

Division and Dialogue:

Ethno-Sectarian Post-Conflict Reconciliation and Education in Divided Cyprus

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Introduction

Rationalist approaches to post-conflict reconstruction have too often ignored the symbolic politics which underlie conflict. Ethnic identity and memory are critical to our understanding of how and why conflicts are fought, and these constructions are reproduced and taught to the next generation through education and socialization. This paper draws on reconciliation theory, scholarship on ethnic conflict, and current international peace education efforts to explore the uniquely transformative potential of peace education in ethnic post-conflict reconstruction. History education specifically can reinforce patterns of conflict, but it also has the potential to redefine narratives toward cross-cultural understanding and peace.

The Mediterranean island of Cyprus has been ethnically partitioned between Greek and Turkish Cypriots for fifty years. A United Nations buffer zone, also known as the “Green Line,” separates the two sides of the island. Subsequently, each community is isolated within its own distinct narratives regarding the history and ethnic politics of the conflict. Educational systems on each side of the island are separate, so inclusive history narratives and cross-cultural education remain weak in Cypriot classrooms. While education is one way political outlooks are expressed, it is also a mechanism through which peace and tolerance initiatives can be successful. Peace education in Cyprus can serve as a means of socialization and identity development, and by promoting intercultural coexistence, it has the potential to bring up a new generation of Cypriots capable of working toward a positive peace.

In this paper, I examine the potential peace education has to heal division and ethnic animosities in partitioned Cyprus. I begin with a discussion of theories of ethnic reconciliation and theories of the potential of education to ameliorate divisions in post-conflict settings. This theoretical discussion touches on the international mechanisms set out to impose peace

education, the potential power of history education for peace, and the reasons why children and teachers are formative actors in peace education efforts. I then review the case study of Cyprus, beginning with the island's history of conflict. I examine the island's key peace education programs, including the setbacks they have faced. I conclude with commentary on the origins of these difficulties before advocating which approaches have the greatest potential to further peace looking toward the future.

Part I:

Ethnic Reconciliation and Peace Education

This section outlines the theoretical foundation of post-conflict reconciliation, with a particular focus on the role of peace education in the wake of ethnic conflict. Education plays a key role in shaping identity, memory, and intergroup attitudes, important components of the symbolic issues underlying ethnic strife.

What is Reconciliation?

Social scientists have perpetually puzzled over how humans maintain our social order. As sociologist Johan Galtung put it: "The fact that we are around testifies to a lot of conflict resolution capacity. And reconstruction. And reconciliation. How come?"¹ The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) defines reconciliation as the "process of addressing the legacy of past violence and rebuilding the broken relationships it has caused."²

¹ William J. Long and Peter Brecke, *War and Reconciliation: Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 1, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/7154.001.0001>.

² David Bloomfield, Teresa Barnes, and Luc Huyse, eds., *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2003), 11. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/reconciliation-after-violent-conflict-handbook.pdf>.

Reconciliation provides for confidence, safety, and trust in a country's future, yet issues of reconciling with past violence are some of the greatest challenges facing new or restored democracies. In societies emerging from conflict, cooperation is strained because relationships are based on "antagonism, distrust, disrespect and, quite possibly, hurt and hatred."³ Particularly in the case of ethnic wars, reconciliation is necessary to prevent renewed fighting early on and to avoid policy failures as compromise is brought to the table.⁴ As a society emerges from conflict, reconciliation involves the transformation of attitudes, narratives, and relationships.⁵

The Unique Challenges Posed by Ethnic Conflict

Reason alone can never produce any action or give rise to volition. . . . Reason is, and ought to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them. – David Hume

By the 1990s, post-conflict literature on ethnic issues had grown considerably and came to reject the 'modernization' paradigm, or the idea that "urbanization, secularization, and industrialization would minimize social differences, while nation-building would develop modern homogenous culture centred around patriotic loyalty to the state, rather than to ethnically based loyalties such as nationalism."⁶ This idea turned out to be an illusion, and an understanding of ethnic conflict and reconciliation became more important than ever as international wars

³ Ibid. Reconciliation is "both a *goal* - something to achieve - and a *process* - a means to achieve that goal." Reconciliation *events* can be "identified in the historical record, whereas reconciliation [generally] ultimately occurs within the minds of many, perhaps most, individuals in a society and is difficult to measure."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Real-life examples of post-conflict reconciliation are not always easy to find. Long and Brooke's 2002 book *War and Reconciliation* analyzed 8 post-conflict relationships and found that "national actors lack the motivation and mechanisms that would allow for exploration of truth; expeditious redefinition of the actors' identities through legal, constitutional, or institutional means; or application of limited justice." In cases of civil war, findings were more robust, as countries which reconciled successfully restored lasting social order. This required protracted processes of hard recognition and public truth telling, redefinition of identities, and partial justice short of revenge.

⁶ Kenneth D. Bush and Diana Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000), 1.

declined and civil wars became more numerous.⁷ Common ideas of conflict resolution frequently fail in cases of ethnic conflict because they are based on inadequate understandings of “how ethnic identities work, why group members mobilize for war, and how they can be mobilized for peace.”⁸

Ethnic wars are often fought over tangible stakes like land, power, etcetera, but these are not the fundamental barriers to conflict resolution. Parties in ethnic conflicts are frequently not entirely amenable to compromise. The problem is “often not the interests at stake, but the emotion-laden symbolic politics of defining, pursuing, and discussing them.”⁹ Memories from war can date back decades or centuries and still inform contemporary political life, and ethnicity is a strong predictor of interpretations of past conflicts.¹⁰ Two diverging perspectives describe the paradigms which underlie ethnic reconciliation: the “rationalist model” and the “symbolic politics approach.”¹¹

Outsiders to ethnic conflicts have typically provided interventions based on the assumption that these wars result from conflicts of interest among rational individuals.¹² Diplomats and rationalist analysts tend to function under the peacekeeping assumption that sides in conflict prefer peace because they recognize the costs of war, and violence is attributed to

⁷ Charis Psaltis, Mario Carretero, and Sabina Čehajić-Clancy, eds., *History Education and Conflict Transformation: Social Psychological Theories, History Teaching and Reconciliation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Stuart J. Kaufman, “Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars,” *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 2 (2006): 203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343306060622>.

¹⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹¹ Socio-political factors can also influence who is defined as a victim or a perpetrator. Violent conflict creates all sorts of victims, and it is important to clarify the factors that lead to their identification and mobilization. Policy-makers and leaders need to be aware of the many faces of victimhood in order to guide programs for the victims. To establish this, there must be civil debate about which people and which communities should be recognized as victims in order to develop the guiding principles for all healing, truth-telling and reparation work.

¹² Ibid., 206. As this paper will go on to elaborate, these peace efforts may fail because they pay insufficient attention to the emotional and symbolic roots of extremist ethnic politics. The rationalist paradigm underlying current conflict resolution overlooks the key causes of ethnic wars, and therefore can pose an obstacle to their resolution.

conflict over tangible interests.¹³ This understanding is at the “heart of mainstream conflict resolution practice” and focuses primarily on “addressing information failures and altering leaders’ incentives, external motoring and peacekeeping, and economic and demobilization aid.”¹⁴ The rationalist model emphasizes that “humans apply universal, general, reasoning rules to all problems in making choices in their current environment.”¹⁵

Alternatively, a “symbolic politics approach” emphasizes that some conflicts, and ethnic wars in particular, are primarily driven by hostile popular emotions toward outgroups. At the core of this construction is a ‘myth-symbol complex,’ which combines the myths, memories, values, and symbols that define the identity and the chosen traumas ancestors suffered through.¹⁶ This approach acknowledges that hostile emotions tend to have their roots in pre-existing ethnic conflicts, and it recognizes that symbolism is at the heart of ethnic identity. From this approach, resolution of ethnic war requires reconciliation and adequate attention toward “changing hostile attitudes to more moderate ones, assuaging ethnic fears, and replacing the intragroup symbolic politics of ethnic chauvinism with a politics that rewards moderation.”¹⁷ This approach is most useful in an understanding of peace education and its applications in ethnic conflicts.¹⁸

¹³ Peace agreements often do not adequately address hostile intersocietal dynamics. The psychological needs driving identity conflicts - in particular the needs for “identity, security, and recognition” require other forms of recognition.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁵ William J. Long and Peter Brecke, *War and Reconciliation: Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 3, <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/7154.001.0001>.

¹⁶ The politics that this method references are typically socially constructed by intellectuals and other elites.

¹⁷ Stuart J. Kaufman, “Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars,” *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 2 (2006): 203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343306060622>.

Forgiveness as a model of reconciliation takes four phases in the literature. First, parties recognize shame from a perceived injury. Forgiveness then involves a changed understanding of oneself and of the other party; one must not only see themselves as a victim, but a whole complete and balanced entity. Cognitively, forgiveness involves separating someone from the wrong which has been committed. Then, parties must forego the option of revenge and be willing to break the cycle of injury and counterinjury. And finally, one or both parties must make an offer of a renewed but different relationship, which “reestablishes, at a minimum, mutual affiliation, coexistence, mutual toleration, or respect.”

¹⁸ In Long and Brecke’s 2002 book *War and Reconciliation*, their research provides evidence that this form of reconciliation offers greater success in settlements, speaking to the importance of a recognition of symbolic politics.

Peace Education

Peace is not only a condition absent of violence, or a negative peace, but it is also the establishment of a positive peace: a profound and lasting condition in which growth and reconciliation can occur sustainably. Positive peace is transformational following conflict because it creates the “attitudes, institutions, and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.”¹⁹ A positive peace both eradicates war and begins “cooperation and non-violent social change, aimed at creating more equitable and just structures in a society.”²⁰ Education is an important tool in facilitating this condition. Through the process of acquiring knowledge about the world, an individual learns to be tolerant of humanity and towards their own society.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes education as “systematic training and instruction designed to impart knowledge or develop skill.”²¹ Educationalists have long been interested in ethnic issues because of education’s potential role in ameliorating division and discrimination. A focus on education post-conflict is important because systems of education are often manipulated in the wake of violence to engender prejudice and fuel the animosity upon which violent conflict is based. This is of particular importance in ethnic conflicts because educational systems segregated along ethnic or religious lines perpetuate dramatically divergent views of conflicts and can hinder the development of relationships across divides.²² This begs the question: *What would education for reconciliation entail if our goal is to rebuild relationships after conflict?*

The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) defines peace education as “creating the conditions that lead to peace, resolving conflicts with peaceful means, spreading among children, the young

¹⁹ “In-depth: Positive Peace Report,” Institute for Economics & Peace, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/research/positive-peace/>.

²⁰ UNHCR, *Learning for a Future: Refugee Education in Developing Countries* — Chapter 4, “Peace Education and Refugee Youth” (Geneva: UNHCR, 1997), 168.

²¹ International IDEA, *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict*, 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

and adults the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required to prevent obvious and structural disagreements and violence.”²³ Peace education aims to increase the interest of a society in peace, ensuring the permanence of peace in education and in the country as a whole, and its particular implementation and facets can take many faces depending on a society’s needs and objectives. Peace is processed at the inter-personal, social, and inter-societal levels.²⁴ Through this lens, the individual is the focal point of peace, and they spread to their environment the tolerance they have learned, therefore contributing to the establishment of peace. This process is the convergence of both peace and education.²⁵

Formal schooling and training can play an essential role in conflict transformation to foster tolerance and intergroup understanding, to sensitize a society to inequalities in a system, to promote reconciliation, or to nurture capacities for peace. On the alternative, schisms in education can lead to conflict. The Albanians and the Serbs in Kosovo serve as an example of this; in order to counteract Albanian attempts to affirm their national identity, the Serbian government "adopted a policy of assimilation, eliminating teaching programmes in the Albanian language and introducing a unified curriculum and standardized textbooks across the country.”²⁶ These measures contributed to the ensuing strife between the two groups.²⁷

Education and Ethnic Reconciliation

The impact of violent ethnic conflicts on children is particularly profound, and the well-being of children is an essential measure of development and peace work. A discussion of

²³ Gülçin Keleşzade, Ali Efdal Özkul, and Ahmet Güneylı, “The Effectiveness of Technology-Assisted History Teaching Based on Peace Training: The Case of History of Cyprus,” *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 17, no. 4 (2018): 2470, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-017-9226-7>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kenneth D. Bush and Diana Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children* (Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000), 7.

²⁷ Ibid.

peace education must acknowledge the key role that children play in conflicts. For our purposes, this is particularly important in the role that children play in ethnic socialization. Early socialization experiences are critical in the formation of ethnic attitudes; socio-cultural attitudes and identities “are a function of the interaction of historical socio-cultural milieu, individual factors, and the physical environment.”²⁸ In order for education to play a constructive role in inter-ethnic relations, it must also target both the children *and* their parents, as certain attitudes are often determined by parent-child relationships.²⁹

The scope of peace education is broad; in different capacities, its facets have been implemented across countless post-conflict societies to promote reconciliation.³⁰ Rwanda has transformed its educational system to emphasize peace and reconciliation, alongside countries like Sierra Leone, Japan, Ireland, Bosnia, El Salvador, Cambodia, and Colombia.³¹ Although this paper focuses on formal government initiatives, varying approaches and informal community initiatives across the globe reflect the unique needs of following different conflicts. One such example of an informal, extragovernmental peace education initiative is the dialogue project “Memory and Alternative History in Azerbaijan.” Conducted in 2017 by the Berghof Foundation, the project sought to collect “individual biographies of people affected by conflict and who witnessed the Karabakh wars [to share] these experiences with different groups,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Often, non-governmental organizations take on the role of peace education when there is a lack of political buy-in from governments, or when democracies are too fragile post-conflict. Ideally, these initiatives should be taken up by local governments after the establishment of peace. This allows the people within a state to lead the planning and implementation processes and ensure engagement with all relevant actors, such as teachers and students. Political buy-in should be prioritized, and capacity-building should see that relevant personnel have what they need to translate policy into action. There should also be equitable financing and secure resources to reach those who are usually left behind, and principles of peace education should be integrated into their own unique contexts, conscientious of conflict and crisis.

³¹ “Peace Education Around the World: Strategies for Conflict and Post-Conflict Education for Peace,” *Peace and Justice Studies Association*, <https://www.peacejusticestudies.org/chronicle/peace-education-around-the-world-strategies-for-conflict-and-post-conflict-education-for-peace/>.

including children from different regions of the country.”³² This initiative aimed to facilitate discussions about historical and humanitarian issues across ethnic divides.³³

This exploration of peace education is focused on the nature of the practice itself, but it is worth noting that certain social and political conditions must be met in order for these efforts to be successful or for their implementation to find any foothold. Critically, a society must have made some progress towards peace. There must be general support for the peace process, as this creates an environment ripe for reconciliation.³⁴ To carry out the implementation of these initiatives, political support and a well-defined policy are crucial. These initiatives have the widest reach in countries with mandatory public education, ensuring that all members of society participate in the process.³⁵

Methods and Implementation of Peace Education

International Standards and Legal Framework

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a framework for the discussion of the intersection between ethnicity, education, and conflict. States are obligated to prevent discrimination, ensure a right to education, and to ensure that education is directed to encourage “respect for human rights, peace, tolerance, non-discrimination, and non-violence.”³⁶ Children are also guaranteed the right to access diverse information and to be protected from all forms of violence.³⁷ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has, on several

³² “Formal and Non-Formal Peace Education Programs for Youth in Armenia and Azerbaijan: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Caucasus Edition*, <https://caucasusedition.net/formal-and-non-formal-peace-education-program-s-for-youth-in-armenia-and-azerbaijan-challenges-and-opportunities/>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Emma Sommer, “Peace Education as a Post-Conflict Reconciliation Method: The Case of Bosnia and Rwanda and the Importance of State Development,” *El Rio: A Student Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2018): 25, <https://ojs.csupueblo.edu/article/view/21313>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

occasions, urged States Parties to modify their educational systems to conform with their provisions. As a part of the 1995 UN Decade for Human Rights Education, governments and non-governmental educational agencies were urged to establish programmes of human rights education under General Assembly Resolutions 48/127, 49/184, and 50/177.³⁸

In 1995, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) endorsed a Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Democracy, which set out policies to combat discrimination.³⁹ As a part of this initiative, UNESCO recommended that states should “pay special attention to improving curricula, [...] textbooks, and other educational materials with a view to [...] educating responsible citizens [...] respectful of human dignity [and] able to prevent conflicts or resolve them by non-violent means.”⁴⁰ Additionally, NATO is increasingly concerned that inter-ethnic tensions expressed through education constitute a risk to peace. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has established a High Commissioner on National Minorities, based in the Hague. They have issued recommendations pertaining to such issues as the education of the Greek minority in Albania and the Albanian population in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Numerous other international instruments relate to ethnic conflict and education. A non-exhaustive list includes: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War - Article 24 (1949), the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1959), the Convention against Discrimination in Education - Articles 1, 2, and 5 (1962), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination - Articles 4, 5(d)(v), and 7 (1969), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights - Article 13 (1966), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - Articles 18.4, 20, 26, and 27 (1976), the Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racism, Apartheid and Incitement to War - Article IV (1978), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women - Article 10 (1981), Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief - Article 5 (1981), Convention on the Rights of the Child - Articles 2, 17, 19, 28, 29, and 30 (1989), Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities - Articles 2.1, 4.3, and 4.4 (1992), UN Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1993), UNESCO Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1974).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

In 2023, 194 Member States of UNESCO adopted by consensus the *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development*. This decision reaffirmed the critical importance of transforming education systems toward long-lasting peace. UNESCO's Recommendation calls upon Member States to "promote intercultural and intergenerational dialogue for cooperation and solidarity and reinforce effective communication to help develop friendly relations between and among peoples, societies, and countries."⁴² International standards for civics education go to the heart of the necessity for compromise. The purpose of establishing professional standards in education is to provide a set of principles against which each curriculum authority can measure its own civic curriculum.

In a post-conflict setting, an international standard can provide minority curriculum authorities with a benchmark by which they can measure how national curricular authorities are "fair and balanced in their views of history and civil rights."⁴³ These guidelines include standards for presenting different views of history and opinions on the contemporary relevance of historical narratives. UNESCO also provides curricula for understanding levels of critical thinking, which involves identifying positions and defending or evaluating arguments. The Recommendation includes an international standard for curriculum excellence in civics, laying out considerations for implementation and learning materials.⁴⁴

⁴² UNESCO, *Recommendation on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development*, adopted 20 November 2023 (Paris: UNESCO, 2023), 8.

⁴³ Bush and Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict*, 19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Disarming History

History is an educational area particularly suited for conflict resolution and peace education initiatives. Through the study of history, students are given information about previous conflicts, and it serves as the "process by which certain stories and events are highlighted while others are minimized or ignored."⁴⁵ UNESCO has concluded that the tendency of history textbooks to "exalt nationalism and address territorial disputes correlates with the xenophobia and violence found in many countries today. What is taught in history class and how it is taught is highly political and can foster either animosity or peace."⁴⁶ In post-conflict societies, often "cultures of conflict" still dominate collective memories and function as major obstacles to peace processes.⁴⁷ An ethos of conflict can orient a society away from peace and direct its goals for the future. Narratives of the history of conflict are "selective, biased, and distorted, as their major function is to satisfy [a society's] needs in conflict rather than to provide an objective account of the reality."⁴⁸

The teaching of history has often been a factor in hostilities, as these narratives give "more attention [...] to war and conflict than to peace and co-operation."⁴⁹ Militarization is not only the act of fighting; it also involves the predisposition to fight. By extension, the militarization of a society is not only the prevalence of military actors but also the tendency of inter-group relations to be defined narrowly in military terms.⁵⁰ All children have the right to know their place in a larger history, but more importantly, "they must be able to read [their

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Daniel Bar-Tal and Yigal Rosen, "Peace Education in Societies Involved in Intractable Conflicts: Direct and Indirect Models," *Review of Educational Research* 79, no. 2 (2009): 560, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40469048>.

⁴⁷ Bush and Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict*, 19.

⁴⁸ Bar-Tal and Rosen, "Peace Education in Societies Involved in Intractable Conflicts," 557.

⁴⁹ Betty A. Reardon, *Tolerance: The Threshold of Peace; A Teaching/Learning Guide for Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy*, UNESCO document ED.94/WS/8 (Paris: UNESCO, 1994), 23.

⁵⁰ The process of demilitarizing the mind and disarming history can delegitimize the use of violence as a means for addressing problems. One indirect goal of historical peace education initiatives may be the evolution of non-violent modalities of conflict management.

history] critically so that they can become active participants in writing their own stories.”⁵¹

Critical historiographical skills allow young people to identify that histories are constructed rather than given, which gives them the opportunity to contemplate “challenging and changing the behaviors that poisons inter-group relations.”⁵²

It is difficult for a post-conflict society to move beyond militarized conceptions of relationships to outgroups. A society that is at war usually “sees every aspect of itself through the particular lens of the issue that has caused the conflict: ethnicity, for example, often becomes the single defining issue that places each person on one or other side of the war.” Often, deeply rooted ideas and vested political interests make it difficult for societies to address how historical representations are manipulated. It is necessary that a curriculum “supports [students] in constructing critical perspectives on the contemporary relevance of the past.”⁵³ Essentialist representations of the past can “entrap individuals and societies into a vicious circle of frozen or even escalated conflict.”⁵⁴

Nurturing Ethnic Tolerance

Educational institutions play a “crucial role in building and enhancing the immunity and resilience of every society [to confront] external and internal [...] forces which oppose pluralism and advocate for exclusion and violence.”⁵⁵ Peacebuilding education has the potential to alter the basic rules that guide the interactions of identity groups in all spheres of life. It seeks to “build bridges between groups and communities that have been separated and polarized by violent

⁵¹ Bush and Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict*, 19.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ Psaltis, Carretero, and Čehajić-Clancy, *History Education and Conflict Transformation*, 8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁵ Mohammed Abu-Nimer and Renáta Katalin Smith, “Introduction: Interreligious and Intercultural Education for Dialogue, Peace and Social Cohesion,” *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l’Education* 62, no. 4 (2016): 395, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24756431>.

conflict.”⁵⁶ As Victor Hugo once said: “A human being who can read has been saved.” Beyond reading words to know oneself, a society, or a history, Hugo’s idea also has a symbolic meaning. He speaks to the saving ability of reading other people and “joining with them in knowledge, respect, and tolerance” to live with others in harmony.⁵⁷ Tolerance is a challenging endeavor and a way of life. Initiating tolerance education in primary school helps to develop it as a habit.

In 1998, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHRC) began its Education for Peace and Life-Skills Programme (PEP) in refugee camps in Kenya, which house many ethnic groups and nationalities. These multi-ethnic refugee camps led to a skills- and values-based approach, PEP, the goal of which was to develop “knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that lead to behavior that promotes peace and encourages conflict prevention and minimization.”⁵⁸ This conflict-prevention programme developed by the UNHRC aims to teach about a shared human identity. Competencies are developed in the value context of peace between individuals and between groups. PEP is almost entirely based on activities and discussions, and it functions primarily through workshops in a 10-session course designed to link education with activities that address the root causes of violence.

These PEP modules focus on peace-building skills, such as cooperation, taking increased individual and social responsibility, skills of trust and empathy, and mediation skills.⁵⁹ An example of a PEP lesson would have the teacher make a set of cards. The class is divided into two groups; the first group belongs to a culture where people give each other cards before they speak, so if someone speaks without a card, they should be ignored. Each person from the first group has a card. The second group is then introduced to the first group and told to make friends

⁵⁶ Bush and Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict*, 30.

⁵⁷ Surya Nath Prasad, *Education for Tolerance and Peace*, Peace Education Miniprints No. 83 (Malmo: Preparedness for Peace Institute, Malmo School of Education, Lund University, 1996), 4.

⁵⁸ Margaret Sinclair, *Learning to Live Together: Building Skills, Values and Attitudes for the Twenty-First Century*, Studies in Comparative Education (Geneva: UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2004), 76.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

with as many people as they can. Someone from group 2 is given a card while the activity is going. The teacher then stops to see if they understand the significance of the card, and asks the students how they felt. A discussion at the end of the activity goes over how exclusion, mistrust, and lack of communication felt.⁶⁰

Teacher Training and the Role of Children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines that “the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and [they should be] brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.”⁶¹ Children are crucial as focal points of peace because “today’s students will be [the] adults of tomorrow, and they carry their skills to every environment they embark on.”⁶² The education system serves as a major agent for socialization *into* or *out of* conflict through school textbooks, school ceremonies, and teacher instruction. In any society in which education is compulsory, this powerful force reaches *all* of the younger generation.

Teachers can be agents of change from narrow nationalism to universalism, and the role of a teacher is crucial in the development of their students’ ability to be “receptive to others and [to] face the inevitable tensions between people, groups, and nations.”⁶³ They are in a unique position to “build upon, acknowledge, and value their pupils’ previous cultural knowledge and

⁶⁰ Ibid., 79.

⁶¹ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

⁶² Tanyel, Sevda Serin, and F. Sülen Şahin Kıralp. “Tolerance for Sustainable Peace Culture in a Divided Society: The Effect of Peace Education on Tolerance Tendency and Human Values.” *Social Indicators Research* 156, no. 1 (2021). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27293382>. 226.

⁶³ Elena Papamichael, “Greek-Cypriot Teachers’ Understandings of Intercultural Education in an Increasingly Diverse Society,” *The Cyprus Review* 20, no. 2 (2008), 55, <https://cyprusreview.org/index.php/cr/article/view/248>.

[...] eradicate preconceived ideas and stereotypes about cultural supremacy.”⁶⁴ They are also working with children who, in the primary education period, tend to voluntarily participate in activities and adopt their values.⁶⁵ Crucially in the case of ethnic conflicts, education is the mode through which younger generations learn about the culture of conflict and how they identify with it.⁶⁶ In this way, education can alter the worldview of generations.

Further, these issues often involve contested, sensitive, and painful accounts of the past, which is why teachers are important as the point of communication for students. Research has indicated that the emotions of teachers are vital in peace education efforts.⁶⁷ When teachers themselves are educated in a conflict-based worldview, they may resist peace education initiatives. Teachers’ emotional resistance to recognizing certain aspects of difficult histories can create obstacles to peace education because the emotional experiences of teachers are “connected with larger historical, political, and social discourses, which demonstrates how emotions and memory are intertwined and political in teachers’ pedagogical practices.”⁶⁸

Part II:

Cyprus as a Case Study on Ethnic Reconciliation and Peace Education

This section traces the historical trajectory of the conflict on the island of Cyprus, explaining the ethnic division to show how educational systems have entrenched discord on both sides of the island. I then review past and present efforts at peace education and their formal mechanisms. I

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Tanyel and Kıralp, “Tolerance for Sustainable Peace Culture,” 226.

⁶⁶ Sommer, “Peace Education as a Post-Conflict Reconciliation Method,” 25.

⁶⁷ Michalinos Zembylas and Loizos Loukaidis, “Affective Practices, Difficult Histories and Peace Education: An Analysis of Teachers’ Affective Dilemmas in Ethnically Divided Cyprus,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 97 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103225>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

highlight both the promises of peace education in Cyprus but also the institutional challenges it has faced, as well as what methods have shown promise in overcoming these setbacks.

The Establishment of Cyprus

In 1400 BC, Greeks from Asia Minor and the Aegean became the first to settle on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus. After a long period of Roman control, the aftermath of the Ottoman-Venetian War declared the island an Ottoman Eyalet, or province, in 1571. Turks were sent to the island from Anatolia, although the Ottomans did not seek to establish a Turkish majority.⁶⁹ The island remained in Ottoman hands until the Cyprus Convention of 1878, when the Ottoman government grew weaker and allowed the United Kingdom to administer the island on its behalf.⁷⁰ It was in this period when Greek Cypriot political leaders developed the idea of “enosis,” or unification with mainland Greece.

In 1914, at the beginning of World War I, the Ottomans declared war on Britain, and the British subsequently annexed Cyprus. The end of the First World War brought the signage of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which officially ended the conflict between the Allied powers and the new Republic of Turkey. In the treaty, Turkey renounced all rights over Cyprus.⁷¹ Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, England declared Cyprus a Crown Colony in 1925. In this period, the “National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters” (Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών or EOKA), a Greek Cypriot nationalist guerrilla organization, was formed.

In what is called the 1955-1959 “Cyprus Emergency,” active fighting broke out on the island as EOKA fought a campaign against British colonial rule. From 1954 to 1958, Greece

⁶⁹ Keleşzade, Özkul, and Güneyli, “The Effectiveness of Technology-Assisted History Teaching,” 2470.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Okcan Yıldırım Türk, “An Island of (Dis)Agreement Within Modern Turkish Historiography: The Chronic Conquest(s) of Cyprus Through the Turkish Past, Present and Future,” *Turkish Historical Review* 13, no. 1-2 (2022): 265, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18775462-bja10044>.

appealed to the General Assembly five times for the termination of British colonial rule. Simultaneously, Turkish Cypriots formed the Turkish Resistance Organization, a secessionist political movement which called for *taksim*, or an ethnic the partition of Cyprus.⁷² The conflict ended in 1960, when Cyprus was proclaimed an independent republic.⁷³ Under the Treaty of Guarantee, its unity and independence would be guaranteed by Greece, Turkey, and Britain, and its constitution created a cooperative mechanism between the local Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot communities. Article IV of the Treaty of Guarantee “[reserved] the right of [the] three guaranteeing Powers [...] to take action [in Cyprus] with the sole aim of re-establishing the state of affairs created by the present Treaty.”⁷⁴

Ethnicity in Cyprus and the Cypriot Constitution

The 1960 constitution of Cyprus prescribed a power sharing agreement within the country’s government. This created a Greek-Cypriot President and a Turkish-Cypriot Vice President and delegated veto powers for both, as well as particular ratios of ethnic leadership within parliament, the military, and the bureaucracy in alignment with the population proportion. In 1963, the Greek Cypriot President presented a 13 point plan to change the constitution in response to perceived government ineffectiveness and also perhaps an overuse of the Turkish Cypriot veto. The two sides generally lacked the motivation to work together. Critically, the president’s proposal envisioned fewer rights for the Turkish minority, as well as the erasure of the ethnic nature of the political system.⁷⁵

⁷² The Cyprus Issue,” Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-cyprus-issue.en.mfa>.

⁷³ In 1956, Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes made a public statement declaring Turkey’s stake in Cyprus on a national and international level and “pronounced his full support for his ‘Cypriot kinsmen.’”

⁷⁴ Treaty of Guarantee, signed by Greece, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Cyprus, August 16, 1960, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 384, p. 3, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20384/v384.pdf>.

⁷⁵ ETH Zurich, “Cyprus.” *GROWup / Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) Atlas*, <https://growup.ethz.ch/atlas/pdf/Cyp>

This plan caused the outbreak of communal violence and civil war. Both of the island's communities were overrun by "antagonistic nationalist leadership [which made] this bicomunal cooperation extremely fragile, if not impossible."⁷⁶ In 1963, only three years after the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus, the political situation devolved into intercommunal violence. December 21, 1963 set off a period remembered as "Bloody Christmas," in which the Turkish Cypriot population was targeted amidst island-wide violence. Approximately 25,000 Turkish Cypriots, about a quarter of the population, fled their villages and were internally displaced. During this strife, Turkish politicians left the government, and by the spring of 1964, the legislature was effectively a Greek Cypriot body.⁷⁷

Conflict and Division

In response to the violence, a United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) was established under Security Council Resolution 186, which recommended its creation in the interest of preserving national peace.⁷⁸ The situation worsened in 1967 when a military junta overthrew the democratically elected government of Greece, and a nationalist paramilitary group EOKA-B was established in Cyprus, echoing the previous EOKA struggle for *enosis* under the British administration. In 1974, leaders of the Greek junta removed the President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, and installed a pro-*enosis* nationalist, whose regime was a puppet state ultimately aimed at annexation of the island by Greece.

rus.pdf.

⁷⁶ Yıldırım Türk, "An Island of (Dis)Agreement Within Modern Turkish Historiography," 265.

⁷⁷ ETH Zurich, "Cyprus."

⁷⁸ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 186 (1964)* / [adopted by the Security Council at its 1102nd meeting], of 4 March 1964, UN Doc. S/RES/186(1964), 1966, [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/186\(1964\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/186(1964)).

Turkey invaded Cyprus in July of 1974 in *Operation Attila*, a response to the junta-backed coup, and captured land on the northern part of the island. As a part of their justification, the Turkish government claimed the need to ensure the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee peace agreement. Around 150,000 people, about one-third of the island's Greek Cypriot population, were displaced from the northern part of the island.⁷⁹ The UN Security Council put out Resolution 353, demanding the “immediate end to foreign military intervention in the Republic of Cyprus.”⁸⁰ The ceasefire line from August 1974 became the United Nations Buffer Zone in Cyprus, or the “Green Line,” and to this day, this line partitions the island and cuts through the center of the capital city of Nicosia. In February of 1975, Turkish Cypriots declared the occupied part of the island to be the “Turkish Federated State of Cyprus.”⁸¹

In a letter dated November 6th, 1974 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus and addressed to the Secretary General, a brief report brings to the UN's attention “violations of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and of international law committed by the Turkish invading forces and their instruments in the occupied territory.”⁸² Such violations include attacks on Greek Cypriot churches and the issuing of Turkish identity cards, with different colors for Greek Cypriots in the Turkish occupied area. The invading force also illegally issued title-deeds to property; Greeks would return to their homes to find that Turkish Cypriots had moved in. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) declared its independence in 1983, although

⁷⁹ Turkish-Cypriots moved to the Northern, occupied part of the island at this time, creating near complete ethnic separation.

⁸⁰ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 353 (1974)* / [adopted by the Security Council at its 1781st meeting], of 20 July 1974, UN Doc. S/RES/353(1974), 1975, [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/353\(1974\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/353(1974)).

⁸¹ In Resolution 367 in March of 1975, the Security Council wrote that it “regrets the unilateral decision of 13 February 1975” because it “[tended] to compromise the continuation of negotiations between the representatives of the two communities on an equal footing, the objective of which must continue to be to reach freely a solution providing for a political settlement and the establishment of a mutually acceptable constitutional arrangement.”

⁸² Letter from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations to the Secretary-General, November 6, 1974, United Nations, New York.

Turkey is the only country which recognizes the territory. Almost complete ethnic separation took place after the Turkish invasion in 1974. The last round of reunification negotiations collapsed in 2017, and the island remains partitioned today.

Reconciliation and Symbolic Politics in Cyprus

Claims over Cyprus by both Turkey and Greece are hopelessly entangled with historical narratives, and any approach to address the island's partition will fail if it does not grasp how diverging ethnic perspectives on the history of Cyprus shape claims and peacebuilding today. Successive UN meetings in 1964 show that Greece and Turkey referenced historical claims to the island. In reconciliation, it is "crucial that these efforts are received, officially acknowledged, and incorporated into the history of the renewed state."⁸³ History and education are also crucial to understand in Cyprus because of the protracted nature of the conflict.

A study conducted by Zembylas and Loukaidis in 2021 analyzed the attitudes of teachers on the island with regard to teaching peace education and difficult histories.⁸⁴ Their research found that Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot definitions of reconciliation tend to be very similar, and both groups are not concerned about trials and punishment.⁸⁵ Cypriot definitions of reconciliation echoed "three main themes: the need to understand the past, to acknowledge mutual suffering, to commit to forward-looking approaches based on cooperation and mutual respect."⁸⁶ Nearly every teacher interviewed in the 2021 study touched on the need to understand history in reconciliation efforts. Nicos Anastasiou, a Greek-Cypriot leader of the bi-communal youth organization "Cyprus Friendship Programme," stated that this process requires courage

⁸³ Virginie Ladisch, "Toward the Reunification of Cyprus: Defining and Integrating Reconciliation into the Peace Process," *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 17 (2006): 119.

⁸⁴ Zembylas and Loukaidis, "Affective Practices."

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ladisch, "Toward the Reunification of Cyprus," 118.

because “reconciliation may mean being existentially brave enough to understand and acknowledge that our side, whatever it may be, has also done terrible things.”⁸⁷ In this way, history education can break out of a pattern of self-victimization.

Across this study, the most frequently cited tool for promoting reconciliation was education; more specifically, history education.⁸⁸ One Greek Cypriot who wished to remain anonymous for the study stated: “Education is the most powerful tool on earth. If education did that much damage to this island, then it must be education which will correct it. [We need to] rewrite the history books in such a way that they would recognize the problems but also give reasons for the problems in a rational way.” A Turkish Cypriot who was interviewed echoed a similar sentiment, namely that: “getting rid of myths on both sides is very important in order to achieve a healthy relationship between the two communities. All victimization and demonization has to be stopped.”⁸⁹ Schools and teachers play a critical role in this, as Cypriots need to “develop a different approach to history [in which] history is not just one truth that the students have to learn but that they [must] do their own research [to critically understand] the notion of history.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 122.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Education and Memory

Depending on the sociohistorical context, the goals of history education may range from the inculcation of national identity to the propagation of moral and political positions, the creation of empathy and presentation of diverse viewpoints, or historical analysis and the promotion of critical thinking, among others. However, in many societies, especially those divided through ethnonational conflicts, history is often used to propagate a narrative focusing on the suffering of the nation and to legitimate its political goals. The suffering of others is silenced, their historical existence is questioned, and sociocultural interactions are ignored. This is how the ‘history of Cyprus’ has been presented in history schoolbooks in the two parts of divided Cyprus.

Yiannis Papadakis⁹¹

On each side of the island of Cyprus, history education serves to create separate national identities, using both internal and external elements. Among internal elements, history education plays on culture, language, religion, and ethnic roots. The external element creates an “other” or “alternate,” generating the perception that one’s own characteristics are superior and crystallizing one’s differences from other people. History education programs change depending on which governments are in power on the island. With this turnover, each new administration has the objective of conveying its own “truth” to new generations. Intercultural solidarity is seen as a weak point of Cyprus history education, as Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have only been taught the histories of Greece and of Turkey respectively. The history of Cyprus is taught as an extension of the history of Greece or as an extension of the history of Turkey.

On the Greek side of the island, posters hang in classrooms displaying the phrase “I don’t forget, and I struggle,” a reference to the Turkish invasion and the community’s collective memory of the event. Interethnic violence in the 1960s is described briefly, and this period is presented as aggression by Turks against Greeks, even if Turkish Cypriot suffering in this period

⁹¹ Yiannis Papadakis, “Narrative, Memory and History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Schoolbooks on the ‘History of Cyprus,’” *History and Memory* 20, no. 2 (2008): 128, <https://doi.org/10.2979/his.2008.20.2.128>.

was, by any measure, greater. A 2004 Report of the Committee for Educational Reform found that Greek Cypriot history education is “Helleno-ethnocentric and religious in character” and that “the ideological-political framework of contemporary Cypriot education remains Greek-Cypriot centered, narrowly ethnocentric, and culturally monolithic.”⁹² The “primary objective of the Greek Cypriot educational system since 1974 has been to educate the new generation of Greek Cypriots about the part of the island that is occupied by Turkey and instill the desire for a reunification of the island.”⁹³

In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, history textbooks were updated in 2004, bringing some reforms. The inside cover of a popular history textbook now reads: “History is no longer presented as a monolithic story of conflict; instead, conscious emphasis is placed on examples of coexistence and co-operation.”⁹⁴ However, this does not change the overarching narrative the books contain. The Turkish invasion of the island in 1974 is represented as a time of glorious victory, and while new Turkish textbooks share blame between the two communities, a larger share is allocated to the Greeks.⁹⁵ On both sides of the island, students do not have full access to information about other cultures, as history textbooks generally reflect monolithic and one-sided narratives that “violence, trauma, and suffering have been caused by the other side.”⁹⁶ History education in the northern part of the island still extensively details the struggle for the independence of the Turkish Cypriots and describes the history of the island as “Cyprus’ Turkish History.”⁹⁷

⁹² EEM [Epitropi Ekpaideftikis Metarrythmisis], *Demokratiki kai anthropini paideia stin evrokypriaki politia* (Democratic and Humanistic Education in the Eurocyprriot Polity) (Nicosia: n.p., 2004), 36, 63.

⁹³ Miranda Christou, “A Double Imagination: Memory and Education in Cyprus,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 24, no. 2 (2006): 285, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/mgs.2006.0019>.

⁹⁴ “A Struggle for the Future of Cyprus,” *Cyprus Mail*, September 14, 2008, <https://archive.cyprus-mail.com/2008/09/14/a-struggle-for-the-future-of-cyprus/>.

⁹⁵ Papadakis, *History Education in Divided Cyprus*, 13.

⁹⁶ Zembylas and Loukaidis, “Affective Practices.”

⁹⁷ “A History Education Workshop for History Teachers from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Was Organized in Kyrenia,” *Türk Tarih Kurumu*, March 8, 2024, <https://ttk.gov.tr/en/a-history-education-workshop-for-hi>

Methods of Peace Education in Cyprus

Various initiatives in Cyprus have aimed at peace education, primarily through improving history education and ethnic reconciliation. Most initiatives are extragovernmental and supported by civil society organizations which receive financial support from the international community. The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) acts under a broad mandate to promote peace through civil society initiatives. One prominent initiative supported by UNFICYP is the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (ADHR), a unique multi-communal NGO established in 2003 in Nicosia, the partitioned capital city of Cyprus. The ADHR is one of the largest organizations aimed at peace education in Cyprus. According to their vision statement, ADHR envisions a society “where dialogue on issues of history, historiography, history teaching, and history learning is welcomed as an integral part of democracy and is considered as a means for the advancement of historical understanding and critical thinking.”⁹⁸ Within Nicosia’s Buffer Zone, ADHR holds intercommunal cultural, artistic, and educational events at a community center called the Home for Cooperation, which ADHR established in 2011.

With the support of the UNFICYP and ADHR, the “Imagine” program was created. This intercommunal educational initiative aims at fostering peace and understanding by bringing together Greek and Turkish Cypriot students and teachers.⁹⁹ Imagine has trained more than 8,200 students and 2,600 teachers, although it will not be renewed in 2026.¹⁰⁰ The first stage of the Imagine initiative aims to bring together primary- and secondary-aged students from 50 Turkish Cypriot and 50 Greek Cypriot schools to facilitate activities that deal with stereotypes, extremism, and intolerance. These activities also acclimate the students to bi-communal

story-teachers-from-the-turkish-republic-of-northern-cyprus-was-organized-in-kyrenia/.

⁹⁸ “Who We Are,” ADHR, <https://www.ahdr.info/about-us/who-we-are/>.

⁹⁹ “Launch of Educational Programme ‘Imagine’,” United Nations Peacekeeping, November 28, 2017, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/launch-of-educational-programme-imagine>.

¹⁰⁰ “Our Work,” ADHR, <https://www.ahdr.info/about-us/our-work/>.

contact.¹⁰¹ In a second stage, students from the two communities are paired and meet up in the buffer zone, where they participate in peace education workshops or play sports activities.¹⁰² The program also aims to reach communities which may be rural or have fewer opportunities for cross-cultural engagement.

The first peace education initiative from within the Cypriot educational system came in 2008, when the Greek-Cypriot Education Minister Andreas Demetriou published a statement of government policy which explained that his principal aims were the development of creativity in schools and the “cultivation of a culture of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and cooperation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.”¹⁰³ In 2016, the Peace Education Program (PEP) was introduced by the political leaders of the two communities with a “mandate to increase contact and cooperation between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot students and teachers.”¹⁰⁴ PEP consisted of workshops with students from both communities, similar to their respective founding initiative in Kenya.

Additionally, peace education programs on the island may focus specifically on educators.¹⁰⁵ An independent NGO in Cyprus, Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU), held teacher trainings on peace education for primary and middle school teachers. The goal of the program was to develop knowledge and understanding between the two ethnic groups and to instruct teachers how to have workshops in their classes on human rights, citizenship, and peace education.¹⁰⁶ AHDR holds a similar Teachers’ Academy for Peace, under the Imagine project.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ “A Struggle for the Future of Cyprus,” *Cyprus Mail*.

¹⁰⁴ Zembylas and Loukaidis, “Affective Practices.”

¹⁰⁵ “A Peace of Us — YEU Cyprus Training Course on Human-Rights Education,” YEU Cyprus, <https://www.yeucyprus.org/a-peace-of-us-training-course-on-human-right-education/>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “Teacher Training and Teachers’ Academy for Peace 2025-2026,” AHDR, October 13, 2025, <https://www.ahdr.info/peace-education/teacher-training-and-teachers-academy-for-peace-2025-2026/>.

Their training addresses media literacy for peace, in which teachers hold discussions on topics such as disinformation and hate speech. These trainings are first monocommunal and then bicommunal. In bicommunal conferences, leaders from both communities exchange ideas about how to further develop democratic cultures.¹⁰⁸

Key Considerations

Education on its own can not be expected to manage or resolve identity-based violent conflicts, just as diplomatic and peacekeeping initiatives on their own cannot be expected to resolve militarized conflict in the absence of complementary political, economic, and social initiatives. Any solution to violent conflict will be sustainable only if it is developed and supported by both governmental and non-governmental actors within violence-affected societies in ways that are consistent with the fundamental and universal principles of human rights.¹⁰⁹

Kenneth D. Bush Diana Saltarelli¹¹⁰

Formally, Cyprus has made little progress towards institutionalizing peace education. In a 2023 paper by Dr. Merve Uysal on post-conflict peace education in Cyprus, Uysal writes: “Peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict states such as Cyprus are typically met with tremendous antagonism from those who desire to maintain the status quo under the pretense of defending cultural heritage, national identity, and security.”¹¹¹ Often, demands for a diverse education fall on “deaf, if not hostile, ears.”¹¹² This begs the question: Is society ready? *All* teachers who participated in the 2021 survey conducted by Zembylas and Loukaidis stated that the intercommunal violence of 1963, the Turkish invasion of 1974, and the ongoing Turkish presence in Northern Cyprus affected how they taught about peace in their classrooms, and this

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Bush and Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict*, 36.

¹¹⁰ Bush and Saltarelli, *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict*, 36.

¹¹¹ Merve Uysal and Çağda Kıvanç Çağanağa, “The Role of Peace Education in Post-Conflict Zones of Cyprus’ Foreign Language Education Policy,” *International Conference on Education and New Developments*, (2023): 611, <https://doi.org/10.36315/2023v2end134>.

¹¹² Ibid., 612.

lack of buy-in is not just prevalent among teachers.¹¹³ One critical institution which has not bought into peace education initiatives is the Orthodox Church, which wields significant cultural influence among Greeks across the globe.

The Greek Cypriot community teaches and highly values the ideals of “Motherland-Religion-Family” / “Πατρίδα/Θρησκεία/Οικογένεια.”¹¹⁴ This is taught as a life motto in many Greek-Cypriot schools, and the Orthodox Church has been an official institution of the Greek state since the time of the Byzantine empire.¹¹⁵ The Greek Orthodox Church has historically taken a hard-line stance to the Cyprus Problem. In 2024, the American Archbishop, Elpidophoros, was condemned by the leader of Turkish Cyprus after stating: “We are fifty years from the invasion and the illegal seizure and occupation of one third of [Cypriot] sovereign Island Nation by the Turkish Troops. We cannot let the world forget, and we will not let the world forget.”¹¹⁶ The Greek Orthodox Church has been a distinct spoiler in efforts towards peace education.

When Education Minister Demetriou announced his goal of cooperation between the Greek and Turkish populations in 2008, fierce hostility and public contestation ensued. Politicians felt that this announcement was a threat to national ideals, and one deputy stated that Demetriou’s plan was “tantamount to the self-castration of our Hellenic heritage.”¹¹⁷ Following this public outcry, the Archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostomos II, warned the government that “if they do not take their hands off education, the Church [will] react vigorously.”¹¹⁸ Archbishop Chrysostomos publicly asked: “Why do we want to create new programmes of study? [...] We

¹¹³ Zembylas and Loukaidis, “Affective Practices.”

¹¹⁴ Eleni Christodoulou, *The Politics of Peace Education in Cyprus* (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2015), 246, <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/6030/1/Christodoulou15PhD.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹¹⁶ Archbishop Elpidophoros Attacked for Denouncing Turkish Occupation of Cyprus during 2024 Clergy-Laity Congress,” Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, July 8, 2024, <https://www.goarch.org/-/he-attacks-7-8-24>.

¹¹⁷ “A Struggle for the Future of Cyprus,” *Cyprus Mail*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

were pupils once, and we were also taught history. Does this mean that the history we were taught was false?”¹¹⁹ The Church leader stressed that “Greek children should grow up as Greeks.”¹²⁰ PEP faced similar institutional challenges, and the two governments have failed to renew their agreement to continue the program.

Because Greek and Cypriot governments have largely neglected to implement peace education initiatives, NGOs have filled in this gap. This failure has occurred because legislative and policy initiatives surrounding peace education on the island are often controversial, and even if rhetoric itself is productive, it may fail to translate into practice. This situation creates a unique dilemma for teachers and organizations, who are at a heightened risk for harassment and social stigmatization if they stray from educational norms, especially ones upheld by critical cultural institutions like the Orthodox church. This can be particularly true when peace education is encouraged by outside actors rather than their respective governments. Instructors may be uncomfortable recognizing ‘alternative’ perspectives of difficult histories, like atrocities committed by members of their own community.¹²¹ It is often strenuous for the teacher to teach difficult histories because the individual, the social, and the political are inextricably linked, as are emotion and memory.¹²²

The state itself, on both sides of the island, is also invested in education as a mode of exclusion, as educational control allows the construction of an “imagined community [to enforce] its own unity.”¹²³ Even if initiatives are able to get off the ground and garner support, it may be difficult to ensure that these programs do not simply reproduce previous conditions of separation. In 2024, the “History Education Workshop for History Teachers of the Turkish

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Christodoulou, *The Politics of Peace Education*, 123.

Republic of Northern Cyprus” was organized, but it largely focused on defending the rights of Turkish Cyprus and the “crucial role [that educators play] in conveying Turkish consciousness to future generations in Cyprus.”¹²⁴ Even though other initiatives, such as AHDR, have shown that intercommunal dialogue is both possible and essential, the seemingly endless impasse of the conflict means that adequate momentum and political pressure for reconciliation and peace education is largely absent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

“Δεν ξεχνώ και αγωνίζομαι.” I don’t forget, and I struggle.

There can be no enemies, only strangers with whom a relationship needs to be developed.

Elise Boulding¹²⁵

There is no “one size fits all” strategy for teaching a culture of peace in a divided country. Inevitably, it is difficult to find methods of social cohesion among peoples who have gone through long-term inter-ethnic fighting.¹²⁶ However, we know from past implementation that the vast majority of parents on both sides of Cyprus, up to 94%, would give consent for their child to participate in AHDR workshops.¹²⁷ This speaks to a recognition also noticeable in interviews with Greek and Turkish teachers on the island: reconciliation is a binding imperative on any post-conflict society seeking a peaceful future, and a generation raised on ethnic hatred, propaganda, and demonization will never avoid future conflict.¹²⁸ Perhaps the case of Cyprus

¹²⁴ Türk Tarih Kurumu, “History-Education Workshop.”

¹²⁵ Elise Boulding, “Peace Behaviours in Various Societies,” in *From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace*, 48 (Paris: UNESCO, 1996).

¹²⁶ Uysal and Çağanağa, “The Role of Peace Education,” 612.

¹²⁷ Stefanos Evripidou, “AHDR Calls on Leaders to Reboot Peace Education Programme Across Island,” *Politis*, November 19, 2025, <https://en.politis.com.cy/politics/politics-cyprus-divided/969527/ahdr-calls-on-leaders-to-reboot-peace-education-programme-across-island>.

¹²⁸ Christodoulou, *The Politics of Peace Education*, 123.

would also benefit from a look at other post-conflict countries which are now in peaceful relationships. How did these countries build models of education where differences are accepted without perpetuating the method of conflict?

Forward-looking recommendations must consider this popular understanding of the necessity of reconciliation, even if communities themselves remain entrenched in ethnic divisions. No specific ethnic group holds exclusivity over the truth; educational initiatives should approach constructions of identity critically, functioning as forums to acknowledge loss and to encourage respect for the experiences of all.¹²⁹ This attitude can be observed in the 2004 change in Turkish-Cypriot history books, which have slowly begun to move away from the idea that “the past shows that people cannot live together.”¹³⁰ History in Turkish-Cypriot textbooks is not exactly equitable, but it does show novel reforms in representing “identity as internally diverse, historically changing, and a result of political choice.”¹³¹

In the future, efforts by the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), including the “Imagine” program, should be fully returned to their island-wide activities, emphasizing a non-partisan reconciliation platform supported by Cypriot families. As a bi-communal organization, AHDR understands the needs of Cypriot society and the importance of inter-communal contact. A study of Peace Education Programs (PEP) in Cyprus conducted in 2021 found that PEP increased students' skills regarding tolerance and human values in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Researchers determined this improvement using particular questionnaires such as the Tendency to Tolerance Scale and the Human Values Scale, which each served to analyze student attitudes.¹³² A similar study has not been done on the Greek part of the

¹²⁹ Marcia Byrom Hartwell, “Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in Early Post-Conflict Society,” *Forced Migration Review*, <https://www.fmreview.org/hartwell>.

¹³⁰ Papadakis, *History Education in Divided Cyprus*, 28.

¹³¹ Papadakis, *History Education in Divided Cyprus*, 28.

¹³² Tanyel and Kiralp, “Tolerance for Sustainable Peace Culture,” 226.

island, but findings are nonetheless promising. PEP could be particularly effective in ethnic reconciliation on the island because workshops address the causes and effects of harm, rather than directly targeting charged ethnic issues such as narratives of history and conflict. By doing this, PEP reduces the gap between alternative voices and tempers ethnocentric discourses.

In mid-November of 2025, Greek Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides and Turkish Cypriot leader Tufan Erhurman pledged to push for the resumption of the UN-led peace process.¹³³ Erhurman ran on a platform of reunification under a federal model, and Christodoulides has expressed his hope for a solution based on the UN Security Council resolution for a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.¹³⁴ The path forward will lie in cultivating further political will to strengthen the institutional capacities necessary to build a durable foundation of peace for all Cypriots.

¹³³ “Cyprus Leaders Signal Willingness to Restart Stalled Reunification Talks,” Greek City Times, November 20, 2025, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2025/11/20/cyprus-leaders-agree-revive-reunification-talks-2025/>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

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