

THE SOCIAL WORK TREATY. THE PROTECTION OF SPECIFIC AND SELF-MARGINALISED POPULATIONS

by Vasile Miftode

Lumen Publishing House, Iasi, 2010

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The protection of specific and self-marginalized populations represents a very important topic in an area that undergoes permanent changes. Volumes like the one we present here, written by a well known figure in the field of sociology and social work, Professor V. Miftode, PhD., are an illustrative example of the importance and necessity of working with marginalized populations.

Tratat de Asistență Socială. Protecția populațiilor specifice și automarginalizate follows a well defined structure while it continuously builds on the current strengths of the field. Throughout the entire book, the author insists upon the objectivity of the scientific analysis, avoiding the „populist or demagogic practices” (p.7) intended for manipulation and not for the real protection of the persons or groups in need.

The volume is structured in nine chapters, thus allowing the reader to familiarize, gradually, both with the theoretical, as well as with the practical issues presented in each chapter.

The first part of the book discusses concepts and topics such as the *communitarian protection paradigm* (p.15), the „institution” of the midwife (p.21) or the *theoretical dimensions of social work* (p.25). The author emphasizes the extreme importance of the tradition analysis in the practice of those experiences that have been proven efficient in the rural Romanian communities.

Currently, the status of the social worker includes both a fundamental *theoretical dimension* as well as a *methodological* one, elements that contribute, in a similar manner, to the transformation of the social reality. Thus, the field of social work gains a well-deserved status of an autonomous area. Getting to know the society, the processes, and the social phenomena build upon a scientific knowledge that implies a high professionalism on the part of the researchers and the „elimination of superficiality and amateurism” (p.37).

The central section of the volume includes the *fundamentals of the profession* (chapter III) and the specific *theories* (chapter IV) used by social workers. The author insists that those that work in the interactional field of intervention must have strong *competencies* (p.61) in the area of social work practice and believes that these skills are the result of *knowledge, abilities* (cognitive, interpersonal, decision-making, as well as administrative) and *values*.

The content structure of the volume confirms its interdisciplinary character as the modern, scientific approach can only be constructed upon the knowledge of both sociological theories and field methods (documentation, observation, interview, etc) as well as of the social work theories. Among the most important theories in the social work area, the author enumerates: the social action theory, the social networks theory, the theory of care, the participation theory, the attachment theory, the theory of loss, and the identity theory.

The network analysis or *the network method* represents, according to V. Miftode's viewpoint, an indispensable tool in the area of social work, extremely useful in all activities designed for vulnerable or marginalized populations. Therefore, if in regards to the *social relations*, the inter-individual aspect is most important, when it comes to *social networks*, one should consider a larger, more open perspective, oriented towards the systemic theory that builds upon various *relational forms and levels* (p.203). Consequently, the professionals in the social area, especially the social worker, should regard the issue of social action from both an axiological (value) as well as a rational (scope and motivation) standpoints. The author considers that the theories mentioned above may help one reconsider the *status of practice* in the field of *human protection* at an individual, as well as community level, and to reconsider the status of the social worker in the modern society.

The chapters that analyze the social work of specific populations (minority groups, Romanian migrants, etc) and the protection of individuals from the totalitarian ideologies are filled with examples backed up by data from direct observations and investigations. In this context, the author brings to the reader's attention aspects related to the logical-philosophical fundamentals of social justice versus the ideology of the "political correctness". His hypothesis is that, in most part, these specific populations are responsible of their actual social state, especially because of their long term life **behavior**, of their **waste of resources**, in conclusion, because of their **passivity and unwillingness** to practice a good "individual management" The diversity of their interests and the characteristics of the minority populations which, very often, contradict those of the majority, imposed the development of the human rights theory and of certain juridical norms and specific politics (chapter. VIII). "*Nobody can ask for or impose a right that contradicts or nullifies the normal rights of others*" (p.268). Moreover, the real protection of minority groups requires a warranty for equal rights, not for supplemental rights (in the terms of a "positive discrimination") in the detriment of the vast majority and nothing that a minority may ask for may contradict the state laws (the Constitution) or the international norms of organizations such as UN, EC, or EU.

The quality of the volume stands out especially from its exceptional blend of concrete research and applications and theoretical aspects. Thus, chapters eight and nine include well designed case studies regarding ethnic protection and demo-

graphic manipulation (in China, Israel, Belgium, or South Africa), *analphabetism and the specifics of the analphabet minors* (p.291) and the *personality of the Romanian migrant* (p.399).

Throughout all the 480 pages of the volume, the reader can learn about European and international, newer or older, yet, significant, aspects in the field wonderfully blended with notes from the theoretical and practical vast and competent experience of the author. Certainly, the book is designed as an extremely valuable tool for social workers, especially for those who are just starting in the field, from at least few reasons.

First, the topics (traditions of social work, competency in social work, field rules/regulations and practical aspects, relationships among clients and social workers, social work at the individual, community, or society levels, etc) generally have a good applicability.

Secondly, the author presents an interdisciplinary perspective of working with minorities, joining together more or less related fields such as: management, mass-media, psychology etc.

Finally, *Tratat de Asistență Socială. Protecția populațiilor specifice și automarginalizate* should be useful not only to the practitioners but to all those who believe that the best solutions for practical interventions should build upon a strong social science foundation.