

Working for peace. Conflict and social work practice in the divided Cyprus

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Abstract:

This paper emphasizes on social work professionals from both sides of the divided Cyprus. Cyprus presents a very interesting, yet under-explored, case study as it remains an island de facto divided. The division has resulted in the physical and political separation of the two most populous ethnic communities (Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots) for over 50 years. This paper offers an exploration of the views of social workers in both sides. Through a quantitative method approach, participants in the study were able to express their thoughts and beliefs on the 'other' and on social work in a post-conflict environment.

Key words: Political Conflict, War, Peace, Cyprus, Social Work Practice, Reconciliation

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in studies exploring the impact, of political and ethnic conflict, upon social work policy and practice. Societies emerging from political ethnic conflict, experience transition to peace as complex and often protracted process. The island of Cyprus constitutes an example of a society that has experienced ethnic conflict in different forms and intensity for a period of over 60 years (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021). As a result of this conflict was the war that eventually led to the division of the island between the two communities. To date, there have been few attempts to explore the effects of this conflict on the Cypriot Social work practice. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot social workers have never established formal links as well as social work agencies and organizations have avoided any form of collaboration. The only form of collaboration can be identified by an unofficial initiative of a group of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot social workers. This initiative took place in 2016 where the first bi-communal social work platform was created, in order to bring together social workers from both communities. This team of social workers, encouraged by the overall pro-peace movement, was determined to reclaim the role of social work as a peace-building, rather than divisive, institution (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021). In order to do so, the team decided to explore Cypriot social workers' views of the conflict, trauma and peace. A key

aspect of the study was to understand emotions, perceptions, thoughts and ideas about social work triggered through a shared space; an understanding of the structural ‘otherisation’ that post war divisions had inflicted on social work. The findings of this research are presented in this article.

After 31 years of complete physical and political separation, several checkpoints across the green line were re-opened in 2003. For the first time, Cypriots from both communities were able to cross the line and visit their hometowns, meet their friends or merely witness how the ‘other side’ and its people ‘look like’. The opening of checkpoints led to a rejuvenation of the peace (Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis, 2019) and reconciliation movement.

Under the new circumstances created by the checkpoint opening and the subsequent revival of UN brokered peace negotiations, the importance of Education, Health Care and Social Services institutions was re-defined as key in the prospect for a re-united Cyprus. For example, research in the field of social work is still very frail, despite the fact that social work practitioners will be expected to implement and deliver policies aiming at a sustainable peace process. The current study is the first of its kind as no researchers have previously attempted to document the perspectives of social work practitioners in relation to the peace process and bi-communal matters (Ioakimidis, *et al.* 2021).

Social work practice in the context of conflict

Violent political and ethnic driven conflicts as well as disputes create negative long-lasting impacts on the population and might distort social workers’ role, in regions in which ethnic-political violence is commonplace (Cohen, 2001; Coulter, *et al.* 2013; Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005). As Ramon (2008) stated, ethnic conflict tends to be severe, protracted and intractable. A culture of conflict has a severe impact at many levels and in many forms; individual, social, cultural, psychological, political, economic and international. Social workers, as their profession dictates, are committed to attend and provide support to vulnerable people, regardless of their ethnic background. However, their professional code of ethics such as values and principles can be tested (Cohen, 2001; Dekel *et al.*, 2004; Peled-Avram *et al.*, 2004). In such particular cases, the social work profession might be compromised by the need to demonstrate group cohesion and, conversely, when the ‘other’ is demonized and perceived to be the enemy (Cohen, 2001; Campbell and McCrystal, 2005). The enormous political influence and pressure imposed in such cases makes it easier in the context of an ethnic-political conflict to treat the victims of one’s own social-ethnic group with the respect and care they require in order to adopt a similar stance towards members of the other social groups in the dispute (Ramon, 2004; Campbell and McCrystal, 2005). Therefore, it can be seriously questioned

whether it is feasible for social workers to achieve separation of professional, personal and political dimensions in their lives as social workers within the contexts of acute social and political conflicts (Shamai and Boehm, 2001).

Ramon *et al.* (2006) corroborated that social work practitioners in ethnic-conflict divided affected areas are faced with numerous complex moral and ethical dilemmas as well as challenges that might interfere with their daily practice. In particular, Campbell and McChrystal (2005) indicated that such conflict divisions negatively infuse most state and social structures. Social work practitioners are likely to confront such divisions on multiple levels including individual, institutional, and cultural or ideological levels. At the individual level, identity is formed through group cohesion, self-censoring and the denial of prejudice and discrimination. At institutional level, the state enforces discriminatory practices through the legal system, and the provision of social welfare services whereas cultural and ideological level is where discrimination is enhanced through negative stereotypes, beliefs, or myths about the other group (Adams *et al.*, 2002; Ramon *et al.*, 2006).

Within such context, social workers' ability to conform to their traditional professional roles and at the same time preserve a neutral stance can be seriously questioned and tested. Social work practitioners usually have difficulties to separate their professional, personal, and political ideologies especially when unity to a social or ethnic group is required during violent outbreaks. A number of studies indicated that social work practitioners in these conflict settings experienced multiple levels of stress. They have emphasized the need for resiliency. However, the ethical, emotional, and societal pressures about how to coexist with colleagues or with service users of the other group is an important deterring factor to performing their daily social practice (Baum, 2011; Ramon *et al.*, 2006; Pinkerton and Campbell, 2002).

Moreover, for social work practitioners, working in communities affected by ethnic and political violence, even at a "post-war" or "post-conflict" stage, their practice is heavily influenced and guided by mechanisms of political control (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021; Coulter, *et al.* 2013). Post-conflict communities are characterized by high levels of insecurity and uncertainty, as well as difficulties to define boundaries. This happens because the experience of conflict not only causes actual physical and material damage through acts of calculated violence, but it also inscribes itself in the memories of individuals, families and communities long after the traumatic events have occurred (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021; Coulter *et al.*, 2013). The damage incurred to communities, groups and individuals is often used to shape social identity, beliefs, values, knowledge and social reality (Humphrey, 2000). Yet, it is within this context that social workers must harness the contradictory and competing strands of their

histories, traditions and values and the multiple identities to develop vibrant, locally specific social work interventions (Sewpaul 2007a; Sewpaul, 2007b). To elaborate even further, Ramon *et al.* (2006) contended that social workers in ethnic-divided societies should attempt to adjust their professional behaviour to provide a value-free, neutral, and professional service in the face of violence. Social work practitioners in these conflict settings have emphasized the need for resiliency in the face of complex challenges, but the ethical, emotional, and societal pressures about how to coexist with colleagues or with service users of the other group remain challenging (Baum, 2011; Baum, 2006).

In the case of Cyprus, there are limited references whether the abovementioned challenges have been adequately addressed within the area of social work practice. One could argue that Cyprus constitutes an example of how constant ethnic political conflicts between the two communities, Greek Cypriots (GCs) and Turkish Cypriots (TCs), have affected the course of social work history and practice. It is worth mentioning that Cyprus has experienced the devastating effect of ethnic conflict in all of its forms and types. However, there is a major gap in the international bibliography regarding the development of Cypriot social work and the effects of the ethnic conflict. This conflict eventually led the country to war and subsequently to the division of the island. In the following section, an attempt will be made to enquire about the impact of the ethnic conflict on the area of social work.

Social Work in the context of the Cypriot conflict

The island of Cyprus, for more than five decades, has experienced political instability. Ethnic conflict started during the last decade of the British colonial era¹. The postcolonial years, were marked by an unrealistically multi-layered political system that encouraged segregation rather than integration. These periods are characterized by the opposed ethnic nationalism, violence and conflict between nationalist, paramilitary groups from the two ethnic communities of G/Cs (EOKA B') and T/Cs (TMT). In July 1974, a military coup organized and executed by the Greek junta and its local G/C partners of EOKA B', led to a Turkish military invasion leading to the physical, political and psychological division of the two communities (Avtzaki, 2012). The result was the Turkish occupation of the 37% of the of the island in the north, while in the south Greek Cypriots retained the representation of the recognized Republic of Cyprus (Campbell *et al.*, 2018). During that period, major forced displacement of population took place

¹ Britain occupied the island in 1878 after an agreement with the Ottoman Empire for an annual rent of £95,000. Although rent (paid by Cypriots through taxes) was terminated in 1927, Cyprus remained a British colony until 1960.

between the two communities, which had devastating negative effects on their psychosocial conditions (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021; Campbell *et al.*, 2018; Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).

Throughout all these years, various attempts and peace enhancing efforts have been implemented without any meaningful success (Hadjipavlou, 2004; Anastasiou, 2002; Avtzaki, 2012). According to Fisher (2001), these attempts could be characterised as models of intervention that lack continuity and willingness from both sides at official mediation efforts and decision-making level. Therefore, the G/C and T/C communities are struggling to reach consensus about the ‘Cypriot problem’, which will eventually lead to a viable solution. As Papadakis *et al.*, (2006) commented, both communities are still in the stage of antagonism instead to the later stages of dialogue, problem solving and reconciliation. Moreover, it can be argued that the resources allocated to unofficial interventions have been weak, very small and very selective in specific groups, thus substantial progress cannot be realised (Avtzaki, 2012; Hadjipavlou, 2004; Anastasiou, 2002; Papadakis *et al.*, 2006).

Consequently, after 50 years, it is worth to mention that the Cypriot problem, hence the ethnic conflict is well preserved within the various social layers of the population. In particular, the younger generations of Cypriots, those who did not experience war, are affected. They indirectly experienced the aftermath of this destructive conflict. Makriyiannis and Psaltis (2007) stated that this generation has been moulded in the educational system, in which history teaching, at least on the Greek side has been described as heritage rather than history teaching. They emphasised that strong elements of a monolithic and mono-perspective nationalist orthodoxy, are quite dominant in the education system (Avtzaki, 2012). Therefore, future and young generation are in danger of falling short of reconciling with people from the other community; the contradicting persistence of reviving old glories and not ‘forgetting’ are aligned with the blurred aspirations for reunification (Christou, 2006; Avtzaki, 2012). To corroborate even further, a number of authors cited that the status quo, even after all these years, preserves strong feelings of fear, mistrust and psychological distance towards each other, while mutual victimisation and reciprocal blaming still takes place (Avtzaki, 2012; Christou, 2006). This is consistent with the research of Ioakimides *et al.* (2021), that educational systems, political discourse and media moral panics are further deepening the psychological, social and emotional distance and negativity between the two communities.

Taking in consideration all the above, social work practice was negatively influenced by the political and social circumstances that shaped the island’s turbulent history. One could argue that these negative effects on social work practice are often neglected and under researched. Social workers are reluctant to engage with research and practice linked to sensitive political

issues in relation to the ethnic conflict in Cyprus (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, a significant number of authors indicated that divided societies due to ethnic conflict and violence create further complications in the area of social work practice (Campbell *et al.*, 2018; Duffy *et al.*, 2019; Coulter *et al.*, 2013).

On a professional level, the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot social workers have not yet established any official contacts with the aim to bridge the divide and form meaningful channels of communication. On the contrary, a notable apathy can be observed on conflict discussions in social work education (Nadan and Ben-Ari, 2014; Segev and Nadan, 2014). Some authors suggested that, social work practice in divided societies tends to become more bureaucratic and technocratic, essentially ignoring the conflicts and sectarianism by hiding behind the pretext of neutrality and disassociation from the war (Campbell *et al.*, 2018; Duffy *et al.*, 2019; Coulter *et al.*, 2013; Houston, 2008). Although some individual efforts of dynamic peacebuilding can be identified among social workers between the two communities, the majority of them have not been socialised towards a culture of resolution and peace. Strong feelings of uncertainty, fear, prejudices, negative predispositions and antagonism of the past are still preserved, despite the assumption that social workers are committed to promote the value of respect and selflessness regardless of the ethnic background and political preferences (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021; Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005; Duffy *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, Social Work education constitutes an important factor, which may distort prospective social workers' attitude towards the 'other'. Even though the Cypriot problem and division of the island overshadows and permeates almost all legal and institutional issues in the political agenda, there are not any references, training programs and/or academic discussion regarding potential bi-communal approaches. Instead, social work in Cyprus took a more ethnocentric character and education of social workers relied almost exclusively on the so-called motherlands, Greece and Turkey. In the south side of Cyprus, Greek curriculums were imported whereas social work in the north side took the direction of ethnocentric provision, fully and exclusively supported by the Turkish Republic. The island's division politically, ideologically and culturally defines social work, and there is little or no discussion about the impact of conflict and violence on social work practice and theory. A 'mandate to silence', it can be argued, works in favour of a hidden curriculum that allows the nurturing of nationalist, divisive notions that quite often discourage an open discussion on the ethnic conflict and its influence on social work practice (Campbell *et al.*, 2018; Ramon *et al.*, 2006).

In a nutshell, the perceptions of social work practitioners in Cyprus might be regarded as 'ignorant' on the particular issue due to the strong institutionalisation of the politics of division

or even sustain a negative image of the 'other', who mostly have never seen or come into contact with each other. A possible explanation is the fact that professional, personal and political identities are intertwined, thus making them more difficult to be disentangled even in post-conflict situations (Ioakimides *et al.*, 2021; Ramon *et al.*, 2006). It is evident that a substantial gap in literature seems to exist in regards to the level, nature and complexities of collaborations and interaction among social work practitioners between the two communities of Cyprus, leading to the formation of the assumptions pertaining to research study.

Rationale of Research methodology

The overall aim of this study has been to understand the complexities Cypriot professional social workers deal with in the context of a geographic and ethnic separation and to create a platform for social workers to de-mystify the 'other' through bi-communal collaboration and contact. More specifically, our research team focused on a) understanding the beliefs, experiences, attitudes and consequently responses of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot professional social workers in relation to the division of the island b) documenting barriers that prevent interaction, reconciliation and bi-communal social work collaboration c) exploring tangible ways of collaboration among the two communities within the social work context.

Research Model

After several meetings and discussions over the methodology, the research team followed a quantitative/correlational method of research. This methodology allows researchers to determine the extent of a relationship between two or more variables using statistical data. In this type of design, relationships between and among a number of facts are sought and interpreted. Quantitative research methods focus on objective measurements, with statistical analysis or numerical data collection. Data are gathered through different methods such as polls and questionnaires (Creswell, 2009). Interpreting previous statistical data using different techniques can also be undertaken in quantitative studies. This approach is centered on gathering statistical data to generalize it across groups of people to provide details on a particular phenomenon (Babbie, 2010).

The questionnaire was written in both languages, Greek and Turkish, and was administered online. Participants were recruited through a snowball approach, making use of popular social media platforms, as well as mailing lists. Participants with whom contact had already been made through social media and emails were also invited to use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in the study. Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit "hidden populations," that is, groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies (Family Health International, n.d.).

The use of a survey as a first data-collection layer was informed by two factors: a) the need to ‘map out’ the diverse uncertainties, conflicts and dilemmas our participants may face before a direct engagement with each other and b) a need to challenge the culture of silence and suppression of all meaningful discussions towards the Cypriot issue. The research was, therefore conducted in two separate yet complimentary phases. In the first stage of research we made use of personally administered structured questionnaires, one written in Greek language and the other one in Turkish language. The construction of the questionnaires was a complicated process since the researchers had to initially construct an English version of the questions and then translate them into the two native languages. English language is the one we use to communicate with each other, since none of the researchers speaks the native language of the other community. For the sake of understanding, we include the English version of the questionnaire (see Supplementary Table S1).

Questionnaires generally have low validity because they do not explore questions in any detail or depth. Where there is little opportunity to qualify the meaning of answers, the fact that questionnaires can be anonymous, means that respondents may be encouraged to answer questions truthfully in the knowledge that they cannot be identified. This may increase the validity of their responses (Trueman, 2015). It is worth to note that structured questionnaires allow researchers to easily standardise them since every respondent is asked the same question in the same way. Therefore, researchers can be sure that everyone in the sample, answers exactly the same questions, which makes this a very reliable method of research (Trueman, 2015).

The rationale behind the current survey methodology was based on our desire to allow social workers take their time while answering the questions. Since this was the first time for them responding to this kind of bicomunal survey, we wanted to make them feel as much comfortable as possible. Our experience from bicomunal activities with social work students showed us that they are hesitant to express their feelings. It should be noted that they belong to a generation that grew up with stories about the enemy who is on the other side of the fence.

Sample

Through the questionnaires, we attempted to document the broad tendencies with regards to participants’ perceptions of the conflict, the ‘other’ and the role of social work. Seventy-five Greek Cypriot (G/Cs) and twenty-six Turkish Cypriot (T/Cs) professional social workers participated in the survey. The overall number of Cypriot social workers, at the time of the research was approximately 860 (800 in the south and 60 in the north). Although the sampling

was not high enough, we are confident that the responses ensure representativeness and validity of the total social work population in both communities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Mapping Cypriot social workers' perspectives on social work in the context of division

Findings

Before proceeding to the comparative analysis of the study, it would be useful to present some descriptive statistics based on crosstabs. The given numbers should allow the reader understand the population culture and professional background, as well as other important elements of the survey. For instance, the majority of participants in the survey work for non-governmental organizations (73% Greek-Cypriots and 50% Turkish-Cypriots) as opposed to central government, local government (municipalities) and other agencies. Similarly, the majority of the participants work as social workers for 0-5 years (77% Greek-Cypriots and 69% Turkish-Cypriots). This situation indicates that although questionnaires were sent to all social workers, regardless of age, those who responded the most belong to the younger generation of professionals (83% of Greek Cypriots and 96% of Turkish Cypriots were among 23-35 years of age). Not surprisingly, the majority of the participants were females (73% Greek Cypriots and 92% Turkish-Cypriots). Interestingly, the following table (*Table 1*) indicates the reasons behind their decision to study social work.

As the table above indicates, the majority of social workers chose social work as their profession because of their desire to help people (38.6%) and their commitment to social justice (28.7%). As we further proceed with the presentation and analysis of the survey, it is important to keep in mind this percentage (67.3%) in order to examine it from different scopes below.

Independent Sample T-Tests

A series of Independent T-Tests were applied in order to examine any significant effects among Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot social workers. In the initial model, the two variables of ethnic community (Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots) were entered as dependent variables and various perceptions and attitudes (friends from the other side, opening of checkpoints, provide services to clients from the other community, etc.) were entered as independent variables. It is worth to point that it is likely that the different work status of professionals played an important role in the way they responded to the various questions.

Opening of checkpoints

To examine whether the opening of checkpoints in 2003 and after 29 years of complete division and lack of communication between the two communities, a series of Independent Samples T-Test were performed. To examine whether work sector affected their views on the free crossing

of Cypriots from the other community, Independent Samples T-Test were also executed. They indicated significant main effect for Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot government employees [$M=1.29$, $SD=.644$, $N=21$], [$t(87) = -2.96$, $p = .004$] and non-government employees [$M=1.87$, $SD=.827$, $N=68$], [$t(42.30) = -3.37$, $p = .002$] (Table 2).

On the contrary, no significant main effect was found on government employees' opinion about the opening of checkpoints [$M=1.52$, $SD=.814$, $N=21$], [$t(87) = -.869$, $p = .387$] and non-government employees [$M=1.69$, $SD=.8758$, $N=68$], [$t(31.491) = -.837$, $p = .409$].

Crossing to the other side

A significant main effect is also shown on the responses for crossing to the other side and to what extent (how many times) that occurred until the moment of their response. An Independent Samples T-Test for free crossing indicated a significant difference between Greek-Cypriots [$M=1.91$, $SD=.825$, $N=75$] and Turkish-Cypriots [$M=1.12$, $SD=.326$, $N=26$], [$t(97.275) = 4.752$, $p = .000$]. Similarly, their responses on the number of times they crossed the other side an Independent Samples T-Test was applied showing significant differences among Greek-Cypriots [$M=2.43$, $SD=1.141$, $N=75$] and Turkish-Cypriots [$M=4.04$, $SD=1.708$, $N=26$], [$t(33.064) = -4.477$, $p = .000$] (Table 3).

Offering services to the 'other'

To examine how social workers from both communities responded to clients from the other community an Independent Samples T-Test was performed. A significant main effect was found between Greek Cypriots, [$M=2.55$, $SD=1.96$, $N=75$] and Turkish Cypriots, [$M=1.50$, $SD=1.00$, $N=4$], [$t(99) = -4.366$, $p = .00$]. No significant main effect was found regarding their responses to clients from the other side [$t(4.35) = 1.91$, $p = 1.23$].

A significant main effect was also found in the question about the views of the participants [$t(99) = 2.40$, $p = .018$]. The mean for the Greek Cypriot social workers [$M=3.41$, $SD=1.84$, $N=75$] was significantly different than Turkish Cypriot social workers [$M=1.73$, $SD=1.002$, $N=26$].

Raising awareness / Educational Activities

A significant main effect was found on the issue on whether awareness seminars could promote solidarity and cooperation among social workers from the two communities between Greek Cypriots [$M=1.24$, $SD=4.30$, $N=75$] and Turkish Cypriots [$M=1.04$, $SD=.196$, $N=26$], [$t(91.70) = 3.21$, $p = .002$] (Table 4).

Similarly, a significant main effect was also found on whether educational activities could promote solidarity and cooperation among social workers from the two communities between

Greek Cypriots [$M=1.23$, $SD=.421$, $N=75$] and Turkish Cypriots [$M=1.08$, $SD=.272$, $N=26$], [$t_{68.090}=2.075$, $p=.042$] (*Table 4*).

Bicommunal recreational activities and workshops

A significant main effect was found in the responses for participation in recreational activities [$M=1.32$, $SD=.470$, $N=75$], [$M=1.08$, $SD=.272$, $N=26$], [$t_{76.030}=3.197$, $p=.002$] and bicommunal workshops [$M=1.24$, $SD=.430$, $N=75$], [$M=1.04$, $SD=.196$, $N=26$], [$t_{91.705}=3.209$, $p=.022$] (*Table 5*).

A significant main effect was found in the responses for participation in the enhancement of conflict resolution and anti-oppressive skills training [$M=1.43$, $SD=.498$, $N=75$], [$M=1.04$, $SD=.196$, $N=26$], [$t_{97.346}=5.612$, $p=.000$] for Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots respectively (*Table 5*).

Working together

No significant difference was found in the question about working together in the same professional team between Greek Cypriots [$M=1.67$, $SD=.949$, $N=75$] and Turkish Cypriots [$M=1.73$, $SD=1.151$, $N=26$], [$t_{70.86}=2.401$, $p=.019$] (*Table 6*).

A significant main effect was found in the responses for mix professional seminars about bi-communal approaches for Greek Cypriots [$M=1.25$, $SD=.438$, $N=75$] and Turkish Cypriots [$M=1.08$, $SD=.272$, $N=26$], [$t_{37.475}=-.255$, $p=.800$] (*Table 6*).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study attempted to understand the complexities Cypriot professional social workers deal with in the context of a geographic, ethnic and political separation and to create a platform for social workers to de-mystify the ‘other’ through bi-communal collaboration and contact.

In order to comprehend the above issues, the researchers focused on understanding the beliefs, experiences, attitudes and consequently responses of Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot professional social workers in relation to the division of the island, documenting barriers that prevent interaction, reconciliation and bi-communal social work collaboration and exploring tangible ways of collaboration among the two communities within the social work context.

Further to the above, what has been extracted from the survey is that the Cypriot society is divided in its views. Although negotiations are held for almost fifty years now, not much has been done by the leaderships of the communities of the island towards unification. The lack of any psycho-social preparation among the people of the island and especially among professional groups, like social workers, is obvious in the current survey. Moreover, the responses of professional social workers demonstrate that there is dearth of social work education on bicommunal issues (Ioakimidis, *et al.*, 2021). It should be noted that although for

almost half a century there are ongoing negotiations between the two communities, not much has been achieved towards the preparation of the people of the island. The current survey findings prove this contradiction. Social workers' responses indicate that there has been no preparation from above (e.g. political leaderships, professional organizations) towards the possibility that one day Cyprus might reunite again. Social workers' associations are responsible to educate their members regarding the possibility of the reunification of the island. Similarly, as a recent survey on social work students in Cyprus revealed, not a single social work programme has included a module that openly discusses the Cyprus conflict (Ioakimidis, et al., 2021). This is not uncommon among tertiary and higher education in Cyprus. As various authors have stated, the Cypriot social work educational model was constructed on a post-colonial ideology (Askeland & Payne, 2006; Neofytou, 2011; Triseliotis, 1977).

The survey indicates that social workers are positive in bicomunal training and participation in bicomunal activities that would bring them closer to the other community. As Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis (2019) suggested, Cypriots must learn from the past and learn from other experiences as learning is the key in the processes of struggles ahead. However, it is simultaneously essential that identities are not ethnicised and essentialized. Yet, so far they did not have the opportunity to do so. Survey results reveal the lack of education on bicomunal issues (Ioakimidis, et al., 2021) since professional social workers, received no previous training on these topics and they are ignorant in terms of knowledge on social work practice in the other community. It is, therefore, critical for social work organizations to promote the establishment of bicomunal initiatives towards training, education, trust build, common synergies and professional collaboration among Cypriot social workers under their common cultural and indigenous identity within the context of a reunified social work.

Future Endeavors: Working for peace

The findings of the survey focus very much on the past traumas and the powerful stereotypes underpinned by opposing nationalist narratives. Although a recent research study about co-habitation of the two communities indicated that younger Greek-Cypriots are reluctant to live together with Turkish-Cypriots (Psaltis et al., 2017) our survey indicates that social workers would welcome bicomunal professional activities, like training. Similar findings were also extracted in a recent bicomunal survey on the views and perspectives of Cypriot social work students (Ioakimidis, et al., 2021).

Social workers in both sides of the divide have not allowed for spaces that encouraged critical exploration of the conflict and its legacies. Consequently, the specific political, economic and

social conditions in the country need to be taken into consideration so as to possibly reshape and redesign the provision of social work.

A key aspect for social work that places peace and reconciliation process in the epicenter of its activity would be reclaiming the Common. The Common, in sociological terms should not only refer to the narrow spaces of the social work curricula. Instead, it needs to be seen holistically as an effort to reclaim public space, politics, human relationships and, most importantly, capture young people's imagination about a shared future (Ioakimidis, *et al.*, 2021). Cypriots must learn from the past and learn from other experiences as learning is the key in the processes of struggles ahead. However, it is simultaneously essential that identities are neither ethnicised nor essentialized (Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis, 2019).

Social workers are products of socio-political, economic and cultural worlds. The ideologies they hold are reflected in, and reinforced by, dominant social systems such as the family, education, culture, economics, politics and the media (Sewpaul, 2013). It is, therefore, important to develop awareness of cultural, political and capitalist ideological hegemony and appreciate how they can shift from being the "subjected being" to a free subject that is the "author of and responsible for its actions" (Althusser, 1971:182). With the development of critical consciousness, there is a greater chance that social workers would use their voice and skills to contribute to socio-economic, political and cultural change and development (Freire, 1973).

Nevertheless, Said (1977: xiv) suggested that there is a "profound difference between the will to understand the purpose of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate." Social work must be directed to the former. While doing no harm and respect for human dignity are held as inviolable, universal principles in social work, they are not without contestation. The interpretations of these, mediated by culture and context, often extend the boundaries of moral relativism to the point of violating human rights. While policy and legislation can provide safeguards, they are often trumped by cultural beliefs and practices (Sewpaul, 2016). Yet, social workers have the requisite skills in empathy, active listening, facilitation, mediation and interpersonal relationships to engage people in such ways that the harmful aspects of culture are challenged, while retaining those that are positive and that allow for inter-generational cultural continuity and human flourishing (Sewpaul, 2016).

The creation of this new, pro-peace momentum mentioned above is not seen by the authors as a wishful-thinking. Studies and observations on the matter confirm that there is now a positive impetus and suggest that the majority of Cypriots among both communities are in support of the reunification in Cyprus through a Federal settlement. Yet, there is still a minority in both

communities who seem to promote, directly or indirectly, the partition of Cyprus into two different states, even though this is unacceptable and out of any discussion by UN and EU, as well as individual countries. A new study among social workers in the two communities seems to be needed in order to further examine the views and perceptions of professionals based on the new political agenda that has just appeared on the island. It is our contention that despite the structural barriers a viable peace process is within reach and social work has a key role to play in its design and implementation. Our current research has allowed for more hope about the social work role in this much-needed peace and reconciliation process in Cyprus.

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Table 1. Main reasons for studying social work

			Job opportunities	Language of instruction	To help people	Commitment to social justice	Total
Ethnic Community	Greek Cypriot	Count	13	7	28	27	75
		% of Total	12.9%	6.9%	27.7%	26.7%	74.3%
	Turkish Cypriot	Count	10	3	11	2	26
		% of Total	9.9%	3.0%	10.9%	2.0%	25.7%
Total		Count	23	10	39	29	101
		% of Total	22.8%	9.9%	38.6%	28.7%	100.0%

Table 2. Opening of checkpoints

	Work sector	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
What is your view on the free crossing of Cypriots from the other Community	Government	21	1.29	.644	.140
	NGO	68	1.87	.827	.100
What is your opinion about the opening of check points?	Government	21	1.52	.814	.178
	NGO	68	1.69	.758	.092

Table 3. Crossing to the other side

Ethnic Community	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
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What is your view on the free crossing of Cypriots from the other Community	Greek Cypriot	75	1.91	.825	.095
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.12	.326	.064
How many times have you visited the other side crossing the checkpoint?	Greek Cypriot	75	2.43	1.141	.132
	Turkish Cypriot	26	4.04	1.708	.335

Table 4. Raising awareness / Educational Activities

	Ethnic Community	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
In your personal opinion, could raising awareness seminars promote solidarity and cooperation among social workers from the two communities?	Greek Cypriot	75	1.24	.430	.050
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.04	.196	.038
In your personal opinion, could educational activities promote solidarity and cooperation among social workers from the two communities?	Greek Cypriot	75	1.23	.421	.049
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.08	.272	.053

Table 5. Bicomunal Activities

	Ethnic Community	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
In your personal opinion, could recreational activities promote solidarity and cooperation among social workers from the two communities?	Greek Cypriot	75	1.32	.470	.054
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.08	.272	.053
In your personal opinion, could bi-communal workshops promote solidarity and cooperation among social workers from the two communities?	Greek Cypriot	75	1.24	.430	.050
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.04	.196	.038

In your personal opinion, could enhancement of conflict resolution and anti-oppressive skills foster solidarity and cooperation among social workers from the two communities?	Greek Cypriot	75	1.43	.498	.057
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.04	.196	.038

Table 6. Working together

	Ethnic Community	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
In a post solution Cyprus, would you mind working in the same team with Cypriot social workers from the other community?	Greek Cypriot	75	1.67	.949	.110
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.73	1.151	.226
Would you participate in mix professional seminars about Bi-communal approaches?	Greek Cypriot	75	1.25	.438	.051
	Turkish Cypriot	26	1.08	.272	.053