A Critique of ‘Liberal Peace’ and ‘Conflict Resolution’: A Critical Peace Alternative

Nicos Trimikliniotis
The two-faces of Janus; rethinking social work in the context of conflict

Educating for Peace in the Aftermath of Genocide: Lessons (not) learnt from Bosnia

Alien demons: Xenophobia and violence in South Africa

Palestinian refugees and ‘popular’ social work
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Cover photo: The separation of Nicosia started years ago, before 1974, when the two main communities, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots began to segregate. The politics, factors and forces of the separation will not be discussed for this photo, as publications like the one you are now reading will give you abundant information. This photo is taken not far from one of the earliest checkpoints raised at Makrydromos / Ledra / Lokmaci street - various names have been used from time to time depending on the context. Slowly but surely the checkpoint became more and more impassable, until 1974 when it became a roadblock. The inhabitants, not able to stand the sheer ugliness of the roadblock (pictured), took many pots and made a small “garden” of pleasant smelling basil bushes. After some time, the army wanted to put “fresh” sandbags, so they took everything down - all the lovely plants were just gone. People reacted and soon after a white plastic cover was placed there to make it less ugly. Then the inhabitants placed a few pots there. As Old Nicosia Revealed (www.facebook.com/old.nicosia.revealed) we try to document such aspects of our old town with the use of photography. You are welcome to explore.

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This first edition for 2015 was compiled by our guest editor Dr Vasilios Ioakimidis whose passion to explore the intricacies associated with conflict and social work's role has produced this excellent edition on social work and conflict. A huge thank you to him and his colleagues for what, I think, is an excellent coverage of this complex world phenomenon. Once again we have articles from across the globe where issues resonate in their similarities as well as their diversity.

International social work is highlighted here as local and global practices are explored in areas where conflict dominates much of the social, political and cultural relations. Social work can't ignore the global forces that dictate and perpetuate violence, displacement, and misery in their quest for power and profit and the human capital expended in their search for more wealth creation. Social work's activities for a more humane response is evident in these articles but we are still left with the question of how to address the broader political, economic interests that lie at the root of much of our present conflicts. The culture of silence cannot be tolerated by a profession concerned as it is with distributive social justice, human rights and free and democratic citizenry. These articles are a wakeup call for international action.

We are planning to keep the format of having guest editors for 2015. I will take the lead for the next edition (June/July) on social work without borders and this will be followed by edition on international education and last one for this year will address issues around international education. I hope along with the social dialogue team that this free magazine continues to resource practitioners, academics and students with current debates crucial to our professional mission of creating a more humane world.

Again a big thank you to Graeme Bland for the design and additional artwork in this edition.
As I am writing these lines, the news of yet another tragedy in the Mediterranean sea reaches headlines. 1,500 migrants from Africa and the Middle East drown in less than six days. A shocking death toll that can only be compared to some of the most horrible and shameful chapters of European history. While the European authorities wash their hands of their responsibilities and attempt to reduce this tragedy to a question of “border security”, the broader geopolitical, social and cultural dimensions of the unfolding humanitarian disaster haunt European societies.

The transformation of the Mediterranean a sea into a mass grave, encapsulates the complexity of conflict and its crucial interplay with state violence, imperialist calculations and the rise of racist ideologies. It is exactly such diverse and holistic definitions of “conflict” that social work needs to grasp in its effort to contribute towards the eradication of the causes and consequences of conflict. Inability or unwillingness to appreciate the political complexity of conflict and its many different forms would reduce social work to a technical activity based on irrelevant -at best- toolkits.

The authors of this special issue have tried to argue that conflict is much more than the absence of peace. Its many forms can vary from open wars to “low intensity” state violence and aggressive austerity. In this sense, the current special issue poses an important question: “How can social work move beyond technical approaches and propose transitions to peace based on social justice?” Authors who participated in this issue have dealt with this question from different angles and perspectives. All of them, however, agree on a fundamental issue; conflict has its roots on historical injustices and social work can play an important role in the process of uncovering the truth as a first step toward dealing with the consequences of existing conflicts and preventing future ones.

I would like to thank the colleagues who participated in this issue and apologize to them for the extremely tight deadlines. Also, I would like to direct my special thanks to all colleagues of the IASSW Board of Directors who backed the idea of a special issue on such a politically contentious theme. It was a brave decision which suggests that social work organisations have moved away from the artificially constructed stance of political neutrality that characterized much of social works history. The photographers who kindly and generously provided us with the powerful images that enrich the articles contributed enormously to our effort (see details in the articles). Last but not least I would like to thank Carolyn Noble. Without her hard work and assistance this special issue wouldn't have made it to your screens.
From the President’s Desk
Professor Vimla V Nadkarni // March 2015

The World Social Work Day was successfully celebrated on March 17, 2015 in Geneva at the Kofi Annan Memorial Hall, UNAIDS. This was the first joint collaborative event after the signing of the MoU between IASSW and UNAIDS. IFSW was also a partner in this event.

The outcome of the conference on that day, which was attended by executive members of IFSW, ENSACT, EASSW as well as Geneva based schools and associations of social work and social services, was the acceptance of a “Common Statement on Ending AIDS, Promoting Dignity and Respect for All”. This Common Statement provides guidelines for future activities between the international social work organisations and UNAIDS.

A few excerpts from this document are presented here starting with point 3:

3. Call for:

By engaging schools of social work, academia and professional social work organisations in the global effort “Getting to Zero” to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 we join UNAIDS and partners in calling for:

- Intensifying efforts on the development of an HIV cure and vaccine to protect and restore dignity for all including those people who are poor, excluded and marginalised and for whom getting
infected with HIV and dying from AIDS related deaths maybe inevitable

- Developing a prominent goal in the post 2015 agenda for ending the AIDS epidemic, TB and malaria and other diseases of poverty and inequality by 2030 with requisite institutional and financial backing

- Increasing the prominence of social protection programs and policy in the new UNAIDS strategy to maximise synergies and enhance the effectiveness of HIV prevention and treatment programs

- Non-discrimination for all including people living with and most affected by HIV through shaping public and civil society policy for effective social protection, including attention on orphans and vulnerable children, adolescents, the decriminalisation of marginalised populations such as MSM, sex workers, and people who use drugs, and migrants;

- Increasing training, motivation and deployment of social workers and to areas with the greatest needs including peri-urban areas and rural areas and request recognition, remuneration and incentive plans for those cadres of the social service workforce who are not recognised by a country's formal health care systems.

Intensify and expand partnership

We commit to:

- Encouraging co-operation at regional and country levels through joint actions between UNAIDS local representatives and IASSW and IFSW with a worldwide net of social work organisations of professionals, educators and scientists,

- Educate, orient, sensitize and engage the world wide network of social workers in the different streams of work on ending the AIDS epidemic and restoring dignity for all

- To continue applying the principles of Social Work in the AIDS response by protecting and promoting the rights and dignity for everyone in accessing HIV prevention, treatment, care and support and other social services in areas where social workers engage in this area of practice.

Geneva, March 2015
The two-faces of Janus: Rethinking social work in the context of conflict

Vasilios Ioakimidis // Director of the MA 'International Social Work and Community Development' at Durham University, UK // Secretary of the European Association of Schools of Social Work.

Social Work and Conflict: a paradoxical relationship

According to IFSW (cited in SWAN-Gre 2011), between 1988 and 2004 more than 40 social workers were detained, kidnapped, tortured or murdered in regions affected by conflict. A close examination of these cases reveals two main issues: a) the concept of conflict is much wider and complex than simply a state of “armed conflict”. Very often conflict goes beyond the ‘radar’ of the Geneva conventions as it can include state violence, low intensity confrontations, ethnic/racial segregation etc. b) Historically, a significant number social workers have been at the forefront of fighting for social justice in their communities, even under the extreme circumstances of political and armed conflicts.

This is a very proud tradition that our profession needs to cherish. Studying and reflecting on this knowledge is of particular importance nowadays, at a time when conflicts engulf an increasing number of global regions and the patterns of violence become increasingly irregular and unpredictable. It is exactly these circumstances that require a social work profession that is alert, knowledgeable, able to make sense of the political/structural causes of conflict and most importantly prepared to side with the oppressed and vulnerable.

Paulo Freire, the prominent Brazilian pedagogue, while referring to the political dilemmas facing the social work profession highlighted these responsibilities:

“The social worker, as much as the educator, is not a neutral agent, either in practice or in action. One of the inclinations that we sometimes have – and this is an offense, an illegality, that we imbibe in our technological society – is to think that the social worker is a very specialized person, a technician, who works in a compartmentalized technical area, and who has a sort of protection within this area, a sort of aggregate of rights, as a particular social group, to stand apart from the political battles of society. For me, this is impossible. It is an error. (Freire, 1990: 5)”.
However, as I discuss in this editorial and despite the proud tradition of social workers who defended social justice under extraordinary circumstances, our profession’s relation to war and conflict has been an uneasy one. The question of “social work in the context of conflict” forms an interesting historical paradox. Although, social work itself has been the direct product of social tensions and political conflicts, the profession has been relatively hesitant in recognizing the dialectic relationship between those two concepts. A quick search on academic databases and the archives of international social work organisations, would easily convince any reader, that academic output and scholar engagement with the topic of conflict is rather anemic and comparatively superficial.

Reluctance to engage with the issue of sociopolitical and armed conflict could be seen as part of a diachronic ambivalence of social work towards politically contentious issues. For decades, the suppression of the ‘political’ offered a comfort zone that was deemed necessary in the efforts of social work to defend professional status and construct its identity. Thankfully, in recent years the perpetual narrative that treats our profession as an activity inherently benevolent, neutral and devoid of controversies, has been critically interrogated by the man international social work organisations, IFSW and IASSW. The decision of IASSW and dedicate the present issue of Social Dialogue, the official magazine of the organisation, to the concept of conflict is a testament to such –welcome-change.

A (very) brief history of Social Work in the Context of Conflict

The first component of the ‘conflict’ paradox lies on the fact that the origins of social work should be traced in the context of the rising sociopolitical tensions and conflicts, which defined much of the 19th century. At the time, in Europe, birthplace of social work, increasing poverty and vast social inequalities led to an escalation of social conflicts and the subsequent threat of a social revolution. This tension informed a dual state response which was based, on the one hand, on institutionalized and often violent suppression of the working classes and on the other hand, on the development of ‘scientific charity’-the moralistic and rigid precursor to modern social work. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the roots of social work are directly linked to 19th century class divisions and social conflicts that generated state policies based on the doctrine of “care and control”. In this sense, the origins of social work seem to be linked with a historic “carrot and stick” state approach to managing the poor.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the dominant Anglo-centric social work model was primarily exported to the colonies of the British empire, thus extending its paternalistic function towards marginalized indigenous populations. In this initial and rather artificial wave of “internationalization”, the profession maintained its conflict-bound character through its close association with the colonial apparatus. It required an extra 50 years until the profession would experience the most significant and rapid expansion in its history- again not devoid of controversy.

Ironically, such expansion was once again based on a conflict, the intensity, of which was unparalleled to anything humanity had hitherto witnessed. Social Work during the Second World War, did not retain a unified response. Instead it assumed extraordinarily contrasting ideological roles and functions. Although, a long term professional taboo, it is not a secret that during the 1930s and early 1940s the majority of social work institutions and individual practitioners in Germany, Italy and Spain at the time sided with the Nazi and Fascist regimes (See for example Lorenz, 1993). These social workers not only supported the oppressive Nazi principles at an ideological level, but they actively attempted to incorporate the pseudo-science of racial hierarchies in their practice.

Nevertheless, at the same time a glorious and unsung history of anti-fascist resistance emerged and reshaped the social work profession. Its legacy deserves much more attention and celebration than it has received from mainstream historiography. In the eve and during the Second World War, numerous social workers courageously paid their dues in the global fight against Fascism and Nazism. 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 sided with the republican forces in their struggles against Franco both through the multiple democratic social projects
in Spain and also through direct engagement with the armed conflict as International Brigadiers.

The inspiring story of pioneer African American social worker Thyra Edwards from Chicago is suggestive. Thyra a dedicated socialist and antiracist, who strongly believed at the universal nature of the struggle against all oppressions, left the US in 1936 and travelled to Barcelona in order to support Republican forces and work at the Rosa Luxembourg children colony. She also became the primary link between the Afro American communities in the US and the Abraham Lincoln Brigades fighting in Spain assisting the recruitment of black Americans. She died shortly after the war while trying to set up care projects for Jewish children in Rome. At the same time, 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 offers another unique and powerful example of professional practices to the complex and diverse needs of the recipient societies, goes beyond the scope of this short editorial.

The cold war was an irregular ideological war that was fought, inter alia, through regional or country-specific proxy conflicts. In this context, several countries experienced violent suppression of civil liberties and the rise of military dictatorships (for example Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Greece, Portugal). Social work, once again, found itself at the center of these ideological conflicts. Despite the significant resistance of diverse groups of social workers that eventually formed the vital reconceptualization movement in Latin America, state social work institutions by and large collaborated with dictatorial regimes and in return they enjoyed ‘professional recognition’ within the state apparatus. Reflecting on some of the most shocking examples of such collaboration, one could refer to the scandal of illegal adoptions in Chile where children from left wing families were kidnapped and given to ‘nationally minded citizens’ for adoption, the shared intelligence between social workers and the police in Argentina that led to the disappearances and torture of several activists (Alayon, 2010), the uninterrupted involvement of social workers in the segregated and racist social services in South Africa (Smith, 2008) and the ‘jobs for obedience’ approach of Greek social workers during the military junta (Ioakimidis, 2011). In a more recent and very important development for international social work, Latin American professional associations started exploring the consequences of social workers’ collaboration with oppressive regimes and helped document the “Nunca Mas” (never again) agenda that forms an important legacy for our profession.

Modern “Irregular wars” and the ethical implications for social work
The end of the cold war did not bring about an end to global conflicts, despite the complacency of many pundits who in the early 1990’s had predicted a prolonged period of stability and prosperity. The disintegration of former socialist states helped the re-emergence of suppressed nationalisms in Eastern Europe and Asia. Social workers in these regions could not find the answers to the immediate political challenges they witnessed and in a rather mechanistic way sided with the emerging state apparatuses, which turned overnight from socialist to nationalist. The example of former Yugoslavia, where social services adapted themselves to the rhetoric of nationalism and quickly developed a quasi-militaristic structure is indicative of the limitations of the profession in transitional contexts (see article on Bosnia in this issue). The transition to capitalism meant that where nationalist wars weren’t fought, armed conflicts were replaced by low intensity internal tensions in the form of turbo-capitalism and violent disintegration of welfare states.

The extraordinary neoliberal influence of post-cold war conflicts marks the rise of a new era of globalized commercialization of war and peace. On the one hand an aggressive ‘war industry’ has been created through the redefinition of the role of NATO and the introduction of the absurd notion of “militarized humanitarianism”. This notions heavily relies on the gradual privatization of armies and outsourcing of national defence and international military interventions (see for example the case of Black Waters in Iraq and G4S in Israel). Therefore in the 21st century ‘war’ has become a multi-billion dollars industry which brings together arms’ manufacturers, private armies, international security think-tanks and hawkish lobbies attached to national governments.

Ironically, the domination of neoliberalism has also created a “peace industry”, an odd state of affairs representing anything but true meaning of the first component of the phrase. The actual objective of this industry is not to promote global peace and justice but rather to reap the financial benefits of post conflict reconstruction and societies in transition. The ‘peace industry’ primarily consists of international NGO’s that develop expertise and toolkits ready to be imported to countries affected by conflict. As contributors to the present issue explain in their articles, the lucrative “peace industry” which often employs social workers and social work academics, rarely cares about the structural reasons behind wars and primarily focuses on short term fixes and target-driven services. Perhaps the most damaging service this incongruous industry provides is its determination to facilitate the transition of war-torn societies to post-conflict structures that obey the neoliberal orthodoxy. Under the pretext of ‘liberal peace’ this process condemns the affected countries to a perpetual status of ‘failed states’ or ‘debt-colonies’.

The paradoxical nature of social work in the context of conflict has not been resolved in the 21st century but instead it has taken the form of a more subtle and complicated affair. As the globe becomes engulfed in the obscurity and viciousness of the ‘war on Terror’, social workers have to deal with the unexpected consequences of a rapidly changing landscape. The illegal war and occupation of Iraq can be seen as a watershed moment in the transformation of global conflicts and their impact on the ‘helping professions’. In 2003 and despite the extraordinary opposition within the UK and the US, the ‘coalition of the willing’ unleashed an unprecedented in scope and illegal according to international law attack on Iraq, which we now know that based on false pretenses. Within the course of ten years a whole country was wrecked, about 4 million people were displaced, hundreds of thousands were killed, Islamic fundamentalism was re-born and the Geneva Convention was thrown into the dust-bin (GPF, 2010).

The most powerful and disturbing symbolism in the transition to this new era of irregular conflicts and ‘flexible’ interpretation of human rights, has been the creation of the US detention centre in Guantanamo. This base quickly became the synonym of modern dark-ages; a place where individuals could be summarily transferred, without trial, without access to legal support and suffer detention under inhuman conditions. The recent revelation of systematic torture of detainees, under the ludicrous technical description ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ brought the ethics of ‘helping professions’ into question, for it was a group of psychologists who were paid by the CIA more than 80 million dollars in order to use their scientific expertise for the development of ‘effective’ torture techniques (The Telegraph, 9 December 2014). In an equally disturbing development, the presence of individual social work practitioners under the disguise of caring for juvenile detainees or supporting the needs of the military (military social work) in Guantanamo has also been documented (Michaels, 2005). It is important, however, to mention that the US National Association of Social Workers not only has condemned the operation of Guantanamo but it has also actively...
campaigned for its closure (NASW, 2004). Nevertheless, the issue of social workers’ involvement in state institutions linked to state violence and violation of human rights (ie military social work) remains largely unanswered by international social work organisations.

Italian scholar Giorgio Agamben (2005) provided us with an important conceptualization of the ethical irregularities embedded in the war on terror when he referred to the rise of a “state of exception”; a suspension of the juridical order which is exploited by the state in order to curb liberties and justify oppressive measures in the name of a nominal or actual threat to national security and order. It is exactly this state of “legalized lawlessness” that we have been witnessing in many countries that pledge to fight the so called enemy within. Once again, social work, a profession tightly linked to the state, has been invited to play an ambiguous role. More recently, social workers have been appointed in detention centers for asylum seekers, institutions of ambiguous legality that have been created in many European countries in opposition to international conventions for the rights of refugees. Also, social and community workers in the United Kingdom and France have been recruited in order to ‘reach out’ to Muslim communities and identify potential cases of extremism and radicalization of young people (see ‘Prevent Strategy’). Within the context of rising Islamophobia and the steady erosion of civil liberties the proposed collaboration of social workers with intelligence services and law enforcement institutions requires careful interrogation for it has the potential to oppress, victimize and stigmatize entire communities. The logic and scope of the Prevent Agenda suggests that social workers involved in such projects would probably be expected to police and control vulnerable communities instead of working with them in order promote social justice and equality. Certainly, the social work answer to the disproportional levels of inequality, poverty and marginalization of minority communities cannot be further policing and manipulation.

Towards the creation of a ‘transitional social work’, unconditionally committed to social justice.

In this brief editorial we attempted to highlight the crucial interlinks between social work and the realities of conflict. We explained that although social work has been shaped by various and diverse historical conflicts, the implications of such intersection have only been examined superficially. The complexity of the global political landscape, the rapid rise in the number of conflicts and the steady erosion of human rights are aspects that require more than a superficial and idle social work response. In fact, such idleness could be detrimental to the development of the profession, reducing it to either an activity irrelevant to affected societies or –at worse- to an institution oppressive in its nature and operation.

Therefore, in this special issue we propose that social work is in urgent need of a paradigm shift regarding the way it understands and responds to political and military conflicts. The entrenched contradictions and rapid social transitions that occur in the context of conflict need to be at the center of such approach, forming a “transitional social work” that is based on the following characteristics:

a) **Critical Understanding of the social and political tensions that escalate to conflicts.**

Contrary to mainstream “peace studies” that treat conflicts as the illogical outcome of competing and immature “tribes”, on-the-field realities are much more complex and reliant on broader socio-political factors. For example, referring to countries that have long suffered from the grip of colonial or postcolonial aggression, as “failed states”, clearly obscures historical facts and hides the responsibility of the colonial and imperialist countries/ organisations. As a result, pseudo-neutral narratives only produce distorted and manipulative approaches to reconciliation. By definition, most conflicts are deeply rooted in historical injustices such as chronic inequalities, unequal distribution of land, illegal occupation etc. Therefore, a social justice based “transitional social work” needs to fully appreciate the structural causes of conflicts and work towards exposing and resolving these injustices.

b) **Appreciate the role of the state in dealing with conflicts.**

Social work is a profession directly related and dependent to state services and policies. The state is never a neutral political agent and its operation reflects the major divisions that characterize society as a whole. In times of conflict the risk of
systemic oppression and state violence increases exponentially. As we explained above, one of the first consequences of conflict is the militarization of social services, which tend to become yet another state tool for segregation and discrimination. Transitional social work cannot afford to surrender its values and principles to a condition of “legalized lawlessness”. Internationalism and the formation of social alliances can be crucial in dealing with ethical dilemmas emerging through the logic of the “state of exception”.

c) Avoid “top-down toolkits” and listen to the collective expertise of the affected societies. The “peace industry” involved in post-conflict transitions is often quick to produce and impose technical toolkits. Often, these toolkits bear no relevance to the real needs of communities on the ground and have been designed by organizations and institutions (such as the World Bank and IMF) committed to neo-liberal orthodoxy. Social Services that uncritically adopt neoliberal toolkits, indirectly facilitate the creation of non-viable and donor-dependent societies that suppress the structural causes of war and nurture cronyism and corruption. The vast privatization projects in post conflict Bosnia and Iraq as well as the hard-core neoliberalism of Latin American dictatorships are representative examples of the scope of the neoliberal view on “post conflict reconstruction”. Transitional social work should listen to people affected by war and learn from the extraordinary grassroots expertise communities develop in times of extremis. This expertise is far more superior, effective and relevant.

d) Peace is much more than the absence of war. Democratic accountability, collective reparations and the uncompromising quest for truth are crucial aspects of healing and reconciliation. Social work can become the vehicle for reclaiming the social character of the reconciliation process, in opposition to narrow legalistic discourses focusing on punishment and dominant business approaches prioritizing “economic reconstruction”. It is important to remember that the end of a war could only mean continuation of conflict through different means, if endemic social and political inequalities are not addressed. Therefore the role of social work in this context should be to amplify the voices of the affected communities and advocate for sustainable and viable peace, based on social justice, social equality and the empowerment of peoples.

e) Above all, unconditionally oppose all unjust wars and support local and international anti-war movements. Social workers who work with refugees, displaced communities and victims of torture know all too well how catastrophic and irreparably damaging armed conflicts are. The simplest and most powerful solution to deal with the suffering caused by war is the actual prevention of wars. Anti-war movements have been instrumental in exposing imperialist calculations behind conflicts and prevent military interventions based on false pretenses. Social workers’ frontline knowledge and expertise can be crucial in documenting the horrors of war and inspiring anti-war movements.

We hope that the publication of the present special issue will open up a much needed debate within the profession and it will contribute towards the exploration of new approaches that can make a difference in the lives of communities and individuals affected by conflict. The current issue includes a wide range of articles, appreciating the complexity and diversity of conflicts. It focuses on case studies from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Australia although the authors’ analysis go beyond the constrains of a narrow definition of armed conflict. The history of our profession and the struggles of the people we work with, demand that we remain not silent when communities are crushed by political oppression and violent conflict. Let’s be brave, speak up and defend the values of our profession, even in the most dangerous of circumstances. Even if this process demands that we engage with a challenging and at times painful soul-searching.

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Michaels, W (2005) “No Greater Threat; America After September 11 and the rise of national security state” Algora Publishing
(Ethno) Political Conflict over Bosnia: brief genesis and societal consequences

In the nineties, western public was at initially disturbed by horrifying war images coming from former Yugoslavia, and eventually shocked by the immense waves of refugees reaching their own borders. Apparently, no one seemed to understand how a once prosperous and most open communist country ended up in such mass scale violence. To this day there has been no comprehensive model of interpretation regarding these processes. However, the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina might be explained as a part of wider transitional processes that emerged at the begin of 90ties, as the fall of communism and unfolding processes of democratization rendered visible (ethno)political ideologies of succeeding republics unwilling to preserve a common state. Namely, in the 1990s Yugoslav state was in a very vulnerable position as it faced with the problems of:

Political integration: absence of legitimacy on the part of communist elites due to non efficacy of the central state, Economic integration: inability of the system to produce wealth, prosperity and sufficient economic opportunities, and Cultural integration: inability of the state to inspire people toward a shared sense of Yugoslav national identity in the context of growing cultural divisions between and within ethnic communities.

Ethno-nationalist narratives reappeared, after five decades of suppression, in the form of political projects directed towards creation of homogenous nation-states in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. Despite decades of intensive efforts in the spirit of socialist ideals of “brotherhood and unity”, equality and social justice, national discourse promoted by the two key political players- Serbian leader Milošević and his counterpart on the Croats side Tuđman, was outright opposite to the modern understanding of nation as “imagined” political community (Anderson, 1998). Moreover, their political imagination sought to reduce national identity to narrow ethnic identity based on a cultural understanding of ethnicity as a natural, primordial, biological and, predominantly religious membership. So, in the context of dissolution of a common state the process of state building in respective republics has been accompanied by the parallel process of nation-building on a anarchonous matrix of ethnic homogeneity and puritanism. These two concepts were prone to inevitably clash in the most brutal way in Bosnia-Herzegovina – a country which by its very nature could not have been established as a mono-national state without mass scale violence. So, ultimate unwillingness to sustain the country and its multiethnic society evolved in its political destabilization, territorial division and destruction. A common expression during the war was that ‘the front line cut through one’s marriage bad’.

Margaret Sommers eloquently pointed at how the biologization of national identity permeated a matrix of genocide by noticing that “tragic evidence of how ethnic and national identity is biologized comes from the case of Sarajevo in the early 1990s, one of Europe’s most cosmopolitan cities before the Bosnian war...the Bosnian Serbs responded to the cries of hate and violence issues from their ‘blood’ relatives of Serbia against their fallow non-Serbian citizens of Sarajevo...the vertically defined naturalized identities of nation and ethnicity provoked to be the foundational catalyst that incited the Bosnian Serbs to genocidal action”(2008, 129). In addition to ethnical biologization, the ontology of genocide was built on the process of “othering”, a well researched theme in social work literature (Dominelli, 2002), which per definition includes policies and practices of dehumanization, stigmatization, exclusion, incrimination and finally extermination. The “other”, the proclaimed enemy was in Bosnian case a population of Bosniak origin who has been constructed as different based predominantly
on their religion, and their destruction being seen as a pre-requisite for nation/state-building. The totality of the destruction and intensity of suffering inflicted upon Bosnian society— even though not reducible to sole numbers—might partially be illustrated by referring to following estimations (Papić et al. 2007:14): between 100,000 and 250,000 inhabitants of Bosnia were killed, 31,500 forcibly disappeared and renamed as “missing persons”, 1.2 million internally displaced and 1 million refugees, between 25,000 and 50,000 raped women, in conjunction with destruction of social ties, tolerance and co-existence, breakdown of families and local communities as well as collapse of social values and normal life. Inspired by Bauman’s seminal work “Sociology after Holocaust”, American sociologist Doubt (2003) in his book “Sociology after Bosnia” uses a metaphor of “sociocid” in order to capture peculiarities of Bosnian experience of destruction of former functional multiethnic and multi-religious society. The Bosnian citizens learned with sadness and disappointment that what we witnessed was not only a series of practices of the extermination of “others”, but also the self-hurting hypocrisy of the “international community”. International organizations and governments, although well aware of the horrors of the Nazi holocaust, which was fuelled by their inaction, once again faced a repetition of history in Bosnia despite the “never again” promise. Eventually, after the market place massacre in Sarajevo and the Srebrenica, the international community finally reacted. The war was formally ended by the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, under auspices of the Clinton administration, but instead of restoring democracy, civil state and respect for human rights, it inaugurated a sectarian, ethnically based political system (ethnocracy) allowing the revival of principle of “founding violence” (Zizek, 2008) as legitimate political mean.

Divided profession for a divided society

In order to outline how did social work adapted to a new, oppressive ethno-political narrative, it is necessary to reflect briefly upon its socialist heritage. Namely, social work in Bosnia— as in other Yugoslav republics— was a creation of communist elites. Social relations under socialism were based on the ideological solidarity and partnership between working class and communist elites which gained political legitimacy from granting security of long-term employment and social security to the workers. Nevertheless, social reality showed that even a socialist society is not immune to social problems. Specific functions in achieving social integration— after the initial uncertainty and doubts about its civic history (Zaviršek, 2009) were allocated to social work— an emerging profession that occupied the specific space of interaction between the individual and his/her social environment. The main function of social work was to assist the process of ‘humanization and socialization of social relations’. Therefore, a professional identity was build around the notions
of social work as a helping profession oriented towards prevention of social problems and satisfaction of human needs. However, as Zaviršek (2009) has rightly asserted, social work practice was not radical in the sense of focusing on criticizing and changing structural problems and contradictions of socialist society, but it remained squeezed in-between its controlling and helping component throughout socialist period.

Territorial disintegration of the country, splitting the country along ethnic lines led to a total breakdown of all pre-existing social structures, including the social welfare system. Policies and practices of exclusion created a reductionist political context in which society was only capable of extending a form solidarity which abruptly ends at the borders of ethnic affiliation. A direct consequence of the state collapse was a complete localization and ethnicization of social welfare. The adoption of a new Law on Social Protection in Serb-held areas in 1993 was the final sign that universal and collective solidarity of the socialist period had been replaced by one defined by ethnicity.

What happens with the social work profession and its emancipatory and humanistic goals within such a political context? Unfortunately, social work in Bosnia proved vulnerable to the politics of ethno-nationalism: an ethnic restructuring also happened within our profession. In the first months of the siege of Sarajevo in the spring 1992, 70% of social work employees of Serbian descent left their professional posts and the besieged city (Poturkovic, 2008); - in areas controlled by Karadžić and Mladics' army, politics and practices of genocide and mass expulsion of non-Serb population led to obvious mono-ethnic profiling of employees within social welfare agencies; - in the areas under the control of Croatian (para) military forces, the practice of parallel social welfare institutions was inaugurated (for example, in Travnik - city in central Bosnia - parallel to center for social work established already in 1974., a new institution has been established during the war to suit the needs of 'Croat' population). The merger of these two institutions has been completed in 2001. An identical process took place in the ethnically divided city of Mostar, where even today two separate institutions exist, one providing services to 'Bosniaks' and another to service users of 'Croatian' descent (Bašić, 2013.).

(Photo Vasilios Ioakimidis)

The tendencies of ethnization were and still are a taboo issue in our academic and professional debates. The social work community in Bosnia still cherishes the notion of a false nobility of the profession, built on the established view that the social work profession has seemingly proved its capacity to act on behalf of vulnerable individuals and groups under conditions of war. Such an uncritical understanding is found also within our international colleagues who, in the aftermath of war, initiated various valuable support projects. For example, the distinguished social work scholar Hessele seemed impressed by what he observed in Bosnia in 1997". They (social workers) dared to improve where social work must be practiced in extremely difficult conditions; - Appreciate the importance of social welfare centers in civil society, both in war and in peace; - Admire the self-respect and professionalism, thanks to which social workers in Bosnia created a general responsibility for the reconstruction of civil society after the war and especially responsibility for care for individuals and groups who were hardest hit by the war" (Hessele, according to Miković, 2005: 100). However, such an uncritically affirmative perspective appears to be one-sided, as it ignores the fact that social workers as professionals, whose mandate deals directly with the person in environment, remained silent about policies and practices of utmost negation of humanity. For now, we can only speculate about the reasons behind such an (un)professional attitude: maybe the silence emerged out of a need to prevent political abuse of the profession; maybe because of false understanding that social work profession is a-political. For example Lorenz, identifies similar attitudes among social workers in Germany during the Nazi regime. He points out that voluntary willingness of German social workers to inevitably follow instructions of Nazi regime and not a professional code of ethics was based on the incorrect assumption that "professional must be distanced from the political" (Lorenz, cited in Ramon et al. 2006: 436) and one would assume on an existential fear and lack of moral courage among female social workers confronted with male politics of extreme violence.

Whatever the reasons, the culture of silence and denial still permeates our social reality. Actually, due to the new ethnic restructuring of the country, social work remained divided along ethnic lines whereas many of its social welfare functions were assumed by large international and non-governmental organizations involved in the peace-building process. Instead of becoming active protagonist in social change, based on their professional knowledge and skills in working with vulnerable individual, groups and communities, social workers withdraw in the bureaucratic and administrative practice model.

Involvement of international humanitarian players prevented partially the process of self-reflection and re-affirmation. Firstly, being pushed to the societal margins, social workers escaped direct confrontation with their professional standards. Second, the approach to peace-building was much more state-building orientated than socially grounded. Peace-building activities were structured around three key areas: free elections, institution building, and development of civil society (Fisher, 2006). Regrettably, the "social” aspects/dimensions of peace-building as a “comprehensive term that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of stages and approaches needed to transform conflict towards sustainable, peaceful relation and outcomes” (Ledarach, 1997:20) were not considered as important.
By doing so, the capacity of local level social work centers to assume a leading role in the development of holistic approaches to peace-building through a combination of psychological services, social and health care program, employment support programs have been diminished.

**Lessons not learnt and prospects for the future**

So, are there any lessons we can learn from the Bosnian experience?

There is nothing new or imaginative in the statement that social work is contextual. It is an established way of thinking about social work as being shaped by political, economic, historical, social and cultural factors. Moreover, the Bosnian case showed that the social work profession was flexible enough to accommodate the needs of ethno-nationalism whose most profound feature was the erosion of social solidarity. Incapable of developing an alternative vision of social solidarity, social workers in Bosnia silently and without any resistance accepted to serve a double-master: on the one hand, the norms and values of the profession and, on the other hand, the logic of aggressive ethno-nationalism. However, taking such a position only seemingly relieved the tension inscribed. Being silent towards political agendas and social practices that conflict with fundamental ethical principles of the profession, such as respect for human dignity, human rights, social justice and equality, resulted in a profession vulnerable to becoming an instrument of power and control that contributes to the oppression/elimination of the undesirable “other” during the conflict, and their post-conflict exclusion. Therefore, for the sake of a peaceful co-existence in future, and through the teachings of Heidegger (1988) we learned that existence is always an existence with the “other”. Social work educators, practitioners and students in Bosnia should in an open manner reflect upon the implications of their past practices and professional conduct, as well as be courageous enough to address diverse ethical conflicts through social work education. In my point of view social work education directed towards social change in the post-conflict environment should be an education for peace (and human rights). The model of education for peace should provide a framework for socializing future professionals with complex challenges posed by ethno-political conflict(s) and professional tasks which social workers are obliged to perform in different stages of the conflict (including, but not limited to):

- **Pre conflict phase:** strengthening of personal and institutional responsibility for resistance to inhuman and degrading treatment of members of communities, sensibility and greater awareness of diverse psychosocial mechanisms of dehumanization, scapegoating, respect for other and otherness;
- **b) Phase of conflict:** strengthening of personal and institutional responsibility within social work agencies in ensuring respect for human rights and human dignity, adhering to principles of international humanitarian law (Geneva conventions), development of a culture of solidarity which turns bystanders into resistance activists;
- **Post conflict phase:** multifaceted and socially grounded peace-building process, trauma, recognition and reconciliation work, critical thinking and reflection on socio-political arrangements and framework for social work practice.

As an education for peace, social work educational programs should help transform inherited and fabricated worldviews based on prejudices against the “other”. But, in order to have a potential to not let the past happen in the future, this process of self-examination within social work should not serve for self-reflexive and therapeutic purposes, but primarily it should have a strong pedagogical character. Its ultimate aim should be to let future generations learn from history, and facilitate the internalization of human rights standards which would allow future generations to live in society that respects and protects human rights.

Finally, such an educational approach would have at its core the creation of a society that should never let down the very basic foundation of our common humanity.

**Literature**


Fanon’s warning speaks of how the oppressed under colonial rule, become the oppressors in post-colonial states. Colonialism and the subsequent most inhumane and atrocious statecraft of apartheid in South Africa relegated African black people to the position of strangers – alien demons and temporary sojourners in their own land. Within legislative frameworks and oppressive state machinery, black people were allowed into the cities only insofar as they served their white masters in the mines, built infrastructure and worked in their homes and gardens. Bio-political and spatial engineering, and inequality in all their facets were entrenched in policy and legislation, leaving black people with poor education and housing, the most menial jobs, split families as men came to the cities to work leaving their wives and children behind in rural areas and in over-crowded ghettorised townships - all too often with no water, sanitation and electricity. In 1921, a Transvaal Province Commission, asserted that: “the Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man’s creation, when he is willing to enter to minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefore when he ceases to minister.”

Citizen resistance and state counter-resistance, with even greater use of state force characterized by systematic beatings, detention without trial, torture, house arrests and murder were the order of the day. It is against such a violent and evil background that South Africa gave birth to a new democracy in April 1994, with leaders committing to peace, reconciliation, forgiveness and a non-racial democracy. Post-apartheid South Africa produced one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world. The preamble to the Constitution includes: “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity’ and policy documents promised a better life for all. Twenty-one years into democracy and the promise of a better life for all has not materialized. While South Africa’s shifts have granted black people political power, its neoliberal capitalist economic policies and practices have widened inequalities and deepened poverty, while creating a rapid middle class nouveau rich among a few blacks. The socio-political dynamics of this have been theorized by Fanon, who asserted that the majority of the downtrodden natives now see wealth as within their horizon but unattainable – unlike in the past when it belonged not to them but to the oppressive other. It is now their own kith and kin that have the smart sub-urban house, car and job and can provide their children with quality education and health care that they covet and are envious of. Thus, though not institutionally the racialised other, they are yet again the aliens.

Demonized, excluded and divided on the basis of class, millions of South Africans are left disillusioned and disgruntled. Under such circumstances poor people let down by the state, and in the struggle over scarce resources turn their anger on easy targets: foreigners who they, in turn construct as alien demons come to take their jobs and their women, and who are responsible for crime. These discourses often find their way into the media. Tladi, e.g. who reflects the popular discourses of many South Africans, responding to the most recent spate of xenophobic attacks that occurred in the townships of Soweto, Kagiso, Alexandria and Langlaagte in Gauteng in January 2015, where foreign-owned stores were looted and destroyed and six people, including a baby were killed, concluded: “Locals were prevented from operating businesses by apartheid when they saw the opportunity. Now other people are coming in and making it very difficult for them, hence the dissatisfaction. Small businesses such as hair salons, spaza shops, taxis and vendors must be reserved for local up-and-coming businesses.”

The economically excluded and poor see their attacks on foreigners as legitimate in the face of the state’s failure to protect the borders and the state’s failure to lift them out of poverty. While xenophobia rears its ugly head in decided ways, this is often combined with attacks against South Africans, and with service delivery protests, where the object of anger is the state and its provincial and municipal organs. With a history of institutionalized violence and oppression, violence, violence has become the language that that South Africans speak.
This picture, which reflects one of the most extreme manifestations of xenophobic violence, was taken during the xenophobic attacks in 2008.

However, it would be unfair to lay the blame for xenophobia solely on the poor. Cues are taken from popular official discourse and exclusionary laws and practices. As Landau argued: “The quest to divide privileged insiders and demonic outsiders is nowhere more evident than in post-apartheid immigration control... the South African Government has shaped cognitive and spatial divides between deserving citizenry and outsiders who can be denied legal identities despite their proximity and utility. While the apartheid state sustained an onslaught on South African citizens’ residential rights... the post-apartheid state has employed similar techniques to alienate and isolate non-nationals.”

For a country that pledges to uphold the rights of all who live in it, the discourses among some public officials are disturbing. Water and Sanitation Minister, Nomvula Mokonyane in her facebook post asserted that in Kagiso almost

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4Cited in Readers’ views – Sunday Times 8 February 2015, p. 20.


“every second outlet ... [was] run by people of Somali or Pakistani origin ... this is a recipe for disaster.” This view is reinforced by the Minister of Small Business Development, Lindiwe Zulu who said that foreigners must “understand they are here as a courtesy and our priority is to the people of this country first and foremost.” Foreigners are accused of being in-ward looking and denying locals business opportunities, a widely held perception that is not supported by empirical data, which shows that foreign nationals make a valuable contribution to the national economy, including the provision of jobs for locals.

Following recent attacks on foreigners in KwaZulu Natal, the eThekwini city mayor, James Nxumalo said that the city understood the concerns of locals and proposed that the city develop by-laws to regulate the opening of businesses in townships. The sub-text to this is obvious – prevent foreign owned or run businesses!

Yet, there is denialism at the highest order of office. Zuma, in a briefing with media editors on 8 February 2015 said: “I don't think we have a foreign national problem. We have a problem of people who don't respect the law. I don't think generally we have a problem with foreigners.”

Post-apartheid South Africa is characterized by an entrenched xenophobia which has manifest in well orchestrated and planned attacks on foreigners at frequent intervals, the most known of which is the pogroms of May 2008 which was reported to have seen 62 dead, including 21 South Africans, 100 000 displaced and more than 1 300 arrests. South African race, ethnic and national – insider/outside dynamics combined with socio-economic deprivations and inequality do indeed provide a recipe for disaster. There are huge structural obstacles to people's quality of life. Laying unfounded blame at the door of foreigners, serve to entrench divides and inflame hate; it intensifies our problems.

Following the xenophobic attacks in May 2008, the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA), the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI), the National Association of Social Workers, South Africa (NASW, SA) and the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) made a written statement to the Minister of Social Development, Dr Zola Skweyiya. The groups, in a collective voice, expressed their outrage at the senseless killing of people in a country that professes to uphold the dignity of all human beings. The preamble to the statement read as:

We understand that the dynamics and the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions that serve as precursors to such de-humanising conduct are complex. While we understand this, the message that needs to go out to communities is that nothing at all can condone any attack on fellow human beings. We urge all those working in the human services sector and the Government of South Africa to send out a message of zero tolerance for violence. We must actively send out calls for peace and work toward peaceful resolution of conflict and of differences, and actively and constructively address those socio-economic factors that contribute to such violence and social dislocation.

In making the statement, the services of ASSWA, ASASWEI, NASW (SA) and the SACSSP were offered to deal with the situation confronting South Africa, beginning on immediate and short term levels by responding to the trauma and displacement engendered by the xenophobic attacks and working toward re-integration and social inclusion of those affected. The statement to the Minister included the following: “... as social workers we are offering our skills to be part of the solution to the enormous problems that we are confronted with. We commend those social workers who are already engaged and we urge all those who are not to make themselves available to deal with the current humanitarian crisis that we face.”

In an uncharacteristically swift response a day after the submission, the Minister responded saying: “Given the importance of this matter, I would like to thank you for the assistance that you are offering especially during this crisis. I would like to have a meeting with you and all the organisations that are involved as soon as possible. " At this meeting, the Minister's response was very positive. He labeled poverty a social crisis of enormous proportion and asked that we submit a proposal for us to work together on issues of mutual concern.
The submission to the Minister proposed a multi-phased approach beginning with a National Social Work Task Team (NSWT - that had been formed as a matter of urgency) that would draw on international and regional best practices and train teams of social workers in disaster responses, culminating in the formation of a National Social Work Disaster Team (NSWDT) and nine provincial SW disaster teams. Social workers can fill a huge gap in offering much needed skills, in the areas of supportive counselling, crisis intervention, trauma debriefing, linking people to needed resources, risk assessments, engaging other stakeholders in ensuring re-integration and social inclusion, and peace promotion and violence prevention programmes that include diversity education.

A focus on re-integration and social inclusion strategies must include an examination of those complex factors that contribute to group based violence and conflict. One of the failures of post-apartheid South Africa that we need to remedy as a matter of urgency is the myth of a one big happy, united South Africa. Our immediate world speaks to a different reality as is evident in the most atrocious attacks against foreigners. While this behavior is restricted to a minority, its destructive power holds potential to obscure the compassion and care of other South Africans. We need to develop strategies to tap into and draw out the caring humanity that is part of South African society. However, it is difficult to do this when the majority of South Africans are still living with the pain and anger of being relegated to sub-human status under apartheid. People need safe spaces to work through these experiences and to integrate them into their total life experiences in constructive and productive ways. To this end, South Africa can benefit from the Rwandan model of the Gacaca Courts that can be replicated in modified forms.

The Gacaca were community-based courts that allowed for voluntary submissions from perpetrators in their pursuit of amnesty. Social workers played an important role in these courts providing an oversight function, ensuring that the hearings were fair and impartial, securing legal assistance for alleged perpetrators and victims where necessary, and on site debriefing and support for victims. The Gacaca courts allowed for victims' feelings and experiences to be heard and validated within local communities, on an ongoing basis. This is a necessary and important part of healing, and one that South Africa must consider emulating.

Post-apartheid South Africa has failed the majority of its people and is in a state of deep social crises. Within neoliberal capitalist practices, the various poverty alleviation strategies, more often than not, have short-term impact on a few people. They do not deal with the structural factors that underlie social problems. Given the limitations of this approach, the submission to the Minister proposed the establishment of a think-tank of eminent, progressive social scientists and policy makers to explore alternative socio-economic policies for South Africa in accordance with its Constitutional and policy mandates to provide a better life for all.

Unfortunately, despite an enormous amount of time and effort being put into project proposal, with designated timeframes and costing, there was no response from the Ministry of Social Development following the submission. In a conversation with the Minister in July 2008 he informed me that the proposal had not reached him. And enquiries with officials in the Ministry were met with muted silence, and the knee-jerk reaction to the immediate crises put on the backburner not to be resurrected – not an unusual state response.

Xenophobia is, to a large extent, a manifestation of the failures of the state. For people who remain unemployed and hungry with no shelter, clean drinking water, sanitation and electricity their hope lie in popular uprisings. Locals and foreign nationals need to develop a common solidarity to counter the power of the neoliberal state, and deal with the triple threat of unemployment, poverty and inequality instead of each demonizing the other and falling prey to the divide and rule tactics of the state.
The environment of crisis

Over the last five years Greece has experienced massive economic and social problems due to the austerity measures. Many citizens and families have been marginalized and communities disintegrated. Stuckler and Basu (2013) refer to the modern, Greek tragedy when reporting the extreme increase of health problems in the population. Meta-analyses of 39 studies (Simou & Koutsogeorgou, 2014) illustrated that economic crisis is strongly associated with public health deterioration and public health services degradation. Vulnerable groups are the ones been most severely hit by economic crisis.

Austerity measures imposed in Greece by IMF and the EU led to social instability and inequity, to mental and physical health problems and to an evident increase in suicide rates. In a country with historically low suicide rates (OECD, 2014) amongst OECD countries, it was the recent crisis that triggered an alarming increase. Couple with this is the number of citizens that nowadays live under the poverty line proved to be much higher than the IMF or the EU could actually predict.

Today, unemployment rates continue to remain at a very high rate, especially amongst the youth. The new class of neo-poor young in employment also keeps rising steadily (Eurostat, 2014). These are junior employees extremely low paid without being able to support themselves. Recession, unemployment, salary reductions, tax increase and the shrinking welfare state contributed to the already impoverished living standards of thousands of Greek citizens. Recession also contributed to the development of an uncertain and often threatening environment for the well-being of citizens and society at large (European Commission, 2013).

The Greek welfare state has no longer the necessary means and resources to fulfill its role. The decline of social services was in line with the introduction of restrictive measures which paved the way for a transition from a social welfare state towards a restrictive state. State policies favored suppressive policies and contributed to the even further marginalization of the already socially excluded vulnerable groups. In practice, these policies reinforced racist attitudes, violation of human rights, social
inequality and social injustice.

The Greek social welfare state today continues to shrink leaving citizens without a safety net and at low living standards comparatively to other OECD countries (OECD, 2014). The breakdown of the social welfare state is followed by a number of negative implications. Quality and quantity of care, public education, public health and other sectors of social welfare suffer. Volunteerism and philanthropy were introduced in several instances as a replacement of public services in the social sector rather than as an extra source of funding and support. Nonetheless, it is doubtful how efficient these practices can be. What is their capacity to respond adequately and to a broad extent to newly imposed needs? What are their prospects in achieving at a minimum level a social security and safety net?

The increasing emigration of highly skilled and educated young people has severely impacted the Greek labor market. This in turn, has left Greece drained from a significant human capital that could contribute towards future development. It also reinforced pessimism inside the country in relation to its future and ability to overcome crisis effectively.

The political system used crisis as a good excuse for reinforcing fear of others. Part of the mass media played their own role in suppressing freedom of expression. Cultivating political fear they have managed to serve social restrictive purposes and sustain the status quo for the last five years. Fear can manifest itself in violence and horizontal aggressiveness towards minority and other diverse groups. Social exclusion, violation of human rights, collective guilt for failure in the mainstream population, scapegoating, forming of guilty groups, penalization of physical and mental health illness and the overall manifestation of aggressive behaviors towards certain groups are omnipresent. The effects of the socio-economic crisis in mental and physical health problems are not independent of poverty increase that manifests itself in a number of areas. The decline of housing conditions, the increase of drug and alcohol abuse, environmental pollution, increased mortality and suicide rates (Antonakakis & Collins, 2014), depression, loss of identity are amongst the few. Depression and loss of identity were also related with the rise of far right political parties and the related with them phenomena.

**State violence**

State violence was introduced with the public disparagement of HIV positive young women from public officers, just before the 2012 election. This case has been symbolic in the transformation of the state from 'welfare to restrictive' and unique in modern Western Europe as an extreme example of human rights violation. This case provides us with a clear example of how certain politicians in order to be re-elected turn disease and illness into a crime, attempting to reinforce public fear and support suppressive policies.

This case is also a paradigm of the confrontation between an authoritarian state that attacks directly socially vulnerable groups and a humanitarian front of social care organizations, active citizens and non-governmental organizations that advocate human rights and social justice. The actions of the latter challenged political power that tried to substitute health and social care with social control practices, imprisonment and social exclusion.

In April 2012 economic crisis turned into a deep humanitarian and social crisis. Recession deepened even further and the social welfare state shrunk rapidly. It was around that time that the Ministry of Health in union with the police decided to make use of an old nearly obsolete Health Act which had never been used for more than half a century. This act authorized the Minister of Health to force medical tests on the general population without having to ask for written consent. This order could be effective in cases when the Minister judged that the public health was under severe risk. On the basis of this anachronistic Act, the Minister of Health decided to declare that the risk for an HIV/AIDS epidemic in the general population were high. Subsequently he ordered a number of people arrested for drug use and/or prostitution and forced them to be tested for HIV/AIDS against their own free will.

A month later (May 2012) a number of young women who were arrested and found to be HIV positive were publicly castigated when their photos and personal data were released to the media on the grounds of public health security. Public exposure was done against any professional code of ethics. Those women were not just exposed but also accused of having the intention to spread HIV/AIDS to their clients through unsafe sex. Most of them were sent to prison. Human rights were clearly violated. Human rights organizations, social workers, active citizens, NGO's and other groups protested against the case, press conferences followed and public debates on the issue created tensions both within and out of the country. Nevertheless, political officers undermined the severity of the event and the fact of violation of human rights on the basis of the argument that they protect public health. Part of the media was in their favor as did part of the public.

Violent practices of public defamation of a group of socially vulnerable women placed gender and ethnic differences, mental and physical health problems and poverty at the center of social exclusion. Besides, most drug users face multiple vulnerabilities: financial, physical and mental health problems, vocational, educational, legal, family and housing problems (Pouloupolou, 2012). Therefore, they easily became another target for police operations.

Repressive policies increased with more arrests in the center of Athens. Police operations to 'reclaim the city center. Police on an almost daily basis was arresting immigrants, homeless people, drug users and anyone they thought that it may turn into a threat for 'law and order'. All people arrested were forced against their free will to HIV/AIDS and other tests.

By August 2012 the city of Athens was empty as most of the people were away for their summer vacation. People with medical and social problems living in the margins became the usual police target. A new
such as homeless, drug addicts, immigrants were victims of violence against socially vulnerable groups and people cultivating xenophobia. Incidents of racist attacks and violence by increasing chauvinism, reinforcing racist attacks and fear of the unknown went even further. The totalitarian mindset allowed the development of the far-right political party Golden Dawn, members of which are also accused for participation in various criminal activities. The party served the system’s purpose for domination, established a right wing government. The political choice was made regardless public outcry. These operations, even though clearly violated human rights, also enjoyed the approval of part of the most conservative sections of the population and some of the perpetrators of these actions were re-elected.

Social workers and social care organizations reacted swiftly following the principles of advocacy, involvement, partnership and empowerment. In many occasions and especially in the case of HIV affected women solidarity networks developed to fight state violence. Press conferences, court protests, press releases against state violence and autocracy were taking place frequently. Free legal aid was offered to women. Human rights organizations took the case to the Greek courts against the Minister of Health and allied professionals who collaborated with him by violating professional ethics. Further actions of solidarity towards refugees and immigrants were held that year too. Nevertheless, the results of these actions were more modest than expected. Other police operations with the same goals took place in several cities around Greece. The political choices were already made to reinforce state violence regardless public outcry. These operations, even though clearly violated human rights, also enjoyed the approval of part of the most conservative sections of the population and some of the perpetrators of these policies were re-elected.

A policy that limits itself in “witch hunting” does not take into consideration the real causes of public fear and uncertainty. The doctrine of “law and order” has been used to avert a sense of public fear instigated by the right wing government. The political choice was made to promote public fear and draw attention away of the actual economic problems the country was facing. Arrests and their extensive media coverage were used to create the false image of a successful and powerful government. However, these events succeeded in nothing more than the cultivation of public fear and moral panic.

**Austerity and social work**

The results of austerity measures, social breakdown and fear of the unknown went even further. The establishment allowed the development of the far-right political party Golden Dawn, members of which are also accused for participation in various criminal activities. This party served the system’s purpose for domination, by increasing chauvinism, reinforcing racist attacks and cultivating xenophobia. Incidents of racist attacks and violence against socially vulnerable groups and people such as homeless, drug addicts, immigrants were happening on a daily basis.

Neo-liberal models of public administration facilitated the breakdown of the welfare state. Reforms in economy and society are bound to affect social work practice. At crisis times, social policy and welfare resources diminish, benefits decrease, budget cuts in organizations increase, services close down and social workers end up finding themselves being equal victims of the austerity measures. Social workers fear for their future unemployment and the deterioration of their working conditions. At the same time they are called upon to adopt new methods and practices and develop a critical attitude for an in depth understanding of the causes and the severity of social problems that crisis and austerity measures have created.

Neoliberal approaches to social work suggested that social workers should transfer social and health services to social policy and welfare departments. However, these actions gave rise to serious concerns about the disputable role of social workers in the new environment. The primary impact of these policies has been the gradual exclusion of the most vulnerable people from social services. Social isolation, long-term dependence from social benefits, multiple deprivations, lack of the basic needs, work, education, training, health services, social security, insurance and the minimum wage leave a large number of the population to a dark present and to an even darker future without hope and vision. This type of social care organizations exclude any options for positive social change, mainly because they expect staff to implement policies that are against their ethics, principles and practice.

Social workers nowadays realize that they need to act as agents of social and political change. They realize the need to recognize the presence of social injustice and reject neutrality. Neutrality was accepted as a professional attitude before the crisis. Today, the neo-liberal state reinforced through its practices the deepening of social problems and placed social workers themselves at risk. Social workers are now called upon to build even stronger ties of collaboration with the service users and face them as equal partners in the process of change on the basis of a set of commonly agreed goals. In Greece towards this direction, critical and radical social work emerged. The Greek Social Work Action Network (SWAN) developed initiatives in collaboration with other social movements and solidarity groups in their effort to seek for new forms of intervention (Ioakimidis & Teloni, 2013).

Critical social work may provide the platform for equality and equity in social relations. Open communication, participation in decision making, acquisition of critical thinking, re-evaluation of experiences from a critical perspective and deep understanding of the hardships and obstacles given in the context of the current socio-economic environment are necessary.

The election results of January 2015 brought to the government a left wing political party. The results expressed in many ways the wish of citizens for social change. The expectations of many people in Greece
are for a humanitarian policy on the above issues and problems. Nevertheless, the environment today is still characterized by fear and uncertainty. Power relations in society continue to exist. Critical social work has now in Greece more than even before the opportunity to question dysfunctional relationships and old practices with the goal to achieve change.

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“It is important to give people responsibility for their own lives”: Social Work and Internally Displaced People in Ukraine

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Armed conflict in Ukraine and its consequences

Since March 2014, Ukraine has been experiencing a violent separatist conflict in the heavily populated regions of Donetsk and Luhansk (supported by Russian military units without insignia) and annexation of the Crimea peninsula by the Russian Federation. Due to the military actions people in Ukraine are suffering humiliation, deprivation of basic human rights and forced internal displacement. The UN has stated, “armed conflict [in Ukraine] has caused great damage to the economy, the social infrastructure is ruined, and people are suffering” (UN, 2014).

At the time of writing this paper, despite all diplomatic peace efforts, the situation Donetsk and Lugansk regions remains very tense and could be characterized as catastrophic in many senses; especially for people who stay there and for those who had to flee from their homes to the safer regions of Ukraine or neighboring countries. It’s a ‘hybrid’ war, a political conflict, a conflict of values and senses with severe social implications.
Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine

By February 2015 the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine has dramatically increased. According to information from the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine by the August 2014 there were 156,000 officially registered IDPs and until February 2015 this number kept rising to 1,042,100 (MSPU, 2015). IDPs from eastern Ukraine now account for 98% of the total displaced Ukrainians, while those from Crimea account for 2% (UNHCR, 2015). But the UNHCR Regional Representation for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine stressed that while the process of centralized registration is still ongoing, the real figure of IDPs remains unknown and is likely to be higher.

The largest number of IDPs is hosted in the areas immediately surrounding the conflict-affected area: in peaceful areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia regions. Many IDPs have returned to northern parts of Donetsk oblast, and following the ceasefire, some of them have returned to conflict-affected area. Among the IDPs, highest numbers are women (35%) and children (34%), while men constitute about 20%, elderly and disabled people are about the 11%. The IDPs are living with their relatives / friends, in rented houses or in collective centers.

Migration has traditionally been viewed as a three-stage process: pre-emigration experiences, transit, and post-migration resettlement. For IDPs, there may be peril and trauma at every stage (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014). Thus, they also need first psychological aid. It should be mention that children and women have some special needs such education, feed for infant etc.
The results of the need assessment, conducted by NGO ‘Labor and Health Social Initiatives’ among IDPs families in Ukraine showed that the most important needs of the IDPs are: financial (employment), humanitarian (food and clothes), housing (permanent or temporary lodging) and medical need. Less important are: social (participation in community life), legal (protection of rights), psychological, cultural and political (participation in political life) needs (LHSI, 2015). While social workers directly involved in supporting people who had fled to Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, stressed that the most common basic needs of IDPs are food, clothing, hygiene kits, medicine, and accommodation;

‘IDPs families had sufficient life in places which they have left. But they were forced to flee from home without season clothing, steady income and food for tomorrow’ (Olha Martseniuk, MSW, social worker at Charitable foundation ‘Bethany Social Services’).

Lack of clarity about the Ukrainian legislation and assistance mechanisms, bureaucracy and difficulties in accessing relief programmers creates confusion, frustration and an increasing sense of isolation among IDPs. IDPs who fled from non-government controlled areas have been left ‘shocked and traumatized’ and many are struggling to integrate. Despite the generosity shown by local residents, negative perception has arisen among host communities who see IDPs being favored by ‘positive discrimination’. This increases stigmatization and affects their ability to rent accommodation or find jobs (Quintanilla et al., 2015).

**Social Services for IDPs**

The International Federation of Social Workers recommends arranging services for displaced populations as collective and autonomous rather than individual and fragmented (IFSW, 2012). In working with IDPs, social workers can use short-term (crisis intervention, outreach work, strength-development, and task-oriented model of social work) and long-term intervention strategies focused on system-ecological model of social work and community development (Ramon and Maglajlic, 2012).

In Ukraine, there are three categories of institutions providing assistance for the IDUs: government agencies, NGOs and volunteers (individuals or groups of people, organized platforms or chaotic, spontaneous help). Each of them has its own way of solving IDPs problems and helping them. But their services are rather individualistic and fragmented than collective and autonomous.

Governmental agencies provide mostly informational services for IDPs and partly cooperate with NGOs in providing humanitarian services, psychological, medical, and social aid. Also these agencies assist IDPs with social assistance such as pension, supplementary benefits etc.

International and national NGOs responded quite fast to this social challenge in the country. For example, UNHCR, UNDP, The Red Cross and IOM created special aid programs inside organizations. In partnership with national NGOs they provide targeted humanitarian, medical, psychological, and legal assistance. Moreover, they partly help in finding housing and employment.
However, IFSW is aware that humanitarian assistance and alternative or developmental solutions for displaced persons cannot replace the political will of governments in their quest for solutions for internal conflicts that caused the displacement (IFSW, 2012). In Ukraine, as International Organization of Migration pointed out, ‘as displaced persons’ basic needs are not yet fully covered, the ability to integrate so far remains vague’ (IOM, 2014).

The most quickly response to internal migration was initiated by newly established volunteer organizations. Most of these organizations were originally simple associations of concerned citizens, volunteers, and students who participated in the massive actions ended by ousted of the former President of Ukraine. All of them have their own websites, hotline phone numbers for rapid response, pages in social networks with an established search system of the housing areas, warehouses of humanitarian aid etc. But volunteer organizations that actively started to be involved in helping the IDPs, lack systematic approaches and qualified professionals, while they are not using empowering strategies but passive tactics of meeting basic needs.

All in all, the role of civil society, charity organizations and volunteers was and are playing crucial role in supporting IDPs in Ukraine.

Challenges for social work in Ukraine

Social work is rather new profession for the country and social services are underdeveloped. Public social services have very few professionals with appropriate training levels meeting modern social work standards.

Since the WWII Ukraine had never been involved in any military conflicts and didn’t have internal civic conflicts. Public services as well as specialists were not ready to deal with this totally new problem for the country – both professionally and psychologically.

Interviews conducted with Masters’ level social workers are involved in helping IDPs on everyday basis, demonstrates that practitioners meet some challenges in their practice related to increasing number of IDPs, limited resources, professional burnout, consumer attitude from some IDPs etc.

’Social work with IDPs is different from social work with vulnerable families, what we previously do. IDPs families were good in their parental responsibilities. The main challenge was to ensure the basic needs of these families. We began fundraising for helping to provide basic needs’ (Olha Martsemiuk, MSW, social worker at Charitable foundation ‘Bethany Social Services’);

‘For me, the main challenge was the large number of those who need help here and now. The numbers of those who need help outweigh the resources we have. I also understood how important it is for a social worker to take care of their safety and needs. The social workers should clearly understand for themselves that they must firstly meet their own needs and only then the client’s needs. If you don’t care about yourself, you cannot provide quality services. Another challenge was the client attitude of some IDPs. It is important to feel the distinction of working with them when they need help and support, and when it is important to give people responsibility for their own lives’ (Natalia Cheporniuk, MSW, social worker at Charitable foundation ‘Bethany Social Services’).

Another challenge for social workers is the personal attitude to military conflict and IDPs. Sometimes women with their children looking for assistance as IDPs while their husbands take part in the military conflict as ‘separatists’ or Ukrainian army soldiers. Social workers face considerable ethical dilemmas when have to work with IDPs who support the ‘side of the conflict’ which differs from their personal one.

These challenges raise questions regarding the content of social work education, in particular how to make future social workers ready to provide services in the situation of emergency, making choice between paternalistic and empowering approaches. The very first lesson Ukraine has to learn is how to work with conflicts of values and negative perceptions, and – of course- how to develop social services for the new types of needy people in times of economic collapse caused by this ‘hybrid war’.

References


Introduction

In 1947/48 the Arab peoples of Palestine were, according to Israeli historian Ilan Pappe (2006), subject to ethnic cleansing by Israeli paramilitary and state forces. Thousands of men, women and children were murdered and many more were injured. Vast numbers were forced, on fear of death, to flee their homes and land. Most thought they were leaving for a short duration until the hostilities ended. They took their property deeds and keys to their homes with them and expected to return home within a few weeks, or few months at worst. 68 years later they - and their families - remain refugees. The Palestinians are the largest refugee community in the world, estimated today to be some five million peoples (UNRWA 2015).

The Palestinian diaspora can be found across the globe. But the majority of refugees remain in camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the West Bank. For 68 years they have had to confront the collective trauma that comes from enforced dispersal and repression (Jones and Lavalette 2011b).

For the last ten years I have visited the Palestinian West Bank as both activist and researcher. My first visit was as an elected local politician and leader of a solidarity group of 35 who travelled to Ramallah and Nablus during the Second Intifada (Lavalette 2006, Lavalette and Master 2014). But over the subsequent period I made a number of research trips, with my friend and colleague Chris Jones, interviewing Palestinian young people about their lives and experiences whilst living under occupation (Jones and Lavalette 2011b) and talking to volunteer workers involved in projects based in the refugee camps (Jones and Lavalette 2011a).

Carrying out this research was hugely rewarding. It was an honour to gain the trust of participants and learn a little about their lives. But the research also forced me to reflect on ‘social work’.

In the projects in the camps I saw some fantastic, supportive, empathetic and non-judgemental work. It was undertaken by volunteers who saw themselves as people with a shared history, understanding and identity with those they worked alongside. The projects met people’s material needs, offered support to the traumatised and their families and used a range of methods - group work, advocacy work, rights based approaches and also forms of art, drama and music therapies - that we would recognise as drawing from the social work tool box. The work with individuals and groups also explicitly focussed on conscientisation: it helped people understand their personal traumas and social situation as a consequence of dispossession, occupation oppression and injustice. Here was work that focussed on the ‘public causes of private pain’ (Mills 19??).

But there was a problem. Not a single volunteer was a qualified social worker. Faced with this fact we can either act defensively and argue that these can not be social work projects because social work requires appropriately trained and qualified workers (McDermott 2015). Or we can look at ways in which to engage with such projects with the hope that the profession can develop by employing the best practices drawn from
these ‘popular social work’ projects. The research in Palestine, then, forced me to confront what we consider social work to be.

‘Official’ Social Work and ‘Popular’ Social Work

Despite the attempt to establish social work’s credentials as a uniform and unified profession it has always been divided by different ‘politics of social work’ (McLaughlin). Within the profession there have always been models of practice (and a minority of practitioners and organisations) that pathologies service users and effectively blame them for their own desperate social situation. The majority of practitioners and organisations within social work, however, are broadly united by their ‘reform’ orientation (the notion that it is possible, with appropriate intervention and support, to help people change their lives, in some way, and possibly their environment). Finally, there has always been a minority of social workers who hold a more radical orientation and want to focus on the ‘public causes’ of so much private pain and trauma (and look towards collective solutions to social problems) (Myers and Cree 2008; Ferguson and Woodward 2009). Thus ‘official’ social work is a contested activity in terms of its theory, practice and scope. As Myers and Cree note: “An examination of social work’s history demonstrates that social work has always been ‘up for grabs’; its tasks and direction by no means self-evident” (2008: 1).

But my experience in Palestine pointed to there being ‘another social work’ which, for a number of reasons, has been hidden and ignored by the mainstream. This is an activity that has its roots in political and social movement activity, that sets out to address the needs of individuals and communities and to confront the social and political issues and problems of the day. I term this ‘popular’ social work. When thinking about ‘popular’ social work I consider a practice that isn’t steeped in the dichotomies of the deserving/undeserving poor; that isn’t judgmental, nor hierarchical. It is a social work that reflects the experiences of, and needs for, welfare ‘from below’ (Jones and Lavalette 2013).

I use the term ‘popular social work’ in three ways.

First, to refer to an activity that is popular in the simple common sense way the term is understood: it is popular with ‘service users’ – it is liked and supported – in a way that state directed social work often isn’t!

Second, to distinguish this activity from forms of ‘official’ social work. State directed social work is contested, and may, on occasions overlap with popular social work, but this is a distinct, but related, activity.

Third, to mean engaged with the popular movements
for justice, the movements of what are sometimes referred to as the ‘popular classes’ (Lavalette 2013).

Researching I began to find a ‘hidden history’ of popular social work. It can be seen in some of the work of pioneers in Britain. For example Emmeline Pethick and Mary Neal both worked in a London mission from the late 1880s. Both were shocked by the poverty they encountered, but they were also increasingly influenced by the social protests then rocking the city. They shared a belief in cultivating the ‘dreams and creativity’ of young people and in 1895 they set up the Esperance Club which was influenced by the ideas of Edward Carpenter (Rowbotham 2008) and William Morris (Thompson 1955). The Club helped a group of young women establish a co-operative dressmaking business. But their vision for social justice and the transforming power of the arts went hand in hand - a model of some of the earliest known participatory arts practice. However, both Mary and Emmeline were also political activists and their concerns at the Club reflected their broader political and social engagement. Their roots in social work were merged in the 1890s with their broader commitment to social reform and social justice to produce a ‘popular social work’ that was innovative and attuned to the needs of the communities they worked with.

It is not just a British phenomenon. Other pioneers include people like (the relatively well-known) Jayne Adams and Bertha Reynolds and (the less well-known) Mentona Moser who were all active during the first half of the twentieth century.

Adams and Reynolds were involved in the US settlement movement, social work education and a range of campaigning social work organisations. As social workers they campaigned against war, for migrant rights and for active anti-fascism (Reisch and Andrews 2002). Moser was born into a wealthy Swiss family, moved to London, where she trained in social work, before returning to set up one of the first social work training programmes in Switzerland. However, in the 1920s she joined the Communist Party, engaged with the organisation International Red Aid and was heavily involved in programmes to offer support to refugees from Franco’s forces during and after the Spanish Civil War (Schilde 2009; Hering, 2003).

In Spain, at the same time, was Esme Odgers, a young Australian who threw herself in to work with child refugees and orphans (Fyrth and Alexander 1991). She had no training in social work but in 1937 she helped set up ‘Foster Parents Plan for Children in Spain’. She had witnessed the plight of refugee children and those orphaned by the civil war and decided to set up a Colonia Infantil providing food, shelter and clothing to war orphans. But they also started to use art, drama, games and activities to help the children learn the skills they needed to cope with the trauma of the war.

More work is needed on the hidden history of popular social work, but as these examples suggest there is potentially a rich seam to be mined.

Popular Social Work in Palestine

But popular social work is not simply a historical phenomenon. My research in Palestine brought me into contact with projects which stand out as exemplars of good social work - though there is not a qualified practitioner in sight!

First, there were a number of projects working with young people who had been traumatized and terrorized by the Israeli army and security services. This ranged from those who had been tortured and imprisoned to those who had witnessed their parents and grandparents injured, killed or systematically humiliated at the checkpoints. As a result, some of the young people were mute, some wet their beds, most had horrendous nightmares.
In the Balata Refugee camp there is a Youth Project staffed by volunteers from the camp. They have created a social space where the children can let off steam – and also understand their plight as third generation refugees. The Centre is noisy, lively and ‘busy’. The Project involves the children in discussion about their history, what has happened to their homes, land and families. This is important as it lets the young people understand their situation in a way that does not pathologise their community and it lets them come to an understanding of who they are. Such historically-political knowledge and understanding underpins a range of activities that allows the children to express their hopes and fears – through music, drama, filmmaking, sport and education.

The children are involved in setting the group’s agendas, establishing what daily, weekly and annual events they will engage with. The organisation of the Project is non-hierarchical, non-judgemental and ‘trusted’ by children, families and the community at large. Such trust has created a space which has allowed a range of practices to develop. Trauma, bed-wetting, and domestic violence are just some of the issues that have been addressed with individuals and through broader community projects.

A second example comes from work being undertaken in the Jenin camp, which is the site where a horrific massacre took place in 2002. I met people working with those injured and maimed by the occupation, who amongst other things were producing artificial limbs with extraordinary ingenuity. The costs of purchasing these from the commercial producers made these from the commercial producers made them completely out of their reach. So instead they would request a sample and copy the design and build it themselves at a fraction of the cost. Moreover, this project was not just about fitting prostheses to the injured but rebuilding the confidence of the wounded and terrorized.

In the midst of the refugee camp each public building had wheelchair access. Questions of disability, mobility, mental distress and trauma had been ‘socialised’. The project workers and leaders, by tying the question of disability and injury into the occupation, had managed to address and overcome long-standing, conservative attitudes to disability – gradually establishing a social model of disability that focussed on the ‘public causes’ of disability and individual trauma (the Israeli occupation). By being explicitly ‘political’, by working with a shared understanding of the crisis facing the community and its external causes, the disability project was an established part of the community and a recognised part of the campaign for refugee rights: social movement activity and high quality ‘popular’ social work fed off and enriched each other.

Conclusion

The purpose of re-discovering and establishing the range and extent of ‘popular social work’ projects is to emphasise three things. First, that social work has always been, and remains, a deeply contested project: there is no single entity ‘social work’. Second, social work is enriched by engaging with new, innovative and ‘popular’ forms of work that originate outside of the profession’s self-imposed boundaries. Central to this has been social work’s engagement with social movement activity which can offer a spring from which new ideas and practices can germinate and flower. Finally, in the face of increasingly austere social policy regimes and increasingly narrow prescriptions of state-directed social work activity the examples of popular social work offer a vision of ‘another’ social work. One that is committed to meeting human need, to eradicating poverty and oppression and to recognising, and addressing, the ‘public causes’ of so much ‘private trauma’. 

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This paper critiques the notions of peace, peace-building, which often goes together with state-building, development and transitional justice, are connected to the liberal peace model. It proposes that alternative readings are required that to allow reconceptualising of peace and better route in a dynamic and conflict-based reading of society. The critique of liberal peace can pave the way for reading the dialectics peace/war and ethnic conflict/reconciliation in deeply divided societies suffering from ethnic-related violence. It critiques Conflict Resolution (CR) approaches and considers how a sociological reading can enrich, restructure and reconceptualise of peace-in-society in terms of critical peace. Unlike those who though quick-fix solution can be engineered from Olympus, a critical sociological reading of peace requires that we carefully examine societies themselves and then try to perceive the dialectic of conflict from the emancipatory-and-peace perspectives and visions of real social forces on the ground.

The literature on CR is vast and complex and provides technical knowledge on various types of conflict and toolkits for its resolution, management and transformation. CR is not a single or uniform discipline/field of studies. There are many approaches within Peace and Conflict Studies, alongside others such as conflict transformation and conflict management. The typologies and remedies produced by the theorists and practitioners in the field over the last 80 years draw from different disciplines; empirical studies have examined more or less every contestation in the globe. Also, a number of critical approaches within political science have produced important critiques to the concept and approaches of Liberal Peace (LP). We can however speak of ‘dominant’ schools taken up by those in power in the globe who are share a vision of imposing directly or indirectly, often engineering ‘good governance’, elections and aspects of human rights, as understood by the ‘liberators’ from outside, and functioning markets, which vary from vulture capitalism to other capitalistic arrangements with more elements of democratic governance.

Nonetheless, one can see a number of approaches that share key elements, despite their sharp differences. First, critiques working essentially within liberal perspective, even when critical challenge of hegemonic perceptions, remain by and large essentially pessimistic about any real alternatives. These critiques seem to be locked in the western-orientated liberal dilemmas which are sceptical regarding the imposing of good governance, market economy and other institutions in conflict-ridden societies but see few if any alternatives.
Hence, they tend to pivot around questions such as ‘intervention versus non-non-intervention’ or ‘to what extent are non-western/southern societies fit [read: ‘mature enough’] for liberal governance? Second, from a sociological perspective, it appears rather odd that the dominant paradigms in this vast field appears to have problematic conceptualisations of society, power, conflict, social class and other social division, state and civil society, as they have poor sociological base. With some notable exceptions, CR perspectives seem to be far apart and distant from the current state of art knowledge, from the insights of sociology as well as the other related social sciences (anthropology, social psychology, geography etc.), particularly from various critical schools of thought in these disciplines.

Sociology and sociologists has not provided a comprehensive and ready-made alternative. In fact, within the discipline of Sociology, the subjects of peace-building, conflict-resolution and reconciliation have not been issues of concern for mainstream sociology. It is only recently that sociologists have endeavoured to bring this into the mainstream of the discipline in what remains an underexplored, under-theorised and pioneering work. This is apparent in the latest textbooks in sociology, which have grown in size, complexity and nuanced thinking. Many such texts contain no conceptualisation of peace and reconciliation in society at all. The latest textbooks which provide the standard introduction to the discipline would contain chapters on nations, war and terrorism, however the notion of ‘peace’ is not conceptualised. Presumably it merely means ‘absence of war’; even ‘war’ and ‘warfare’ was rather neglected from mainstream sociological analyses tended to remain rather marginal, save for the exception of some pioneering works, mainly drawn from sociologists, who were working in an on conflict-ridden or war-torn societies.

The sociologist Galtung is one of the founders and influential thinkers in the flourishing field of conflict resolution. Galtung (1969) conceptualized some of the key concepts; for instance, he distinguished between on the one hand ‘negative peace’, which requires that we understand which type or process of conflict resolution is appropriate and ‘positive peace’, on the other which is about social transformation. Moreover, amongst the most creative current thinkers and practitioners in the field, there are professions who are trained as sociologists; for instance Lederach, a great innovator, insisted to some extent like Galtung that we must speak of transformation rather than resolution of conflict (Lederach, 2003). CR essentially grew out of political science and is strongly influenced by international relations (Ramsbotham et al 2011).

Traditional CR studies are primarily orientated towards actively intervening, participating and influencing the outcome of conflict situations and divided polities and societies. It would be naïve to think that CR would be somehow immune Liberal Peace, which is the dominant paradigm of how to resolve conflicts in the globe. Academic and professional autonomy, both as a study/scientific discipline and field of professional engagement, seems utopian, particularly in this field. CR seeks to carry weight with and influence the current powers such as Governments, the UN and other international organisations and the NGO sector. Recognition, funding, professional placements in the fields of conflict of the globe, as well as practical engagement in official and unofficial advising, counselling, accessing data and parties in conflict and negotiations as well as participation in missions, mediations are essential to carry out field studies and to influence the field. As such, the most influential centres for conflict resolution are heavily dependent on the powers that be (Governments, UN, EU etc.). It is not surprising that they are lured to and are reproducing, often highly sophisticated and technically excellent paradigms and techniques, which are convenient to the western/northern powers capable of effecting change/stability in conflicts with little accountability to the societies they are supposed to be aimed at. In this sense, the dominant paradigms of CR are typically drawn to and to a large extent driven by the dominant paradigms political science and international relations, i.e. the ‘liberal peace project’. However, by default even critical perspectives from the postmodern and post-structuralist critiques of power, which see no point in ‘grant narratives’, do not produce any alternatives to liberal peace. Moreover, in the spirit of deconstructionism various alternatives, either in global social/political forces or in any local forces, are deconstructed and dismissed as either utopian-idealised versions of unworkable practices, or corrupt ideologies.

A serious issue on the subject is the operation of the War and Peace Industries, with their own rules of engagement and professionals within them must be willing to play within this domain obeying these rules. Large numbers of CR professionals, coming from different disciplines, are employed by international and national NGOs. In liberal theory, these organisations are part of civil society, and are thus supposed to be ‘independent’ from the state. However, the vast majority of them are in practice heavily dependent on Governments and interstate organisations such as the UN, the EU and others, due to the funding and recognition that they receive. It is therefore not surprisingly they are blamed to be long arms of the same global, regional and local forces which generate, maintain and reproduce conflicts, divisions and are then selling themselves as ‘fixers’ of such conflicts and divisions. Studies produced by CR think-tanks, as a rule, produce thinking on economic development in conflict-ridden or divided societies based on neoliberal
management in economics and devising suitable geopolitical arrangements for regional stability which reflecting the regional power-structure, rather than questioning for the foundations the current order of things. Research Institutes are often heavily dependent on good relations and accountable to the Foreign Ministries or other Governmental agencies as well as interstate funding and dependency arrangements; these factors determine the agendas and the engagement of professionals in the field.

It would be misleading to blame the perpetuation of conflicts or divisions on peace-makers or peace organisations. The problem is already there before such agencies or individuals get involved. Imperial forces as well as CR experts and mediators are locked together with local forces in a system that ties them together. For instance, local political elites, war lords or nationalist, racist or other reactionary forces or powerful individuals who have an interest in the perpetuation of the conflict or from the status quo, which have carved territories and the spoils of wars become mere ‘stakeholders’ and win legitimacy in ‘peace negotiations’ under the Liberal peace and conflict resolution models; hence the war and peace industries often reproduce the basic structures of the conflicts via the continuation of conflicts and division or transformations of these in ‘state-building’ or ‘nation-building’, ‘empowering civil society projects’. No matter what the outcome (i.e. resolution, maintenance of status quo or even transformation etc.), the basic features of the industry are somehow reproduced: it seems that, no matter what, there would always be ‘work’ to done, i.e. profits and labour for the professionals in conflict resolution: in liberal peace mediators, professionals advisors, experts, regional and local warlords under the supervision of regional and global superpowers manage to reproduce themselves, their interest and ideologies. This is why a critical sociological analysis is required: such perspectives make no assumptions about the quickness or effectiveness of solutions. Nor is there space or interest in disappointment for various formulas and recipes adopted. Societal forces and energies can be released in different directions depending on the context.

The problems of the CR logic derive from a number of factors. Some of the key critiques the Liberal Peace models of are the following:

First, interpretations of acts and practices of historic violence often fail to appreciate institutional and systemic aspects, the duration and the variety in which ‘force’ is manifested; often they tend to ignore or
underestimate structural factors, such as colonialism, class and social power and in general political economy issues. For instance, borders and partitions (visible, overt and covert) are often manifestations of initial violent ‘acts’ and ‘practices’ of different forms, which may retain some of their historic rationale/ functions (e.g. repressing and fragmenting), and they are constantly transforming the shapes, forms and magnitudes of violence in unexpected manners. Secondly, in recent globalisation-dominated literature there is inadequate sociological linkage between the macro and micro levels of violence in ethnically divided societies. Thirdly, the dialectic between ‘violence versus non-violence’ and ‘conflict versus cooperation’ is somehow under-theorised and under-researched. There are rather simplistic assumptions about what is the ‘rule/norm’ and what is the ‘exception’. Fourthly, comparative studies of ethnic conflict-ridden societies generally lack sociological and contextual historical depth and/or are not based on deeper knowledge of all the ‘case studies’ under examination. Moreover, reduction of societies into ‘case studies’ reduces them into mere ‘examples’ in already thought-out global paradigms or other stereotypical regionalised models, often disguising Eurocentric and ethno-centric readings, as well as other heuristic distortions, such as intellectual dependency and exceptionalism. Fifth, studies of ‘ethnic-conflict’ are dominated by conflict resolution paradigms taken from comparative political science. Here, as a rule, no reference is made to insights provided by contemporary sociological debates. What is required in this regard is a paradigm shift. Finally, the fragmentation derived from disciplinary expertise and specialisation tends to disconnect the specificity of the conflict from the reconciliation processes, as these are studied by different sets of experts. Hence, the connections made are based on superficial modelling rather than in-depth comparative sociological studies of conflict and reconciliation as processes.

Assumptions about the nature of conflict, polarisations and divisions need to be challenged. For instance many reconciliation and CR models need to get rid of any ‘ethnicist’ assumptions about ‘communities’, be they ethnic or religious, which are considered as unified and homogenous and ignore political, ideological and social characteristics and identities, such as gender and class. The rich debates around social identity, racism and anticommunist, gender, nationhood and intersectionality can enhance reconciliation theorisation and praxis. Critical perspectives within western CR traditions, which question the above, are often ridden with a sort of western pessimism about the world and the success of any kind of involvement, no matter how benevolent. Their ideas leave them essentially without any concrete alternatives as they fail to properly understand these societies. Even sophisticated CR theory that recognises the importance of wider and diverse social, international and political factors tend to essentialize and effectively reduce conflict to individual factors like psychology rather than addressing the complex and multi-faced social, economic and political aspects. Hence we often find recommendations for the creation of decentralised models of government, ‘good governance’, market-based capitalist economies and definite state structures that are based on the premise that these structures can be designed to serve psychological, economic and relational needs of groups and individuals within nation-states. The designing of governmental structures in regime-changes that followed US-led invasions or the various aid developmental reform programs in societies are ridden by ethnic conflicts are generally based on such perceptions. Rather than relying on the development of the local or autonomous historical traditions and structures of governance, the programs funded, promoted and often imposed tend to be models imposed from above: these models are designed by ‘experts’ premised on political, economic, cultural and socio-psychological assumptions that allegedly fit ‘essential characteristic’ of the groups of people involved. Therefore both the ‘diagnosis’ and the ‘remedies’ for ethnic conflicts are ridden with specific interests, biases and simplistic assumptions about the kinds of ‘solutions’ to the various conflicts. One of the most common assumptions made by CR theorists concerning the nature of ‘ethnic conflict’ is that these conflicts result primarily from ‘historical hatred’ and ‘ethnic antagonism’ i.e. ethnic or national groups which are assumed to be homogenous and somehow naturally compete.

In the days socio-economic crisis, geopolitical turbulence and uncertainly, and the rise in ethnic/state violence in questioning the foundations of the kind of diagnoses, recipes and remedies developed in the context of ‘Liberal peace’ becomes more than essential. These frames and technologies of peace, still used as ‘remedies’ are hardly relevant, adequate and effective, even for the purposes of mere stability of the interstate system. More to the point, they seem increasingly undesirable and unfeasible in the current historical juncture for the peoples and regions they are supposed to benefit. This paper critiqued some of the prevalent and accepted Liberal peace recipes for resolving ethnic/state, religious-political and other political/social conflicts: the various devices on peace-building, conflict resolution, reconciliation, transitional justice and development are part of the same paradigm, which is fundamentally questioned today. The various approaches were developed within (a) specific historical contexts, i.e. the post-1960s and the post 1970s, characterised by the rise of neoliberal economics; (b) within geopolitical and spatial contexts, i.e. the Western/ northern traditions projecting and studying the East/ South; (c) the ‘internal’ dimension suffered from being often ignored, or orientalised, or romanticized; (d) the economic aspects of the ‘solution’ proposed was framed by neoliberal economics that measures the ‘peace dividend’. The result is that has thus tainted the relevant findings as to the nature of the conflict as well as the recommended policy fireworks for addressing these, the kind of recipes and remedies proposed.

The alternative to Liberal peace can be broadly referred to as ‘critical peace’ requires that we fundamentally reconsider to be state-of-the-art on successful peace-building, peace-keeping and ‘restoring’ societies torn
by war, conflicts or other violence. Sociology, and particularly critical conflict sociology is an essential ingredient that that can open up ways of seeing, thinking and acting in this direction. Recent sociological studies have produced interesting readings that can enrich the debates on peace, peace-making and reconciliation, enabling to see through and go beyond the liberal peace models of conflict resolution. Moreover, the fields of inquiry of Sociology itself is expanded and deepened, in what have traditionally been under-developed fields. However, it is essential that we starting from the basics in sociological debates. In Sociological debates, 'conflict' is juxtaposed to 'order'. In fact sociology is often divided between those who see society in terms of order and those who see it as essentially characterised by conflict. George Simmel (1903) insisted on the “sociological significance, inasmuch as it either produces or modifies communities of interest, unifications, organizations, is in principle never contested”. In the old debates Functionalists sought answers to what maintains order in society including common values, social cohesion/ solidarity and consent to hierarchical relations and ranking in society, whilst ‘conflict theorists’ (Marxists, Weberians, followers of Simmel and others) sought to understand the nature and modalities of ‘conflict’ derived from oppressive, exploitative and unequal relations and polarisations derived conflicting interests, ideologies, priorities and ways of life.

Postcolonial studies illustrate how colonialism by other means continues; national liberation movements may turn into oppressive regimes. Partitionism, borders and fencing or ethnic oppression and exclusions operate as institutionalised forms assume their own logic, unleashing new forms of violent realities in the present and the future (Brown, 2010). There is little doubt that “whenever a delineation of boundaries takes place - as is the case with every ethnic and national collectivity processes of exclusion and inclusion are in operation” (Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1992: 39). Borders, frontiers and boundaries are very specific creatures serving different purposes depending on the context and political reality. Another dimension of violence as a force in society and history, is that it can be an operative force, even in its’ absence: memories of violence are powerful tools in shaping political, cultural and social institutions and performances, whilst the fear and anger of outburst of violence is an operative force at an individual and collective level that is difficult to measure. Moreover, what must not be generalised but properly contextualised and seen as an inter-connected social whole, is the specificity of violence related to the unequal socio-economic positions and power-relations in terms of class, cast, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability and sexuality etc. Of course at this level of generality, the nuances of contextual sociological and historical analyses are limited to mere categorisations. The dialectic of violence versus non-violence has been a key debate in the arguments between those who argues for the necessity of violence to overcome oppression, colonisation, exploitation etc. in the globe. However, the use of violence had generated at some point such structures of power or contradictions in the system which essentially undermined the emancipatory, revolutionary and progressive potential of these forces/movements (Sitas 2008; 2012). Revolutionary movements, once in power or on the way to power, are faced with systemic factors which generate more and/or new types of violence, oppression, and exploitation; therefore Fanon’s dictum that ‘violence has not been cathartic’ is not substantiated (see Sitas 2008; 2012; Trimikliniotis 2013). In the 21st century, violence has also become simultaneously more global and local. Sociological interest in the general category of violence is not new; macro-sociological and historical sociological systems of analysis have examined the role of violence in the shaping of nation-states; recently attention has shifted also to the micro-sociological aspects. A sociology of ethnic conflict and reconciliation processes as a singular mode of reading these phenomena is distinctly absent. Recent contributions extending the knowledge on the subject are set out recent sociological works are important pave the way for a sociology of war, peace and reconciliation. Malesevic (2010) attempts as sociological insights to war and conflict and (Brewer 2010) on peace processes; they endeavour to address the lacuna in political sociology and to intervene in debates dominated by conflict resolution, international relations and comparative politics. Even though they are very different in scope, style and themes covered, they can be said to cover the state of the art debates in current sociology on the subject of ethnic conflict and
reconciliation processes, if read together. They both coming from broadly Weberian perspectives and note the absence sociological readings in their respective subjects and aptly underscore the importance of a comprehensive sociological inquiry into the reading of war/conflicts and peace processes. Malesevic (2010) examines the historical and contemporary impact of coercion and warfare on the transformation of social life and vice versa, and argues that despite the fact that “collective violence and war have shaped much of recorded human history the mainstream sociology remains ignorant of war”. It therefore provides a useful reading organized violence by placing it within a wide ranging sociological analysis which links classical to contemporary theoretical debates to specific historical and geographical contexts. Brewer (2010) provides a useful entry point for a sociology of peace processes as he stresses the virtues of a ‘sociological enquiry’ to what he refers to as ‘peace processes would be enriched by understanding ‘social peace processes’ alongside ‘political peace processes’. Moreover, the book lays down some important groundwork, which can be summed up as follows: firstly, it usefully links peaceful transformations to social transformations and changing social relations and critiques the professionalization of reconciliation. Secondly, it develops a typology, albeit in rudimental form, of post-violence society along three axes (i) relational-closeness, (ii) partial separation-territorial integrity and (iii) cultural capital arguments. Thirdly, it has a basic analysis of the debates around civil society, gender, emotions and memory in terms of ‘truth’ and victimhood. Finally, it confirms the relation between war and peace processes. This is only an entry point on the potential richness of a sociological enquiry.

Sociological studies on gender, ethnic conflict and divisions, war and peace provide us with essential insights into conflicts, wars and peace processes if we are to understand and address these seriously (Anthias and Yuval-Davies, 1989; Yuval-Davies, 1997). Moreover, the sociological debates on class, race/ethnicity and the rich debates on nations, nationalism and racism are vital if we are to understand and overcome ethnic/state/national conflicts and as such peace-processes have to properly engage with such issues. If the dialectic of war/peace and conflict/reconciliation are to be addressed sociologically then the social divisions, fragmentations and polarisations deriving from the above must be dealt with. Sociological interest in the general category of violence is not new; macro-sociological and historical sociological systems of analysis have examined the role of violence in the shaping of nation-states.

Sitax (2008) attempts to lay the foundations for the work by asking the question: “what are the sociological underpinning for the consolidation of the ethic of reconciliation?” This is essentially the development of a sociological perspective on the subject of conflict, peace-processes and reconciliation. Along these lines I have argued for extending the sociological conceptualisation for understanding and comparing ethnically and other deeply divided societies, particularly as to how societies deal with violent and divisive past (Trimikliniotis 2013; 2014; 2015). Such an endeavour not only enhances academic knowledge but may impact policy as regards peace and reconciliation processes, both in terms of understanding the past as well as dealing with the present and future of post-conflict societies.

A sociological enquiry into conflicts, wars and peace and reconciliation processes requires a deeper insight into societal forces at place. We ought to examine closely the network of relationships, mechanisms and process promoting justice and address the root-causes of possible enmity, contestations and differences. Despite the growth of research and knowledge at technical level and the variety of approaches, including critical approaches, social self-reflexivity must extend further and be contextualized within the policy frameworks of the post austerity-and-crisis era. This requires that we think anew peace-building and peace-keeping in ways that actually transforms thinking and the practice of peace-seeking in the world; at the core of this rethinking is the need to locate ‘peace’ within the processes of transformation smugles which generate new socialities. 

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The recent attacks on Charlie Ebdo in France and the Woolwich attacks in the UK heighten the anxieties of Western governments about violent Islamic terrorism which are continually renewed with acts of aggression emanating from what is associated with ‘homegrown’ terrorism. These fears escalate as the association of young people with histories (or attempts) of fighting in Arab and Middle East zones of conflict, for humanitarian reasons or to support/confront governing regimes, are revealed. For instance, in the Woolwich attacks in the UK, one of the assailants reportedly attempted to join the al Shabaab in 2010. The urgency becomes even greater in the face of fighters returning to Europe from conflict zones.

According to the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), an unprecedented number of fighters amounting to approximately 20,000 from across the world are travelling to fight in conflict zones and one fifth of these are reported to be from Western European countries (Neuman, 2015); prominent amongst these are France, UK and Germany though in proportion to population size Belgium, Denmark and Sweden are the most significantly affected. Almost 500-600 British citizens are thought to have travelled to Syria or Iraq to fight alongside Islamic State (Isis) (Ackermann, 2014).

The threat posed to the West is couched in terms of the fears that returnees may present. These include concerns about the increasing levels of indoctrination of fighters and the assistance they may potentially provide, for instance crucial country information about possible targets; help with IT and scientific skills; assistance with communication with Western media. In addition, there are mounting tensions about the possibility that the fighters will return as trained ‘noncombatants’, ready to attack domestic targets (Counter-terrorism Home Affairs Committee, 2014). In view of this, hard punitive responses have followed, including discussion about the prevention of returnee fighters, the confiscation of their passports and, in the UK, exhortations that a presumption be made that they are guilty, until proven
innocent (Boris Johnson, 2014), and worthy of arrests and imprisonments. In 2013, twenty arrests of people with Syrian-linked activities were made, followed by fourteen in 2014 (BBC, 2014).

Softer instruments addressing terrorism take the form of preventative measures aimed at preventing radicalisation and engagement in extremism. In Europe, and elsewhere, since 2000 a comprehensive set of measures have been introduced to de-radicalise and disengage particularly young people from militant ideas and activities. On the one hand such initiatives target ‘at risk’ sections of society (primarily Muslim youth) in order to make them resilient to radical ideas, and on the other, they identity ‘at risk’ individuals who shows signs of prospective involvement in militant activities or attraction to ‘radicalisation’. The notion of radicalisation, is of course, a contested one but at its core it is about individuals adopting ‘extremists belief systems, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change’ (Allen, 2007:4).

In the UK, the Prevent policy prevents future radicalisation; it is contained within a broader counter-terrorism measure named Contest which incorporates strategies to make contingency plans to pursue intelligence and police-led counter-terrorism policies (Pursue), prepares for action during domestic terrorist incidents (Prepare) and to protect the infrastructure, roads, nuclear power plants, etc. from terrorist attacks (Protect). An additional feature of the Prevent policy is the Channel programme that aims to work directly with young children to help channel their anger and grievance when they are identified and perceived to be ‘at risk’ of radicalisation. Prevent and Channel endeavour to de-radicalise individuals and drive them away from prospective terrorism related activities.

The Terrorism Act (2000) defines terrorism as ‘the use or threat of action designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public, or a section of the public; made for the purposes of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause’. Radicalisation is seen to be a process through which one begins to support terrorism and extremism, while extremism is defined as a ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs ... and calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas’. ‘Violent extremism’ is seen as an ‘endorsement of violence to achieve extreme ends’ (HM Government, 2011).

Prevent and Channel are premised upon a particular understanding of the causes of terrorism and upon a construction of the (potential) ‘terrorist’, which shape particular solutions. In terms of causal analysis, it is commonly accepted that there is no single, definitive cause of terrorism, but amongst those advanced, sociological factors such as economic discrimination of minority communities, their marginalisation, exclusion and resultant alienation and vulnerability to subsequent radicalisation score high (Crenshaw, 1981; Piazza, 2011). Therefore, efforts to ameliorate and remediate economic discrimination, to address alienation by affirmative action and to promote integration of minority groups are seen to prevent radicalisation and stymie terrorism. Strategies for social and community cohesion and inclusion targeting Muslim communities in UK have been attempted, but their delivery through terrorism related Prevent funding raised acute anxieties amongst Muslims that they were being criminalised and treated as ‘suspect’ communities. Such fears resonated in experiences of young Muslim men being disproportionately stopped and searched and in areas subjected to intensive surveillance practices where, for instance, without consultation, particular areas with high concentrations of Muslims were placed under surveillance cameras, as in Sparkbrook, Birmingham. Hence any expectations that attempts to increase community cohesion might mitigate radicalisation were hampered (Kundnani, 2009: Kundnani, 2011).

Work with younger children, through Channel, adopts a more psychological perspective based on human development, life-course approaches and psychometric tests, screening and profiling. These provide ‘scientific rationality’ and legitimacy for placing young children under surveillance, to facilitate a ‘normal’ development into adulthood and claim to address and prevent ‘risks’ of mental ill-health and well-being that may ensue from ‘radicalisation’. These are reminiscent of the ‘mad, bad, sad’ paradigms. Whilst the relevance of socio-economic and even political factors are acknowledged as a backdrop in these approaches, their central plank is the risk-averse agenda centred around discourses of risk and ‘deficit’. Practitioners are directed to be alert and attentive to the opinions expressed by young people (in schools, youth clubs, health centres, social work settings) and to identify ‘at risk’ children suspected of accessing, for example, online radicalising materials, associating with family and friends who may have extremist views, or who may express anger, distress, or feel ‘culturally uprooted’ and have feeling of social or spiritual alienation (HM Government and ACPO, 2010:9). Practitioners are directed to ask children and young people if they feel that their communities are discriminated against; if they are dissatisfied and disillusioned with mainstream political institutions as mechanisms for political change, and to probe about the children’s identity, faith, self-esteem and whether they identify with any charismatic individuals (DCSF, 2008: Youth Justice Board, 2012:22-3).

The use of such indicators and the widespread referrals by teachers and other practitioners, or even members of the public, can deem children and young people to be vulnerable to radicalisation. They are then referred to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements for assessment and intervention which place children under ideological mentoring. Examples of referrals by members of the public include a child who was known to have had recently converted to Islam and, without evidence, the boy was believed to be willing to sacrifice his life for his faith. Upon further investigation no indication of extremist behaviour or attitudes were confirmed but other vulnerabilities were revealed: the
boy was from a foster care home and affiliated with a local street gang. He was referred to an organisation specialising in work with young converts, and through one-to-one meetings and group activities the boy's interpretation of Islam was explored. Another referral came from a community youth group worker where a boy had been heard to have said that he wanted 'to go to Iraq and kill Americans'. He was subsequently the subject of engagement with 'social activities' and 'ideological mentoring', which challenged the 'boy's violent feelings towards non-Muslims and was followed by educational support, Islamic education, mentoring and working with the boy's mother' (HM Government and ACPO, 2010:16). Further work might lead to the boy being supported into engagement with alternative activities such as sports, finding a part-time job or perhaps building stronger bonds with his family as evidenced in similar work carried out in Denmark (The Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, 2012).

These models and practices give primacy to the 'deficit thinking' model where people are positioned as being in need of improvement and treatment, to be 'normalised'. The predominance of normative, psychologising discourses are characteristic of pathologising techniques; they deny the social-economic and the political dimensions of the young people's experiences and their individual agency (Coppock and McGovern, 2014). However, this is not the first time that such approaches have been used; they have historical echoes. Many anti-colonial movements and armed resistances have been quashed by colonial powers, suppressing dissent, cultures of resistances deemed 'primitive', 'oppressive' and 'dangerous' because they threatened the power and ideology of the rulers. To name a few, Native Americans, South Africans and Australian Aborigines bear witness to such experiences, all of whom were acculturated, assimilated and integrated through process of being brainwashed and indoctrinated with the use of Christian principles, and whose anger and resistance was placated through a process not too dissimilar to that of Prevent and the Channel programmes today, except that in the past, at least the political content of the disaffection of the colonized was recognised. The current programmes are much more clearly focused on mental health and 'well-being' and can be construed as applying the 'mad, bad, sad' treatments.

The current programmes of indoctrination run against a backcloth of political discourses in which young Muslim people see Islam and Muslims being demonised and vilified as an 'axis of evil', which 'clashes' with Western civilizations, whilst the latter are perceived to mount
For proponents of structural social work, it is evident demonstrated by the Terrorism Act (2000) and others. periods without evidence and policing thought, as preventing free speech, detaining people for prolonged Western world has breached civil and human rights by regimes return. Counter-terrorism legislation across the these issues, particularly as fighters against foreign Social workers are increasingly required to work with states wishes to evade. that young and older people want to address, but which issues and questions will not disappear and it is this by Prevent and Channel but overridden by impositions generated. These are factors that are partly recognised which has intensified after 9/11. This can be seen as a solidarity with others sharing similar interests within and across boundaries. So in this globalised world, the causes of terrorism may not always lie in the country of the ‘home-grown’ terrorists, but in the wider world. Just as nations acts in solidarity, individuals too are capable of reflecting sympathies with others and act upon them. The call to arms across the Muslim countries resonates with Muslims across the globe, a process facilitated by the concept of ‘Umma’, or unity amongst Muslims which has intensified after 9/11. This can be seen as a product of political awareness, perceived as exploitation and oppression by the West and the alienation it has generated. These are factors that are partly recognised by Prevent and Channel but overridden by impositions of neo-liberal techniques and emphasis on individual pathology. However, the political essence of these issues and questions will not disappear and it is this that young and older people want to address, but which states wishes to evade.

Social workers are increasingly required to work with these issues, particularly as fighters against foreign regimes return. Counter-terrorism legislation across the Western world has breached civil and human rights by preventing free speech, detaining people for prolonged periods without evidence and policing thought, as demonstrated by the Terrorism Act (2000) and others. For proponents of structural social work, it is evident that social problems are not caused by individual deficits and communication problems between individuals and systems, but more importantly, by differentials in power to access resources, the intransigence of the powerful, the frustrations of not being heard by conventional methods and the lack of political representation which are the deeper causes (Morau, cited in Carniol, 1992). Morau states that in ‘defence of the clients’ we must ask whose side we are on and this necessitates that we need to ask brave and courageous questions if we are to challenge and redress injustices. In this case, these are questions about the role of state, media and other powerful elements that give succour to the demonization of Muslim people, which contributes to their politicisation and political militancy.

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Social Work and Armed Conflict: How the Everyday Practice of Social Work is Affected by International Politics

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Even though in the past the role of social work in armed conflict was made a topic (Staub-Bernasconi, 2004), by and large social work has not paid much attention to this issue. Global developments nevertheless put pressure on social work and in 2002 the motto of the 19th Social Work Day at the United Nations in New York was “Displacement, Forced Migration and the Effects of War” pointing out the considerable impact armed conflict had on social work practice in many parts of the world, especially since the early 1990s. What were the developments that made armed conflicts and international developments more important for social work practice than they were before?

What is of primary importance, here is the emergence of what has been called ‘asymmetric wars’ and changes in the nature and character of wars (Kaldor 2007). ‘New wars’ have resulted a) in an increase in refugee flows to Western countries and b) in humanitarian organizations being of increasing importance in crisis areas. Both developments greatly spill into social work practice at home and internationally.

The main characteristic of so-called ‘new wars’ are the following: a) they are no longer inter-state, but rather intra-state conflicts; b) they are asymmetrical, meaning that the parties to the conflict are using dramatically different means of fighting, c) they are often ways of making economic gains and possibilities for large-scale exploitation of the civilian population and finally d) they are not conflicts that are fought between regular armies but non-state actors, irregular forces including criminal gangs and finally - in varying degrees depending on the nature of the conflict – 5) the civilian population gets involved in armed conflicts as a central target or as collateral damage.

Even though there is certain disagreements on exact numbers, one can say that wars between nations have become a very rare event. According to one source, of all counted wars and armed conflicts since 2001 only 6% conflicts were about secession or for regional autonomy. (AKUF 2001; Collmer 2003). Over the last 50 years, the number of civil conflicts (i.e. civil wars, so-called counter-terrorism activities, genocide, asymmetrical violence and armed conflict between non-state actors) has far exceeded the number of interstate conflict. That is, we are dealing with a different combat environment as well as with different actors (Dosse 2010; Davenport 2014). While these are intrastate conflicts they nevertheless generally involve many countries, the Iraq war e.g. involving 33 countries. The US partnered with 17 countries in the so-called war against terror (Davenport 2014).

In the 1990s, armed conflict became the main driving force of involuntary migration where the main push factors being the collapse of civil structures and economies, the establishment of authoritarian regimes and violent dictatorships and the ensuing threat to life and reduction of life perspectives for the civilian population (Bade 2001, 27). Intra-state conflicts display additional characteristics: 90% of them take place in countries of the so-called Third World; they last longer than interstate conflicts; and they increase the likelihood of refugee flows as the civilian population is targeted and involved greatly. The main refugee flows since the 1990s coincided with intra-state conflicts.

The increase in refugee flows also testifies to the involvement of the civilian population. While again there is the usual disagreement about exact numbers (Roberts 2010), there is agreement that the number of civilian casualties has steadily increased over the past decades (ibid) at least in some conflicts amounting to 90% of all casualties (ibid.; Kaldor 2000).

Research since the 1990s has established that in the ‘new wars’ the sexual attack on women has become a weapon of war where women have become tactical targets. This is attributed to women’s cultural and social position in most societies as well as to the fact that the attack on women and children is a tremendous push factor if populations are to be ousted from a region. As a result, the gender-specific violence has become one of the main reasons why women seek refuge in other countries (Seifert 2001).

Children, too, are increasingly afflicted by armed conflicts. According to UNICEF, in the 1990s approximately 2 million children died as a consequence of armed conflict worldwide. At least 6 million children are either handicapped or seriously ill due to armed conflicts and more than one million are orphaned, the number of children who are refugees within or outside their countries of origin being estimated to several millions (Graca 2002). According to the Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, in 2013 children - - defined as young people
under the age of 18 - at the present time are trying to escape primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2013/2014 because of forced recruitment into armed groups, exposure to armed conflict (shelling, bombing, direct attacks) and human rights violations including sexualized violence (Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict 2013). In Syria, by the end of 2013, 11,420 children 17 years or younger were recorded killed out of a total of 113,735 civilian and combatant casualties (Oxford Research Group 2013).

How is social work affected by these developments? First, in most Western countries, migration and refugee work has dramatically gained importance. Taking the example of Germany, in 2013 and particularly 2014 ‘unaccompanied minors’ have become a major issue in social work. Since in 2010, Germany finally ratified the UN Child Protection Convention without reservations (before, some reservations had been made), the country is at least potentially a safe haven for minors – provided they manage to get to the country. Those who arrive in Germany generally have been on their way for a period of 6 months up to three years. The exact number of minors that entered Germany in 2013 can only be estimated since the statistics available are faulty or incompatible. UNHCR estimates that about 4000 young people under the age of 18 reached Germany; however, it could be more than that. What we know is the number of applications for asylum submitted by minors in 2013 was 2,486 (however, for legal reasons not all minors file such an application) with Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria topping the list. According to the German Children and Youth Services Act, when apprehended inside the country (which often happens in the streets of regions close to the Eastern and Southern borders of Germany), they immediately have to be handed over to local Youth Welfare Office or one of the care centers that have been established for unaccompanied minors which, in turn, report to the Youth Welfare Office (Mueller 2014). The number of unaccompanied minors who had an ‘emergency admission by Youth Welfare Authorities’ as it is called in German law, in 2013 was 6,584. But again, this does not include unaccompanied minors who have not been apprehended (ibid., 30). According to legal requirements, unaccompanied minors have to get a legal guardian who takes care of their well-being and accompanies him or her through legal procedures. At this point, the issue moves into the very center of social work. First, the need for social workers competency in this area has soared; second, there are specific demands on their skills as well as knowledge of asylum seekers policy and laws.

A good knowledge of the asylum laws requires specific legal as well as skills in dealing with the psycho-social situation of refugees in general and minors in particular. Finally, in order to be able to understand and assess the situations of the clients, social worker will have to take an increased interest in international politics and its contents and area of coverage.
Regarding the psycho-social situation of political refugees, trauma has become a major area of concern, trauma in this particular context being an intricate concept. Trauma resulting from the experience of armed conflict or political violence (taking place in specific regions of this world) has cultural as well as political aspects. Regarding the cultural aspects, the experience of war and violence is coped with differently in different cultures. An example for this is a study by Nita Luci on the ways Kosovar women dealt with war rapes in the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. Psycho-social organizations in the receiving countries of refugees and in Kosovo offered Western-type coping mechanisms, first of all ‘talking cures’. They soon discovered that – as distinct from Bosnian women – Kosovar women ‘did not talk’. While some imputed that this was due to female suppression in a patriarchal society, Nita Luci suggests that while this may have been true in some cases, it was also a specific coping mechanism the culture provided.

In other words: Is individual counseling helpful when the culture proposes social silence (Luci 2004; Schwandner-Sievers). When helpers insisted on Kosovar women talking, this might have done more harm than good and might have been a colonialist imposition of certain coping strategies ignoring the resources the culture had itself.

Thus, while culture-sensitive knowledge about trauma is necessary, there has also been scathing criticism about social work adopting a psychological and therapeutic focus on war trauma thus pathologizing and de-politicizing the experiences of refugees (Stubs 1999a; Pupavac 2000). Becker calls the diagnosis of the so-called post-traumatic stress syndrome (a popular concept in social work) in war victims a masterpiece of decontextualizing and de-politicizing experiences (Becker 1999, 172; Becker 2006).

This criticism focuses on the fact that crises and problems that have resulted from a deliberate, man-made and brutal attack on individuals and groups are psycho-pathologized and made an issue for individual therapy. What is considered inappropriate is the sole concentration on the individual ignoring that the real problem is not the person but the political and social conditions s/he has been exposed to. In Beckers words: A dictator has murdered the client’s family and submitted him or her to brutal torture. What this person desperately needs is not a medicalization of their condition, but the recognition that s/he has been exposed to political violence and that s/he is not reacting ‘pathologically’, but has a normal reaction to a brutal experience. An exclusive medical diagnosis here, too, might do more harm than good whereas a recognition of the political context may contribute to healing. The medialization of political trauma according to Becker is the center-piece of the last big imperial project that ignores the political embeddedness of people’s suffering (Becker 2006, 271). For social workers that means: It is not enough to apply a PTSS questionnaire and then be empathic; it may also be necessary to confront oneself with the political situation that has caused the clients’ suffering and the very specifics of a given context and condition if social work is to be more than a repair shop cushioning off the devastating effects of hegemonic political conditions.

Moreover, in post-conflict situations whole populations would have to be labelled as ‘traumatized’. Apparently
it is absurd to think of population groups having to undergo therapy. Thus, while the necessity and usefulness of therapy in individual cases is not contested, a social work approach that takes into consideration the political implications of the effects of political violence on their clientele, theoretically and practically has to consider ‘collective healing’, i.e. the provision of existential security in the receiving countries and the reconstruction of a secure, functioning and reconciliatory environment in the crisis regions themselves. All this has to be considered in the teaching and the application of social work methods for this particular context.

Again a practical example may serve to illustrate the point. In a comparative study on refugee work done with ex-Yugoslav refugees in Italy and the Netherlands, Korac (2004) found that well-meant work in the Netherlands that provided social relief according to need, thus favoring Bosnian refugees over Croatian or Serbian ones, gave a boost to ethno-national identification in those groups – a dangerous dynamics that was not in accord with the aim of reconciliation and dialogue that helpers also wanted to support. While one would presumably not want to give the same aid to people with considerably different needs, this shows how complicated social work might become under certain circumstances. In other words: there are no clear formulae or methods or procedures which social work can pursue in post-war reconstruction or refugee work.

At the Annual Conference of the German Association of Social Work in 2014, it was stated that in order to live up to ethics and professional standards of social work it would be necessary to take a clear political stance in favour of refugees and to enter into alliances with social forces that supported refugees. In other words: Social work cannot be but political.

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Torture is a subject that is often met with political and social taciturnity either for political reasons, or simply because it is something that people would rather think of as occurring in ‘other’ countries. The outrage expressed towards those who ordered or are perpetrators of torture, has long been dependent on the state party involved or individual that is engaging in this brutal practice. This outrage is usually justified on the grounds that the victim is somehow ‘deserving’ of the treatment, that they are involved in criminality, are considered socially ‘deviant’, or, more commonly, that they are less-than-human and therefore devoid of human emotions and rights.

Since the terrorist attack in the United States in 2001, and the ensuing so-called ‘war on terror’, the torture of those deemed terror suspects has become a normalised practice, not only at the hands of the US government (including its agents) and many of its allies, but also by states that use US torture as an excuse to treat its own citizens in the same manner. The lack of accountability for those who have ordered, and carried out torture, or turned a blind eye (that is, in some cases, still occurring), has meant that those involved in these crimes against humanity continue to live without any legal ramifications. The consequences have been devastating, and resulted in increased pro-torture attitudes in countries like the US and Australia, and the decimation of human rights and civil liberties.

All of these situations combined, the legislated immunity for those involved in torture, and the ever-increasing conservative political environment, have made advocating for accountability for torture extremely challenging and wrought with controversy.

This controversy has placed a great responsibility on advocates, including social workers, to visibly and powerfully condemn torture and call for accountability, in order to ensure justice and human rights are protected globally.

Unfortunately, this has not occurred in relation to social work. There has been a notable silence from peak social work bodies in relation to torture that has occurred as part of the war on terror - despite the strong social work commitment to human rights and justice. This does not bode well for a profession that has long been

Challenging torture in a post 9/11 world: The urgent need for courage

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active in social change movements and seeking justice and basic human rights for vulnerable communities and individuals.

But why this has occurred?

Since 9/11, the narrative surrounding terrorism has been crafted in a way that skillfully casts those accused of terrorism offences as social pariahs. Defending the basic human right to be free from torture has been akin to defending those convicted of child molestation in the social sphere. Advocates regularly receive death threats, abusive emails, and are accused of being terrorist sympathizers, despite their opposition to violence of any kind.

The narrative surrounding torture and terrorism continues to be wrought with emotive and visceral responses. Much of the mainstream media plays an integral role in dehumanising and vilifying victims of torture, protecting offenders, and has contributed to fear-based responses to terrorism. This makes the situation for advocates even more challenging, particularly when trying to engage the broader population in conversations that canvass the importance of protecting human rights in all circumstances, and why accountability for torture is so important. Indeed, the simplification of the politics surrounding torture and terrorism has made advocacy in this area a very difficult task.

It takes a great deal of courage to speak out for individuals in these situations, and given the social climate of fear that pervades terrorism, and increased job insecurity due to global economic factors, many are unwilling to take the risk of publicly defending the right to be free from torture when it could cost them their livelihoods or their personal relationships. Speaking out about controversial matters such as these can, in many cases, come at too great a personal cost.

The legal situation of those who actively speak out against government’s involved in torture has also been compromised. Legislation has been passed in several countries that effectively criminalises whistleblowing torture related material. For example, in Australia, legislation has recently been passed that allows for a person to be imprisoned for publishing material if he leaves the embassy. He has good reason to be concerned about extradition to the US. A former CIA agent, and torture whistleblower, John Kiriakou, has only recently been released after spending 14 months in a US prison for blowing the whistle. Numerous people of courage have been punished for speaking out, including many former Guantanamo Bay guards, intelligence officers and US military personnel.

More people have now been prosecuted for blowing the whistle under President Obama than any other administration in US history. The knowledge that the US government will stop at nothing to prosecute those who expose their criminal activities has meant that some of those involved who have extensive knowledge about what is occurring have been reluctant to come forward.

Despite the horrific breaches of human rights that Manning, Kiriakou and WikiLeaks exposed, the only ones who are under investigation and have been prosecuted are the whistleblowers and publishers— not those responsible for crimes against humanity. Those higher-up in the chain of command continue to remain unaccountable, not only within the Bush administration, but also in countries complicit either directly or through turning a blind eye and failing to condemn.

Increased surveillance of advocates and researchers, and the insecurity of electronic devices, has also had a chilling effect on advocacy in this area. Data retention of all phone conversations, emails and other personal communications have led to advocates having to use programs like Tor, and other ‘off the grid’ electronic communication devices to communicate with journalists and researchers about their work. Some people active in this area of advocacy have also been under surveillance and have had their computers hacked and phone calls intercepted and disconnected. Challenging government impropriety can be a risky business.

However, fighting torture in a post 9/11 world has never been more important as the world shifts into a situation where state powers have been increased on the back of innocuously termed ‘national security’ policies. Moving the focus back on human rights and justice will take a concerted and global effort by the international community to counter the fear. Social work can play an important role in this movement, and must do so if it is to remain a viable and relevant ‘human rights profession’ in the future.

Having the courage to be controversial is essential in challenging torture, no matter what the context or who is responsible. It is time for more courageous action to ensure a peaceful and just future.

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
A historical approach to social work’s responses to the Colombian armed conflict context

Colombia is a country with more than 60 years of a violent and still ongoing-armed conflict, where the struggles have been historically associated to structural economic, cultural and political inequities (Zuluaga, 2004, p. 36). This conflict involves not only rebel-guerrilla factions but also illegal private-security paramilitary groups, both factions playing an active role in drug trafficking. Consequently, there has been an increasingly high number of victims. Through different ways, violence has affected Colombians from every socio-economic, age, gender, religious, and political filiation. In response, the Colombian government has resorted to armed coercion, resulting in an abuse of power by government officials – many of whom are complicit in the violence. All of this leads to an environment where “impunity remains a structural problem affecting the full enjoyment of rights” (UNHCHR, 2012, p. 4).

Some numbers reflect the deep social and humanitarian impacts of this conflict. As per the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre by the Norwegian Refugee Council (2013), Colombia has the first largest number of internally forced displaced population in the world. According to the Colombian government’s online records (DPS, 2011), 3,875,987 people have been forcibly displaced from their land from the 1990s to the end of 2011, 37% of this population are children, the 25% are adult women, and at least 12% belong to an ethnic group. In the same timeframe the government also reports 2,039 people killed by anti-personnel mines, out of 9,704 total victims of such artifacts – 38% civilians, 10% children–, almost all of them from rural areas (Paicma, 2012). On the other hand, from 1999 to 2013 the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing (ICBF) reported 5,156 children placed in its support program for children demobilized from illegal armed groups (IOM, 2010, p. 10). Recent analyses show that most of these children were recruited when they were around 13 to 18 years old, but still a fourth part of this population was by the ages of three to 12. Yet, this Institute only reports the number of assisted children, but Colombia does not have an accurate record of children recruited by armed groups, which according to other researchers may vary between 6,000 to 17,000 children (Humanidad Vigente, 2010), and depending on the circumstances surrounding the demobilization, not all demobilized children receive psychosocial support from the government.

By September of 2012, the National Registry of Disappeared Persons cumulatively recorded 18,527 persons allegedly forcibly disappeared (UNHCR, 2013, p. 14), while by the same timeframe the Attorney General’s Office reported the exhumation of 4,703 bodies, with a third of them identified and handed over to families (UNHCHR, 2012, p. 12). The report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Ibid, p. 8) on Colombia indicates the involvement of 3,963 members of the government security forces in 1,622 cases of extrajudicial executions, with a very low rate of sentences given by the justice system. The situation is similar concerning cases of conflict-related sexual violence where by November of the same year only four cases were on trial out of 183 fully admitted by the Constitutional (Supreme) Court (Ibid, p. 1 3).

This article explores the ways Social Work has responded along its history to the challenges posed by this context. The historical approach informing this reflection allows to identify the way Colombian Social Work has understood: (a) the complex set of socio-political problems that are mixed and expressed through an armed conflict like this, and (b) the place of its professional identity in relation to its subject matter. In delimiting such a historical approach, we agree with Édgar Malagón and Gloria Leal (2001, 2006)
that Social Work should be understood as a specialized practice informed by sound scholarship. This has two important implications for thinking about Social Work's history. First, the history of social phenomena studied and intervened by Social Work brings an important framework, but it is not to be confused with Social Work’s own history. This means this paper is centered on the historical stages of Colombian Social Work, and the development of the armed conflict is presented here in reference to such stages. Second, the origins of Social Work are to be located when the very first academic school devoted to prepare social workers appeared, and not in previous significant but non-academically prepared practices of assistance.

There are two more assertions in Malagón and Leal's work (Ibid.) taken in this manuscript takes as premises to reflect upon. The first assertion distinguishes the responses provided from two different but not mutually excluding logics that define Social Work as either a professional practice or an academic discipline. The former develops several support practices from distinct and well delimited Social Aid Relationships (SAR), and the practices particularly related to dealing with the consequences of armed conflict are mainly focused on meeting the victims’ physical, psychosocial and cultural needs, while some social workers have recently joined interdisciplinary teams to support the social reintegration processes of demobilized combatants. The latter logic leads to different methodologies of social research. In this sense, the research subject matter of Colombian social workers has been around the impacts of the armed conflict on its victims (mainly by internal forced displacement), and its expression and reproduction of other underlying social problems, which has led to a view of this conflict as a scenario for Social Work’s professional performance (Duque and others, 2007, p. 130). This resulting academic knowledge has been applied in both informing Social Work’s practice, and advocating for victims’ rights to truth, justice, and reparation.

The second assertion (Ibid.) organizes Social Work’s history in three stages: pre-reconceptualization (1936-70s), reconceptualization (’70s-’90s) and post-reconceptualization (’90s-up to date). The reconceptualization period is a milestone where the foundations of Latin American Social Work were shook by the paradigm of socialism, which led some practitioners and scholars to embrace the cause of emancipation through “all means of struggle” – even through arms. In the previous stage, the social doctrine of the Catholic Church and the structural-functionalist sociology informed the practice. In the last and current stage, both profession and discipline pursue social change but through critical approaches different to socialism. Thus, the approaches in the literature authored by social workers on the Colombian armed
conflict since the beginning of the 2000s are most notably: social constructivism (Bello, 2000a and 2000b), gender (Pinto, 2008; Cifuentes, 2009a), poststructuralism (Mellizo, 2008), and peace-building and do-no harm (PIUPC, 2011), among others.

The first part of this paper defines the Social Aid Relationships (SAR) that have historically delimited Social Work both as a practice and a discipline. From this framework, the second and third parts characterize how Social Work has incorporated issues of armed conflict in its professional and disciplinary interests, and the challenges to continue working towards realizing human dignity.

Social Aid Relationships as scenarios for Social Work profession and discipline

Social Work has historically been related to the interpretation of and search for alternatives to the problems of individuals in meeting their needs, from all spheres of social interaction. This is why Human Rights are part of Social Work’s own definition as an ethical standard for realizing human dignity.

Based on Manfred Max-Neef’s (1995) Human scale development, it is possible to think about human dignity as a state achievable through meeting the individual’s fundamental human needs. Such needs are met through social relationships that involve a person from the very first time in his or her life, and those that he or she builds through spheres of social interaction (i.e., family, community, territory, among others). This framework leads us to understand both the individual and his/her human dignity as socially interpreted.

Fundamental human needs should be distinguished from the resources that satisfy them (satisfactors); and also from the conditions that result from the denial of such resources (deprivations). This conceptual differentiation makes it possible to go beyond the widespread perception of human needs as a kind of never-ending list, to delimit them into two non-excluding, non-hierarchical levels, each with specific categories: existential needs (to be someone, to be somewhere, to do, and to have), and vital needs (bodily needs, emotional needs, and sociocultural needs). Hence, deprivations are opposed to human needs, and thus they can be classified respectively as follows: existential deprivations (alienation, heteronomy and disempowerment), and vital deprivations (poverty, indifference and exclusion) (Bello and Chaparro, 2011).

Within the capitalist framework both family and paid work are expected to provide direct access to satisfactors without additional support. These are then viewed as social wellbeing relationships (SWR), which aim to satisfy the human needs. When access to one or several satisfactors is denied, deprivations are generated and society responds through Social Aid Relationships (SAR). These are grounded in ethical principles of social aid, which lead to create means for redistributing satisfactors through the generation of either monetary or in-kind supplements. It is from here where Social Work has performed as a practice with the main purpose of providing support, and later in history, promoting social change (Malagón, 2000).
In this way, Social Work appears to understand armed conflict as a violent socio-political phenomenon against the realization of human dignity, where the armed conflict expresses and reproduces both existential and vital deprivations. Thus, Social Work in Colombia has responded to this context from the following three SAR:

1. Self-management: This is an organized response of mutual help, under the principle of solidarity among associates that view each other as equals, e.g.: victims associations for the advocacy of human rights, such as the National Movement of Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE). Nevertheless, it is important to be sensitive to those cultures where their members actually meet their needs—not their deprivations—through relationships of self-management, usually based on kinship or other kinds of filiation, which makes of it then a SWR. Some of these cases may take the form of social organizations, e.g.: the National Indigenous Organization (ONIC), or the Afro-Colombian Major Community Councils such as Cocomacia. Social workers’ role here is to promote social cohesion, and to support the search for alternatives to critical situations according to the communities’ own cultural and symbolic resources.

2. Social Assistance: This SAR consists in the redistribution of satisfactors from people in better conditions to others in disadvantage. Its ethical foundations have historically changed, hence influencing its outcomes. Christian charity and compassion first inspired this kind of assistance, but modern liberalism replaced them with secular altruism and philanthropy, from where social inequity is not challenged and social support is more similar to social control to keep the status quo (Malagón, 2000). Later, human rights have inspired new critical approaches for promoting social change towards equity and social inclusion, through the ethics of cooperation and social justice (Bello and Chaparro, 2011).

3. Public policy: The purpose of this SAR is the realization of social justice as both ethical standard and state’s commitment, through social policies, programs, and projects where social workers have played key roles of coordination and social intervention (Malagón, 2000), e.g.: the ICBF’s programs of assistance to children demobilized from illegal armed groups, or its mobile units of assistance to internally displaced persons.

As a discipline, Social Work is not limited only to one of these relationships, but goes through all of them inquiring about the social phenomena they deal with, and their responses. Thus, we suggest here that Social Work’s production of knowledge is founded upon an ethics of responsibility: a) to socially share it, and b) to aim towards realizing human dignity.

The following section demonstrates the way as Colombian Social Work, both as a practice and a discipline, has historically responded to the context of ongoing-armed conflict. The lack of literature on this specific topic during the first two Social Work’s stages lead us to present some conclusions as conjectures, based upon the characteristics of Social Work’s practice of that time. It is our intention that the reflection here proposed encourages other scholars to carry out more in-depth studies on this perspective in Social Work history.

The Colombian armed conflict through the Social Work’s pre-reconceptualization stage

Following the premises aforementioned, Social Work in Colombia began in 1936 with the first academic school devoted to train specialized social workers. This program was promoted by Maria Carulla, a Colombian woman who graduated in the first cohort of the School of Social Assistance of Barcelona (Spain), sponsored by the International Catholic Union of Social Services, and the Colombian Catholic church. Such influences clearly attached Social Work to the religious understanding of charity and compassion, informing its practice within the framework of social assistance in urban spaces. The main purpose at that time was to protect traditional family order through reinforcing conventional social roles for women, such as taking care of the household (Malagón, and Leal, 2006).

Colombian social context at that time was strongly marked by poverty and illiteracy in the rural population. Large numbers of people migrated to the cities looking for better chances to get a job in construction or other low-income positions in factories, while women were either hired for domestic service or stayed at home caring for children. Salaries were low, and the available job positions could not meet the growing demand from peasant migrants. This led to the growth of slums inside and around large cities. In turn, people who stayed in the countryside struggled to sell their products, while municipal authorities were under the control of traditional wealthy political elites (Meertens & Sánchez, 1983).

Regional politics reflected what was happening at the national level, characterized by continuous confrontations between the Liberal Party (in the power at that time), and the Conservative Party. These confrontations became more intense by the end of the 1940s, when the Conservative Party assumed power and the Liberal Party promoted the formation of guerrilla groups in the countryside to oppose the Conservatives. The practices of these groups were characterized by terror and massive cruelty against those identified as political opponents, while the government responded with the full power of the armed forces, leading this period to being named La Violencia (ibid; Pizarro, 1990).

Studies on Social Work’s history do not mention any particular response from the profession to the conditions of this period. It is valid to suppose that first cohorts of Colombian social workers, following the ethical understandings on charity and compassion, provided any sort of social assistance to those who came to the cities not only for economical reasons but also escaping from violence.

Due to the lack of an approach to recognize these new migrants as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP),...
and therefore as victims of armed conflict, social workers might have understood their issues as solely related to poverty, without questioning the political struggles behind the armed violence that led them to such situation and made their existential and vital deprivations different (e.g., restrictions to their freedom that created a harmful heteronomy; loss of hope that led to alienation and disempowerment; emotional distress related to threats against their lives, and grievances for the murder of loved ones; exclusion of their sociocultural identity in the new urban places where they tried to settle, among others).

This confusion should still have continued in 1953, when La Violencia ended with a political agreement between the Liberal and Conservative elites to alternate in power until the mid-'80s. However, peasant guerrilla groups continued the armed struggle with the sponsorship of the Communist party, which was excluded from such an agreement.

By 1952 the secular Colombian state passed legislation providing for education in Social Work, which led to powerful influence from both structural-functionalist sociology and hygienist medicine. These approaches view the problems experienced by people as the result of their own bad choices, without questioning the role played by social structures (Malagón, 2001). In consequence, IDP and other victims of the armed conflict became even more invisible to social workers, whom confused them with the poor population that had been supporting through charitable assistance, and now through the social policies (which by then consisted on governmental programs where social workers were hired to assist the most marginalized). Thus, the ethical guiding principles practice were a mix of compassion with secular altruism, sharing space with the scientific foundations that informed the methodologies that characterized Social Work back then: individual and group case work, and community organization (Ibid.).

Social Work's reconceptualization and its responses to the armed conflict

Although the influences mentioned above made of Colombian Social Work part of what could be perceived as mechanisms of social control, both the sociological and medical influences gave the profession a sense of academic existence. Yet, in the 1960s it led to question what was Social Work's own identity, then opening the door to build a Social Work academic discipline (Ibid.).

Such concerns made it easier for Marxist sociology to influence Colombian and Latin American Social Work in general, with its critics against oppressive social structures and a call to make social change through all means of struggle. Although Marxist approaches influenced all social sciences in general, Social Work's permanent contact with the disadvantaged socioeconomic classes was yet another reason to be very sensitive to such influence (Ibid.), making of reconceptualization a crucial stage between 1970s-90s.

At the same time, the armed conflict was going through important changes. In the 1970s-80s, several new national guerilla groups appeared, while in the mid-'80s drug-lords and landowners sponsored paramilitary groups supposedly for self-defense, using them for their own purposes and leading to the increased victimization
of the civilian population. Particularly in this period, internal forced displacement of the population became a strategy of war, exponentially increasing the number of its victims (Bello, 2004).

Yet in this stage, Colombian Social Work literature does not evidence recognition of IDP and other victims of armed conflict as requiring a different kind of support to that provided to poor and other people considered non-victims. From the Marxist approach, the profession read social problems as the result of oppression by economic and political elites, and of the American-supported armed coercion of the Colombian government to stop drug trafficking (Malagón, 2001). Marxism led Social Work to implement new methodologies for promoting self-empowerment through grassroots initiatives, such as Paulo Freire’s popular education, popular communication, and community development models. Although social workers’ identities involved in these activities remained unknown, many of them helped community leaders to read the complete works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Tse-tung, among other communist authors, and to understand their own agrarian issues and advocate using a Marxist language around concepts such as proletariat, surplus value, class-consciousness, class struggle, etc., as can be read from the writings of grassroots leaders of the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC) (MH, 2010a). This led Colombian Social Work to look at solidarity as a new guiding principle which self-management relationships of social aid were built upon.

In urban areas, some social workers gave similar support to the creation of Neighbourhood / Community Action Boards, while others tried to promote emancipation from the inside of their jobs with the government or NGOs. Some of those NGOs assimilated the change towards emplacing more supportive community work, and since 1975 they assumed a role of political demands of human rights, filling gaps of mediation between the people and the state that traditional political parties were unwilling to overcome (Londoño, 2005, p. 2). But practitioners promoting emancipation for governmental offices or more conservative NGOs were seen as “revolutionary threats”. Many of them had to abandon the emancipatory cause in order to keep their jobs, while the names of those fired were included in black lists among employers. Some others even assumed a radical position and joined the revolutionary groups – both their non-military and/or military factions (Malagon, 2001).

On the other hand, reconceptualization opened an explicit interest on consolidating Social Work’s disciplinary identity. Approaches such as participatory action research informed a disciplinary practice called analytical documentation of experiences (“sistemización”, in Spanish), which was assumed as independent from the professional practice, although the experiences documented were those performed within the SAR (Malagón & Leal, 2006). This might suggest why this kind of research method did not recognize the particular issues faced by armed conflict’s victims until the post-reconceptualization period in the 1990s, when some grassroots organizations of IDP gained enough political presence to draw attention to their particular needs.

The Social Work’s post-reconceptualization approach to armed conflict

In the 1980s-90s the violence associated with the armed conflict reached critical levels. Guerrilla groups routinely kidnapped political figures, and some even carried out armed takeovers of important public spaces, e.g.: in 1985 the take of the Supreme Courthouse, which the government recovered through a violent military operation. Paramilitary groups fought with guerrillas over the control of vast areas in the countryside and some urban neighbourhoods, basing their strategy mainly on massacres of several people in order to create terror among the population and to gain respect based on fear. Drug-lords also displayed their power by terrorizing the urban population with bombs, as well as ordering the murders of police officers in the streets and of political figures that could threaten their business, using economically-disadvantaged youngsters as pistols-for-hire (sicarios). By the beginning of the ‘80s the Colombian government declared a state of emergency, which enabled it to exert the full power of the armed forces. As a result, the government was responsible for several egregious violations of human rights, particularly forced disappearances of many leaders of labour unions, student, and community movements (Pécaut & González, 1997).

This situation overwhelmingly increased the numbers of IDP (CODHES, 2005). Many peasant and indigenous people were displaced to urban slums, experiencing marginalization that made of them the poorest ones among the poor (PIUPC, 2008). By the beginning of 1990s, community leaders of this population promoted autonomous organizations in order to improve such conditions and to advocate for their rights. Social workers did not miss such initiatives and analytically documented them.

Some NGOs focused their work on grassroots community development and awareness of the humanitarian crises presented by violations of international humanitarian law (Ruiz, 2005), disregarding of their secular or religious foundations. From this moment, the importance given to human rights made of cooperation the new ethical standard of the social assistance relationship. From there, and along the post-reconceptualization stage, social workers developed and supported many initiatives towards community empowerment, lobbying, cultural recognition, as well as therapeutic assistance from approaches such as the systemic, the ecological, and the psychosocial, among others.

In turn, public policies have always been attached to government interests, and therefore did not develop a differentiated praxis for armed conflict’s victims until 1997, when the existence of IDP was officially recognized through law No. 387, and special programs were designed to support their humanitarian needs. Even though social workers in the field had engaged with this population before, since then they were able
to develop different strategies of intervention, and others were hired to review applications by the IDP to access economic and in-kind aid provided through governmental programs.

Two years later, social workers at the ICBF were requested to design a program to provide specialized assistance with respect to the social re-integration of children who formerly fought within illegal armed groups, whom had been captured by security forces, had run away from their recruiters, or just had been released, and now were in the custody of the child welfare system (ICBF, 2003; Pinto, 2008).

The academic discipline of Social Work has experienced major advances since the 1990s post-reconceptualization stage, but there was a lapse before systematic research on the armed conflict was done. At the beginning there was some analytical documentation of work experiences with IDP and their grassroots organizations, which towards the end of the decade led to inquire about the impacts of internal displacement on rural development (Osorio, 1996, 1998), and on individual and collective identities (Osorio, 2001; Bello, 2000, 2001). Comprehension of this phenomenon required an understanding of the complex causes and dynamics of the armed conflict. With that purpose, the National University of Colombia created the Program of University Initiatives for Peace and Coexistence -Piupc-, one of the first in the country led by a university Social Work program, in order to promote interdisciplinary exchanges from approaches based on the particularities of gender, ethnicity, culture, and socio-political contexts (Bello & Chaparro, 2008). The conclusions of these inquiries informed social workers' practice within the SAR. Furthermore, the Program created a documentation centre on forced displacement, which included analytical documentation of experiences produced by both social work practitioners and undergrad students within their practicums or final dissertations.

Yet, a review of four of Colombia's most important Social Work journals shows that they did not publish on the armed conflict but until 2000. Such articles reflect how Colombian Social Work's interest on this topic was guided by its concerns for assisting the victims of internal forced displacement, recognizing the differentiated impacts on individuals and social organizations (Rodríguez & others, 2005), families (López & Agudelo, 2000; Cifuentes, 2009b), children (Pinto, 2005), women (Cifuentes, 2009a), and ethnic groups (Pardo, 2005). Other concerns related to forced displacement have been about Social Work strategies of intervention (Herrera & Echeverry, 2005; Pardo &
In between 2003-5, the disciplinary interests of Social Work in relation to the armed conflict broadened, when the Colombian government negotiated the demobilization of the biggest paramilitary structure in the country. The government used this negotiation to validate its narrative that the conflict had largely ended, and that guerrilla groups were “narco-terrorists” without a legitimate political agenda, situating the Colombian conflict both within the War on Drugs and the post 9/11 global War on Terror. At the same time, the government denied the existence of paramilitary factions that were not part of such demobilization, despite the fact that they were still attacking civilians and operating as the private armies of drug-lords and landowners. Such remaining groups were also threatening and killing human rights defenders, as well as leaders of victim’s groups of different crimes (e.g., torture, kidnapping, forced disappearance, sexual violence, among others). Groups of victims demanded that the negotiation with the paramilitaries not lead to impunity, but instead be used as an opportunity to guarantee their rights to truth, justice and reparation. The support of the international community to these groups of victims, forced the government to include some of their demands in law No. 975/2005, which regulated said negotiation.

Despite its several weaknesses for realizing victims’ rights (Uprimny and Saffon, 2006), the new legal framework resulting from the paramilitary demobilization strengthened what social workers had been doing since many years beforehand: supporting victims groups through social aid relationships of social assistance and self-management. From the social policy relationship, social workers joined interdisciplinary teams to design strategies for supporting ex-combatants in their social re-integration processes, which represented a challenge but also an ethical dilemma for a profession that had been mainly working with victims. The first analytical documentations of works with ex-combatants (particularly children) appeared towards 2008, while Social Work journals first began publishing articles on demobilized children (Cifuentes, 2008; Pinto, 2009).

On the other hand the PIUPC began to focus on exploring the psychosocial impacts of violent practices different to internal forced displacement, such as forced disappearance, kidnapping, and selective murder (PIUPC, 2009). This program applied two additional approaches to the armed conflict: a) do no-harm and peacebuilding strategies, and b) historical memory. The former explores the ways in which humanitarian aid can unintentionally lead to exacerbate conflicts rather than to build peace (Anderson, 1999; PIUPC, 2010). The latter is considered to be both an approach and methodology because it empowers victims’ voices in understanding their experiences through violence and survival strategies (MH, 2009; Cancimance, 2011). The numerous cases of violence in different parts of the country have led historical memory to move Social Work research towards the analysis of regional agricultural conflicts around the distribution, use and access to lands and territories, particularly from gender (Pinto, 2011), psychosocial, and ethnic approaches (MH, 2010, 2011).

Rediscoveries, recoveries, and challenges

This historical review on the responses from Social Work to the context of the Colombian armed conflict confirms Social Work’s engagement to realizing human dignity. This is not an easy goal, and despite initial influences, Social Work has been able to make of it an ethical commitment instead of an ideological one. Such commitment has been closely attached to the cultural, political, geographic, economic and social conditions that define the field of work.

This commitment was first clear in the Social Work practiced from the SAR, which in the case of sociopolitical violence first provided support to victims, being unaware of how conflicts of power had led them to such conditions, and made their existential and vital deprivations different to those of the poor people that Social Work had been assisting before.

On the other hand, the tensions around an epistemological identity of its own during the reconceptualization stage founded the interest in building Social Work as a discipline, without leaving its ethical goal behind. Thus, the discipline’s purpose for understanding social problems has been closely attached to the SAR from where the profession has since then operated. This is most likely why initial attempts to analytically document Social Work experiences helped the profession to identify the differences between the existential and vital deprivations of the victims, and of those experiencing structural impoverishment. This is also why working with ex-combatants to promote their social reintegration is still a challenge for Social Work as both a practice and a discipline. Social Work has historically advanced by defining specific strategies for victims’ advocacy. In this vein, Social Work research must progress towards advocating for ethical and effective social integration of ex-combatants in this next stage of the conflict.

The discipline of Social Work has proved its potential for informing the profession, as well as for a theoretical understanding of social problems expressed through complex phenomena as sociopolitical violence, as it has done in other fields of study (i.e., family and child wellbeing, public policies, labour relationships, etc.). In order to keep advancing on this achievement, both discipline and profession must take into account the conditions that define the context of work (e.g., culture, power relationships, social dynamics, previous history, etc.); and particularly the goals of such work must not be imposed from outside the population. Among other reasons, this is a common mistake when political or funder’s interests are uncritically prioritized above people’s concerns and own understandings of how they have been or have not been affected.

Yet, the biggest challenge for Social Work in Colombia
is its context itself, where sociopolitical violence is a present reality. According to Martha Bello (2005), while people’s human dignity and safety are top priorities, it is necessary that Social Work inquires about what interests produce conflict, what political conditions keep it, what role is assigned to the communities in the perpetrators’ military strategies, and how this leads to make of them the primary victims. 

With the purpose of opening a discussion with better informed arguments rather than giving conclusive statements, this historical review is expected to contribute (as it happened to us as authors), to the rediscovery of the ethical commitment of Social Work when dealing with sociopolitical violence, as well as to recover the sense of the importance of doing these efforts in the middle of an ongoing violent context such as the Colombian one. 

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Books:


Bello, M., and others (2000a). Efectos psicosociales y...


Contributions to books:


Unpublished works:


Online articles and reports:


Under the European Network for Social Action (ENSACT) seven European organisations have worked together since 2007 to promote a human rights based approach to social work, social work education and social policies. From 2007 until 2013 ENSACT concentrated its efforts on organising joint biennial European conferences to debate, develop and disseminate issues and innovative practice in a European forum. However, the member organisations have now decided to concentrate their efforts on other ways to promote their joint goals, among others hosting the European observatory for the Global Agenda – visit www.ensact.com for more information.

ENSACT members have diverse backgrounds. They represent a variety of organisations of social work educators, social work practitioners, social policy developers and service users of social work. The mission of ENSACT is to collectively promote a more inclusive society, a stronger role for service users, and a closer cooperation between professionals. By acknowledging these issues as urgent priorities, we aim to increase the visibility of our actions and the influence we have on decision makers.

In order to clarify our objectives, ENSACT members have prepared a mission statement that we would like to share with your readers. Of course we welcome cooperation with other organisations in Europe focusing on our goals.

**Mission statement**

The members of the European Network for Social Action (ENSACT) have worked together since 2007 to promote the human rights based approach of social work, social work education and social policies, in line with the objectives of the global social agenda but with a view to producing practical solutions at the local and regional level.

As in many other countries worldwide, economic and social inequalities are increasing in Europe. The current crisis has intensified this tendency: as a result, we face major issues such as mass unemployment, poverty and growing social exclusion. There is an urgent need for social policies aimed at reducing inequalities and strengthening cohesion, through the promotion of universal access to basic social protection schemes and social services.

During the past few years in most European countries, governments have adopted measures to reduce public deficits, resulting in cuts in social expenditures. Many social services are delivered under severe financial constraints and professional standards are likely to be reduced: social professionals are suffering a depreciation of their mission. Service users and beneficiaries will also be affected by this situation, and will have ideas for improvement, which calls for enhancing service users’ involvement.
Given the complexity of the social consequences of the crisis and the interconnection between all of these factors, there is a need for stimulating a much stronger cooperation between service providers, social workers, educators, policy makers, service users and communities. Each stakeholder has to be supported by the others in order to optimize a common efficiency.

The mission of ENSACT is to collectively promote these issues: a more inclusive society, a stronger role for service users, a closer cooperation between professionals. By acknowledging these issues as urgent priorities, we aim to increase the visibility of our actions and the influence we have on decision makers. Social action in Europe deserves to rank higher on the political agenda of European governments, European Union, Council of Europe and other relevant institutions.

Within the very large mission ENSACT members have, we agree to focus on effective strategies to improve the lives of vulnerable target groups that are most affected by the social situation in Europe including:

- People faced with unemployment, homelessness, poverty, drug and alcohol problems
- Disabled people
- Children and elderly people
- Minorities, migrants and refugees
- Women affected by violence, trafficking and prostitution

We aim to obtain our goals by:

- Networking exchanges (research, practices, effective interventions, education methods);
- Get-togethers involving all stakeholders, to discuss and share results;
- Feedback to national governments and European institutions;
- Collecting examples of good practice via the European Observatory;
- Increasing media attention for social issues.
- Members of ENSACT
- European Association of Schools of Social Work EASSW – www.eassw.org
- European association of training centres for socio-educational care work FESET – www.feset.org
- International Federation of Educative Communities FICE Europe – www.fice-inter.net
- International Federation of Social Workers IFSW Europe – www.ifsw.org
- PowerUs, service users in social work learning partnership – www.powerus.info
- Social Work and Health Inequalities Network SWHIN - http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/study/cll/research/swhin/
List of conferences 2015-2016

**EASSW Social Work Education in Europe**
29th June – 2nd July 2015.
Bicocca University, Milan Italy  http://www.eassw.org/2015/

**5th International Conference on Sociology and Social Work.**
http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/26716

**Professional social work in South East Asia: Education and Qualifications.**
July 21st- 22nd.

**2015 International Conference on Mental Health and Social Work.**
11th June 2015.
Washington, USA.

**Joint World Conference on Social Work Education and Development 2016.**

**3rd International Indigenous Voices in Social Work Conference.**
14th – 17th September 2015.
The International Association of Schools of Social Work has member schools in all parts of the world; 5 regional organizations in Africa; Asia and the Pacific; Europe; Latin America; and North America and the Caribbean are affiliated with the International Association of Schools of Social Work and represented on the board of directors.

The IASSW promotes the development of social work education throughout the world, develops standards to enhance quality of social work education, encourages international exchange, provides forums for sharing social work research and scholarship and promotes human rights and social development through policy and advocacy activities.
IASSW Membership
If you would like to join IASSW Membership, find out more at: http://www.iassw-aiets.org/categories-and-fee-structure

Project Funding – Call for Proposals
IASSW Grants for Projects in Social Work Education
IASSW invites proposals for projects, designed to advance social work education internationally. Grants of up to US $4,000 are available for proposals that can be expected to contribute to the implementation of the IASSW Mission Statement, and to the enhancement of cooperation among schools of social work world-wide. This is a continuous aspect of IASSW activities but the final submission date for the next round of bids is 30 of November 2014.

Proposals with filled Cover page (can be downloaded from IASSW Website) for Project Application should be sent by e-mail to:
anna.metteri@uef.fi, with a copy to the IASSW office: rashmi@iassw.net
For more information and guidelines for submission, visit:
http://www.iassw-aiets.org/project-funding

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