# From Undertaker to Funeral director: A social change in Cyprus

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**Abstract:**

How often do we think of our own death? And how often do we stop and think of the changes surrounding death that affect our lives? Thanatology, the study of death and dying, examines death from different perspectives. Following a thanatological path, this research aimed to explore the relationship between death and technology in terms of social change, specifically in the Republic of Cyprus. Funeral parlours were at the center of this research with three funeral directors being interviewed along with one recently retired priest in the city of Nicosia. Using in-depth interviewing, the research explored the experiences, processes, and changes that Cypriot funerals underwent. Three major turning points in Cypriot history influenced social change in the funeral sector, namely, the 1974 Turkish invasion, the accession of the island to the European Union, and the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Findings revealed several changes and interestingly enough, the funeral parlours today are involved even when the funeral is over with the help of the Internet. Along with other causes such as ideology, competition, conflict and political and economic factors, the funeral industry not only evolved and broadened its role but also managed to get de-stigmatised. The undertaker transformed into a funeral director and now acts as a coordination center for various other businesses, with the client ending up with fewer responsibilities. Lastly, while funeral parlours are certified and examined for their profession, institutions such as the state, the police, and the church still regulate and limit their role.

## Dedication:

To Elena. As promised this thesis is for you. I know that through the entirety of these two years you were always next to me. As you'll be for the rest of my life. Until we meet again.

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I would like to express my gratitude to the four participants that agreed and dedicated their time to share their experiences and knowledge regarding my thesis.

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## 1. Introduction

How often do we think of our own death? We have always and somehow still deny death. We are constantly being bombarded with information that will help us live longer and avoid death (Rotar & Teodorescu, 2011, p. 10). Eating healthier, exercising, drinking less alcohol, and not smoking are the most important actions to take in order to live a long and healthy life. Death has been a very private matter that one experiences and tries to avoid by taking decisions for their body. The pandemic and recent wars have proven that death cannot be limited to our own space. Globalization has entered every part of our everyday life, from the private sphere to the more public one. We share ideas, cultures, and services all around the world. The globalization process has brought people together with interactions between societies and individuals all over the globe. The nature of globalization is interdisciplinary and can be discussed in various ways, generating different advantages and disadvantages. One of the most prominent features of globalization, that made our lives easier is technology. The vast digitalization that followed brought the development of the Internet. Slowly and steadily, our world became more digitalized and technologically advanced. Whole countries can rely on online and digital systems for their bureaucratic processes, economies, and communication. As we continuously change, modernity and globalization have digitalized, medicalized, and professionalized most of our life's surrounding sectors. What is usually left out in the discussions of how technology has helped the world, is the most natural outcome in human existence, death.

While we do encounter death almost every day, and as previously stated, tend to ignore it, it is a natural outcome that eventually every human experiences. Nowadays, survivals strategies have been developed aiming to avoid death. By denying death, these various life options, such as exercising and eating healthier, ensures in a way our survival and the health

of our bodies. Death has become the source of our existential anxiety. For Peter Berger, this is due to the fact that the confrontation with the dead makes us realize our own mortality, thus, creating anxiety that challenges our notion and sense of the reality of the world (Shilling & Mellor, 1993). To be an ontological secure being we willingly leave death out of our minds. However, no matter how much we control our surroundings and our bodies, inevitably, all humans have a time limit on this earth. We cannot neglect death, but we can cope with this existential anxiety by explaining and sometimes regulating the concept of it. Funerals, and overall, the burial process of the dead as well as taking care of the deceased is a way to come to terms and accept that a friend, a relative, a human died. These customs and rituals surrounding death can be traced back to the first civilizations on earth. What is easily noticeable is that not all civilizations had the same rituals and customs, but all of them had the same understanding towards the deceased. There is a universally shared feeling that there is something deeply wrong with not caring for the dead. In the end, the dead demand the attention of the living, therefore, the dead persist in the living world (Ruin, 2018, p. 7).

Many people have attempted to research the care of the dead, which will be the central theme of this thesis, and all of them came with different views and perspectives. But one thing is certain and agreed upon. The care of the dead has been regarded as foundational not only for the polity, the tribe, or the clan but also for the religion, the capacity to mourn and the finitude of life (Laqueur, 2015, p. 9). The actions of taking care of the dead constitutes the dead as social beings; creatures that need to be eased out of the world and settled safely in our memory. Through funeral rites, disposition and, often, redisposition of the body, along with other post-mortem actions, the dead take part in the living world. According to Thomas Laqueur, materially and imaginatively, these post-mortem actions are the sign of change from the order of nature to the order of culture (Laqueur, 2015, p. 8). The burial of the dead is perhaps the fundamental phenomenon of becoming human. Cultural practices regarding the specifics of post-mortem rituals became important in all human societies. Their underlying purpose was to bring the incomprehensible horror of death within the realm of an ordered understanding of the role of death in human existence. In other words, regulating and trying to control the existential anxiety created but something so abstract as death (Bryant, 2003, p. 6).

Usually, when one attempts to think about death, it often gets connected to the process of the funeral, the religious underpinnings, and the ritualistic nature of it. Historically, from Ancient Greece to today, the rituals surrounding death have changed, according to the different

timelines. In each timeline, the rituals concerning death are explicitly interconnected with the living interacting with the dead. As the past societies were deeply connected with religion, every ritual had to go through the correct religious authority in order for the dead to have a legitimate passing. Once the hegemonic control of churches over funerary matters was challenged by wider struggles over the general scope of religious authority, market competition between secular and religious movements and worldviews came into being (Spiegeleer, 2019, p. 181).

This thesis's central theme, as mentioned briefly above, will be about the care of the dead, focusing on funeral parlours and their connection with technology. Today, professionals have taken over the care of the dead, a profession created out of demand. We are constantly growing our distance away from the deceased by appointing the funeral director responsible for everything related to death. But it wasn't always the responsibility of the funeral director. Not long ago, the undertaker had different responsibilities. As modernity took over the world, technology, industrialization, medicalization, and secularization have changed almost entirely our lives. But what about our deaths? In a complex industrial society like today, a person's occupation or profession is central to his or her personal and social identity. Therefore, in a society that seeks to deny the reality of death, the funeral director is a living symbol of this dreaded subject (Thompson, 1991, p. 405). The sequestration of death resulted in many more questions concerning today's procedures. Where does the funeral director's duties end? Another aspect of death that is not often talked about is technology. How can death and technology be related and connected?

## 1.1 Research questions:

To better structure and understand the thesis, a research question was formed in an attempt to explore some of the aspects of technology in relation with the care of the dead. But, by no means does that make death understandable and comprehensible. Death remains a mysterious phenomenon that can only be studied through our own experiences. Beyond death, nobody knows what lingers. The main research question guiding this research is;

**Is there a social change in regard to the funeral industry in Cyprus and if yes, then did technology contribute?**

To further analyse the above question, two sub-questions were formed:

i. **What were the changes concerning the care of the dead in Cyprus?**
ii. **What are the causes of the changes regarding the funeral industry in Cyprus?**

The above research questions of course could not be answered without the help of professionals, specialised in the care of the dead. Cyprus being a small and deeply religious community with closed competition does not have the variety of funeral parlours as other much bigger countries in Europe. In the capital city of the island, Nicosia, only five state-approved and legal funeral parlours exist. Three out of the five funeral directors agreed to be interviewed and answered questions about the ever-changing process of taking care of the dead and the help of technology. Finally, another interview was taken from a recently retired priest.

Understandably, this research is limited to the religion vastly connected with Cyprus, being Greek-Orthodoxy with the belief in burials.

## 1.2 Why Death?

Everyone must have attended once in their lifetime a funeral. Either that was for a relative, a friend, or someone they just knew. Most people do not come across death until they grow up. Having a close relative being a funeral director I remember asking about their work. The answer he was always giving to my young self and that stuck in my mind is, 'I make people happy before I return them back to God.' It sounded beautiful back then and it was until I grew up, I finally understood the nature of his work.

Unfortunately, a few years ago I tragically lost my best friend. I was involved in the whole process as much as I could, but the funeral director was essentially the person responsible. Not only before and during the funeral but, surprisingly, after the process was done too! Slowly and steadily, I noticed a pattern. The funeral director was becoming more and more involved. The funeral director was acting as a coordinator. Technology started to provide a new platform for the funeral parlours and, in the end, the dead were not dead but alive, at least on the Internet. Reminders of their memorials, their pictures with various people expressing their condolences were everywhere on my social media profile. At that point, I decided that technology was now walking alongside death, helping maybe people to express their grief. Upon a quick google search, I realised that technology and the Internet are still not really connected with the theme of death in academia. This thesis aims to provide new information

about this interesting interaction between something that everyday advances and changes, being technology, and something that is and was always a steady part of our lives, death.

For this reason, this research has technology and death as its primary concern, situated in the field of sociology.

## 1.3 Disposition:

This section started with an introduction to the study as well as the research questions and the aim of this study. The second section focuses on previous research that is relevant to this study such as the processes of modernity and the connection of death with technology. Moving on to the third section of the paper which presents the main theory of this study being social change, and a discussion between various other theories that developed according to social change. Section four contains the epistemological foundation and the main method being interviews along with other considerations. Moving on to section five which includes a detailed account of the findings from the interviews and section six offers the analysis of the findings by answering the two sub-questions. Lastly, section seven is considered the conclusion of the study and answers the main research question of the thesis, followed by a brief paragraph with recommendations.

## 2. Previous Research

Diogenes the Cynic, an ancient Greek philosopher, believed that upon his death, people should throw his body outside the city walls for wild animals to feast, discarding the idea of his body being important after death (Laqueur, 2015, p. 5). So why do we care and bury our dead? Why do we not follow Diogenes example? Several academics agree that the care of the dead is a sign of our emergence from the order of nature into culture. The burial of the dead must be a fundamental phenomenon of becoming human (Laqueur, 2015, p. 8). As time progressed, technology became a vital part in our lives. It's almost impossible to imagine our lives without it.

There are numerous sources used in order to at least attempt to understand of the complex social process of taking care of the dead. These sources were carefully selected because of their relevance to this thesis. The following articles, journals, and books will be

summarised, critically analysed, and evaluated. The literature was uncovered by using the keyword 'death' and narrowing my search along with other keywords I found relevant such as 'burial', 'digitalisation', 'urbanisation', 'modernity', 'sequestration', 'technology', 'medicalisation' and 'social change'.

## 2.1 The History of Custom and Rituals:

Getting familiar with the care of the dead is not easy. While we do attend funerals, we are mostly following the priest's words and actions while all the work is done by the funeral director that has professional expertise on the matter. Cyprus being heavily influenced by Greece and having the same religion has mostly the same rituals and customs with minor differences tied to different geographical locations.

Starting from Ancient Greece, the pre-Christian Greeks believed that the spirit, at the time of death, called psyche (ψυχή), was leaving the body (DeGraff, Wilson, & Petersen, 2019, p. 53). Usually, the relatives of the deceased would place a coin in the mouth of the departed as a symbolic payment to Charos, the ferryman to the underworld. (DeGraff, Wilson, & Petersen, 2019, p. 53). The preparation of the deceased as well as the rituals were done by the women of the family (Dubisch, 1989, p. 190). First comes 'Prosthesis', which was to lay the dead body in the house, and then 'Ekphora' which was the funeral procession, and lastly, the burial or the internment in a tomb. The house was then thoroughly cleaned for 'Perideipnon' to take place, which was a funeral feast, symbolically hosted by the dead man to show gratitude to those that helped his passing (DeGraff, Wilson, & Petersen, 2019, p. 54). The dead were moved to their final resting place on the third day of their passing before dawn (Erasmo, 2019, p. 57). After the funeral, people would go to the gravesite and leave their offerings while close family members will also wear black clothes (Dubisch, 1989, p. 195).

Nowadays, in Greece and Cyprus, we can still see similarities in the ways we take care of the dead as in Ancient Greece. In Greek Orthodoxy, a priest provides the sacraments of Confession, Holy Communion, and Holy Unction to people close to death. After death, the priest reads the Trisagion, which is an abbreviated memorial service over the body (DeGraff, Wilson, & Petersen, 2019, p. 55). Just like in ancient Greece, in older times, the deceased would be laid in the house for the relatives and neighbourhood to mourn before going to the church and then to the final resting place, the cemetery. After the funeral, people would gather at the departed's house for a memorial coffee or meal. On the first three anniversaries of death, which are the passing of three days, nine days, forty days, three months, and six months a

'Mnimosyno' (memorial) is held at the church and then at the grave where the priest gives a eulogy on the spot for the deceased and people distributed koliva, wheat cooked for the occasion (DeGraff, Wilson, & Petersen, 2019, p. 56). In Cyprus, it is customary for the 'Mnimosyno' to be done every year, while in many areas in Greece such a thing does not happen.

The Greek Orthodox church, unlike the Catholic Church, forbidden cremation because it is believed that burying the body presupposes and implies faith in the Resurrection of the Dead and the Second Coming (Erasmo, 2019, p. 38). However, the law states that a person can choose cremation if it's stated in writing of their wish to be cremated before their death. Otherwise, it is customary to have a coffin that is not airtight for rapid decomposition, which is extremely important for the exhumation rites (Erasmo, 2019, p. 59). While people in Greece have the infrastructure of getting cremated, in Cyprus they don't. The island has not infrastructure resulting in funeral directors sending the deceased in another country to get cremated and then returned back in an urn.

Several sources are describing the ancient and modern Greek rituals and customs with the above being the most cohesive and descriptive that I could use in this research. However, upon searching for the Cypriot funerary customs, the sources were limited and mostly described the process in case of a foreigner's death in Cyprus. Most of the information about the actions taken at a Cypriot funeral was taken by the interviews with the Cypriot funeral parlours and the priest. While the sources did provide useful insides on how the customs and rituals are performed over time, there was no mentioning of any modern technological contribution to the process of a funeral. Thus, I had to change the search and move away from death as the central keyword.

## 2.2 Beyond the body:
The concept of death is inevitably tied to the human body. Since the study is situated in the Cypriot context, with burial being the majority way of taking care of the dead, it is important to discuss the body. The majority of funerals in Cyprus, because of Greek-Orthodoxy being the main religion, end with the burial of the dead. Having researched and gotten familiar with the funerary rituals and customs my research moved into a more sociological framework. The dead are perceived as social beings who need to be taken care of, eased out of this world, and settled in our memory (Laqueur, 2015, p. 13). In the 16th century, a shift in cultural norms moved away from the conception of the body as grotesque, transforming it into a classical body that

was associated with the high culture of the Renaissance. But upon death, the dead body was still seen as grotesque (Hallam, Hockey, & Howarth, 1999, p. 23).

The dead body can be attributed with different meanings depending on the context. Turner was concerned that the body was always a 'slave' to Christianity (Hallam, Hockey, & Howarth, 1999, p. 24). A similar theory was shared by Camille, who emphasized the contrast between the body as impure and corrupted but at the same time holy and incorruptible. The dead body was not feared, and the living actively took part in the deceased's funeral. Binski continues on the theme of religion, mentioning that Christianity helped 'demarginalising' the dead, thus, creating closer relations with the living and dead (Hallam, Hockey, & Howarth, 1999, p. 24). For Berger, confronting the deceased is a reminder of our own mortality. Giddens and Elias in a similar fashion sees the dead body as a reminder of our limited time even if we try to control every aspect of our life and despite the various civilising processes. Moreover, Bourdieu believed that the dead body is a threat to our self-identity and a decline in our symbolic value (Hallam, Hockey, & Howarth, 1999, p. 54).

Nowadays, it is extremely important to have a corpse to claim in order to accept death and grieve. Religion and now science, are responsible for identifying and establishing the personal, ethnic, and religious identity of the deceased in order to make the right decision about how they will be handled, 'corrected' and used (Fotlyn, 2008, p. 102). The dead body is now a victim of a fundamental redeployment of relations of power (Fotlyn, 2008, p. 103). The relatives of the deceased employ elaborate coffins and hold feasts to show not only their kind of love but also their social standing and class in society. Therefore, the dead body, as Foucault would agree, has a utilitarian value used to extend control of life (Fotlyn, 2008, p. 103). While morticians and funeral directors attempt to shift the focus from the stigma and the market aspect of their work by promoting their social credibility, people continue to treat the dead as a way to showcase their status (Thompson, 1991, p. 405).

It's important to discuss the body in relation to death. As humans, our bodies play a huge role in the construction of our identity. Our bodies have both physical and symbolic potential that absorb meanings around us. The common characteristic of all these scholars is how they emphasize the significance rather than the ontological status of the corpse. The dead body is seen as a symbol of disorder and dysfunction.  These sources were used in order to have a better understanding of the body in case of death. What happens when we die? Our body that is tied to our identity stops working but our identity is still there. The sources beautifully enhance the sociological aspect of the body taking into consideration the perspective of death.

## 2.3. Theories about death:

Previously, we attempted to understand the relationship between the body and death. Moving deeper into the concept of death, we will now attempt to understand the theories that surround death. This endeavour is extremely difficult, simply because we discuss death from the viewpoint of the living and for the living (Ruin, 2018, p. 16). Our experience of death is from the dying other, which transforms the other not into a corpse but into 'our responsibility.' (Ruin, 2018, p. 20). Coming in close contact with a dead body reveals the existential truth of death. Not only that one can die, but that we are mortal.

Because humans are symbolic beings, they also construct symbolic systems to deal with death and life, thus giving meaning to them. According to Hegel, the act of burial is symbolic, in a way attempting to manifest the free nature of spirit across death (Ruin, 2018, p. 21). The belief in the continuation of life after death. While burials are believed to be an exclusively religious or superstitious ritual according to Hegel in the 'Phenomenology of Spirit', Hertz gives another explanation as he perceives the act of burial a 'moral obligation', as death imposes certain culturally specific duties (Ruin, 2018, p. 44).

All scholars, in the sources chosen, agree that the dead demand the attention of the living. The dead may be gone but, through the various actions, rituals, and customs, they still linger in our everyday life. Through the process of burial, the living interact with the dead while an expanded understanding of society is enacted and constituted (Ruin, 2018, p. 57). Slowly, as modernity took over, the handling of death got out of the house and into the commercial sphere. Due to facing the dead in our everyday life, and consequently, facing our own mortality, death anxiety and fearing death became a common characteristic. Modern societies, in order to build ontologically secure people and away from the existential anxiety that death brings, produce diversions (Bryant, 2003, p. 10). The uneasiness of death is handled by professionals and specialists who keep our contact with death to a minimum (Willmott, 2000, p. 1).

Furthermore, there is an agreement among scholars that creating symbolic systems can offer explanations for human existence and alleviate the fear of death (Bryant, 2003, p. 8). Religion and its notion of resurrection also help people deal with fear and offer, what Durkheim discusses, social order in society with the various 'do's' and don't's' if you want to go to heaven (Bryant, 2003, p. 119). People have also suggested the many interpretations of death. What do we mean when we describe that someone died? Is it the death of the body? Does our soul continue to exist? Is religion offering the possibility of afterlife as a way of our souls to keep living?

There are two basic views on death. First, it's the Dualist notion which distinguishes two basic components for a person, the body characterised by its material substance and the soul, characterised by the opposite immaterial substance (Kagan, 2012, p. 13). When dualists refer to the soul, they are referring to the mind. Both, the body and the soul interact, but when the body dies, there is a possibility for the soul to continue to exist (Kagan, 2012, p. 15). In other words, dualists suppose that a person has or is a soul. However, if we do accept the existence of the soul, we cannot really be certain of the immortality of it (Kagan, 2012, p. 69). The second view on death, is the Monist notion which perceives a person to be just a body (Kagan, 2012, p. 21). Each person, each body, has its own abilities different from each other. Of course, monists do acknowledge the existence of the mind but explain it in the notion of abilities (Kagan, 2012, p. 23).

The sources were useful in terms of tying up the various sociological and philosophical notions about death. An attempt to loosely understand death is obviously difficult since, as mentioned earlier, we do not have first-hand experience of death. Descartes and Kant both agree that we should not be fearing death since according to the first one the mind or soul is eternal, and according to the second one, we have reason to support the existence of God or immortality with death being just a change (Bryant, 2003, p. 9). However, theories are exactly that. Theories. None of the of course has evidence that support their claims with scholars also disagreeing on spirituality and the after world. We cannot argue about death and the soul if we haven't experienced it. A monist's notion on death does not even recognise the soul. It is at this point where I had to decide on which theory would mostly fit my research and the sources definitely helped shaping my opinion.

## 2.4 Changing death:

Death rituals and customs help people's understanding of social order. But people of the present have a different understanding of these rituals. Like everything in this world, death rituals and customs went through a number of changes, especially as technology transformed societies. Namely, death has changed from traditional to modern and finally neo-modern (Rotar & Teodorescu, 2011, p. 11). Traditional death was in the period where people experienced death as a communal event in their homes and participated actively in the funeral customs and rituals as a surviving group (Shilling & Mellor, 1993, p. 415). With modern death, people started to distance themselves from death and hygiene became a significant reason for it. The corpse was seen as a site of contamination, especially when professionals started to understand

how epidemics spread. Emotions were privatised and the dead moved away from home (Rotar & Teodorescu, 2011, p. 12). Lastly, with neo-modern death, each individual wants to create their own idea about death and find rituals and customs that suit their personal emotional needs (Rotar & Teodorescu, 2011, p. 12).

Changing the rituals and customs of death was not a fast-pacing process. During the move away from rural areas into more industrial-like cities, the dead moved away from home and into hospital care (Rotar & Teodorescu, 2011, p. 15). Sequestration, the removal of the death from domestic spaces to hospitals and funeral parlours, was aided by urbanisation and medicalisation gradually helped experts take over the field of death. In addition, this privatisation of death opened new paths for the global market (Shilling & Mellor, 1993, p. 418). Secularization has played a major role in establishing a global market of supply and demand for funerary practices. With medicalisation the hegemonic control of churches started to decline. This decline is not only cultural but also institutional (Spiegeleer, 2019, p. 174). With secularisation, religion can no longer deny the finality of death as individuals now seek more concrete answers with evidence. This awareness of the inevitability of death while being unable to have concrete knowledge of what death will entail, is exactly the source of existential anxiety that threatens people's ontological security (Shilling & Mellor, 1993, p. 421).

Although none of these sources mentions a particular ritual or custom that changed, other than the deceased moved from the house to the hospital, the sources offer an insightful understanding of the various and complicate processes of modernity along with the changes in relation to death. The descriptive and tied to sociological theories nature of the articles helps to emphasize the plurality of choices offered by professionals in terms of death care as well as the decline of religious control over the life of the living.

## 2.5. Digital immortality:

Living in a highly digitalised era it's only expected from death to follow the same path as other fields. Recently, due to the pandemic that still lingers, we have been witnesses of online funerals and commemorative online sites (Hjorth, Horst, Galloway, & Genevieve , 2016, p. 112). The Internet is clearly changing once again the customs and rituals of death, memory, and commemoration, by inventing new 'thanatotechnologies' (Cutter, 2019). Funeral parlours are expected to follow the new online systems and market such as new designs on coffins or urns, and even the transformation of one's ashes, for instance, to a diamond. The new technologies affect the experiences of mourning and grieving (Rosetto, Lannutti, & Strauman,

2014, p. 975). Of course, with the Internet, the persistence of death to exist in the world of the living is even more prominent. Huge corporations such as Facebook and Apple invented new ways of regulating the still active profiles of the dead that everyone can still access (Greenspan, 2019). In a way, the dead still remain in the realm of the living, since social media grants them digital immortality.

Unfortunately, not many sources were found regarding the technologies that help the funeral directors before, during, or after a funeral. While there were some studies concerning the effect of social media on mourning, there weren't many concerned specifically with 'thanatotechnologies', that were limited only to describing how web funerals and web cemeteries work. The digitalisation of the deceased, as well as the advanced steps in technology regarding death, raise a number of ethical considerations. Coming across the limited number of sources also demonstrates how sensitive and delicate the matter of death is for people. One has to be very cautious when researching death not only with respect to the deceased but to the people left behind. There were some sources indicating the ways in which one's ashes can be turned to a diamond or a tree with sustainability in mind, but since burials is the most common way in Cyprus, I did not research further.

## 3. Theory and theoretical framework

To answer the main research question in this thesis, 'Is there a social change in regard to the funeral industry in Cyprus and if yes, then did technology contribute?' a number of different theories were considered. The next sections will be discussing the debates in the literature concerning change. Scholars contextualised the many aspects of change involved in this thesis in different ways, complementing each other. Because social change being the central theme in the paper, the social change theory in addition and in relation to with a number of processes will be discussed. When and if there's a change, several other components can also be altered, therefore, discussing only one aspect of the causes and consequences is not possible.

Among scholars, social change was never an easy topic to discuss. It is not my intention to pick a side, or decide on a single perspective but rather, to discuss the different views and opinions and analyse them in order to attempt to answer the research questions as best as possible.

### 3.1. Defining terms:

Every perspective has its own advantages and disadvantages. This section won't be strictly defining social change due to its multidisciplinary nature. Much like social change, other terms that relate to it are also characterised as complex and giving a specific and simple definition would restrict and ignore other aspects that might be important for its understanding as well as answering the research questions. One suitable way to understand most of the following terms is to view them as umbrella terms that encompass more than one processes.

### 3.1.1. Culture:

A common term in this thesis and when referring to social change is culture. We are the carriers and transmitters of culture while we can also modify it and/or change it (Nordskog, 1960, p. 81). Culture is supra-individual, and it includes everything, material and non-material, that we have done in order to raise ourselves above our natural limitations. In other words, culture consists of all the human achievements of mankind. Social behaviour, institutions, norms, knowledge, beliefs, habits, art, customs, and rituals are some of what culture entails. We can describe culture as a unique phenomenon that continually changes (Nordskog, 1960, p. 80).

### 3.1.2. Urbanisation:

The term refers to the process describing the increase of people living in towns and cities. People move from rural areas to urban areas in times of a country's development searching for economic activity, administrative and political organisation, and communication networks (Vago, 1998, p. 104).

### 3.1.3. Bureaucratisation:

Moving on to bureaucratisation, the term is related to changes within an organisation towards greater rationality in decision making, efficiency, and achievement of goals. Bureaucracy is 'a hierarchical social structure for administering large-scale organisations rationally, efficiently, effectively and impersonally' (Vago, 1998, p. 108). The bureaucratic process has a hierarchical line of authority with each role having its own duties and responsibilities based on technical knowledge.

### 3.1.4. Industrialisation:

Industrialisation is the process by which manual labour is replaced by technology which becomes the main way of production. The process can have several patterns and rates as well as different perspectives on when we start recognising a nation as industrialised. In addition, industrialisation can sometimes be spread through diffusion rather than social inventions (Vago, 1998, p. 101).

### 3.1.5. Modernisation:

Another umbrella term in this thesis is modernisation which transformed agrarian societies into industrial sociates (Vago, 1998, p. 95). It entails the formerly explained processes of urbanisation, bureaucratisation, and, sometimes, industrialisation. The term is usually used when Western countries, that are seen as developed, transfer patterns, products, and technologies to less developed countries. Some scholars perceive modernisation as the growth of new knowledge and the mastery of the environment. Others believe that when one country can process information and respond to it appropriately has been through the modernisation process (Vago, 1998, p. 96).

### 3.1.6. Culture and Modernisation:

Since culture has the capacity to change, and modernisation is generally a process of growth and transformation of society then how do these two terms interrelate?

A culture change is broadly explained as an evolutionary or developmental process which is created by changing societal conditions (Haferkamp & Smelser, 1992, p. 258). In the cultural sphere, modernisation has modified and sometimes weakened significant aspects of cultural and value systems. Religion and ideology, because of modernisation underwent the process of secularisation which weakened the traditional and cultural elites (Vago, 1998, p. 106). In the end, modernisation is a never-ending product, that offers continuous change not only on an individual level but societal.

### 3.1.7. Globalisation:

There is no other term as wide as globalisation. It emerged as a theme in the 1980s, and discusses 'the present ongoing large-scale growth of transplanetary – and often supraterritorial-connectivity' of every aspect of everyday life (Scholte, 2005, p. 84). There is an increase of interaction between societies, sharing ideas, services, and goods as well as an open market that provides new opportunities to whole countries. Globalisation is often used with a negative

connotation mainly from anti-globalists. They view the globalisation as a merger of different cultures resulting in them losing their significance and as well as endangering human security (Scholte, 2005, p. 311).

## 3.2. Conceptualisation of Change:

Change is a very broad concept and can be divided into further categories. What the word denotes, is a difference in what we observe over a period of time. Change of season, or physical growth, for instance, do not fall under the social change category. Instead, a broader definition for social change is when a large number of people engage in group activities and relationships that are different from the ones that they or their ancestors engaged in before (Vago, 1998, p. 7). Social change influences social action and/or the culture in a given society. When trying to be more specific, the lack of uniformity concerning the definition becomes a problem. Definitions of social change and its influence vary based on the author. But when mentioning social change, what exactly does it change?

Wright Mills and Hans Gerth view social change as whatever happens to the roles of institutions or the order of the social structure, always in a society with complex relations in which all members participate (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 226). The complex relations in the changing society can include the introduction of new techniques, new professions, changes in place of residence, new ideas, and new social values. Other sociologists, view social change as directly emphasized on the social structure while focusing more on the change in the functioning of the society. MacIver and Page moved away from the structure and function of society and observe change in terms of social relationships and how we relate to one another (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 227). Continuing from MacIver and Page, Tudson Lundis wrote about the changes in the structure and functioning of the social relationships of society (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 227). Moreover, Nisbet understood social change as the succession of differences in time within a persisting identity.

There are many more scholars that researched and attempted to explain social change. However, all of them have different perceptions of what a social change is. The most used term for social change is by Steven Vago, which he refers to social change as 'the process of planned or unplanned qualitative or quantitative in social phenomena that can be analysed in terms of the following interrelated components; identity, level, duration, magnitude, and rate of change (Vago, 1998, pp. 36-37). In conclusion, and as seen above, there are four notions of social change; change in the structure of society, change in the structure of society and the functioning

of society change in the social relationships, and lastly, change in the social structure and social relationships.

## 3.3. Sources of Social Change:

Anything that changes, has a reason and a consequence. For social change to happen, a number of factors can contribute. In sociology, four main social revolutions changed not only the social structure but also the social relationships. The first social revolution happened when the hunting and gathering societies developed into horticultural and pastoral. In the second revolution, agricultural societies emerged, before the third revolution happened due to the invention of the steam engine that allowed the industrial revolution. Lastly, nowadays, we are witnessing the invention of the microchip that stimulated the fourth revolution (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 228).

Several factors can generate a change in society. The primary sources of change are technology, ideology, competition, conflict, political and economic factors, and structural strains but this thesis will be more focused on technology. Singling out and focusing on one factor can lead to incomplete research when studying broad social changes (Vago, 1998, p. 37). However, since this thesis is focused on seemingly one factor, being technology, the focus will be directed to that without ignoring any other factors that can help in answering the research questions. Social change and technology are multidisciplinary and can be combined with various other factors and theories.

Technology influences what people think and how they make connections with one another, therefore, offering the capability of change. William Ogburn in his work identified technology as the main factor driving social change which can only happen through three processes: invention, discovery, and diffusion. Social inventions can be material or social inventions such as capitalism and bureaucracy. Discovery is a new way of understanding and viewing reality. Thirdly, diffusion is the spread of invention or discovery to other areas. The main source of diffusion is when cultures interconnect and ideas are shared. Ogburn also mentioned the term 'cultural lag' which refers to the rate at which a culture adapts to an invention or discovery. For Ogburn, technology changes first, followed by culture (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 232).

In other words, technology has the capacity to change human life as well as the character of social institutions quite rapidly. Interestingly enough, the change from human to machine technology has also transformed social relationships. The way we use technological

machines (computers, mobiles, tablets) is now changing the way we interact and create information, resulting in a state of information surplus (Vago, 1998, p. 14).

Other factors being ideology can have several types, for instance, Marxism or the ideology of Protestant ethic being influential to the rise of capitalism, that challenge existing social arrangements and can instigate change. Competition can invigorate innovation and can be used as an effective force for social change in development programs but can also lead to conflicts. With conflicts, social change is bound to happen, but the outcomes are not always for the best. Political factors have contributed to social change with governments changing society at various levels and between them. Economic factors can be seen as the main factor in changes in the stratification system and of course, globalization with its open market, services, and capital have resulted in diverse social consequences. Lastly, structural strains can be caused due to imbalances in the population, scarcity, anomie and can lead to social changes (Vago, 1998, p. 37).

## 3.4. Theories of Social Change:

When writing about social change theories, it's also expected to refer to the many important scholars that have influenced the field. Every theory touches upon different aspects of social change in relation to its respective timeline that was written and observed. Theories of social change are divided between evolutionary theories, conflict theories, structural-functional theories, and lastly, social-psychological theories.

Evolutionary theories focus on the process of evolution, noting the similarities between the evolutionary stages, from less complex and differentiated to more industrial and secular (Vago, 1998, p. 73). Important scholars of the evolutionary theories are:

- August Comte with the theological, metaphysical, and positive stages, (Vago, 1998, p. 47)
- Herbert Spencer with his view that social improvement could be achieved through natural evolution and not through legislation and lastly, (Vago, 1998, p. 49)
- Lewis Henry Morgan, with also three stages of evolution being savagery, barbarism, and civilisation (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 233).

Conflict theories believe that social change has the possibility to be reached through conflict while others support that conflict is the only mean of social change. Social change is

seen as inevitable due to the competition for resources among groups of society (Vago, 1998, p. 73). The prominent scholars that contributed to conflict theories are:

- Karl Marx perceived change and conflict as inseparable since society rests on an economic foundation that is dependent on the forces of production and relations of production that eventually will clash and create conflict (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 235),

- Lewis A. Coser, views conflict as an opportunity for those who are not satisfied in their society to confront the dominant group and change the distribution of social values as well as formulate a new social order (Vago, 1998, p. 57), and

- Ralf Dahrendorf with his perspective of conflict as a problem of unequal distribution of authority and rejects the Marxist notion of social class based on means of production (Vago, 1998, p. 57).

Moving on to structural-functional theories that based their overall framework of change on the interrelated parts of society working together to maintain its balance (Vago, 1998, p. 74). Structure here is perceived as a system of lasting patterns and functions as the dynamic process within the structure. Each structure in society has its own function, much like an organism when compared to biology (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 234).

- Talcott Parsons views society as a system of three others being personality, organism, and culture which have their own boundaries. Social change is when the boundaries of these three are breached and it can be at two levels; change from processes within the social system and change of the social system itself (Vago, 1998, p. 62).

- William F. Ogburn, whom we have already mentioned, focuses on social change that is driven by technology but tempered by social responses to it based on its material or non-material culture (Vago, 1998, p. 63).

Lastly, social-psychological theories emphasize the role and activities of people as the determining factor of social change. Through people's modifications of behaviour societal development is possible (Vago, 1998, p. 74). Important scholars of this perspective are:

- Max Weber pays much attention to the spirit of capitalism and Protestant ethic that changed how people deemed the acquisition of goods the ultimate goal in life, having little regard for traditions (Vago, 1998, p. 66)

- Everett E. Hagen, had a specific interest in economic development and emphasized that the change from traditional to modern societies will only come

if there is a change in personalities. When society has innovative personalities with entrepreneurial spirit only then economic growth, development and social transformation will happen (Vago, 1998, p. 70).

## 3.5. Limitations of Theories:

In conclusion, what we can observe, based on the theories and processes analysed, is that social change is inevitable. That can be due to 'the determining force of culture itself or on some one aspect of culture and social structure such as technology, the stratification system or the economic system' (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 228). We cannot be sure if technology is driving social change or if social change is driving technology. Trying to solve such an issue is similar to attempting to solve the chicken-and-egg paradox. Social change can be a very broad theory and one can easily fall into categories and specific theories.

As mentioned before, there are as many definitions of social change, as the authors writing about it. There is not a satisfactory theory of social change that can explain the changing elements, how, and why a change is happening. All scholars have their own perspectives that sometimes agree and other times clashes with other explanations. The reason for mentioning and summarising only a handful of prominent scholars for each theory and not investigating in depth each one of them is simple. It provides us some conception of the theories and the relation between them in order to have a conceptual discussion in the end, with our practical data. This thesis is more concerned with attempting to recognise if a social change has happened in relation to a very specific sector, being the funeral parlours, with the help of technology and its consequences. For this reason, we cannot simply situate our research in just one theory and one factor or explanation, but rather, stay open to the many possibilities and views of social change.

# 4. Methodology

Conducting social research and writing about it is a messy and complicated process that sometimes does not even go entirely as planned. The following sections give insight into my position as a researcher as well as the data sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and research design of this thesis.

## 4.1. Epistemological foundation:

The collection and analysis of data, as well as its interpretation, is always situated in a broader understanding of the origin of knowledge (Bryman, 2012, p. 6). The epistemological foundation is the researcher's view on knowledge and its production, as well as its connection with data. Usually, when a researcher chooses a specific epistemology, they are also revealing the way their research was conducted (Bryman, 2012, p. 6). Due to the empirical data that created this thesis, several different perspectives were considered but, in the end, Critical Realism was chosen.

Critical realism has its roots in several approaches and traditions. It views our world as having different realities situated in political, social, and cultural contexts, one of which is privileged (Bryman, 2012, p. 11). Truth claims can be evaluated in terms of empirical and real-world evidence, thus, acquiring some measure of shared understanding is possible. In addition, there is also an unobservable reality that consists of real-but-undetectable structures, powers, and tendencies (Jackson, 2011, p. 74). Critical realists support the notion of our world existing independently of human theories, concepts, and notions (Jackson, 2011, p. 104). As a position, critical realism deems social phenomena as meaningful, and thus, that meaning is not only externally descriptive but also constitutive of them.

In an attempt to understand reality, critical realism distinguishes between our experiences and the world but also between the real, the actual, and the empirical. Behind these domains are the mechanisms that sometimes interact and generate certain phenomena and entities. These mechanisms occur in combinations and cannot be generalised (Sayer, 2000, p. 16). The empirical domain is the entities in the world that we can perceive directly with our senses, our experiences. Moving on to the actual domain, which includes the empirical domain, includes the phenomena that we perceive as well as those we do not perceive both generated by mechanisms, highlighting that the world goes beyond the perceptible. Lastly, the domain of the real includes the above two mentioned domains and the things that had the potential to happen but did not, once again generated by mechanisms (Sayer, 2000, pp. 11-12).

## 4.2. Research Design:

This thesis is a qualitative case study with its main data collected from interviews. When conducting a case study, the goal is to understand and analyse in-depth a specific case (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). A qualitative case study was chosen because of its ability to capture complex action, perception, and interpretation due to its particularistic nature (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). It can also reveal knowledge of a phenomenon that we would not have observed if it

wasn't for the in-depth analysis. Overall, a case study is a holistic description of a very specific entity, phenomenon, or unit (Merriam, 2009, p. 46). However, the same particularity of a case study that offers such an in-depth analysis is also its disadvantage. When researching a particular unit, we might not be able to generalise our results, but this is at the researcher's discretion to decide (Bryman, 2012, p. 69).

## 4.3. Data Collection:

Every researcher has primary and secondary sources for data collection in order to acquire, as humanly possible, a valid conclusion to their research. Primary data is derived from first-hand experiences while secondary data usually offers an interpretation of primary sources and often includes the author's perspective (Merriam, 2009, p. 152). Therefore, the primary data of this research was collected from the interviews in order to answer the research questions. Several books, articles, journals, and websites were used as a secondary source of data in terms of acquiring more information and drawing connections between the interviewee's answers.

### 4.3.1 Secondary Sources:

For this research, I first started searching for various books, articles, and websites that could help me acquire some pre-knowledge concerning the funeral sector. For that reason, I've decided to first mention secondary sources, leaving last the primary sources. As previously mentioned, information especially about the Cypriot funeral sector was limited on the Internet. However, having lived most of my life on the island, I quickly drew the connection between religion and death. Some clues about the funeral process were posted on various religious websites about Greek-Orthodoxy, but again, nothing about the practicalities. In addition, after coming across a live broadcast of a funeral on my Facebook, I uncovered a website that offered online services for the funeral sector, which greatly helped the process of this research. The use of secondary sources helped shape the interviews.

### 4.3.2 Interviews:

As Kvale and Brinkmann wrote in their book; 'Interviewing is an active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce knowledge' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 17). In-depth interviewing is an interesting method that offers useful insight into the social world from the perspective of the interviewee (Silverman, 2013, p. 56). The data collected from the interviews can provide evidence of the nature, the context of a phenomenon, and the situations in which a phenomenon emerged (Silverman, 2013, p. 63).

*Sampling:*

Having already decided the case to be investigated, being the funeral parlours specifically located in Nicosia, Republic of Cyprus, a sample within the case needed to be chosen. The sampling technique used in this thesis is purposive sampling, which relies on the judgement of the researcher to choose the participants (Ishak & Bakar, 2014, p. 32). The interview participants were three out of five funeral directors that owned a funeral parlour in Nicosia, recognised by the Republic of Cyprus as a legally certified funeral parlour, and one recently retired priest.

*Access to the field:*

Through my secondary sources, I acquired some knowledge in the funeral sector enough to be able to conduct my interviews. Next in line was finding funeral directors to interview. Luckily enough, I already had access to the field because of a close relative being a legal funeral director in Nicosia. The close connection that the funeral parlours have in Nicosia and because of my relative helping me, I was able to get interviews from the majority of the other funeral directors. It is also worth noting that in order to get an interview, my relative and I had to specifically mention that the interview would not have any questions related to a funeral parlour's economic matters. The interview conducted by the recently retired priest was an opportunity that appeared due to the priest being the former priest of my village. His interview was extremely helpful in finding out several Greek-Orthodox traditions as well as the experiences he had conducting funerals in the past and now.

## 4.4. Semi-structured Interviews:

Using a semi-structured interview type allows for questions to be open-ended and give the opportunity for the interviewees to define them on their own, gaining a certain exploratory feeling. The questions are usually flexible and can be modified on the spot in order to extract certain information from the interviewee (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). A certain degree of flexibility can reveal new perspectives in contrast with a highly structured interview. However, interviews without an intensified structure can also result in the interviewees going off-topic if the researcher does not direct them to the intended theme of discussion (Symon & Cassell, 2012, p. 248). For this reason, I was ready to subtly re-direct the interviewees back to the theme of the interview.

The semi-structured interviews resulted in two sets of data. The first set of data was collected from the funeral directors and its aim was to understand the old and new processes of conducting a funeral as well as potential changes that might have happened. Moreover, the second set of data's goal, which was generated by the recently retired priest, was to explore and learn the customs and rituals surrounding death in Cyprus. The priests, since they represent the church, are always in contact with funeral directors, therefore, it was interesting to listen to the other side's experience even if it was limited to just one interviewee.

The first interview I conducted was with my close relative. I treated the first interview as a pilot interview which helped rephrase and refine some of the questions that were crucial to my research (Merriam, 2009, p. 95). Its aim was not only to review and practice my question but also to acquire information related to my research questions and get familiarised with the funeral sector's terms and processes. Choosing to conduct the pilot interview with a familiar face was easier and offered the opportunity to return back for more questions after the other interviews were done. The remaining interviews were easy in terms of understanding several professional terms as well as product names that I could connect with the various processes.

Regarding the interview questions, I followed Patton's six types of questions in an attempt to get a holistic perspective of the interviewees. The six types are behaviours and experiences, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background questions (Patton, 2002, p. 352). In addition, Kvale's and Brinkmann's types of questions were considered during the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 135-136). When needed, I asked more probing, specifying, and interpreting questions. Finally, follow-up questions were asked to the interviewees if I needed further specification in a certain answer and examine the validity of the data.

## 4.5. Ethical Considerations:

In social research, it is important to be mindful of the ethical considerations surrounding the participants. Alan Bryman in his book refers to Diener and Crandall for the main four ethical principles that every researcher should take into consideration. These four areas are concerned with the potential of harm to participants, the lack of informed consent, the invasion of privacy, and whether deception is involved (Bryman, 2012, p. 135)

As indicated previously, the participants were wary of the interview questions, and I reassured them that no economic-themed questions would be asked. One of the interviewees

expressed their concern over the potential economic loss of their business due to the interview. For that reason, I ensured the participants the confidentiality of my research explaining how private data that could help identify them would be disclosed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 72). The transcriptions were saved without the real names of the participants, and the audio files likewise.

Before the start of the interview, I emphasized not to mention any information that could help in their identification or any other's person that might connect with their information. However, I also informed my participants of the possibility of their anonymity being uncertain due to the fact that they are three among the five funeral parlours in Nicosia. Certain speculations might happen, but their anonymity would be protected in any case. In addition, the procedure and purpose of the interview were disclosed to them, and described that this research is done in order to obtain my Master's degree (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 71). Finally, participants were informed that at any stage of the research, they have the right for a specific answer, or remark, or their entire interview to be withdrawn. Their verbal consent was recorded during the interviews.

## 4.6. Positionality:

When conducting this research, I acknowledged the fact that I was an outsider and an insider as well. Having no prior knowledge of the processes in the funeral sector, I was an outsider. Therefore, interviewing professionals in the funeral industry would help my research and obtain knowledge of the field. Because of my nationality, being a Greek-Cypriot, and speaking the native language of the island I was also an insider and familiarising myself with the participants was easy. The interviews were done in Greek and later on translated into English.

There were many instances in the interviews where the participants would laugh and refer to many situations as 'you know how it goes' or simply 'you know', referring to my identity as a Greek-Cypriot and my insider status. Furthermore, the funeral directors are the insiders of the funeral sector. When answering the answers, their truth claim is always from their perspective. I recognise that their perspective is a privileged one since the information I'm acquiring is the information from experts but might not reflect the absolute reality.

## 4.7. Reliability and Validity of Research:

There are criteria and a variety of types concerning the reliability and validity of data. When analysing and assessing the data from the interviews, I was careful to pinpoint the similarities between the answers. When comparing data from the interviews, no disagreements were corroborated. Since repeatable results are an indicator of reliability, I concluded that the data of the interviews is reliable and valid (Bryman, 2012, p. 46).

Of course, due to the limitation of sources in the Cypriot context concerning the funeral sector, I was not able to examine the external validity. Nevertheless, because of some of the changes that I had the experience to see (digitally), I deem their answers to be true. Examining external validity, throughout the island, could be the aim of future studies.

# 5. Findings from the Interviews

This chapter offers an analysis of the data collected during the interviews. To better understand and showcase if social change happened and influenced the funeral industry in Cyprus, the chapter is divided into four sections. Each section analyses the past processes and compares it with the present in order to compare and showcase a potential social change.

While engaging in all the phases, one thing is for certain. Technology has always been a part of our lives. By no means the analysis suggests that technology was a major turning point, since technology has always been a part of our world. However, the use of the internet and the invention of new technologies in the last 5 years, has contributed to significant changes for the profession of a funeral director.

## 5.1: At the time of death:

Suppose someone is dead and we need proof. How do we know they are dead? In the past, people would hold a mirror under your nose and wait in case there was a sign of breathing, meaning that if there was a sign of life, the mirror would become foggy (Worrall, 2014). Of course, this less scientific method has been misused many times, resulting in people being buried alive. The end of breathing no longer means the end of life. If someone was sick, the family would call a doctor, if the family of course was privileged enough and had a doctor available nearby. Today, people usually turn to their doctors more frequently. Hospitals are

now open all day and night ready to offer their services. In Cyprus, even in rural areas, you can access a doctor since the urban centres of the island expanded their services.

It used to be common for people to die at their houses, especially in rural areas. In contrast, nowadays, people, while it's not unlikely to die at their home, they also die in hospitals either suddenly or after the attempts of the doctors failing to keep someone alive. Nowadays, we don't hold mirrors under somebody's nose to see if they are breathing. We have professionals that can determine that and are responsible to issue a death certificate. Usually, women had some knowledge for taking care of the deceased while today, professionals handle everything.

So, what exactly happens today when somebody dies? According to the interviewees, the first step is to issue a death certificate. The only person that has the authority to issue it, is a doctor. If the family doesn't contact one at first, the funeral director has the responsibility to.

> *'If they had a thousand problems and were old and, you know how things go, we just call the doctor and ask for a certificate. If they didn't know what happened, then we need to get him'* (the deceased) *'to the hospital and get an autopsy if he died at home. If it's in the hospital, then it makes our job easier.'* (Funeral director B)

When the death certificate is issued, the funeral director picks up the deceased in a bag, if the deceased is at the hospital, and get back to the funeral parlour.

At the start of the profession, the undertaker's job was only limited to digging graves and the transportation of the deceased to the cemetery. Later on, it transformed into a coordination of services. There was a noticeable shift from undertaker to, what we now know, as a funeral director. The funeral directors became professionals and like the others, they have to follow the state's legislation. For a funeral parlour to be legitimate and work, it needs the right licenses. In Cyprus, the funeral parlours are under the Ministry of Interior and have to follow strict rules regarding their building's infrastructure, hygiene, tax, licenses, and hearses. According to the latest survey, there are only 16 legal funeral parlours working all over the island (Chatzistylianou, 2022). The state acts as the force to restrain the funeral parlour's expanding role with the various legislations, along with the police and the medical professionals.

The shift of funeral directors becoming professionals was accompanied by the creation of the expectation that as professionals they will take care of everything and is expected of them to actually co-ordinate the different other professionals needed. It is a complex process of contacting and coordinating the doctor, the church, the person responsible for digging the

grave and making the tombstone, the family of the deceased, and lastly the notice for the funeral. In the past, the clients would come in contact with the funeral director and the rest of the people responsible. Nowadays, all the above can be managed just by the funeral director.

Another difference is also in terms of contact with the funeral director. At first, the client would come in contact with the closest funeral director in the area. When asked about the designated area of work, the interviewees were quick to explain that it doesn't hold that much of a significance. The area makes it easier for them to work mostly because of the distance. However, they also mentioned the social circle of their business. According to them, being clean and detailed at their job, being legal with the right certifications and paperwork, and having friends is important for the business.

> *'Yes, most of my funerals are in Nicosia. But, for example today I have one at Pafos. It's a three-hour drive! (laughs) It's your circle that counts. The area is important but I'm not going to turn down someone. Now If I have a lot of funerals and can't afford the drive, I will call a friend that works nearby them to handle it. But that's not often.'* (Funeral Director A)

It's in the nature of their profession to be close and personal to their customer. Not because of just the grief they go through, but most importantly for their work on the deceased which most certainly was loved by their family. When interviewing the funeral directors, the need to satisfy the customer was prominent in all three of them. They emphasized how they try to make the wishes of the family come true, whatever those are, without judging. There were of course instances where the differences between legal and illegal funeral parlours would be mentioned, especially since the illegal ones have lower prices.

## 5.2: Taking care of the deceased:

When everything is taken care of by the funeral director, the body ends up on their stainless-steel table. The funeral director responsible for taking care of the deceased has the right certificates that prove his expertise on the matter. The offices of all the participants had their certificates displayed somewhere easily noticeable. What is more interesting is the timing of issuing those certificates. The participants would reminisce back to 2004, when Cyprus joined the European Union and entering a new era of demands. With Cyprus being a European member, regulations changed and specialised training, practical and theoretical, was mandatory for their business legitimacy.

In the past, women who had some kind of knowledge about the matter would take care of the dead. They would clean the body with water and maybe some soap so it wouldn't smell and dress the dead in their clothes. That would be the process if someone was presentable after their death. When the body was not presentable, for example, if the deceased was in an accident, the women would still take care of the body as much as they could. If the body was too damaged, the deceased would not even be cleaned, and the coffin would be closed. The same would be done in case of an unknown illness due to the fear of spreading a disease. The deceased would be then laid in a coffin, usually placed in the living room of their house, while the relatives and others would mourn all night.

Another important point emphasised by the interviewees was the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974. There was, of course, an urgency to bury the dead. No preparation was done to the dead and some even got buried with wrong names written on their graves. Afterwards, there was a need to create a record to document the victims of the invasion.

In the present, the process of taking care of the deceased is much more complex. The dead body is cleaned with specific tools and products because of the sensitive nature of dead skin. The funeral director must be extremely careful when handling the body due to the easiness of creating a bruise or a scar. According to the interviewees, there is no perfect condition when taking care of a dead body. They all try to make the deceased more presentable as they were. They use certified products specifically designed for dead bodies to fix any visible bruises or discolorations on the face and dress the dead in the clothes provided by the family. When the process is done, the body is placed in the fridge until the day of the funeral. The deceased can stay in the fridge for up to three days, in contrast with the past where the deceased had to be buried the next day. Nowadays, the funeral can get delayed in case of a relative that needs time to travel and attend the funeral or due to any other inconveniences.

Another matter that the funeral director needs to take into account, is if the deceased needs to be repatriated. In that case, the funeral director needs to embalm the deceased, a process that only certified funeral directors can perform, before arranging the return of the deceased to their country. The certification of embalming is given after the funeral director has the right infrastructure and followed the right theoretical and practical seminars now given by the University in Cyprus. Moreover, in case of cremation, the deceased will need to be transferred to another country with a crematorium since Cyprus does not have one. Until recently the deceased would be sent to Bulgaria. However, Greece recently build a crematorium enabling more choices for the funeral Cypriot market.

All three of the funeral directors had at least one experience with a dead body they could not care for.

> *'I remember when I went to pick up the… the victims of Orestis\*. It was very weird. I was ready for a regular day. I got in the morgue at the hospital… and... and I saw two policemen looking at me. The dead were in a body-bag. Both of them. The policemen said, and I remember it like it was yesterday! Don't open the bags. Just take them like this and put them in their coffins. Keep it closed. Don't even open the bag.- Of course, I didn't.'* (Funeral Director A)
> (\*Orestis was a serial killer in Cyprus who killed five women and two children.)

Another case, more recent, was during the start of the pandemic, Covid-19. At the start of the pandemic, scientists were still struggling to find the causes of it as well as the way the pandemic was spread. The funeral directors explained the process of burying the first victims of the pandemic in Cyprus. Essentially, they were only transporting the deceased and making sure the church was ready for the funeral. There was no preparation of the dead body and they had to follow strict protocols. The deceased was in a body-bag, which was not to be opened under any circumstances.

While the role of funeral parlour keeps expanding to other businesses as a co-ordinator and organisation, the state institutions constrain this role with various new regulations that they have to follow. In the past, there was no need to regulate such businesses because simply the undertaker was not considered a legitimate business, but a side-hustle that did not pay well and was mostly avoided and criticized. Today, funeral directors have their own representatives and in case of disagreement with the state institutions, the 'Association of Licensed Funeral Home Owners' steps in to resolve the issue.

## 5.3: The funeral

> '*At the villages up the mountains… Kyperounta let's say! There are still cases where they leave the deceased in the house. Somebody goes to the village's doctor to certify the death. The are some women that still know what to do, they will fake-dress the deceased', while the relatives would go buy a coffin. Next day, they would put the deceased in the coffin and hold the funeral. No funeral directors involved. On their own*.' (Funeral Director C)
> \*('fake-dress' is the direct translation in English. It was really meant as doing their best but not professionally)

In the past, the deceased would be rushed to be buried the next day since there were no means to preserve the body. Today, the deceased, while it is recommended for the funeral to happen as soon as possible, can be buried even after a week has passed. This is due to the ways

that are now accessible to preserve the dead body as well as the process of taking care of the dead that was mentioned above.

Before the funeral, people would spread the word about who died from mouth to mouth and people closer to the location of the funeral would attend. Today, this process has become the responsibility of the funeral parlour which is also an additional service that gets charged. At first, the funerals on the island were published in the local newspapers with the details of the church, the time, and the mourning family as well as information about any donations happening at the funeral. In the last five years, the announcements of funerals developed even more. The funeral parlours, like many other businesses, have their own websites that inform potential clients of their services. Interestingly enough, in these sites is the newly created section about funerals happening on the island. Moreover, there is a paid local website called 'Penthima gegonota' (Πένθιμα Γεγονότα / Mourning Events) (https://www.penthimagegonota.com/) where the funeral parlour gets in contact with, and the funeral is posted. The people entering the site even have the choice to share on their personal profiles on Facebook and more sites, the funeral of a loved one to inform other users on their social media.

On the day of the funeral, everything is already decided and agreed upon with the family as well as the various other elements that make up a funeral. The coffin that was already bought by the family, the flower arrangements for the deceased, the chosen gravestone that will be built on the grave later on, and finally the customary memorial coffee. The funeral director is responsible for the transfer of the deceased to the church, and later on to the cemetery. Of course, as mentioned above, in the past everything above was solely handled by the family.

Undoubtedly, technology and its constant developments helped funeral directors and the mourning families to take care of the deceased as best as possible. Initially, people used to take the deceased and their coffin on their shoulders to the church, while today we have hearses specifically designed to drive the deceased. The fridges where the dead body is stored until their funeral, embalming, and the various other methods to take care of the dead only prove that technology found its way to enter the realm of the dead. The various technological developments were always there. Following the constant technological advancements, the Internet that entered our everyday lives was only natural that would find a way into the funeral field. On the site previously mentioned, 'Mourning events', there is a paid service to live broadcast a funeral.
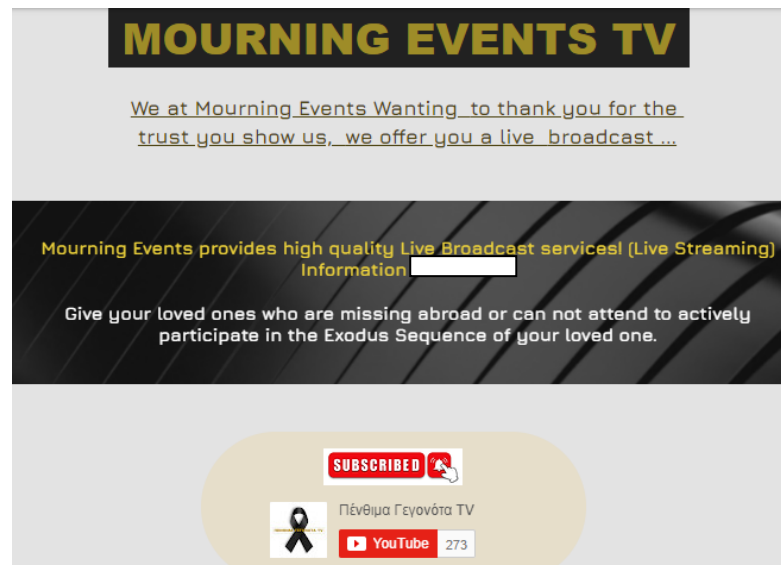
Figure 1: Screenshot taken directly from the website (https://www.penthimagegonota.com/) advertising the live broadcast service.

The live broadcast takes place on their designated YouTube channel, so anyone can enter and follow a relative's funeral. The live video can be then shared on anyone's social media profile for other people to watch. In addition, the comment section is open for everyone in case somebody wants to comment on the live funeral or express their condolences through the Internet.

After the burial, the funeral's guests would attend the customary coffee, which in the Cypriot dialect is called 'pariorka' (consolation) in the memory of the deceased. The consolation demands a Cypriot coffee, rusk, and olives but it varies depending on the location. Some villages in Cyprus have a tradition to drink wine or cognac. The consolation is also a service provided by the funeral parlour and the family can choose either the traditional ones or add various other options from the bakeries. During the last 3 years, according to the interviewees, the tradition of the consolation changed. Due to the pandemic, there was no consolation at first, but when the restrictions were partially drifted and till today, the rusks and olives are individually packed in small plastic boxes to minimise the spread of the pandemic.

## 5.4: Post-funeral Involvement

Generally, when the funeral was done and 'pariorka' was over, everyone would continue their lives. The family of the deceased would of course honour the religious traditions and hold memorials for the departed. According to the interview of a retired priest, after three

years, the relatives would contact the undertaker to perform an exhumation in order to collect and clean the bones before storing them in an ossuary. The exhumation is only done in some areas of the island. Sometimes, the priest of the village would also contact the undertaker only to clean the area of the cemetery before or after a funeral. Nevertheless, the role of the undertaker was no longer needed after the funeral. Everything was a matter of the family and the church.

Today, because of the several changes that happened over time, the funeral director is even involved after the funeral.

> *'You know, at first it was about helping people. People were calling asking for reminders about their mnimosyna. You can't say no! It's like saying no to the-the- the dead. Nobody does that! (laughs). We had it in our website's calendar. But later on… Penthima gegonota came and made it easier for us, right? They can either call or pay through the site or they contact us. We have a subscription to the site. I think monthly? If they call the site is more expensive than calling me. So, we charge them less and contact the site. We are still helping people but it's so many of them we might as well put a price for our toil.'* (Funeral Director B)

The funeral director acts as the mediator between the site and the client. Anyone can access the site of 'Penthima gegonota' and look at their services but the price is much higher if the individual pays without the funeral director's involvement. Another service provided by the site is the ability for the family to thank those who joined the livestream of the funeral, and overall everyone who went to the funeral on the official site of 'Penthima gegonota'.

When asked about the church, all of the funeral directors reported that the priests never created a problem for them. Only in some cases, and those were quickly judged as misunderstandings that ended happily for both sides. What's more interesting, is the relationship between the funeral director and the priests after the funeral. In some instances, the priest would call the funeral director, on behalf of a deceased's relative, to announce a memorial. Something like this would never be done in the past. The funeral director has the responsibility, if the family desires, to contact 'Penthima gegonota' and post a reminder on their website and social media about the date and time of a memorial for anyone interested. In addition, according to the interview, some priests will even advise people on which funeral parlour to choose, and in some instances, the priest contacts the funeral director on behalf of the family. Every funeral director rejected the idea of the Church regulating their business. The funeral parlours do work close with the priests, but that was quickly explained.

*'Priests are like… Our best friends! (laughs). You can say… The nature of the business, Cyprus being deeply religious. Eh, you know Cyprus is Cyprus! To be good in your job you have the responsibility to know the religious practicalities and traditions and organise accordingly a funeral that is Greek-Orthodox, by the rules of the church. It's not that hard.'* (Funeral Director C)

While the funeral parlour works as a centre of coordination for many businesses, it works are a center of communication too. Past clients or even people who haven't had a funeral with the parlour might contact them for other reasons than a funeral. For example, people contact the funeral parlour in case they want a gravestone changed. The funeral parlour will get in touch with the right business and make the right arrangements. There is also the matter of supplies for the grave. Here are many stores in Cyprus that offer lamps, oil, candles, and overall religion-related supplies but so do most of the funeral parlours. People can go to the office and often get the supplies from there.

## 5.5: New technologies – New opportunities?

Technology in Cyprus has been helping the process of a funeral, changing the way customs and rituals are done over time. While through interviews and personal experiences one can notice the changes that technology has brought, according to the interviewees there is still a long way to go in terms of reaching other countries' technology. When asked about the new technologies that can help a funeral parlour, the funeral directors rejected the idea of being able to use some of them. About the matter of cremation funeral directors seemed very positive and ready for a change. Cremation was made legal on the island in 2016, but there is still no crematorium (Browne, 2021).

*'We know how other countries work. But can we really follow? They make graves with a digger. You know our cemeteries. Can a digger go through your village's cemetery? Does it fit? One grave is on top of the other!'* (Meaning that cemeteries are crowded) (Funeral Director C)

When compared with other countries and their technology in the matter of funerals, the funeral directors were cautious. Most of the other countries' technologies that were described, like a digger, or machinery that lowers the coffin in the grave, are impossible to be used in Cypriot cemeteries. Cyprus has a lot of old cemeteries, with little to no space in between graves making it difficult to use anything similar from abroad. According to the funeral directors, new technologies in regard to cemeteries do not pose any new opportunities and the only way they seem fit is their own two hands.

In regard to a potential digital transformation, the funeral directors agree that it would be a major step in improving the funeral industry in Cyprus. The bureaucratic processes in Cyprus are usually done in person, with limited processes done online. A funeral parlour has a lot of paperwork to fill out and deliver to the ministries involved, most of the time, this process takes a full day or two of work. They believe by digitally transforming these processes will be mutually beneficial for them and the state, in order to also combat the illegal funeral parlours across the island. Another matter of discussion was the pricing. A funeral is not a cheap process at the current time and the funeral directors seemed to admit and accept this fact. By bringing new technologies into the business, they also need to adjust the prices in order to make a profit. Adjusting the prices means charging more than what they already do.

Another matter mentioned in all the interviews was the planning of funerals. Planning a funeral for a relative is what is expected, but how often does one plan their own funeral? The interviewees agreed that in the past nobody would plan their own funeral. Talking about someone's death was considered taboo and bad luck.

*'They joke about it (death) now. At first, it started as a joke. You know we were sitting at the Kafene (traditional coffee shop) and they would start saying 'Funeral Director B, I want cherry wood for my coffin. The expensive one.' Or 'I want you guys to drink whiskey and pour some on my dirt. It's all jokes. But now? No more jokes.'* (Funeral Director B)

One of the funeral directors had an encounter with an older man that planned his funeral down to the last detail. The reason behind the pre-planning was his concern over who would take care of him after death since he did not have any living relatives. He chose his coffin and his selection of flower arrangements to be decorated around the coffin. The selection was then sealed with a contract signing in front of a lawyer. The funeral directors that had previous encounters with pre-planning a funeral agreed that they did not want any responsibility in taking any money before the funeral. The customer is always encouraged to leave the appropriate amount to the lawyer.

## 5.6. A religious account:

The section below describes the information derived from the recently retired priest. As previously mentioned, there was only one interview concerning such a religious person as a priest. While a priest is a representative of the Church, his interview is not considered as the general opinion of the Church, but as his perception and opinion of what the Church believes.

According to the interview with the recently retired priest, the process of a funeral concerning the religious part did not really change. Regarding the religious aspect of the funeral, the priest mentioned that there were not significant changes. Priests read the same religious rites that read in the past. The main anniversaries of death that require a priest to conduct a memorial at the grave are still the same. However, the priest observed the trend of hosting 'parties', as he named them, after the memorial.

*'Mnymosyno is all about remembering the dead, cherishing them. What is needed is a simple bread and olives. Wine even or water. All these… Parties with pastries, cakes, sandwiches. God is not about wealth and showing off. This trend is unnecessary. Bread and olives.'* (Priest)

The main changes that the priest recalled happened during the pandemic were at first the deceased would be immediately transferred in a body bag to the grave instead of the church. When asked about the influence of technology the answer was that it was to be expected that the Internet or overall, the technology would change certain procedures. The church of Cyprus has a strong presence on social media, having its own website. Every metropolis and every bishop are mentioned on the site as well as links to redirect you to their respective website.

Another aspect connected to the religious process of a funeral is the possibility of live broadcasting. The priest had some experience with live-broadcasting due to a funeral he conducted last year. He seemed to not mind the use of the Internet.

*'So many people use it* (the Internet)*. If it brings them to the house of God, then I don't see any reason to deny anyone this right. Every Christmas and every Easter you see the live-broadcast of the mysteries on your TV and that was even before Covid. No reason to deny such service now.'* (Priest)

There is a form a priest needs to fill out due to personal data laws in order to give the right to the filming crew to record them and the church.

Concerning the relationship between this particular priest and the funeral directors, he didn't seem to remember any instances that he ever had a problem. He described them as professionals that show an extensive understanding of the religious processes that need to be conducted during a funeral. Personally, there are several instances in which he recommended a particular funeral parlour because he is a friend of the funeral director. But the final decision is still at the hands of the family in choosing the funeral parlour. When reminiscing about experiences of other friends and priests, he reported that he hasn't heard anything being said in an ill-mannered way. Funeral directors and priests work alongside respecting each other's fields of expertise.

# 6. Analysis of the Findings

All four interviews were more than an hour-long with some even closing in the two-hour mark. The interviewees were more than helpful to provide information about their experiences and the procedure they follow. The above findings helped in answering the research questions at the start of the thesis. The sections below will provide an analysis of the results by answering the sub-questions first.

## 6.1. What were the changes concerning the care of the dead in Cyprus?

While the above section, concerned with the findings through the interviews, can provide in a detailed manner the answer to the question, I decided to provide a brief summary of the changes.

In the past, women would take care of the deceased as best as they could by cleaning and dressing them. Word of their death would spread to the people interested in attending the funeral. The undertaker would be contacted to prepare a coffin. Usually, the coffin would be placed in the house for the relatives to mourn until the funeral. Because of the decomposition, the funeral would often take place the next day and the deceased would be buried at the local cemetery with the help of relatives. When the funeral was done, everyone would gather at the deceased's house or outside the church for the traditional pariorka, the customary memorial coffee.

Nowadays there are a number of changes that the interviewees spoke about. Firstly, the funeral director is a center of coordination and communication between various businesses that relate to the funeral industry. The funeral parlours are responsible for all the paperwork such as the certificate of death, the care of the deceased, as well as the funeral. There were a lot of technological advancements not only in preparing the deceased for the funeral, but for the funeral itself. Today it's possible to live broadcast the funeral, as well as offer your condolences online. Moreover, the customary memorial coffee is now a responsibility of the funeral parlour. Lastly, the funeral director acquired a post-funeral involvement by issuing reminders of memorials.

## 6.2. What are the causes of the changes regarding the funeral industry in Cyprus?

The above changes happened over time. We could argue that the historical process and evolution of the care of the dead followed the various social processes happening in Cyprus.

However, attempting to pinpoint all the causes from the beginning of Cypriot history is impossible. Therefore, the time period of researching the funeral industry and the care of the dead was from 1974 to the present day. Causes can be both external and internal, with the first referring to societies other than Cyprus that could influence the Cypriot society, and the latter as the interrelations between values, social structure, and social processes (Haferkamp & Smelser, 1992, p. 370).

From the funeral directors' interviews, I was able to pinpoint and distinguish three major turning points that influenced the funeral industry on the island. Those were the 1974 Turkish invasion, the accession of Cyprus to the European Union, and lastly, the Covid-19 pandemic. While staying open to the many possibilities and views of social change we can already distinguish some parts of the main sociological theories regarding social change.

### 6.2.1: The 1974 Turkish invasion:

First, let's consider the 1974 Turkish invasion that happened on the island. While the invasion had several consequences, this thesis will only be considering the ones related to the funeral industry. Back in 1974, the funeral director was still an undertaker. The funerals, if done at all, were characterised by a feeling of urgency. In some instances, the priests would return after days or weeks to conduct the funeral. The burials were done in a hurry, and the names on the graves were not written in full confidence that the deceased was indeed the one buried. In some cases, the deceased would be wrapped around in a blanket instead of being placed in a coffin. There was also a difference between the deceased and the place of their grave. Soldiers that were members of the coup plotters were buried with the name on their grave being 'Unknown'. Dead people who were also considered to be communists were also buried either outside the cemetery or together in a single grave indicating social change caused by political factors, heavily influenced by the invasion.

Due to the urgency of the situation, there was no documentation. Families were displaced from their homes unsure if their relatives were dead or missing. There was a need to document the victims and there was an extensive search around the cemeteries. Interestingly enough, while the Republic of Cyprus agreed on the creation of a Commission with its sole purpose to find the missing people from the invasion in 1977, Turkey only agreed to it in 1981. Turkey continued to pose problems in exhumations and identification of missing people and only fully agreed to cooperate after conversations for its ascending to the European Union

started (http://www.missing-cy.org.cy/el/history). Now there is an extensive record of missing people as well as the victims of the invasion.

Conflict, and in this case invasion, and the consequences of its hostilities can be a significant factor in re-organising institutions, developing new technologies, and overall change in society. There was a period of adjustment after the invasion in many sectors that influenced the funeral industry in Cyprus. Social structures and relationships were disrupted resulting in certain citizens of a different political party being buried and treated differently.

## 6.2.2: Joining the European Union:

Moving on, the accession of Cyprus to the European Union in 2004 resulted in further changes regarding the funeral industry on the island. This is a critical step towards specialisation and professionalisation in the funeral industry. There was a change in ideology on the island. Cypriots now had a dual identity. They were Cypriots and Europeans, meaning that they would have to follow European standards. The Republic of Cyprus had to follow certain procedures and regulations in terms of specialisation in taking care of the deceased. There was a significant change in the bureaucratic system in Cyprus that got further developed. With the help of the European Union, the Republic of Cyprus offers the funeral and widow's economic aid which can be obtained by registering a form to the respective ministry.

The funeral parlour got further involved with bureaucracy as it is responsible for filling and submitting the form on behalf of the family. The legal system was beginning to acknowledge funeral parlours as businesses with registration numbers and are now held accountable for their prices and taxes. There are also a number of certificates that a funeral director needs to have in order to be able to work. For example, they must have an annual license to practice, a certificate of hygiene with surprise visits from the Ministry of Health, and an annual certificate of owning a funeral parlour. In the past undertakers did not need any certificates or certain specialisation to be able to work. Today, to become a funeral director and an embalmer you either need to finish the respective degree (which the university of Cyprus does not offer) or be a practitioner for several years. For funeral parlours that do not abide by the law, there are severe fines.

## 6.2.3 Covid-19 Pandemic:

The most recent event that can be associated with changing the Cypriot industry is the pandemic. While scientists were still trying to research and cure Covid, the whole world was

getting into lockdowns and restrictions. Cyprus was no different. Funerals were held with one or two relatives while the deceased was still in a body bag. The Cypriot society slowly started to adapt to the new life conditions. While the Internet was already a part of Cypriot life, with Covid there was an intensification. Not only because of online studying, working, and communicating but also to join several life events. One of them being funerals.

Funeral parlours were slowly and steadily getting into the digitalised era with personalised websites that include important information and contact details. While they already advertising the information for funerals that were about to happen and with covid coming into the picture, live broadcasting the funeral, another important aspect was appointed to them. Now funeral parlours have post-funeral involvement with the reminders of memorials, as well as other services (gravestone changing, equipment for cemeteries, etc).

### 6.2.4: A Plethora of Causes

Initial observations suggest that the pandemic, as well as the 1974 invasion, and the accession to the EU, were three significant historical points that helped shape the Cypriot funeral parlours into the businesses they are now. The data concerning the changes and the causes need to be interpreted with caution. The three turning points presented in this thesis do not suggest that they are primary causes but rather helped in changing the funeral industry. In other words, these three moments contributed to changing the funeral industry along with other factors happening over time. As previously mentioned, while technology can be the main connection for social change, the results of this research do not rule out the influence of other factors and processes. These processes and factors include medicalisation, professionalisation, specialisation, and modernisation.

Doctors became the primary caretakers of people. The doctor can transform a person into a 'patient' and then into a 'corpse' by announcing their death (Hallam, Hockey, & Howarth, 1999, p. 57). For the transformation process to happen the doctor uses the help of technology. On the account of death, the professional who is then responsible for the deceased is the funeral director with extensive knowledge that is now examined and certified. While following the evolution of technology, the various processes of both the doctor and the funeral director change. The change in ideology, the political and economic factors, and the invasion were all causes of social change on the island. Another source of change is the competition in the Cypriot economy. Funeral parlours noticed a gap in the market and took advantage of it. While other countries started live-broadcasting funerals, the professionals in Cyprus quickly

followed. Funeral postings, memorials, and live broadcasting comes with a cost that the client is paying additionally to the rest of the services.

## 7. From Undertaker to Funeral Director

Having discussed the sub-questions of the thesis, the changes, and causes, the final section of this paper will answer the main research question.

**Is there a social change in regard to the funeral industry in Cyprus and if yes, then did technology contribute?**

According to the findings from the interviews, it is indicated that there was indeed a social change concerning the funeral industry in Cyprus. Considering various theories of social change, we can draw connections to the Cypriot context. A social change can be in the structure of society, the function of society, or a change in social relationships (Mutekwe, 2012, p. 227). It can also be caused by various factors, according to Vago, such as ideology, competition, conflicts, structural strains, economic and political factors (Vago, 1998, p. 37). Many changes that were described by the interviewees can be attributed to the above factors when combined with the three major turning points.

As previously discussed, at the start of this study, death has started transforming from traditional to modern and then neo-modern (Rotar & Teodorescu, 2011, p. 12). Traditional death entails a communal event, which according to the data derived from the interviews, in the past people would personally clan the deceased and take care of the body as well as the funeral. This also suggests the minimal involvement of the undertaker. Moreover, as hygiene became more important, the undertaker transformed into a funeral director taking more responsibilities as people distanced themselves, indicating the shift from traditional to modern death. Neo-Modern death indicates a change in how the individual wishes to be taken care of after their death. While the data suggest only a handful of examples of Cypriots wanting to plan their funeral, it provides an insight into the changing process of death on the island.

The undertakers started from digging graves and taking care of the cemetery and evolved to funeral directors having a legitimate business with certifications and creating their own union with its respective rights. While in the past the undertakers had limited expertise and tools to help them, today we can observe a plethora of tools that the funeral director relies

on. Specialised in their profession grants them the exclusivity to work. A new market has opened for the needs of funeral homes with exhibitions happening all around the world. Concerning the Cypriot market, Covid showcased a lack of digital innovation.

Today, the funeral director is someone who coordinates a plethora of other businesses and has the ability to take care of every need in a fast-paced society. It's a social centre that organises others leaving the client with fewer responsibilities. Social change can lead to culture change because of the societal conditions changing. For instance, and in this case, the funeral directors have now the responsibility of decorating the funeral as well as hosting and providing the memorial coffee. However, the argument of secularisation concerning cultural change due to modernity, does not apply in this case. While modernity can lead to secularisation, in this thesis it seems that while the responsibility of hosting cultural practicalities got transferred, from the family of the deceased to the funeral directors, religion still dictates the practice and process of the funeral. While the religious control over the process of the funeral is still strong, the cultural practicalities of the funeral got transferred to the funeral parlour. This gives the opportunity to the funeral parlour to charge depending on how simple or extravagant the family wants the funeral to be which leads to other consequences concerning social classes and post-mortem identity that are not discussed in this thesis.

In terms of social relationships, regarding the profession, there is also a change in the way people perceive the profession. An undertaker was stigmatised because of the nature of his profession and the close proximity to death. The funeral director, based on the interviews is no longer stigmatised. In addition, the relationship between the church and the funeral directors did not get influenced by the change.

Although the profession is evolving by broadening and expanding its role, certain institutions constrain the funeral parlours' role. First, the government with its regulations has regulated the business with various regulations and the certificates previously discussed. Secondly, the police, based on the interviewee's experiences, can sometimes not allow and advice the funeral directors not to take care of the deceased. Lastly, the church. While the interviewees did not mention and quickly rejected the idea of the church disagreeing with their work or regulating it, it is obvious that the funeral director's job, especially in Cyprus, is dependent on and revolves around the church. Some certain religious customs and practicalities must be upheld. Therefore, the funeral director's job is to follow them.

The undertaker's limited post-funeral involvement can be observed in relation to the present and shed new light on understanding the reasons behind it. Technology has been

contributing to social change along with other factors, but it should not be considered the primary cause. It has contributed to changing the way funerals are done, but it was merely due to the gap the pandemic revealed and influenced by the competition in the funeral industry. The recent pandemic has revealed the significance of technology, especially the Internet. While there is the involvement of the internet, the customs and rituals are not done entirely online. It would be interesting to observe the involvement of the Internet when there will be no regulations due to the pandemic anymore concerning the funeral's live broadcasting. Concerning the yearly reminders of memorials on the Internet and the further services a funeral parlour offers after the funeral, it showcases an interesting trend in removing several responsibilities from the client.

## 7.1. Recommendations:

This research, as previously indicated, was carried out only in the district of Nicosia. While Cyprus is a smaller country compared to others, we need to be cautious when generalising the results. It would be wise in the future for a more holistic study concerning the whole island. Another interesting aspect of the evolution of the funeral industry in Cyprus is also the post-mortem identity and how it gets influenced by the living social class. Moreover, the post-funeral involvement of funeral parlours highlighted several changes in light of recent events such as the pandemic and it would be interesting to observe the results of those changes after the end of the pandemic. Lastly, it would be interesting if future research was to include more interviews with people with a religious background such as archbishops, bishops, and priests to get a better view of their belief about the use of the Internet in religious settings such as the funerals.

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# 9. Appendix

## 9.1. Interview questions with the funeral directors:

**Business:**

1.  How do people usually get in contact with you?

2.  How do you maintain a balance between being empathetic and stoic?

3.  What would you say is the key to your business?

4.  Do you have an association? Conferences or seminars that happen and you attend?

5.  How do you stay in contact with the market? With the latest products?

6.  What packages do you have?

7.  How is the competition here?

8.  Did you experience any negative attitudes towards you because of your profession?

9.  How do you do to check the quality of your work? What can you describe as high quality in your profession?

10. What is the most challenging part of your work?

11. Did you ever get in the position of giving discounts because of specific situations?

12. Being a funeral director has also an emotional aspect. How do you consult a grieving customer? Is there a way of balancing business and emotions?

**Procedure:**

1.  What does it take nowadays, education wise, to be a funeral director?

2.  Can you describe a regular day of work to you? What do you usually do?

3.  Do you have certain procedures that you must follow in terms of preparing the deceased? Is it possible to describe the process?

4.  What happens when you have shortages in certain products? Do the funeral homes in Nicosia co-operate?

**Secularization related questions:**

1.  Do you work closely with the church? Do you have certain requirements and proceedings to follow in agreement with them?

2.  (If close related to church then) Do you believe that the close relationship you have with the church deems the funeral sector as conservative? (If not) Do you believe the funeral sector is conservative? Why?

3.  Have you directed a funeral that was not Greek-Orthodox?

4.  In Greek-Orthodoxy cremation is prohibited. Was there a case where the deceased or the family wanted to choose cremation?

5. Do you believe the church will one day stop being influential in your business?

6. Did you ever have a disagreement with the Church in relation to a funeral procedure?

7. What do you think is the opinion of the church for the increasing social influence on funerals? Do you think they find it harmful?

**Burial questions:**

1. Can you describe how the burial process is conducted? How do you prepare the deceased?

2. Do you remember a situation during a burial that stayed in your mind?

3. Have you seen any differences between the younger population at the cemeteries? How they react or behave?

4. Have you attended or directed a funeral that was not Greek Orthodox? How did it go?

5. Do you have any knowledge of the funerals back in 1974?

6. Were you in a situation where the deceased had no physical body? Did you spot any differences between that funeral and others that had a body? (maybe from 1974, a missing person)

7. Do you believe that the body is essential at a funeral? (For accepting someone's death, for grieving etc)

8. What happens when the body is in a very unfortunate state? (closed coffin? Specific procedures

**The change of practice:**

1. Did you spot any differences between years ago and now?

2. Do you remember what changed in the procedures when you first started, and nowadays?

3. Have you seen the new methods of burial options? (biogradable capsules, QR codes on tombstones etc)

4. Did something change with the pandemic? Procedure or social wise?

5. Have people contacted you to plan their death?

6. Social media and the Internet have penetrated our lives. Did the Internet or the social media influence your business too? How?

## 9.2.    Interview questions with the priest:

1. How many years have you been a priest?

2. How did you decide to become a priest?

3. What happens when a person dies? What does the church say?

4. What do you require to conduct the funeral?

5. Can you describe us the process of a funeral?

6. Why is cremation prohibited in Greek orthodoxy?

7. What's your opinion or the Church's about the notion of Hell/Paradise?

8. What happens to our body after we die?

9. Do you believe Christianity brought the dead closer to the living?

10. I'm sure you're aware about the wide-spread influence of the Internet. Did the Church got influenced?

11. What's your personal view on secularization?