Chapter 2
Resurgent Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Need to Promote Healthy Human Relationships

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2.1 Introduction

South Africa is a country that has undergone significant changes since the advent of democracy in 1994. Such transformation is evident in race relations, where there has been more integration of the different races, especially between whites and blacks. Furthermore, there have been a lot of important developments that have cemented the dignity and worth of the country’s citizens. To this end, various policies and legislation have been passed to secure the rights of South Africans with all forms of discrimination being outlawed. Despite the country making these positive strides, there seems to be regression in human relationships, especially when it comes to the question of race. This chapter addresses itself to the problem of resurgent racism in South Africa, after 26 years of democracy. The chapter contends that there seems to be a general spike in racism and racist incidences across the country in the last couple of years. What is perplexing to South Africans and especially policy-makers and practitioners such as social workers is that this regression in human relationships has become apparent after two decades of democracy. Equally disconcerting is the fact that this problem is unfolding after so much work went into engendering reconciliation, social cohesion and nation-building in past decades. What this means is that there is a sizeable number of South Africans who have not moved with the times and are still stuck in the past. Some commentators have intimated that these racist incidences have always been there in South Africa and that...
they only seem ubiquitous these days because there is now social media and smart phones, which can capture racist incidences in real time and then disseminate them to a wider audience in the country and around the world.

As this chapter was being finalised, the former and last president of the apartheid government, F.W. de Klerk had embroiled himself in a controversy which stemmed from his assertions which he made in a television interview. These sentiments were attributed to apartheid. According to de Klerk, apartheid was not a crime against humanity, despite the United Nations (UN) declaring it as such, in 1973. After de Klerk made these pronouncements, many South Africans were outraged and called for his Nobel Peace Prize, which he won together with the former and late president, Nelson Mandela, in 1994, to be withdrawn. Some have since then been waging a campaign to have his Nobel Peace Prize declared null and void. After this national backlash, de Klerk apologised to the nation through his foundation. Nevertheless, many black South Africans were not convinced that the apology was genuine. They also found it disingenuous, on his part, to apologise through his foundation. Many black South Africans had demanded that he personally apologises to the nation – before they could even consider his apology. This last sitting president, of the apartheid era, not only opened old wounds but also had highlighted a behavioural pattern that is quite prevalent among white South Africans – of outrightly denying that apartheid was ‘not so bad’, or that they had not aided and abetted this heinous crime against humanity. Some have gone out of their way to sanitise the apartheid state and its abhorrent actions. This denialism or ‘amnesia’, as regards apartheid, has sharply brought to the centre stage of South African politics and human relationships the unfinished business of national reconciliation and nation-building.

Indeed, there seems to be an outright disregard by some white South Africans towards other races as they still want to continue to adhere to the colonial and apartheid precepts and ethos of racism, in dealing with people who are not from their race. To come to grips with this puzzling trend in South Africa and the bellicerence on the part of some white South Africans, after a quarter century of democratic rule, this chapter will be engaged in three tasks. First, it will bring forth the conceptual premises of the chapter which focus on racism and the notion of human relationships and specifically, healthy human relationships. Perspectives on the former will be discussed and, thereafter, located in the South African context. Second, the chapter will be invested in teasing out historical forces of racism in South Africa, by shedding some light on the way racism was conceptualised and reinforced for many centuries, first by colonial rule and later through the apartheid system. It will also attempt to show how racism became embedded in the social fabric of South Africa and why it is now rebounding. The third part of the chapter will attempt to show how racism can be tackled in contemporary South Africa through the promotion of healthy human relationships. It will argue that social work should be at the forefront of promoting healthy human relationships that diminish or eradicate racism.
2.2 Tracing and Unpacking Racism

The main issue that is under scrutiny in this chapter is racism. It is important to mention that racism exists all over the world and is not only found in South Africa. However, what makes racism to become prominent in South Africa, unlike in other African countries, for instance, is its unique history of colonization of a special type, as mentioned and explained in the introduction of this book. This is also linked to a significant number of individuals who practise racism. Therefore, racism can be seen as a type of human relationship that forces those who are at its receiving end, to think and believe that they are indeed inferior. This can be achieved through various measures such as subjugation, brainwashing and indoctrination, among others. Pillay (2017, p. 6) argues that in the South African context, it was the affirmation and imposition of whiteness as the superior pigmentation and population group, at the extent of oppressing and dehumanising the black majority population, which led to black people actually believing that they were inferior human beings. The apartheid policy entrenched the protection of white rights embedded in political privilege, social advantage and economic domination. Economics was racialised not just in terms of production forms and processes but also in terms of distribution and consumption. Furthermore, the job market was systematically geared to protect the economic activity and sustainability of white people, observes Pillay (2017).

Nevertheless, it can be speculated that racism has existed ever since different human races came into contact with each other. According to Dummett (2004), in many parts of the world, including the most developed countries, societies are torn by enmities that originate in racial, ethnic, tribal, national, class and religious differences. These are group enmities, and it is one part of their strange nature that they subsist between human groups that identify themselves and their targets, substantially discreet collectivities, although the concepts under which they do so are patently vague. The same author then observes that racism and the above associated concepts are complex and problematic phenomena. However, one of the earliest definitions of racism, dating back to the 1930s, but still prominent in the dictionaries, takes racism as principally an ideology, doctrine or set of beliefs that divides, classifies and scales humankind along the aforementioned categories (ethnic, tribal, national, class and religious differences) (Dummett, 2004, p. 10). Heuchan and Shukla (2018, p. 7) point out that racism is about prejudice and power. For example, if a white person discriminates against a person of colour, they are prejudiced and – what makes the difference – hold the social power in that exchange. Crucially, it needs to be noted that no amount of wealth, fame or status can completely shelter a person of colour from racism. The last point made by the former authors is of great significance, in that racism goes beyond class and that it can be taken as an attitude of supremacy which puts another race into a subordinate position through various means, such as coercion, suppression and total humiliation.

Following Hoyt (2012, p. 227), it is noted here that terms are created to capture phenomena for which we need a frame, a handle by which to grasp and share understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. In this respect, racism is a term
originally crafted to frame a phenomenon that, by the early part of the twentieth century (having emerged in the nineteenth-century enterprise of classifying peoples according to a racial hierarchy), was powerful, distinct and in need of nomenclature. The said author further explicates this issue in the following way:

Originally the term racism was meant to stipulate a belief in essential biological and associated (social, intellectual, and so forth) differences between subgroups of human beings that rendered some subgroups superior or inferior to others. Since the stipulative definition of racism, some have advocated forcefully that the original definition should be made more narrow, precise, and limited in its use (a precising definition). This has led to lexical definitional confusion and conflict (Hoyt, 2012, p. 227).

In arriving at a definition of racism, that will also guide this chapter’s discussion, the following conceptual building blocks provided by Hoyt (2012, p. 225) are essential:

**Prejudice** – preconceived opinion not based on reason or actual experience; bias, partiality.

**Racism** – (original definition) the belief that members of a purported race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or other races. Racism is a particular form of prejudice defined by preconceived erroneous beliefs about race and members of racial groups.

It is also important to proffer some insights and lessons from other contexts, with similar historical trajectories of racism, in order to nuance this chapter’s analysis. This will be undertaken through a comparative enquiry of the United States of America’s (USA’s) race relations.

### 2.3 A Comparative Analysis

In the case of the USA, a country that has not candidly dealt with its racist past, but one that prides itself as one of the most democratic countries in the world, and ‘leader of the free world’, racism and racist acts continue to oppress and denigrate people of colour in this country. This is a country where contemporary human relationships are tainted with racism. However, even after the abolition of slavery in 1833, African-Americans suffered the brunt of racism in the south for generations. Unsurprisingly, even during the progressive ‘New Deal’ social policies of the late 1930s under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, African-Americans were overlooked. Lieberman (1995) argues that the history of American social policy creates a puzzle in that most, although not all, social policies have stigmatised and isolated their African-American beneficiaries. The policies of the Social Security Act (‘New Deal’) were created with similar racially relevant exclusions, which systematically kept African-Americans from receiving new benefits of this state intervention. It is therefore small wonder that racism is still visible and entrenched in the USA today. This is because it was institutionalised via a battery of policies and legislation, just as it was during colonial and apartheid rule in South Africa. However, the difference here is that those who institutionalised racism in South Africa were a minority population. Also, those who practise racism today are in the minority. However, their
sense of entitlement stems from colonialism and apartheid which legitimised the dehumanisation of other people/races who were not white.

When taking the case of F.W. de Kerk, which was explained earlier, and then juxtaposing it with the American contemporary situation, it will be discerned that there are not so many differences between the two contexts. The author, Robin DiAngelo (2019), notes that when white Americans are confronted with the reality of racism in the USA, they often deflect the issue. She notes that, in fact, the smallest amount of racial stress is intolerable to them – the suggestion that being white has meaning, often triggers a range of defensive responses. These include emotions such as anger, fear and guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence and withdrawal from the stress-inducing situation. These responses work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel challenge, return white people’s racial comfort and maintain their dominance within the racial hierarchy. This situation is similar to the one that is obtaining in South Africa where some white people are in denial and do not want to come to terms with the reality that racism was institutionalised and then brutally enforced by a police state during colonial and apartheid rule (DiAngelo, 2019). Furthermore, racism in the USA is not only systemic or institutionalised but also internalised by many people in the country. The way some white people react to the presence of African-Americans, especially in stressful or confrontational situations, is symptomatic of internalised racism. A good example of behaviour or attitudes stemming from the former is expressed in the ongoing killings of innocent African-Americans (especially males), by predominantly white police officers and other white people in the USA. This behaviour is not only shocking but extremely worrying to the outside world, and what is even more telling is that a significant number of white Americans seem numb to it.

Furthermore, what is equally troubling is that African-Americans continue to be easily killed in a similar manner in previous epochs, especially in the 1960s and prior to this period, when the Ku Klux Klan and other white American mobs lynched black people any odd how. Despite having the country’s first biracial president, Barack Obama, from 2009 to 2017, the racial fault lines in the USA did not simply disappear and continue to exist today. Arguably, the new president, Donald Trump, has given credence to racism and legitimised it through his utterances and actions. However, it is important to also not only stress that black lives matter, but to acknowledge the fact that race relations in America are still patterned along the lines of the plantation slave master and slaves. This is because the power structure in the USA continues to be the domain of white people, especially white males. That is partially the reason why the police are so jittery whenever they come into contact or confront African-Americans, especially those who are assertive and invoke their citizenry rights, because black people still represent the ‘otherness’ or an ‘aberration’ of American society. In addition, African-Americans experience structural-institutional racism that impedes them from accessing various opportunities and life chances. The outcomes of this type of racism are dire and have been laid bare by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which is claiming a disproportionate number of fatalities in this community. Other minorities such as the Hispanics are also suffering the same fate.
African-Americans are stopped and frisked by the police, especially when they are found walking or driving in certain neighbourhoods that are predominantly white because they symbolise a ‘runaway slave’ who should be on the ‘plantation’ and not roaming freely in America. In modern times, the plantation represents the ghettos and ‘projects’ of America. Why should a simple traffic stop result in the death of an African-American in this day and age? Not in 1950, not in 1960, but in 2020? That is why Malcolm X was not only highly sceptical of American race relations but poured scorn on them.

2.4 Continuities with the Past

In this section, it is imperative to highlight some racist incidences which were in the public domain to drive this chapter’s contentions home. Unfortunately, there is no other way to report them through euphemisms as they were publicised in newspapers and beamed on national television. They represent the realities of present-day South Africa, 26 years after democracy. The last and most public racist incidence, which caught South Africa’s attention, is one where a South African white man of Greek origin, Adam Catzavelos, posted a video on social media, where he referred to Africans as *kaffirs* – a racial slur which was used in the apartheid era to denigrate and humiliate Africans. While on holiday in Greece and relaxing on a beach, he remarked, along the lines, that it was really nice to see no *kaffirs* on the beach. Immediately after the video was posted, it caused national outrage, with structures such as the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and political parties, such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) weighing in on this issue. Upon his return to South Africa, he was charged with hate speech and appeared before the country’s Equality Court. He was subsequently ordered to pay a fine of R150,000. This was after he offered a lengthy apology.

The foregoing case and/or similar incidences have puzzled South Africans, whereby, seemingly, educated and young white South Africans are engaged in racist acts. In most instances, these racist expressions have happened without any provocation. Therefore, it can be seen that racism is something that is not isolated as there seems to be a general pattern that emerges upon closer scrutiny. What is worth noting as regards these racist acts is that they were mainly perpetrated by whites and a few black people. The key issue to take into consideration is that these incidents were in the public domain and had caused rifts across the race fault lines with many blacks taking strong exception to the blatant racism that was being expressed by white South Africans in a free South Africa. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the fact that the internet and social media may have unencumbered some white South Africans to express themselves in the crudest manner. It can be argued that in all of South Africa’s post-apartheid era, this period had seen the notion of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ being called into serious question, in more ways than one.

When reflecting on the American experience, it can be seen that the situation in South Africa was and is still different in that those who were and still are at the
receiving end of racism are the majority peoples of the land. Black Africans were and are the indigenous people of South Africa, and they are the majority population group. However, they still bear the brunt of racism and racist acts in their land that is supposedly free. In this vein, it should be noted that racism does not only signify a state of mind denoting some form of superiority, but it is also a way of patterning and ordering a society, and in the case of South Africa, it was the colonial and apartheid societies where it was located. In this regard, it is important to explore this past of racism in order to understand why it continues to denude contemporary human relationships.

2.5 South Africa’s History of Racism

The occupation and eventual colonisation of South Africa, and Southern Africa, by Europeans can be traced back to the rise of Portugal in maritime trade, in the late 1400s. This dominance came to pass when this country mastered the high seas with explorers setting out on voyages across the oceans to establish new trade routes. European nations had endeavoured to find an alternative route to Asia after the land routes to this continent had been closed off by the Ottoman Empire in present-day Turkey. Historical accounts show that Bartolomeu Dias was the first European to navigate the tip of Africa en route to Asia. However, this journey had resulted in a landing for fresh water and other fresh supplements. This was the beginning of Europeans’ incursions into Africa. Later, another Portuguese, Vasco da Gama sailed from his country and eventually reached India after having navigated the west coast of Africa. Afterwards, Spain followed suit, but it was Portugal that dominated the southern sea voyages. It was the Europeans who named the southernmost tip of Africa, the ‘Cape of Storms’, and later the ‘Cape of Good Hope’. Subsequently in 1652, the Dutch landed on the shores of what they named the ‘Cape of Good Hope’ and set out to colonise the area. Most likely, the area had an indigenous name as there were indigenous people residing in this area already. These were the Khoi and San people. Previously, the Portuguese had made a temporal stop on their way to Asia to trade in spices and gold among other items. Thus, the Dutch were the second Europeans to come to this part of Africa.

The Dutch, through the Dutch East India Company (or Vereenigde Nederlandsche Ge-Octroyeerde Oost Indische Compagnie – VOC), established settlements. This was the beginning of colonisation with land being at the centre of this process. Lester (1998) asserts that from 1657, the VOC allowed white farmers (free burghers) to cultivate and trade on their own behalf. However, in 1679, free burghers, with slaves provided by the VOC, were allowed to disperse and farm beyond the area surrounding the VOC station. By 1700, the core western Cape farmers were increasing the production of wine, wheat and livestock, and they were investing their surpluses in slaves and more land, while trek boers, despite the presence of indigenous peoples, were continuing to occupy grazing land further to the east and resulting in conflict and warfare with the indigenous polities (Lester, 1998).
Eventually, the Europeans who had earlier began trading with the Khoi and San people would change their tactics and annexed their lands and basically stole their livestock. The European settlers’ voracious appetite for land led them into further conflicts with other indigenous polities, and in the process forcibly seized their land and occupied it. In these interactions, with the local people, acrimonious patterns of interaction and unhealthy human relationships emerged. It can be surmised that racism was a direct off-shoot of European conquest of indigenous polities.

Therefore, South Africa’s past is one that was predicated on racism which shaped and defined human relationships, slightly over 350 years. For the longer period of colonialism and apartheid rule, people could not interact freely across the race-lines. Magubane (1979) informs us that the plight of the black people of South Africa was (and still is) intimately bound up with the history of white settlement in their lands, and the South African social formation itself represented a stage in the evolution of the world capitalist system. He goes on to observe that the ideology of racism, called into life and fed by the expansionist and exploitative socio-economic relations of capitalist imperialism, became a permanent stimulus for the ordering of unequal and exploitative relations of production along ‘racial’ lines, and further demanded justification of these relations. The seemingly ‘autonomous’ existence of racism today does not lessen the fact that it was initiated by the needs of capitalist development or that these needs remain the dominant factor in racist societies (Magubane, 1979, p. 3). Therefore, racism and colonialism of a special type cannot be separated. This issue is again dissected by Magubane (1989, p. 13) in another study who notes:

The social heritage of settler colonialism in South Africa was not merely a rigid structure of an elite of wealth, status and power at the apex, and at the bottom of a pyramid, a mass of poverty-stricken, marginal, powerless and subordinated people. Such societies have flourished everywhere. The tragedy of the colonial heritage was a social structure further stratified by colour and physiognomy – by what anthropologists call phenotype: an elite of whites and a mass of people of colour – coloureds (mixed blood), Indians and Africans – in that ascending order. The British imperial bourgeoisie, like their North American counterparts had come to understand that a society may perpetuate social inequalities and injustices far more effectively when the maldistribution of income is buttressed by phenotype.

The issues raised above by Magubane (1989) are of critical importance in that they alert us to the fact that race became a yardstick for upward social mobility in South Africa and seems to do so in present times – albeit in subtle forms. In this regard, the post-apartheid political economy, which was inherited from colonialism and apartheid, continues to shape contemporary socio-political and economic trends. That is why it is difficult to easily erase racism, 26 years after apartheid. Again, it should be reiterated that racism is neither an abstraction; nor is it its own justification. The racial structure of the South African society arose from the severest exploitation and contempt, guaranteed by power. Anyone who wants to change the structure of racial oppression must understand its fundamental nature, its historical formation and its manipulation by the rulers. Racial oppression and class exploitation are inextricably intertwined in the modern world; they cannot be neatly
separated for the sake of theoretical purity (Magubane, 1979, p. 15). Dugard (1989, p. 97) underscores Magubane’s analysis in this manner:

South Africa and the struggle to advance human rights are inextricably linked. The Republic of South Africa has been singled out since the United Nations’ foundation as a principal violator of the human rights norms contained in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Repeated resolutions of both the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council have called on the South African government to comply with international human rights standards. Within South Africa itself, opponents of the government have measured domestic law and policy against the human rights norms proclaimed in the international community. The main charge levelled against the South African government is that it has chosen to continue to pursue a policy of institutionalised racial discrimination at a time when world opinion has turned against racism. However, it is important to stress that the policy of apartheid comprises two components – racism and political repression.

When analysing the foregoing issues, perhaps, this is where the problem lies, in that the post-apartheid government did not deeply delve into the issue of racism in countering its effects after 1994. The new leaders did not ask the whole society to interrogate racism’s fundamental nature, its historical formation, and its manipulation by the colonial and apartheid rulers (emphasis added) as Magubane (1979) above proposes. It could have been erroneously assumed by the country’s leadership and civil society that the progressive policies and legislation outlawing racism were enough. The grave inequalities (coupled with extreme poverty) that emerged after 1994 did have racial connotations and may have fuelled racism across the country. Perhaps this realisation made the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, to remonstrate in this way:

We therefore make boldly to say that South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure…The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. The nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure…The reality of two nations, underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid white minority domination, constitutes the material base which reinforces the notion that, indeed, we are not one nation, but two nations (Mbeki, 1998, p. 3).

This duality of the post-apartheid South African society is manifest in many sections of the country and even in institutions of higher learning, where racism, albeit, subtly expresses itself in curricula and course content. Therefore, it is unsurprising that this issue was sharply brought to the centre stage of the national narrative, when students from almost all South African universities staged countrywide protests against higher education fees and demanded for decolonised curricula. The trigger for these protests can be traced back to the University of Cape Town (UCT), which has been described by some black students as the ‘last bastion’ of white privilege. Usually insulated from student protests that had been localised in Historically Black Universities (HBUs), the protest actions had found their way to UCT, due to
changing student demographics. With more black and poorer students coming to universities such as UCT, where, for the better part of post-apartheid South Africa, white students had outnumbered black students, the social dynamics at this university also changed. Also, ‘bread and butter’ issues took centre stage. The first salvo came in the form of a student protest calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes, which had stood almost as a guard post to UCT’s and the country’s past of exclusion and disenfranchisement. It seemed to serve as a stark reminder of South Africa’s brutal past of colonialism and apartheid, which was (and continues) to be reinforced in the ‘new’ South Africa through such symbols.

Initially, the university administration had resisted this call by the students and did not remove the statue. In response, the students had resorted to unconventional, if not, unhygienic methods such as throwing human excrements at the statue. The statue was also defaced. Eventually, the university administration relented and removed the statue. This was also a time when the newly formed militant party of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) had gone around the country defacing colonial and apartheid statues that continued to stand in South African towns and cities in the name of ‘history’ and ‘reconciliation’. The EFF’s predominantly young and fiery leadership called into sharp question the inherited and unaltered colonial and apartheid symbols and went on a course of action to remove them. It must be mentioned here that the EFF’s tactics had resonated with those of the students. One issue that is not given much coverage when discussing the fees must fall protests was that the EFF had made in-roads into universities and other institutions of higher learning. In the process, the EFF had created structures in the institutions of higher learning and had also recruited many black and African students who were predominantly from impoverished backgrounds.

The ‘EFF factor’ had generated a militancy in the Historically White Universities (HWUs) where black students felt alienated and made to feel ‘invisible’. The calls for free education and the redistribution of land without compensation were well received by the black and African students. Therefore, the merging and even overlapping of ideas and agendas between the fees must fall student movement and the EFF are discernible and should not be overlooked. However, it is also not to say that the students’ protest was hijacked or defined by political parties. The spontaneous protests that started at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), another HWU, had been precipitated by solely the students.

2.6 Counteracting Resurgent Racism and Building Healthy Human Relationships via Social Work

That racism is re-awakened after 26 years of democracy is not only worrying but should be a time for the nation to reflect on what did not go right, between the races and in the nation, during this period. Questions must be asked as to why racism still finds resonance in a democratic country, with a Constitution that has been touted as
one of the best in the world, and also having a host of rights-based legislation, for example, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) 2000 (Act No. 4 of 2000) (the Equality Act) which was promulgated in 2000, to give effect to Section 9 of the Constitution. This piece of legislation endeavours to facilitate South Africa’s transition to a democratic society, united in its diversity and guided by the principles of equality, fairness, equity, social progress, justice, human dignity and freedom. On the other hand, Section 9 of the Constitution provides for the enactment of national legislation to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination and to promote the achievement of equality. This implies the advancement, by special legal and other measures, of historically disadvantaged individuals, communities and social groups who were dispossessed of their land and resources, deprived of their human dignity and who continue to endure the consequences.

There is something that is missing in the South African national discourse which needs to be addressed by various role players, if racism has to be erased in the country’s human relationships. For this discussion, social work should be leading the charge against racism. Thus, the call for social work to provide lasting solutions against racism is of great importance. With this statement, it must be borne in mind that social work education and training in South Africa is generalist in nature. Therefore, social workers are generalists, that is, they need a wide array of skills at their disposal. They are prepared to help people with individualised personal issues and with broad problems that affect whole communities. They engage with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities. Their work is based on a body of knowledge, practice skills and professional values. They also function in settings that focus on children and families, health, justice, education and economic status (Kirst-Ashman, 2007). Social workers are also predisposed to responding to racism because of their training that is focussed on diversity. It can be noted that diversity requires cultural competence on the part of social workers. This is an ability to apply knowledge and skills to social work practice with diverse groups. Cultural competence includes specific knowledge about individual cultures, valuing of and sensitivity to cultural differences, awareness of the patterns of oppression experienced by other cultures and the skill to utilise culturally appropriate interventions according to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) 1996 cited from Kirst-Ashman (2007). In the same vein, social workers should be at the forefront in leading diversity programmes in schools and work places. An appreciation of diversity will not only stem the tide of racism but help to promote healthy human relationships in South Africa. Social workers must be especially concerned with people at risk of oppression due to the elements of race, ethnicity, national origin, colour, sex/gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political beliefs, religion, and mental or physical disability (NASW 1999 cited from Kirst-Ashman, 2007).

Social workers can also engage in anti-discrimination practice. This is an approach to social work which seeks to reduce, undermine or eliminate discrimination and oppression. It challenges various forms of discrimination or oppression encountered in social work and recognises the impact of discrimination and oppression on people’s lives. Anti-discrimination practice seeks to explore ways of avoiding the pitfalls of practices which directly or indirectly result in the unfair treatment
of individuals and groups (Thompson, 2001). In anti-discrimination practice, the practitioner’s focus is on personal and group empowerment through dialogue and an understanding of the totality of the experience of oppression and its manifestations on those affected by it. The social worker should have knowledge of the different processes that are associated with discrimination, such as lack of income, skills, racial prejudice and beliefs. He or she should be aware of the marginalisation of people from the mainstream society (Thompson, 2001). Given the fact that many practicing social workers as well as educators are products of this colonial and apartheid history, where racism was indoctrinated into the minds of some population groups, it should also be important that these individuals should begin an earnest journey of unbundling themselves of their inherited racial baggage, their ascribing to liberal and ‘Ubuntu’ tenets notwithstanding.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed resurgent racism in post-apartheid South Africa and the need to promote healthy human relationships in the country. In its analysis, it was able to bring forth a comparative lens by illuminating the state of race relations in the USA. The discussion linked the rise of racism to colonialism and apartheid. To this end, the chapter spent some time examining the country’s past and looked into the race relations that emerged from the colonisation of South Africa. The latter part of the chapter looked at the role of social work in fighting resurgent racism in South Africa. In this regard, diversity and anti-discrimination practice were proposed as mechanisms of providing solutions to the new wave of racism in South Africa.

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