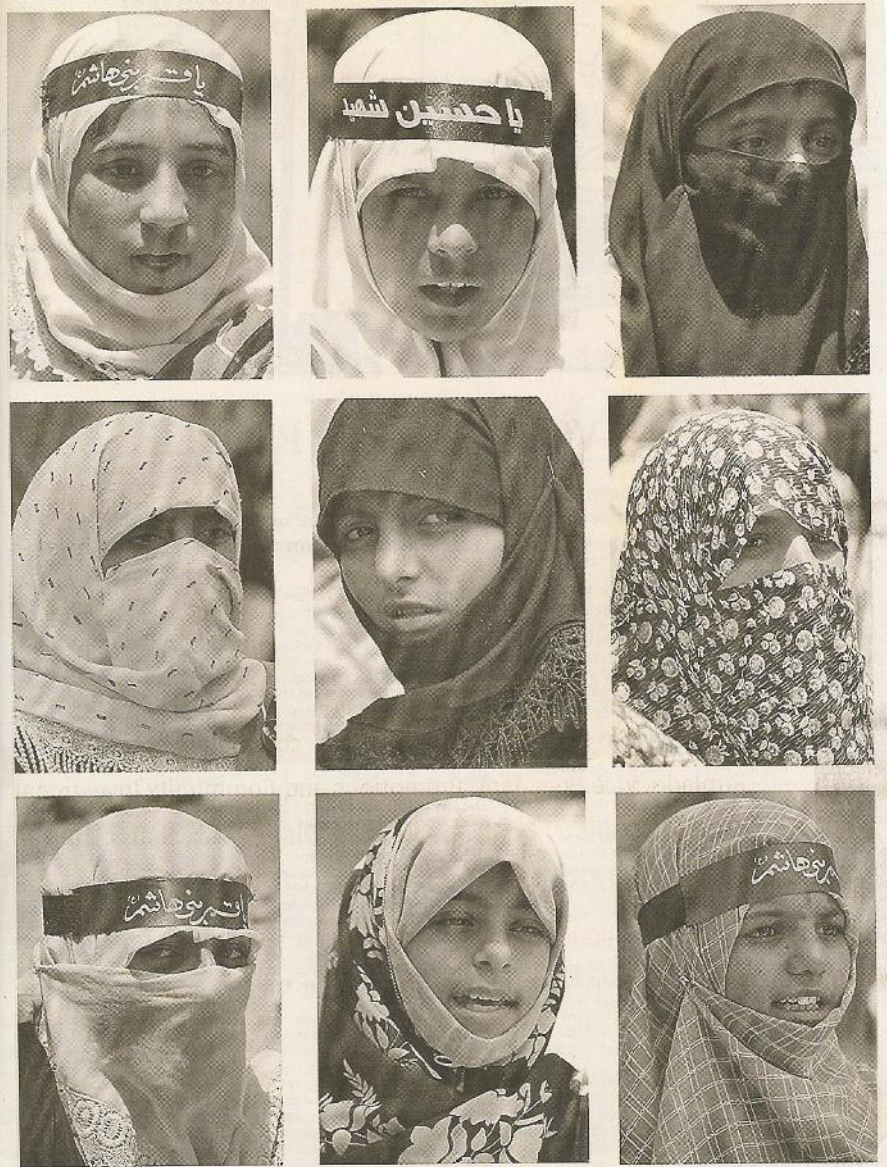
- A contentious issue
  - Essentialised or fixed and unitary identities
  - Postmodern or fluid and multiple identities
- Social Workers tend to focus on fixed and unitary identities
  - Problematic in responding to diversities
  - ‘Other’ or dehumanise those that are *different*
  - Engage in oppressive practices

The Observer 06/08/06 p 36

Challenges to Essentialised Identities

- New social movements
  - Challenge unitary assumptions and exclusion from public life, social resources and decision-making
  - Demand recognition of equality, entitlements (human rights) and actual citizenship
  - Tactical alliances around identity and enforced unity within categories
  - Identity politics
- Radical professionals, scholars and researchers (overlaps)
- Voluntary sector workers

Marchers demand head scarves for students be mandatory



FAROOQ NAEEM/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

More than 200 women and students rallied in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad Monday, demanding the

Voices from Below

- Voices of many tones and hues
  - Status quo
  - Cacophony of sound
  - Exclusion
  - Harmonious differences
- Identity-based groups
  - Emphasize similarities
  - Emphasize differences
  - Look for similarities and acknowledge differences

Emphasizing Differences

Politicising Differences

- Submerging or Amplifying Difference

- Key aspects of identity-based differentiation that impact upon social work practice (and theories)
  - Class
  - Gender
  - ‘Race’ and Culture
  - Disability
  - Age
  - Mental Ill Health
  - Faith

Looking for New Solutions

Those involved in identity-based politics

- Critiqued oppressive practice in social work, especially by women and minority ethnic groups
- Developed alternative services that were developed by and run by those concerned, e.g., feminist provisions around domestic violence, homes for black elders

Organising for Change

- Changing practice in the field – service organisation and delivery, especially in social services and health
- Changing laws and policies
- Bringing new theories and practice methods into the academy
- Changing the curriculum
- Changing assessment criteria
- Producing new teaching materials

European Dimensions

European identity remains to be created

- Can be ‘unitary’ and fixed
  - Would require the imposition of one on diverse peoples to achieve this
  - Americanisation would help in that task
- Could develop as unique, multiple, fluid identities that share values and attitudes to the world in common
  - Would require an agreed common political purposes and some similar institution
  - Maintain both uniqueness in identities and find commonalities

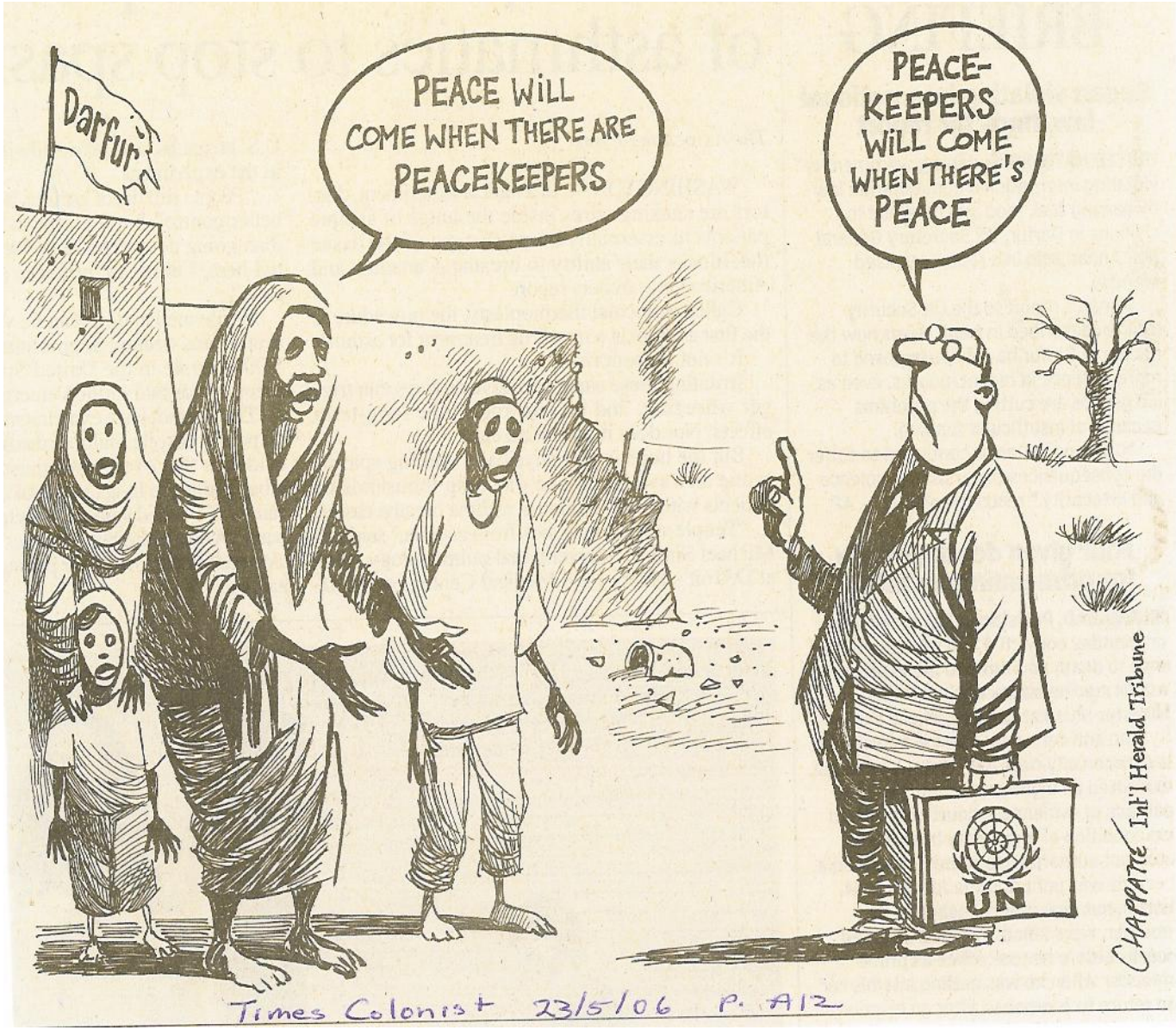
Key Concerns

- Racism and Fortress Europe
- Failure to integrate diversity in the existing mix
- Structural inequalities continue to impact on people in differentiated ways that make some more equal than others
- Focusing on values as solution to structural inequalities like poverty is inadequate
- Redistribution of resources is necessary (but this needs the values of equality, solidarity and reciprocity to be share)
- Lacking a vision that goes beyond neo-liberalism

Neo-liberalism is a Key Challenge

Neo-liberalism as the current form of globalisation is a key challenge

- Capitalist social relations permeate all aspects of social, political, cultural and economic life
- Market-based solutions dominate
- Individuals become consumers or non-consumers
- Loss of social solidarity
- Competition over scarce resources and lack of social cohesion as exemplified in rising crime rates and increased numbers facing exclusion

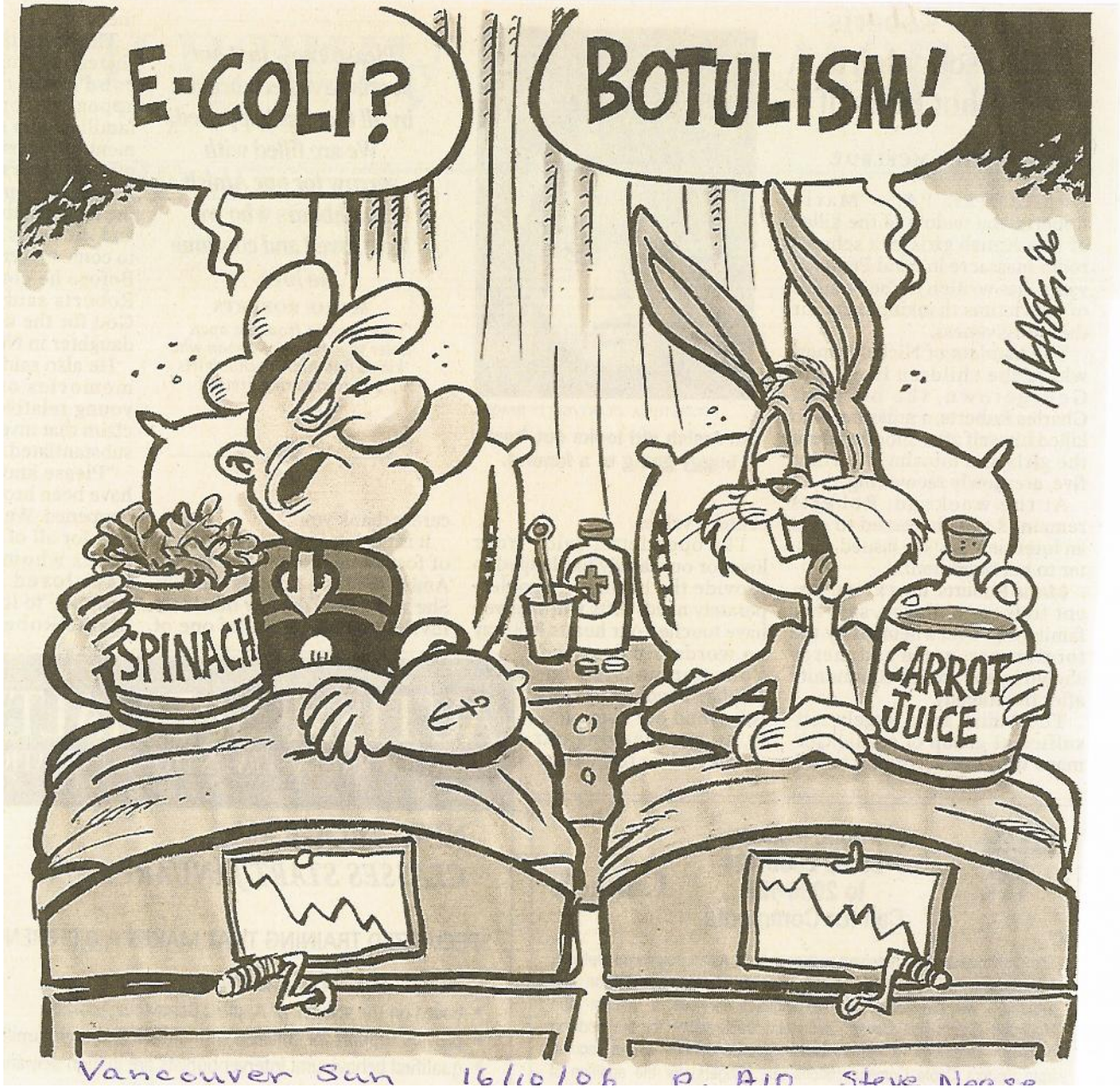


Times Colonist 23/5/06 P. A12

Activation State: Friend or Foe?

The activation state has adopted neo-liberalism as an economic strategy, but thinks it can keep a political commitment to social solidarity

- Doomed to fail as presupposes all can engage in the labour-market
- Devalues forms of work that are not waged , e.g., women's work in the home, volunteering
- Has written off those sections of the population who are without money or paid employment, e.g., the 'underclass'



Vancouver Sun 16/10/06 R. AID Steve Nease

What Can Social Workers Do?

- Do research on the impact of neo-liberalism on local communities and individuals, to highlight the diverse forms of social exclusion that are evident
- Mobilise local communities and groups to reverse their disempowerment, develop new visions of how they want to live
- Lobby governments and international organisations to move away from profit-making at any cost towards caring for people and the planet's physical resources/environment
- Contribute to mobilising civil society organisations that promote egalitarian social relations and globally redistributed resources
- Can we all be 'wealthy' together?

Canada "pleased" to be part of new UN body -McKay

JJ McCullough Tri-City News 14/5/06 p. 10