Title: *Making sense of Social Work's troubled past; professional identity, collective memory and the quest for historical justice.*

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Abstract

Social work historiography has neglected to engage meaningfully with the most troubling aspects of the profession's past: the histories of complicity, or at least acquiescence, in acts of state violence and institutionalised oppression. Through the exploration of historical case studies, this article provides a tentative typology of social work's "horrible histories" focusing on the project of engineering the ideal-type family, in colonial and oppressive socio-political contexts. The authors argue that practices of oppression and complicity can neither be reduced to the "few bad apples" approach nor judged through the individualizing prism of moralism, prevalent in Kantian Ethics. Instead, they propose an ethics of transformative reconciliation which is based on the principles of apology, respect for victims and collective action for -professional and social- change.

Keywords: Ethics, Oppression, Radical Social Work, Reconciliation, Social Work History,

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Introduction

Social Work has been facing an important paradox. Although, as a profession, it has been the product of extraordinary historical and political circumstances, as an academic discipline it

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has very dealt with its past legacies in a meaningful manner (Ioakimidis, 2015). Save for some notable exceptions (Niemeyer et al. 1998; Hering/Muenchmeier 2014), the prevailing view in social work historiography seems to selectively neglected those uncomfortable historical chapters which would have allowed the profession to navigate present and future ethical-political dilemmas: the histories of complicity, or at least acquiescence, in acts of state violence and institutionalised oppression. This contrast with the now celebrated iconic figures in social work, who committed themselves to emancipation. We argue that re-discovering and addressing these histories, not only would allow social work to learn from mistakes of the past, but, most importantly, it will allow a reconciliatory process with the victims of past violence.

An existing official history which primarily focuses on the profession as a technical, benevolent and consequently political neutral has deprived social work from a meaningful discussion about its rich, fascinating and often contradictory political histories. Most importantly, it has not allowed Social Work professionals and educators to consider their own legacies and shape a future based from the lessons of the past. Social Work is a profession suffering from historical amnesia and assert that "in an increasingly ahistorical culture", which by and large remains "ignorant of challenged the status quo" (Reisch and Andrews 2002). However, it is crucial to underscore that a radical kernel within social work existed since the inception of the profession. From the 19th century settlement movement in North America to the reconceptualization movement in Latin America and from the resistance of indigenous communities to the contemporary Social work Action Network, there has been a fascinating history of radicalism which, although largely unexplored, it greatly influenced the profession (Ferguson et al, 2018). This legacy deserves more recognition and celebration as it captures social work's long- standing commitment to social justice values. One would very rarely read in mainstream social work textbooks about the numerous social workers who in the eve and during the Second World War, paid their dues in the global fight against Fascism and Nazism (Schilde, K, 2003). Likewise, the Spanish civil war, this terrible prelude of the horrors of Nazism, saw the first organized mobilization of social workers against fascism. Hundreds of practitioners against Franco both through the multiple democratic social projects in Spain and also through direct engagement with the armed conflict as International Brigadiers (Auhtors's own, 2015). One of the most influential pre-war anti-fascist social workers was African

American social worker Thyra Edwards from Chicago: a dedicated socialist and antiracist, committed to the universal struggles against all oppressions, travelled to Barcelona and worked in the Rosa Luxembourg children colony. Edwards was the primary link between the Afro American Community and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and died shortly after the war when trying to set up care projects for Jewish children in Rome (Andrews, 2013). The *"Statement to American social workers on their stake in the civil war in Spain"* published by the Social Workers Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy is another, relatively unacknowledged yet powerful, example of social work internationalism and commitment to social justice; a powerful internationalist manifesto formed during a fierce ideological and military conflict (McMillen,1937). As the war engulfed most of Europe and Northern Africa, the Red Aid, a vast anti-fascist network, mobilized thousands of social workers and social welfare practitioners globally in order to develop services caring for refugees, political activists and orphan children (Schilde, 2003). The Reid Aid was the first comprehensive effort to internationalise a politically engaged social work, but it has been wiped off social work history textbooks. The gap that official social work historiography has left has largely been bridged by police and intelligence services: it is nosecret nowadays that the FBI has been the most painstaking biographer of radical pre and immediate post-war social workers, such as Thyra Edwards (Andrews G, 2011; Reisch and Andrews, 2002). In recent years, some National Associations have started engaging more confidently and meaningfully with the profession's historical wrongdoings. As we were writing this article, the Canadian Association of Social Workers issued a ground-braking 'Statement of Apology and Commitment to Reconciliation' stating that "by publicly acknowledging, with humility, past and ongoing wrongdoings will begin an honest and transparent dialogue as we continue on the path of reconciliation" (CASW, 2019).

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Social Work's Troubled Past

There is a pervasive ahistorical culture within social work scholarship (Reisch and Andrews 2002) which has also suppressed another very important and complex legacy: the *troubled histories* of complicity and oppression. Without exploring, recognising and ultimately addressing social work's "troubled histories", the profession cannot meaningfully embrace its

human rights potential and subsequently will continue facing difficulties of political legitimacy among -primarily- users of social services and the broader society.

Social Engineering, Eugenics and Social Work

In the context of "horrible histories" a key preoccupation of social workers with the nature, values and evolution of the institution of the family has been central (Ferguson et al 2018). Such a preoccupation emphasizes the desire of the state to ensure the perpetuation of working-class families as a disciplined unit of production and consumption. Welfare services have been seen instrumental in this process. The 'care and control' function of the welfare state, finds no more complete and powerful expression than in the context of family services. For although in the most advanced capitalist states the welfare state has been able to provide varying but often acceptable levels of care, the element of harsh social control on the poorest in society has always been present. The oppressive nature of this system is well documented. Notwithstanding the recognition of the 'de facto' oppressive nature of family services, several historical incidents highlight examples of notorious brutality, informed by the development of equally extraordinary political conjunctures. In the West, these cases can be linked, most notably, with the rise of fascism, Nazism and other racist ideologies and their pseudo-scientific preoccupation with the creation of the 'superior race'.

Undeniably, the most notorious example of social work complicity with oppressive regimes were the practices of social workers and social pedagogies in Nazi Germany (Lorenz 2004:33). On the one hand, social workaimed at physically and socially segregating and exterminating those families and individuals 'unworthy' of being citizens of the Reich. On the other hand, it focused on educating/ reforming the family end ensuring that all members had a clear understanding of the distinct role required by the State (Ferguson et al, 2018). Social workers and social pedagogues were directly involved in the process of monitoring the re-shaping of families and indoctrinating children. Young women were expected to stay healthy, exercise and devote their lives to the infamous concept of "the 3 K's- Kinder, Kuche, Kirche" i.e. Children, Cooking, Church (Haste, 2001). The education of the German Youth under the Nazis, often facilitated by social workers and social pedagogues, included field visits to centres for the detention of people with disabilities. These visits were used as 'freak shows' where

German youth could witness the 'realities' of racial hierarchy first hand. While Nazi authorities focused on the 're-construction' of the Aryan family, social services also focused on the removal of "defective" children from the community. The creation and reproduction of the Aryan race could have not been achieved without the parallel segregation and eventual extermination of the 'unworthy', who were deemed as 'surplus populations'. Social workers were heavily involved not only in advancing the ideas of social Darwinism but also actively implementing them in the process of diagnosing racial inferiority and facilitating the detention of those deemed 'unworthy' (Johnson and Moorhead 2011).

Many "Fuersorgerinnen" ('social carers'), the precursors of the more anglicised post-war "social workers", were immersed into eugenics discourse and uncritically accepted its principles believing that this was more about "public health" improvement rather than an aggressive form of social engineering. However, the instrumentalisation of eugenics in the context of social services did not end with the defeat of Nazism in the second world war. Eugenics was also popular across Europe and shared between different ideologies for much of the 20th century. Roughly, up until the 1970's in the US social problems such as poverty, crime and unemployment were considered as largely 'hereditary' within the inferior underclasses and therefore treated through practices aiming at preventing those classes from "reproducing". Recent research suggests that in some states (most notably in North Carolina) this practice lasted until well into the 1970's affecting more than 7,600 poor, vulnerable, and minority citizens were permanently affected by this practice (Boggs, 2014). Several sterilizations were recommended by social workers who would base their 'diagnosis' solely based on observations of home environments or poor school performance (Boggs, 2014).

Nazi Germany in many respects offered a blueprint for social work development in the early years of Francoist Spain. In fact, in many European countries the idea of developing the social work profession was itself conceived and nurtured by military regimes. In Spain the brief progressive example of the Second Republic offered women and children a glimpse of an alternative society based on the principles of solidarity, social justice and gender equality. These were the very principles that Franco's regime, which emerged victorious after a vicious civil war, attempted to obliterate. Over a period of more than 30 years after the civil war social services were implicated in an illegal mechanism set up by state and church officials

aiming at kidnapping children – mostly from left wing and poor families- and offering them for illegal adoption to nationally-minded families (BBC, 2011). Similar stories that involved politically motivated abductions of children also occurred routinely in Greece, Argentina and Chile (Ioakimidis, 2011).

Social Work in the context of colonialism

With colonialism, the development of social work was invariably seen as a "soft" approach to perpetuating colonial rule through social control and reconfiguration of socio-cultural institutions. Although in recent years the emergence of the 'indigenisation' debate has generated some interesting arguments challenging the colonial nature of social work, we are yet to understand the level of social work complicity in the oppressive politics of assimilation. Social Services in these contexts actively attempted to suppress indigenous cultures and forcibly extend settler values to native communities. Once again, manipulating and re-shaping the institution of nuclear family was deemed to be the 'gold standard'. The infamous Canada Scoops and the Aboriginal Protection Act of 1869 in Australian, represent powerful examples of systematic child removal from aboriginal families in an effort to drastically assimilate those communities. The process of assimilation designed conditions that would lead to the alienation, marginalization and stigmatization of native populations in order to justify more draconian state interventions. The infamous Canada Scoops, a methodic process of child removal from aboriginal families offer a sobering example of drastic assimilation under the guise of social care. According to The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (1999), within a period of nearly twenty years (from the early 1960's till the late 1980's) the child welfare system "*removed Aboriginal children from their families, communities and cultures, and placed them in mainstream society. Child welfare workers removed Aboriginal children from their families and communities because they felt the best homes for the children were not Aboriginal homes. The ideal home would instill the values and lifestyles with which the child welfare workers themselves were familiar: white, middle-class homes in white, middle-class neighbourhoods. Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal parents and families were deemed to be "unfit." As a result, between 1971 and 1981 alone, over 3,400 Aboriginal children were shipped away to adoptive parents in other societies, and sometimes in other countries*".

A lesser known case occurred in Greenland in the early 1950s with welfare practitioners from Danish charity organizations who worked closely with the Government of Denmark attempting to 'modernise' Greenland through forcibly removing children from their communities in Greenland and placing them in middle class foster families in Denmark (BBC, 2015). Another brutal practice of European colonialism, were the 'children colonies in the Congo' under the order of the Belgian King Leopold with the collusion of Catholic missionaries: thousands of children designated as 'orphans' were forcibly abducted for the purposes of making them soldiers; thousands perished from disease, trauma and the long journeys they were forced to endure (Hochschild 2012, 133-135).

Possibly the most extensive and sophisticated example of social work's complicity in practices of racial segregation and social engineering is this of South Africa. Apartheid, a complex, brutal and multilayered system of segregation designed to physically, politically, socially and culturally exclude non-white populations aimed at maximising labour exploitation through the consolidation of colonial rule. Mainstream white South African social work, which had largely accepted segregationist ideologies well before 1948, readily adopted the practices of racial separation culminated with the creation of Apartheid: "*Through hegemonic discourses, social work generally supported the maintenance of the racist status quo*" (Smith, 2014: 313).

Making sense of social work's troubled past

Recounted these troubled histories is not meant posthumously 'moralize' on individual social workers; however, as social work academics and practitioners are called upon to take responsibility and make moral choices, it is important to recognise three broad factors which fuelled the profession's complicity in the above-mentioned examples

First, every time social work has attempted to present itself as a purely technical, politically neutral activity and social workers suggested that they "just need to get on with job", the profession- stopped prioritising the well-being and human rights of the people we work with. The notion of "the state of exception" (Agamben 2005) allows us to explain the process of the

subordination of 'ethics' to 'security': under the guise state necessity justifications liberties and oppressive measures are imposed. In a state of "legalized lawlessness" is major and complex risk, if social work is to be about progress, humanity, emancipation and democracy. Imperial practices have hardly eclipsed in the 21st century, even if they are often disguised as peace projects (Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis, 2019a).

Second, the default position for many social work organisations had historically been to prioritise the self-image and status of the profession at the expense of individuals and communities it is supposed to serve. At times when social work felt most insecure about its knowledge base and scientific grounding, the profession desperately sought refuge to the rigidity of positivism (biomedical models) and the illusionary authority of pseudo-science (eugenics). Ferguson et al (2018) suggest that a number of internal and external factors, including a weak professional identity, a contested knowledge base and a lack of strong professional organisation, have meant that in the face of a ruling-class desire to regulate and control the behaviour of those sections of society perceived as deviant or dangerous, the organisation and content of the social work role has been shaped by the state to an even greater extent than professions such as medicine or teaching.

Third, even a passing reference to social work ethics reminds us of a noteworthy paradox. The social work profession, possibly more than any other so called 'helping profession', has fully incorporated the discourse of Kantian ethics and ethical dilemmas. The two main global social work organisations have developed detailed, elaborate and progressive ethics codes, and also, at a national level, social work practitioners have been regulated by mechanisms that unfailingly include extensive guidelines on ethical standards. Likewise, social work academia has produced an ethics-focused scholarship disproportionately large in comparison to other themes (bar child abuse and neglect). Although much of the social work scholarship on ethics has historically consisted of comparative studies akin to parallel monologues or toolkits on how to navigate complex dilemmas, in recent years we have seen the emergence of more critical material (Banks, 2012; Gallagher et al, 2020; Pawar, et al, 2019). However, these critical analyses have very rarely made it to professional ethical codes. Apart from some notable exceptions (for example in Aoteroa New Zealand and Canada, National Associations have recognised the importance of indigenous values in their codes of ethics) most National

Associations retain the inherent propensity of individualising ethical dilemmas by designing a professional canon; whoever is caught outside these moral principles is deemed unfit to practice and expelled from our otherwise well-functioning professional *context*. So, the way the construction of Kantian ethics have been incorporated in the profession, mostly through Codes of Ethics, do little more than reducing complex political debates to moral dilemmas and devolve the responsibility of addressing those to the individual and not the collective. Banks (2008) explains that "*Social work ethics, if it continues to broaden its scope beyond traditional professional ethics (focusing on codes and difficult cases) to ethics in professional life (including virtues, relationships of care and the critical moral competence for everyday and transformatory practice), will benefit from more serious engagement with moral, political and religious philosophy*".

Exploring the politically complex histories of social services and boldly confronting 'horrible histories' is necessary so as to appreciate the importance of maintaining a focus on the broader context and structure. Observing how and why these histories have unfolded can safely lead us to the conclusion that practices of oppression and complicity can neither be reduced to the "few bad apples" argument -so easily invoked in social work- nor should they be judged through the individualizing prism of moralism, prevalent in what it is taken to be, according to the Social Work mantra, Kantian Ethics. Of course, this is a reduction of Kantian thinking which is open to more radical interpretation, particularly if one takes into accounts Kant's own writings on justice and politics (Kaufman 1999; Flikschuh 2003; Ripstein, 2009). Moreover, this is not to ignore important contributions in debates on virtue ethics, critical, feminist and postmodern ethics and ethics of caring which have critiqued Kantian ethics (Webb, 2019; Cree and Phillips, 2019). We propose that the debates are taken further in the direction of reflexivity conducive to meet the necessary transformations of our times.

Towards a global social work memory?

The current dilemmas and the extraordinary threats facing democracy suggest that it is time for social work to break free from the self-serving instrumentalization of the professionalised version of Kantian ethics to reimagine what we term as **the transformative ethics of reconciliation**. This process refers not only to reconciling social work with its own past but it

is also contingent to reconciling the professional memory with the experiences of those affected by professional oppressive practices. In this context, *reconciliation* becomes a necessary step towards liberation. Our conception of reconciliation is not based on some naïve reading of 'the end of history' where social conflicts would somehow be 'erased' or miraculously suspended. On the contrary, the notion of post-conflict, and for that matter post-austerity reconciliation is part of our envisioning a society that engages with the social questions we are faced with.

A long process of reflexivity with remarkable initiatives is taking place. It is high time that these take a step further by coordinating a global approach to place the matter at the heart of the profession. We propose a *global response* of Social Work as a profession taking responsibility necessitated by the era of globalisation. In this sense, transformative reconciliation is part of a wider vision that must be that located in the challenges faced the world we live in.

Envisioning the profession's policy via transformative reconciliation is thus becoming all the more urgent. There is richness in debate and thinking particularly from the Global South which is 'meeting' critical reflexivity in West (Sitas 2008). Our reading of reconciliation is primarily concerned with *how* and *why* of the 'praxis of reconciliation' by interrogating how the social processes may generate exceptional interruptions which generate the necessary ruptures old orders of things', the assumed 'normality' (war, polarisation, division, exploitation, oppression, discrimination etc.) in the potentialities of new worlds initiating *new societal normalities* (Sitas et al 2016). In most cases, these processes involve serious debates about apology, reparations, damages and may or may not involve forgiveness. Societies with severe past abuses follow different pathways: some chose amnesties whilst others demand punishment for the guilty for atrocities and/or it may lead to systemic and power transformation; it may even take different forms and different time frames. These must be studied taking historical, political and sociological aspects of each particular context.

Dealing with the violent and divisive past of conflict however is a daunting task as it is essentially about both the present and future (Duffy and Campbell 2019). Different societies

deal with this subject in their distinct way; however, experiences and ideas migrate: how a Government, an international body, a political party or an NGO deals with this, influences others. Ideas and social processes tend to travel to transform other contexts often in different and unintended ways. There is disagreement rather than consensus as to the 'best route'. Nonetheless, there are today different 'toolkits', promoting to copy and apply universally. We are highly sceptical of such mass-is produced industrial outputs produced by the 'booming truth business' (VanAntewrpen 2010: 28). We instead propose that social workers must creatively and constructive take up various ideas and learn from other experiences and then read this in a way that takes a critical approach to the political, economic and cultural agendas in a world system, which based on hegemonic relations. There are problems in the adaptation of 'imported models' and ready-made solutions. The key is to avoid 'paradigmatic distortions' such as exceptionalism, intellectual dependency (or 'copy and paste' approaches), ethnocentrism and distorted universalism (Trimikliniotis and Keim, 2017).

Knowing the 'truth' about who is politically, morally and legally responsible for the violent and oppressive acts/processes does not necessarily lead to reconciliation. Nonetheless, not knowing or concealing the past is recipe for future destructions and possible repeat of social work complicity in atrocities in the future. We are dealing with denying past abuses; without learning we are more in danger that these may be repeated. In any case, we can say that at least under certain conditions and to some extent reconciliation has prevented further violence - Mandela's insisted on putting an end to racialism in South Africa (Gibson 2004). The debate in South Africa is still continuing about the reconciliation model adopted, the transition processes, the social questions since and the 'unresolved national question' (Webster and Pampallis 2017). The nature of apartheid, which was based on the oppressive exploitation and racializing dehumanisation of the black majority allowed the white minority drew from an individualistic approach to guilt which was an imported model suited for Latin American dictatorships (Mamdami cited in Ellis, 2000). There are powerful arguments that South African transition was designed to avoid addressing the historic injustices by legitimising white privilege the new regime without the necessary transfer of wealth and income Wilson, 2001; Ellis 2000). In other contexts, there is reconciliation without *seeking any agreement as to the 'truth' of the past*, allowing the old enemies their own version of 'the truth', as they only agree on how to share power and governance (e.g. Ireland); however we

must take note the important academic and profession debates pertaining how social work is shaped by "the troubles" in Ireland (Duffy et al 2019) as well as conflict elsewhere (Duffy and Cambell 2019; Campbell 2019) .

Social work must take up transitional justice seriously. Social work is at the heart of the practice of transitional justice which is about recognition that traditional or conventional justice is often incapable of reaching 'ideal justice in transition situations. Measures addressing gross human rights violations of the past regime are not necessarily do not meet 'retributive justice' (Elster 1998; Hayner 2010; De Greif, 2010). Justice is of course contested as a concept. It can be read as *fairness* (Rawls, 1971) or as *relational* and *procedural* approach (Young, 1990), or as a matter of capabilities (Sen 2009) or reads social justice in the context of *transformative politics of framing* and counter-public (Fraser, 2008). We must question the structures relating to discourses and practices that would transform 'the deep grammar of frame-setting in a globalising world" in the aim "to overcome the injustices of misframing by changing the boundaries of the 'who' of justice [and] the mode of their constitution, hence the way in which they are drawn" (Fraser 2008, 23–24). But justice is at the heart of what social work is supposed to be about. Recognising that reconciliation measures are part the process of transition to democracy from dictatorship or war-torn societies, allowances are made (Elster 1998). It is precisely in these dire situations that social workers are called upon to act; they are often thrown at the deep end of situations at the edges by reaching out to the most in need in these situations. However, transitional justice measures dealing with the violent past vary considerably in scope, nature and effect. There are measures enhancing peace-building or legitimating regimes, the rule of law and fairness democracy and bringing about reconciliation, which in theory are supposed to support or complement each other but they may be contradictory, ill-thought or inappropriate or intentional and ultimately damaging of the processes of transition and reconciliation. The priorities, the quality and the extent to which these are actually realised depends on the content of the settlement reached and the balance of political forces in each case. Social workers must become actively engaged by being critically involved, being empathetic and aware so as to develop the kinds of professional reflexivity in these processes. They can become a valuable source of critical knowledge in reshaping and enhancing processes towards reconciliation. Different

dimensions of *truth seeking* and *truth telling* as crucial aspects of reconciliation in post conflict situations with Truth Commissions across the globe, (Hayner, 2010; Trimikliniotis 2013).

Reconciliation breaks through the narrow confines of specific traditions and energises processes which in turn generate socio-political and cultural osmosis within very diverse societies: Mandela, like Gandhi, is distinguished as a global symbol of resistance *and* reconciliation throwing his weight behind reconciliation. Despite prevalence of the destructive global 'logic of fragmentation', South African sociologist Sitas (2008; 2011) insists on the 'ethic of reconciliation' as an emerging force offering the potential to unity. Sitas considers that this has found intellectual expression in four aspects of post-war thought: the neo-Gandhian notions of non-violence; the post-war Western self-reflexivity which no longer tolerates violence, racism and oppression of the 'Other'; the convergence between post-Stalinist communism/socialism, workers movements, democratic traditions and human rights sensitivities; and, finally, the creativity of artists whose lives and works retrieves what is live and human in humanity amid the destructive elements of modernity.

There is no consensus on matters relating to reconstructing as society as this is intimately connected to politics, the economy and social questions. Crucial are matters pertaining to the role of the social policy which are connected to labour issues, particularly in addressing poverty, inequality, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion. These must be developed in the context of transition and the potential for post-conflict societies to reconstitute as progressive and renewed polities; the shape of social services, social policy and the character of the welfare state must rethought in response to the that social issues and challenges ahead. Problems relating to peace, reconciliation and peace education cannot be conceive in abstract terms. Attempt to 'read' these phenomena requires a significant re-ordering and re-referencing that injects the richness of theorizing from the perspective of the Global South to that of the Global North. Any effort to properly capture these processes requires a serious re-imaging of socialities; there is considerable thinking of this kind in the South and the East. Peace-making must be read in the context of the modes of livelihoods; the socialities, solidarities and connectivities long experienced in the Global South, the East and what was thought of as 'backward Rest' (i.e. that which is not in 'the West' or the 'Global North'. In

these days of austerity, new socialities are being produced by the 'wretched of the earth'. 'Structural reforms' are made possible by listening to 'voices that reason'; i.e. from the perspective of the 'ordinary lives'. Contrary to readings of politics as the exception reading 'ordinary lives' as resistance can illuminate how we construct notions such as 'peace' and reconciliation. The subaltern can and indeed does speak; they speak back, but most importantly they act and inscribe social struggles (Trimikliniotis, et al 2015; Sitas et al 2016).

Towards a Transformative Ethic of Reconciliation in Social Work

Sitas (2008) has eloquently described the ethics of reconciliation as 'ideomorphic', a word that is of his own concoction, combining two Greek words, *idea* and *morphe* (i.e. from). The ethic of reconciliation is idiomorphic, he explains, in that it navigates dispositions and practices despite dominant constellations of power. We can therefore focus on the ethical praxis as part of the broader political and social structure regardless of hegemonic powers.

The notion of *reconciliation* refers to the dynamic process of understanding each-other's experiences, reconstruct collective memory, place people's actions in the context of history and attempt to restore meaning and relationships. Its roots can be found in the concept of theological redemption and its first recorded practice in the context of conflict has probably been recorded in Nicaragua. Influenced by the principles of liberation theology it informed the reconciliation process between the Sandinistas and indigenous groups. Undeniably, the most iconic, almost archetypal, model of truth and reconciliation was developed in post-Apartheid South Africa. An ambitious, cathartic and all-encompassing process which aimed at bringing the nation together through a methodical quest for truth, recognition of suffering and forgiveness. Ever since, multiple variations of Truth and Reconciliation have been used in different parts of the world. However, the path of Truth and Reconciliation is neither the default global position in dealing with troubled histories nor it is a golden standard. There are different pathways to reconciliation. In fact, many countries and communities choose to follow the model of Spain and Greece based on the exact opposite principle: the only way to deal with the troubled history is to stop talking about our history – silence and oblivion. The unresolved trauma of hundreds of thousands 'stolen children' and refugees, endlessly revived through the indignity of Kafkaesque trials suggests that suppressed truth and the artificiality

of oblivion only makes the forces coming out of the inevitable 'Pandora's box' more extreme, divisive and traumatising.

The power of transformative reconciliation, proposed in this presentation, is based on the structural antinomy of a Janus-faced profession. One side of social work's history inflicted unspeakable damage to some of the most vulnerable people in society. The solution and remedy to this damage also partly lies with the profession. The radical tradition of social work, shaped by the principles of solidarity, internationalism, empathy and social change provides a path to a genuinely inclusive and transformative reconciliation. A circular reconciliatory process that can be initiated through the acknowledgement of social work's trouble histories and a recognition of the pain this has caused to communities involved. An apology issued by the global international organisations representing social work (IFSW and IASSW) would not only have a symbolic value but it would also demonstrate that the social work profession has the emancipatory confidence to confront its troubled past and invite communities to jointly re-imagine our common future. Truth seeking is a necessary and crucial part of this process. Testimonies of social workers and -most importantly- of people affected by the profession's complicity with state violence have the power to challenge and reshape official discuses. Archives referring to the development and activities of social work will have to be re-assessed and co-analysed with people and communities affected. Crucially, archival material and official discourses need to be confronted by oral histories from below as part of a bifold process: truth-seeking and development of genuinely inclusive historical narrative. The recent innovations and progress in the direction of recognising the human right abuses of disappeared persons were not a given by those in power; these were fruits of tireless efforts and long struggles activists (Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis, 2019a, 2019b). Below we provide a schematised version in a diagram depicting the proposed integrated global approach to a transformative reconciliation that potentially generates a forward-propelling and dynamic process:

Diagram 1
Global Level
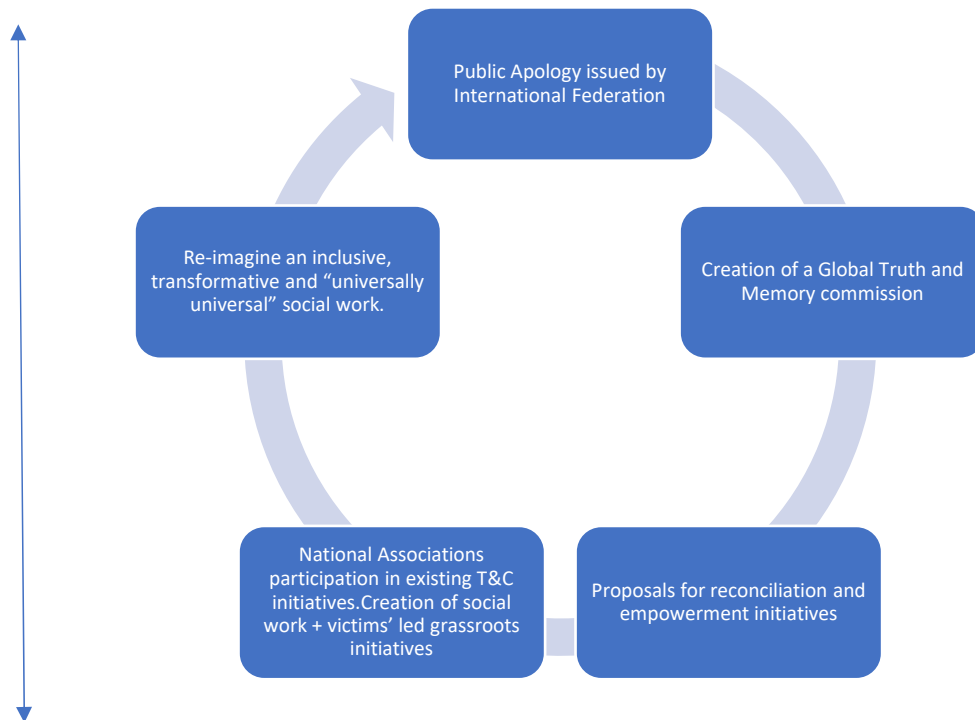
Grassroots/ Community Level

Diagramme1. A dialectic and transformative social work approach to Truth Seeking and Reconciliation.

Although, a process of reconciliation can be initiated at a global level by the two main professional associations, it will only truly transformative when it engages communities at the grassroots and local level. Acknowledging historical wrong-doings at the highest level of the profession provides essential space (and legitimisation) to social workers at a regional and national level to explore approaches to reconciliation that can lead to policy reform, reparation and social change. The legacies of social work's radical pioneers who worked directly with social movements and marginalised communities -as opposed to practicing as creatures of the statute- offer vital knowledge on how to nurture relationships of empathy, trust and political action; necessary ingredients of the ethics of reconciliation.

Undoubtedly, one could expect significant opposition, within the profession, against opening up the difficult discussion about memory and reconciliation. Various criticism are levied against apology:

a) Saying "Mea Culpa" at the age of apology is hollow and hypocritical.

b) Insecurity: exposing a skeleton in the closet would damage the reputation of the profession.

c) Moral Individualism: Why would we apologise for the wrongdoings of past generations

d) Revolutionary purism: 'truth and reconciliation' does not go far enough.

These criticisms could range from pure cynicism to well-meaning concern. Part of the problem for mainstream social work has been that at the core of its refusal to deal with history, lies the belief that social problems have little to do with the way our societies are organized. Exploring social or political histories, this approach maintains, does not give us enough information about the 'here and now' of the profession's mechanics. In addition, 'truth and reconciliation' models are often reduced to toolkits developed by the 'transitional justice' and 'humanitarian law industry'.

Apology is the very opposite of "apologism" and of course 'apologetics'. The international legal scholar Koskenniemi (2005,548), reminds us that one of the founders of modern sociology, Max Weber noted that the legal order is always a projection of the legal staff's knowledge of it. He paraphrases this in order to aptly speak of "the indissociability of the social world and the concepts and categories through which it appears to us". Thus, he argues the international lawyer is a "social agent" pointing to the dilemma of how live and act within "an inherently conflictual reality of international life". "Apologism" versus utopia are an everyday matter are one is confronted with routines which reproduce a social and legal reality. Koskenniemi (2005, 549) hoped to "provide resources for the use of international law's professional vocabulary for critical or emancipatory causes" and it is recognised today that rather than masking power, one must speak the truth to power (Rajagopal 2006). Social workers are called upon to approach matters in a similar way: Social workers knowledge of the world and the concepts around them are very much part of the construction of the world we live in. As such, it is the responsibility of social workers and their professional organisations to reflect upon past practice and reconstruct these to address issues they are confronted with. Past abuses, violence and conflict of the past require amends, not 'apologism' or 'apologetics'. Power must be confronted with the abuses of those in power of the past: apology is an essential element for moving forward.

An ethics of reconciliation, however, neither accepts the sectarian micro-politics of occupational tribalism, nor does it unconditionally adopt top-down toolkits. Instead, we propose a dialectic and circular practice that is encouraged by the profession at a global level, occurs at within communities at a local level and co-produces historical- professional knowledge that reshapes our global discourses (See diagram 1). We are not proposing a prescriptive or relativistic "model". Instead, it is our contention that social work can navigate the current extraordinary political challenges through the creation of reconciliation movement that is transformative, challenges the current status-quo, and reclaims the history of the profession and -in the words of Wallerstein- it is "universally universal" (Wallerstein, 2006).

Despite the gloomy global climate with the rise of xeno-racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and/or fundamentalist populisms and regimes in different contingents, scholars working in the field of the sociology of apology and reconciliation, perhaps a little over-optimistically, speak of "the age of apology": Through a process of open dialogue, victims and perpetrators can exchange perspectives and combine their memories and recover lost dignities."

In spite of the negative mood generated by the rise of the Right-wing and racist forces around the globe, we have seen a remarkable extension of the **use of apology** as a means to do amends for past evils. In fact, significant scholarship notes an important means to counter new tensions and escalating hostilities I what is a new world disorder is the renewal of our ideas, energies, tools and processes. We can take courage and inspiration that "apology remains a powerful trend in global politics" (Barkan and Karn, 2006).

The use of apology cannot be read in some abstract and ahistorical manner. Nor should we approach it somehow as a mechanical process of going through certain rituals and motions. Rather they must be understand in the context of popular social struggles aimed at improving their everyday lives, resisting oppression and exploitation that generate the potential for realising peoples' social imaginaries. It is the sort of communities the social work has promised to serve and care for. Let's not forget that societies are instituting our imaginaries and vis-a-versa societies themselves are instituted by ordinary peoples' collective imaginaries and praxis (Castoriadis 1987).

In this sense, an apology by professional bodies at global level is not a mere gesture of good intentions or some vacuous move aiming to play the game of symbolic gimmicks currently in vogue. On the contrary, it is the culmination of a collective ethic of a profession with a dual and seemingly irreconcilable legacies: in war with itself. It is an attempt to reconciling and restore the professions' need for renewal so as to realise its' potential in a globe in search for world of peace, justice and transformative reconciliation.

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