AUTHOR(S):

TITLE:

YEAR:

Publisher citation:

OpenAIR citation:

Forgiveness and the practice of compromise in post-apartheid South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness has become a striven-for societal goal in post-conflict societies in the past decade or two. The rise of 'policies of forgiveness' (Misztal 2011) can, for instance, be illustrated by the increasing popularity of truth commissions to deal with past human rights violations. In this context, forgiveness is advocated as part of a measures to deal with past human rights violations and as a means to reconciliation (Montiel 2002). At the same time, if forgiveness is considered a moral imperative in post-conflict societies, victims might feel pressure to forgive too quickly, risking a devaluing of their suffering and 'of the principle of equal value itself' (Muldoon 2008: 308).

In relation to the sociology of compromise, the capacity for forgiveness is one of a number of mediating factors that make it easier for people to live together after conflict and to practice tolerance; other such mediators include the ability to transcend divided memories of the former conflict, senses of the fairness of the concessions, trust and, perhaps most crucially the social networks in which people are located. While this chapter particularly focuses on understandings and practices of forgiveness among victims in South Africa, it is important to first note a number of issues in relation to compromise itself.

Compromise might be considered universally applicable, but there are cultural and social practices specific to particular post-conflict settings that may enhance or hinder the ability of victims to conceive of, and practise, it. For example, many interviews for this study were conducted with native Bantu speakers and compromise is not a readily available word in isiXhosa or isiZulu. The term compromise also had particular connotations in the South African context. Respondents most frequently linked their conception of compromise with political arrangements and processes, even when subsequently prompted about the notion of a reciprocal practice of tolerance in public. Some understood compromise as 'sell out', whereas others characterised it as a political solution or a necessary bargain. For example:

> We were disappointed with the kind of deal that was struck, with the sunset clause giving the oppressors opportunities and rights to continue beyond our liberation to still be in charge of the economy, to still be in charge of land rights and so on. So it was a major compromise right from the outset. So we had a compromised victory (P6).

Most commonly addressed in response to compromise were the negotiated settlement and its conditions, such as the demobilisation of the armed liberation forces, the amnesty clause and the disjuncture between political and economic freedom. Wider political and socio-economic issues such as redistribution, inequality and poverty shaped victims' understandings of the term. Some of these issues impact on people's understanding of forgiveness, which is my main concern here.

The distinction between private and public spheres is central to the practice of compromise and was mirrored in interviewees' conceptions of forgiveness. Some reserved forgiveness on a personal level but, at least in principle, subscribed to a societal need to forgive. Others saw forgiveness predominantly as a political idea that necessitated reciprocity and some perceived it as an official project that contrasted with their own everyday efforts to live with and forgive the historically defined other. This chapter will first provide some necessary background on the South African case, summarising legacies of the Apartheid past and efforts to deal with these legacies. I then briefly review the relevant literature on forgiveness in relation to dealing with violent pasts. After outlining methodological considerations, I explore victims' own senses of forgiveness. I distil three main themes from the interview data: religious forgiveness, secular forgiveness and forgiveness as coping. While there were relatively high levels of forgiveness among the victims interviewed for this study, the last part of this chapter will demonstrate that forgiveness is contingent on senses of the fairness of the peace process and contemporary experiences of social justice, and can be withdrawn years after the formal end of violence. Contrary to a supposed linear temporality of peace processes within which healing takes place progressively such that forgiveness and trust increase with the passage of time, contemporary victimisation experiences can bring back negative emotions about the past that can shape individuals' capacity for forgiveness. The conditions that sustain forgiveness need to be continually supported.

LEGACIES OF A VIOLENT PAST

South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 were preceded by fifty years of legislated racial oppression under National Party rule, and centuries of earlier segregation policies, with race determining individuals' access to political rights, life-chance opportunity, education, employment and health. All 'Blacks', 'Indians' and 'Coloureds', to use the apartheid-era classification terms, were victims of the regime, even though it did not affect the three 'non-white' groups evenly. Violations produced physical, psychological, financial and social effects. Those who were opposed to the regime were subjected to violent repression. Such direct

victims of human rights violations were often political activists – members of the many banned political parties, civil society organisations or the broad-based non-violent resistance movement United Democratic Front (UDF) – and this is reflected in the selection of participants for this study. Although a large majority of activists were non-militant, their involvement in the political struggle clearly complicates idealised notions of the victim as 'innocent' or 'lacking responsibility' (Bouris 2007). Indeed, the very categorisation of victims and of perpetrators can be highly contested and transitional justice scholarship has increasingly questioned such a victim-perpetrator dichotomy (Borer 2003, Fullard 2004).

The intra-civilian character of the conflict, particularly during the late stages of apartheid when ethnic tensions were escalated by the nationalist paramilitaries in the service of the apartheid regime, further complicates constructions of victimhood. Of the 21,000 people that died as a result of political violence under Apartheid, 14,000 were killed in the transition period when political negotiations were already underway. This communal dimension has meant that perpetrators and victims have often continued to live side by side, arguably increasing the need for the practice of forgiveness and compromise (also see Gobodo-Madikizela 2008).

Efforts to deal with the legacies of this violent past were intertwined with the workings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which famously provided conditional amnesty in exchange for the disclosure of knowledge of human rights violations. It set out to investigate any gross violations of human rights between 1960 and 1994, defined as 'the violation of human rights through the killing, abduction, torture or severe ill-treatment of any person emanating from the conflicts of the past and carried out or planned by any person acting with a political motive' (TRC 1998: vol. 5: 10). The definition therefore excluded victimisation experiences that resulted from the structural violence of apartheid, such as forced removal, unequal education, discrimination and so on. As the TRC Report stated: 'the Commission's focus was […] a restricted one, representing what were perhaps some of the worst acts committed against the people of this country and region in the post-1960 period, but providing a picture that is by no means complete […] millions of South Africans, and more particularly those who were not white, were subjected to racial and ethnic oppression and discrimination on a daily basis' (TRC 1998: vol. 1: 29). The TRC classified 29,000 victims and documented 47,000 gross violations of human rights.

The Commission was also charged with developing a reparation and rehabilitation policy, which resulted in recommendations for a reparations grant, symbolic reparation, community rehabilitation programmes and institutional reform measures. Individual grants

were paid out (albeit late and at a reduced sum) and some symbolic reparation was undertaken, but government has to date not implemented other aspects of the TRC's reparations policy. Over twenty years after the end of apartheid, there continue to be protests by victims campaigning for a full implementation of the Commission's recommendations and a re-opening of the registration process. Reparations were an important theme in our interview data too and a revoking of forgiveness, or refusal to forgive, was related, by some participants, to their perception of inadequate reparations. This means that continued feelings of social injustice infuse ideas about forgiveness and its practice.

FORGIVENESS AS A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE APPROACH

Restorative justice approaches, such as those encapsulated in truth commissions, might be thought to encourage the idea of forgiveness (Wilson 2001, Muldoon 2008), with the South African TRC providing one of the best-known examples. That forgiveness and reconciliation have become central tenets in the transitional justice debate over the last two decades has been linked to the shift towards expressive and psychologically-minded individualism in the Western world since the late 1980s (Hamber 2007). This shift might in part account for the embracing of victims and their personal suffering as the foundation for political and social reconstruction in post-conflict societies (Humphrey 2003). In line with this argument, societal reconciliation was sometimes equated with individual victims' forgiveness in public discourse in South Africa (cf. Humphrey and Valverde 2008). Such understandings rely on a relatively straightforward connection between forgiveness as a personal and as a political process, but the linkages between interpersonal and societal, third-party, forgiveness need to be more carefully unpacked, both at specific moments of a transitional justice process and over time.

Gobodo-Madikizela's (2008) concept of forgiveness through empathy is based ~~in~~ on psychoanalysis and the notion of *ubuntu*, a complex Southern African value system centred on humanity's essential interconnectedness. Counter to Hannah Arendt's notion that some crimes against humanity are unforgivable, Gobodo-Madikizela argues that forgiveness should involve decisions about what can or cannot be forgiven that are formulated and taken in the actual encounter of victims and perpetrators living side by side. She calls this 'victim-perpetrator dialogue'. Discussing how one of the mothers of the Gugulethu 7 grants her son's murderer Mbelo her forgiveness, Gobodo-Madikizela (2008: 183) contends that forgiving is 'illustrative of dialogue that is primarily concerned about giving a human face to a man who is begging,

not for the slate to be wiped clean, but for a change to take the first steps towards rehabilitation and to live among fellow human beings.'

However, the prominence of Christian notions of forgiveness in the South African TRC has been criticised. Wilson's anthropological study of the Commission and its impact in communities claimed for example, that its available scripts were determined by its dominant view of reconciliation, which was an 'amalgam of transnational human rights values and a Christian ethic of forgiveness and redemption' that clashed with retributive notions of justice present in townships and chiefs' courts (2001: 80). Muldoon (2008) similarly contends that the morality of forgiveness became inscribed in the hearings of the TRC and ended up largely defining the reconciliation project. The dominant presence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu might lend further salience to these critiques. More generally, religion and religious actors can powerfully shape transitional justice projects, for example through participating in negotiations, serving as commissioners, using religious ceremony, providing logistical support (Philpott 2009), all of which had a strong influence in the South African TRC.

However, these critiques have a tendency to overlook that South Africa is a deeply religious country. About 85 per cent of the South African population considered themselves to belong to a religion in 2011, the year in which the qualitative interviews for the South African project were carried out (Human Sciences Research Council 2011). Of these, 82 per cent belonged to Christian churches and nearly 10 per cent belonged to other world religions that similarly draw on notions of forgiveness. Levels of religiosity are also high: nearly 60 per cent of those who belonged to a religion attended religious services monthly or more frequently and about a third attended weekly or more frequently. As the analysis of interview data below demonstrates, many victims associated their ability to forgive with their own religiosity. What is more, as one TRC commissioner put it:

> even for people who are not believers in any particular faith, the kind of symbolism of religion was quite important. […] it again comes back to the question of acknowledgement and respect. That here was a well-known public figure [Archbishop Tutu] who meant something in public life, and his robes of office symbolises that (anonymous, interviewed in Cape Town, 15 February 2011).

Victims criticised the Commission for a number of reasons but none of the participants judged it to be overly religious or predominantly focused on forgiveness (also see Chapman 2007), although there was, for a small number, a perception of forgiveness as a great request and burden.

When considering attitudes towards forgiveness in the general South African population in 2011, only just under 8 per cent of the population disagreed with the statement that they were trying to forgive those who hurt them under apartheid; whereas over half (53.5%) agreed that they were trying to forgive them (South African Reconciliation Barometer 2011). The percentage of those trying to forgive was notably higher in historically-disadvantaged groups than in the whole population group and there were statistically significant differences in attitudes towards forgiveness between historically-defined race groups: roughly 38 per cent of the white population agreed or strongly agreed that they tried to forgive, as compared to 56 per cent of the black   population, 62.5 per cent of the Asian population and 60 per cent of the coloured population.

METHODOLOGY

The South African project within the Leverhulme research programme included 38 interviews with victims/survivors of apartheid-era gross human rights violations. All interviewees had experienced gross human rights violations as defined by the TRC (although only two had submitted to it), as well as experiencing the structural, legislated-for, violence of apartheid. All interviews were conducted in the Western Cape Province, during four months of fieldwork in 2011, in a mixture of urban (Cape Town and Cape Flats townships; 25 interviews) and semi-urban or rural (Oudtshoorn, George, Mossel Bay; 13 interviews) settings, and in most cases at participants' homes. Eight participants were female, 19 historically defined black, 18 historically defined coloured and one historically defined white. The Western Cape is unique in terms of its demographic composition, with a larger percentage of the population being historically defined coloured and white than in any other province. As with other provinces, victim experiences and the forms violence took are distinct (TRC 1998).

Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. They addressed the key themes central to the overall research programme to ensure comparability with the data collected in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, but they also included contextual and emerging themes. Forms of victimisation that participants had experienced included the killing of relatives, torture, detention without trial, rape and other sexual violence, shootings by police or other apartheid state organisations, maiming, forced removal, lack of access to education, healthcare, employment and political rights.

It is noteworthy that only just over a third of those interviewed described themselves as 'victim' and less than a third preferred to use the term 'survivor'. Other terms that interviewees frequently used to describe their identity in relation to apartheid human rights violations were

'freedom fighter' and 'victor', since some used their accounts to construct narratives of their active contribution to the liberation struggle. I acknowledge the debates around the problematic use of the term 'victim' and that there is a preference in some strands of the transitional justice literature to use the term 'survivor', but neither was universally accepted by participants in relation to the violations they had experienced in the past. I use the term 'victim' in this chapter therefore to highlight that people have experienced, and often continue to experience, human rights violations but do not necessarily imply that they chose to define themselves as 'victim'.

Occasionally, this chapter draws on secondary survey data analysis to document attitudes to forgiveness, reconciliation and religiosity in the general South African public. These quantitative data have been derived from analysis of the South African Social Attitudes Survey (Human Sciences Research Council 2011) and the South African Reconciliation Barometer (The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2011), both of which are nationally representative annual surveys.

VICTIMS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF FORGIVENESS

Three dominant understandings of forgiveness emerged from victims' narratives: religious forgiveness, secular forgiveness, and forgiveness as coping. Forgiveness was not a meaningful concept to all participants, however. When asked what it meant to him, P7, a frequent victim of imprisonment and interrogation, said: 'Personally I have never felt a need for anyone to come and say [that they want my forgiveness]. And I don't know either...Maybe there is a role, some people will find comfort in that. For me I have never expected that.' Other interviewees did not forgive, or could no longer forgive, as the last section of this chapter will demonstrate.

Religious forgiveness

Religious notions of forgiveness were clearly discernible in many victims' accounts, such as in the following interview with a Christian respondent: 'I think it is only God who blessed me with it, because I can make peace with you. If you hurt me a lot, I will be with you and I will forgive' (P10); or, from an interview with a Muslim victim:

> we don't hate the government and what they did to us, we forgive them. And a lot of people ask me this question, please explain how can you forgive? As a Muslim and also as Christian, we believe God forgives. Don't we? And I will ask myself who am I not to forgive (P28).

This prevalence is perhaps not surprising, given the levels of religiosity in the country that were noted earlier. Some victims also converted to religion, often evangelism, in later life and credited this conversion with being able to cope with their experiences of oppression, suffering and struggle. The following biographical narrative by one participant, whose father was killed by apartheid police, illustrates this relationship well and bears citing at length:

> I was around 19 years [when he was killed]. So that was a great pain. I didn't regard a white person as a person. I regard him as a person to be killed. Then after that I had to go into exile, via Lesotho, then I was trained as a soldier, a freedom fighter. First I was started in Zaire, and then we go down to Angola […]. So it was a very hard time in my life, before I came to Christ. Though now I am relieved, because I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my saviour and I had to forgive and to love the people. And to see that people are not the same. Sometimes things happen in life and God wants to rectify or do something after that. Although the scars are there, but I have forgiven (P30).

Victims like this one, who became combatants and were later 'born again', showed high levels of forgiveness and the willingness to compromise. An additional link with practising compromise is that many religious victims were active in their churches and their wider community. Social networks, such as churches and other religious spaces, can promote – but of course also undermine – compromise. As the above participant, who is now a Baptist pastor, highlighted:

> I am reconciled. I have a lot of friends that are pastors, white pastors, and we try to break the barriers between the Christians. We started a team, a soccer team, and I have white friends who have joined our churches and we have sports together, playing together and eating together. That I think is bringing healing to the other people. Because I myself am healed. And I know that one day I will be out of this world, but the only thing that I have to do is the people who are surrounding me, that is my heartbeat. How can I influence them to learn and to start how they can improve their lives themselves (P30).

Secular forgiveness

Though often influenced by people's religiosity, forgiveness can also be rooted in a secular and ethical worldview, where victims strongly identified with the idea of a common humanity and a progressive political vision. The following extract from an interview with a former activist and political prisoner in Pollsmoor, exemplifies this perspective:

When I got to prison the first time and I had interaction with the guy who looks after us, the warders, I came to the realisation that there is this common humanity. Because I was talking to this guy who was supposed to be the enemy, […] and I realised that he was probably more of a victim than I was. Because psychologically, he was in prison, although he held the key and I was there in the little cell. He was imprisoned psychologically in a huge way, by fear, by lack of vision. He had no vision of the future. Whereas we had a vision of a non-racial, democratic future (P21).

This interviewee and other participants like him associated their moral vision with their education. One victim, for example, discussed his understanding of whites as shaped by South Africa's history and 'trapped' within the oppressive system of apartheid:

I think it was a pre-1994 thing with me… When I started looking at things, and I started reading and researching and I said to myself: […] there were reasons for this and the reasons weren't always positive reasons, for why the establishment acted the way they acted at the time. And then I started looking at what the British did to the Afrikaner (P12).

In particular, the political education that activists and the broader population experienced through the ANC, UDF and other mass movements played an important part in the development of this secular version of forgiveness. This is because resistance to apartheid sought to challenge the state's racial classifications. The tenets of the Freedom Charter – that 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white' – and the philosophy of non-racialism impacted strongly on many and arguably contributed to their development of compromise more broadly.

Forgiveness was also associated with exposure to social networks that included those considered 'other' during apartheid. One of the key objectives of apartheid was to keep people of different racial groups separate. Pre-conflict mixed social networks were thus highly restricted and almost exclusively existed amongst ANC cadres or individuals exposed to the non-racialism of the liberation movement organisations. As a result, political activists may have been able to develop the ability to compromise more easily. For these respondents, the public practice of tolerance was tied up with a moral, often socialist, belief in a common or shared humanity.

Moreover, prison and the political education activists experienced there played a large part in the stories of victims and accounts for the development of a more inclusive and forgiving mindset. A teacher and former political prisoner who also described himself as victim of structural violence, gave a fairly typical account:

When I went to prison I started to understand the police, the wardens of the prison, I started to understand the white people, the fear that they have. I was able to get into the shoes of the white people (…) Now I was angry then, but as I stayed there I started to understand these things, I can't hate a white person, because that man is indoctrinated, he is full of fear, with fear of something we don't even know (P5).

The next extract comes from a torture victim that was exposed to the so-called 'ANC University' in during his imprisonment on Robben Island:

When I got to [Robben] Island I was an ill-disciplined young man. And the elderly comrades took me under their wings, and started to teach me, this is not the way things are done, and so on. And then we got involved in political discussions, and the history of the ANC, and global politics and all that. And there the ANC taught you, it is not the white people that's the problem. It is the system, it is there that the problem lies. So there you learnt that it is not about yourself, it is about taking your country forward (P3).

Robben Island in particular has been acknowledged as a site of political and academic education for many of the senior leadership of the ANC (Buntman 2003), although political prisoners all over the country experienced aspects of their incarceration as educational. More generally, the 'ANC University' also helped victims to cope and to transform into 'survivors' or 'victors':

Your period in prison it is a learning curve. Because in prison you meet all these ANC leaders, and see the ANC members. And for your time in prison, it is normally a period of learning, they have political schools, you learn more about the politics, more about society, more about international politics, so they equipped you...the senior politicians the likes of Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada, Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba and all others. Those are all very senior ANC cadres, and with those kind of cadres in prison, they actually teach you hope to cope (P33).

Our data thus shows an association between victimhood, activism, imprisonment and the development of forgiveness.

As is evident in previous extracts, victims also linked forgiveness with strong leadership, citing prominent 'reconcilers' such as Nelson Mandela as role models for forgiveness. As the participant cited immediately above (P33) explained, the senior cadres of the banned organisations were identified as instructive in teaching victims how to cope. Mandela in particular played a key role in modelling reconciliation and embodying the moral virtue of forgiveness. The prevalent discourse of reconciliation that emerged post-1994 contributed to a societal expectation to forgive, as one victim, now a municipal officer in the

Southern Cape, experienced: 'the issue of tolerance towards those who violated us is a true fact, because in public it is expected from us to project the idea of a good patriot that needs to walk in the footsteps of Mandela, the great reconciler and for the sake of nation building' (P2).

However, with the long passage of time since the transition, we can note something of a crisis of leadership vis-à-vis victims. Although many in leading political positions experienced significant victimisation under apartheid, they have benefited from the post-apartheid order and cannot necessarily relate to the continued experiences of marginalisation that the majority population faces. Having access to resources has allowed them to better deal with past traumas, be it through counselling after the transition, financial resources or a clear break with the past. Some political activists who were victims of gross human rights violations received counselling at the behest of the ANC; others began their political careers for the ANC, now the ruling party, during the struggle. Conversely, the majority of victims (or their relatives) remained poor and have had little political leverage to push forward victim issues such as reparations. This gap between the new political and social elites and those who continued to consider themselves victims makes speaking on behalf of victims deeply problematic.

Some victims also experienced as a burden the expectation of forgiving, only because their leaders had done so. The value placed on upholding a tolerant self in public was perceived as very high for some, especially given that many activists-victims held public offices in the aftermath of the transition. In our study, it was particularly those engaged in public and political life that were troubled by the social pressure to 'responsible' behaviour and a particular post-conflict mindset. The following extract illustrates this social expectation:

> I am, as a public figure, as ex-mayor and community leader, responsible to agree to the concept of South Africa as a rainbow nation and to be an embodiment of a united non-racial South Africa. But amongst my close comrades I am the first person to criticise the fact that the liberation movement has sold us out (P2).

This passage highlights well the distinction between public and private space that is central to the practice of compromise in post-conflict societies but it also shows the burden of compromise, which often falls on those who have been violated in the past.

Forgiveness as coping

A third, perhaps more pragmatic, understanding of forgiveness emerged from the interview data. Forgiveness as coping is exemplified by this interviewee: 'You are not going to forget, but you would rather forgive. Otherwise you are going to make a wreck of yourself' (P12).

Many victims made a connection between forgiving and 'moving on' from the past; it was understood as a necessary prerequisite to be able to live your life after conflict and violence and to be able to deal with negative emotions such as anger or hatred. As such, forgiveness goes beyond a religious or secular ethical practice to a question of personal survival and well-being. Some interviewees moreover highlighted the intergenerational value of forgiving as coping.

> I wish you could see how I brought up my kids. That is something that I hated to imprint on my children. Why should I expose them to what I had to go through. Because it would not be healthy for the psyche. And they would not focus forward. They would constantly be reminded about this unpleasant past. So I decided to raise my family in a positive way. Fortunately, even the studies that I have done, I did a bit of psychology when I was studying (…) So that's where I was exposed to a lot of positiveness and living your life healthy, rather than have my bad milestones as reminders in your life (P15).

The therapeutic value and healing power of interpersonal forgiveness has received much attention in psychological and psychoanalytical literatures since the 1990s (see for example De la Rey and Owens 1998 on the therapeutic value of testifying; Allan *et al*. 2006 on the relationship between apology and forgiveness; Murray 2002 on intergenerational transmission). Some, in line with the idealised view of the TRC internationally, have emphasised bearing witness as cathartic and healing. However, others are less positive about the value of truth recovery on the development of forgiveness and have stressed the TRC's potential to re-traumatize victims, especially victims who were not given adequate psychosocial treatment. Stein *et al.*'s (2008) report an association of exposure to the Commission with decreased distress and anger, giving some credibility to the argument that it has contributed to a process of reconciliation, but also found a significant relationship between being a direct witness with increased distress and anger and decreased forgiveness. This is a significant finding in relation to the argument that 'social spaces of forgiveness-redemption' can enable figurative or third-party forgiveness, showing that exposure to these spaces does not always impact positively on people's forgiveness, particularly when directly involved. In a study focused on four black communities in the Western Cape, victims were not very forgiving, but that they were more likely to forgive if they believed that the wrongdoer was truly sorry (Allan *et al*. 2006). There is then an expectation of reciprocity that appears to influence forgiveness, as the following section will argue.

RECIPROCITY IN INTERPERSONAL AND POLITICAL FORGIVENESS

As briefly outlined in the Introduction to this chapter, the separation of public and private spheres in the practice of compromise can be seen as mirrored in the distinction between (inter)personal and societal (or political) forgiveness. It is possible to be constrained in forgiving, or choosing not to forgive, on a personal level but to subscribe, in principle, to a more general, societal willingness to forgive. A number of interviewees operated such an explicit distinction. For example, one former Pollsmoor prisoner whom we encountered earlier, stated that he has not forgiven his perpetrator on an interpersonal level:

> Look, I don't see [the perpetrators], or know where they are. At the personal level the people who manhandled me and my sister, I don't think about them. And I think when you think about the system it is more at the general level, and at the general level, one can forgive, and say that those people were also victims of circumstances, and they did things in a particular era […] I think if one has a broader understanding of the social context in which this happened, then one can say, we must move on. But of course no one has come to me and asked for forgiveness so how do you actually forgive someone if they don't come to you. It is a difficult process (P21).

This is echoed in the academic literature where a distinction is usually made between interpersonal forgiveness and public, socio-political (Montiel 2002) or political forgiveness (Misztal 2011). The former is directed at the private plane, within an individual or between two people; the latter terms all address a process that operates amongst large groups of people. Misztal defines political forgiveness as occurring in 'the public space given to retrieve traumatic memories and the community within which the process of forgiving is initiated' (2011: 40). This definition recalls the association of a politics of forgiveness with respect for the past, efforts at memorialisation and memory work.

However, a large number of interviewees described this socio-political forgiveness as a sacrifice that has not been reciprocated adequately. For example, one victim interpreted it as a 'great request' in the service of peace building; something that the formerly oppressed have 'agreed to' in the service of building a democratic South Africa (P6). Another participant similarly felt that

> we sacrificed a lot, if you look in terms of reconciliation. We were saying we are no longer going to fight, whatever happens, we forgive them for all the wrongs they did to us. But […] after 1994, after the freedom of our country, the white people in the country, they still received the same money, the same funds (P26).

Another interviewee directly addressed the notion of reconciliation as a mutual practice: 'there was not real reconciliation, because for me reconciliation is a two-way road, you see, we meet each other half-way […] they will tell you, forget about the past. How can you forget about the past if the past has not been healed? And the healers were not people to be trusted'(P1).

These narratives draw attention to the expectation of reciprocity. Reciprocity and people's senses of the fairness of the concessions of a peace process are themselves essential components of the sociology of compromise as we conceive it, which involves the '*reciprocal* practice of tolerance and civility'. The South African data moreover highlights that forgiveness is conditional and mediated by perceptions of reciprocity. Forgiveness is sometimes seen as conditional because it entails the choice not to forgive and the expectation that the violation will not occur again (Misztal 2011). However, it is also conditional because it is reciprocal: the agreement to forgiveness can be threatened, for instance, such as in the extract above (P26), by the betrayal by the government to fulfil the promises of the liberation struggle.

Victims' senses of the one-sidedness of the South African peace process mirrored in other areas, such as perceptions of the fairness of the peace process (particularly in relation to perceptions of the amnesty process), inadequate reparations, and victims' wider experiences of the lack of economic redistribution. Social justice in post-apartheid South Africa is important for a degree of redistribution and redress appeared to be necessary for forgiveness to take place and, crucially, for it to be maintained. While most interviewees focused on a lack of reciprocity in relation to socio-economic justice and redistribution, some talked about their expectations for remorse by the 'other'. Remorse for wrongful acts, alongside acknowledgement of harm done and restorative action, has been said to be a necessary conditions for forgiveness on a socio-political level (Montiel 2002). The key achievement of the TRC surely was to create a historical record of the apartheid regime that acknowledged the harm done. But there was a very widespread perception amongst victims that there has not been adequate remorse on a collective level in South Africa. One interviewee was a witness in an amnesty hearing:

> From these guys that actually killed our people, from the police. I was sitting there and I was watching them, how they represented themselves, not really. ....they were not remorseful about what they did, they just sat there and told their story and blah. That's what I observed. And to me, all the people, in terms of reconciliation I don't think that was a reality. Because some of those people they are still bitter (P6).

The issue of amnesty was a particularly thorny one and served as a metaphor for a lack of reciprocity and unequal concessions in many interviews.

To contextualise briefly this finding, some background on the TRC's unique conditional amnesty clause – offering perpetrators amnesty in exchange for full disclosure of the truth – is necessary. The clause had been agreed at the last minute in the political negotiations between the ANC and De Klerk's national party government in order to avoid further violence. It is generally acknowledged to be one of the key concessions of the peace process, for which reparations, both individual and collective, were to act as counterbalance. To qualify for amnesty, perpetrators had to demonstrate they had committed acts with a political objective, make a full confession and demonstrate that they received orders from a political party or the state. However, due to time and financial constraints, many cases were not examined in detail. Very few of those whose cases were rejected and recommended for criminal prosecution ended up being prosecuted, whereas some perpetrators were subsequently pardoned under the Special Dispensation for Presidential Pardons. What is more, reparations were to provide reciprocity to the amnesty arrangement but, as noted earlier, were not delivered fully and in a timely manner. The TRC had a dual purpose of providing a platform for victims to give their own accounts of the violence they experienced and providing a mechanism through which to have a claim on government, yet ultimately only delivered one of these two strategies for the restoring of victims' dignity. Elsewhere, it has been established that justice considerations influence fairness assessments; providing victim compensation increases perceptions that an amnesty is fair (Gibson 2002).

Political forgiveness, rather than assisting victims' healing, can then also be perceived as betrayal, as the experience of P6 cited above shows. Breen Smyth (2007) similarly highlights that forgiveness was experienced as betrayal by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in post-conflict Argentina. The interviewee continued describing his feelings of being 'pushed into compromising' in the Commission: 'It was the whole set up, and also we didn't have a part in whether there would be a truth commission process. If we had had an option we would have gone to court, to a criminal court, to charge these guys criminally' (P6). Difficulties with forgiving – or a refusal to forgive – among our participants were most typically linked to the unfairness of the concessions of the negotiated settlement, insufficient reparations, and the lack of effective redistribution of wealth.

FORGIVENESS AS DYNAMIC AND NON-LINEAR

In previous sections, I have explored victims' understandings of forgiveness. This is not to claim, though, that all the interviewed victims had forgiven. Neither is forgiveness a stable and

final state for participants. Rather, we might consider it a dynamic and non-linear practice, as this section argues.

As the old adage goes, time is seen as a healer, and there is a common assumption that the passing of time can overcome any harm. This was indeed the perception among a few interviewees. For example, one of the older interviewees in the study, who had spent several years in prison and experienced torture and beatings by the police, told me: 'Because now it is long years ago, and we are older now, and we are looking to the grave. I think, on my side, I have to say, I forgive them already, because what can I do, what can they do for me? Nothing' (P23).

However, the passage of time can also increase the potential for a reversal of the commitment to compromise. As was also the case in relation to other compromise mediators in this study, such as hope or perceptions of the fairness of the peace process, people generally felt that there was a greater sense of forgiveness in the immediate aftermath of the transition. I have already shown in the previous section that forgiveness was coupled with perceptions of reciprocity, which in turn were associated with concerns around justice, reparations and redistribution. When asked to reflect on forgiveness, many interviewees turned to accounts of their contemporary experiences. One activist in the UDF, who was responsible for carrying out acts of sabotage and was imprisoned and tortured on several occasions (again highlighting the blurred distinction between perpetrator and victim in communal conflict), is a good example:

> I think there was sort of a general sense of forgiveness. Not that it meant a lot, because I think there is still a lot of... Like I said, Apartheid is not dead, you see it every day. We still experience it. People think because we suddenly have freedom it's finished. But it's not. And I think a lot of people are traumatised. I think...I am father of some children also, so hopefully I am over it, but still, thinking about it makes me sad (P35).

As with this participant, people often discussed what they saw as continuities with the past. They related their lesser ability to forgive, or to compromise more broadly, with their senses of a continuum of inequalities between the apartheid past and the post-conflict present. 'We are still oppressed', 'apartheid still exists' and 'things are still the same' were phrases that were commonly used across many interviews. The changes in people's capacity for forgiveness and other compromise mediators come across particularly clearly in the following narrative, which is worth citing at length:

> The people who killed Ashley Kriel killed him with a spade and then shot him, they bludgeoned him with a spade. They created bombs to go off, dummy bombs, they bombed out community centre and blamed it on us, we were at the time of the bombings off all those bombings they would create the notion, in their media, that it was our failed attempts at bombing that detonated these bombs. So it's a great request to just forgive, it's this whole Christian notion of forgiveness. And so we have agreed to forgive, but we can't forget our experiences because it has become part of my psyche to often think or remember these things when I get angry about stuff. If you see corruption in the present day government, if you see nepotism […] then it hurts. When you know people have sacrificed with their lives to be liberated and the end result is not what we thought it would be, when the issues that you fought for are not being dealt with, basically (P6).

Forgiveness is then conditional and dynamic, rather than a permanent state and secure achievement. The ability to practice forgiveness is connected to perceptions of reciprocity but also to broader experiences and perceptions of interviewees' post-conflict realities. As such, forgiveness – and by extension perhaps the ability to compromise – can be withdrawn if other parties do not keep to what is perceived as their side of the bargain.

CONCLUSION

Two main arguments can be reiterated in conclusion: personal forgiveness is not a pre-requisite to compromise, nor is forgiveness a secure achievement. First, our data demonstrates that, amongst victims in South Africa, there is a strong current both of religious and of secular forgiveness, the latter of which can be linked to political and academic education and to perceptions of good leadership. This is an important finding in relation to those critiques of the TRC, and of the peace process more broadly, that have overlooked the levels of religiosity in South Africa.

However, the data also show that interpersonal forgiveness is not a necessary condition for the practice of compromise: the South African study included a number of victims who specifically stated that they had not forgiven their perpetrators but nonetheless practiced tolerance and compromise in the public sphere. It is possible to forgiveness but maintain negative emotions such as anger or bitterness (also see Muldoon 2008). Digeser similarly claims that 'political forgiveness is not about clearing the victims' heart of resentment' (2001: 28). In the first instance, this finding goes to the heart of our notion of compromise and the distinction between public and private spheres: forgiveness does not necessarily involve the forgoing of anger or other negative emotions *on a personal level*, but it does necessitate that

citizens *publically* affirm their commitment to restoring civic relationships with their former enemies.

Furthermore, the finding throws into relief the nature of forgiveness and that there are different kinds of forgiveness. Transitional justice mechanisms, not least the South African TRC, have more typically focused on interpersonal or two-party forgiveness that resides in the relationship between victim and perpetrator. Some of the victims in this study were not willing or able to forgive the other party in this way, but they were subscribing to the idea of forgiveness at a societal or figurative level. It is this kind of third-party forgiveness that participants referred to when they explained that they chose to 'forgive them for all the wrongs they did to us' (P26) and that 'we as black people, we have forgiven white people. Already, we have forgiven them, and they keep on asking for forgiveness' (P34). Given that the participants who did not forgive their perpetrators, but had forgiven in a wider figurative sense, were able to enact tolerance publically, we might argue that third-party forgiveness is essential to compromise whereas two-party forgiveness is not. Truth commissions, alongside other social spaces enabling third-party forgiveness, can bring more redemption than interpersonal forgiveness. However, I have also highlighted above that exposure to the TRC did not always encourage forgiveness, nor did it impact positively on victims' well-being, particularly when victims perceive a lack of reciprocity.

This leads me to the second concluding argument. It is important for our understanding of peace processes and post-conflict societies to recognise that forgiveness is not a permanent state but that people's willingness to forgive, and indeed to behave civilly in public, might cease, even after a relatively long time has passed. The perception of reciprocity and ultimately of the necessity of the practice of compromise appears to have diminished during the last two decades. Victims' perceptions of fairness have decreased because, for many, circumstances have not changed – or not changed enough. A degree of redistribution and redress appeared to be necessary for forgiveness to take place and, crucially, for it to be maintained. The lack of effective redistribution of wealth in the post-apartheid era played a huge role in respondents' accounts of the fairness of the negotiated settlement. The majority blamed the white population for not wanting to share the wealth and resources of the country and the black elites for 'leaving them behind'. The discrepancy between political and economic freedoms was central to most victims' narratives of the one-sidedness of the negotiated settlement: social and economic transformation that remains devastatingly incomplete twenty years after the first democratic elections.

Brewer's (2010) distinction between political and social peace processes is helpful in this context. Political peace processes concern negotiation and diplomacy towards good governance reforms, such as voting, electoral and constituency changes. Social peace processes concern 'the repair and rebuilding of social relationships, interpersonal and inter-group reconciliation, the restoration of community and the social bond, and social and personal healing' (Brewer 2010: 200). Social transformation, which victims in this study required most for a sense of reciprocity, is premised on such a social peace process and is necessary for genuine and sustainable conflict transformation (Brewer, Higgins and Teeney 2011: 37). In South Africa, where huge inequalities continue to characterise post-apartheid society, it has become increasingly difficult to disentangle forgiveness from social transformation and socio-economic justice.

As our data show, forgiveness, and by extension the ability to compromise, can wane or be withdrawn. Continuing structural violence and marginalisation in particular affected participants' willingness to forgive. Given the relatively long passage of time since the end of apartheid, South Africa makes an ideal case through which to examine such dynamic shifts in victims' practices and their senses of fairness and reciprocity. By contrast, what might be described as the dominant linear temporality of peace processes and transitional justice sees healing and forgiveness as taking place progressively (Mueller-Hirth, 2016). From this dominant temporal perspective, past and present are dichotomous; violence belongs to the past whereas the present is for peace and closure (Hinton 2013; Igreja 2012). After an appropriate amount of time has passed, victimhood must be resolved and forgiveness secured. There is little acknowledgement in the academic and practitioner literature that past and present are often far less distinct for victims. This is particularly pronounced in contexts of continuing social and economic injustice and the persistence of violence, such as in South Africa. Our findings demonstrate that incomplete social transformation can lead to a reversal of forgiveness and compromise, even decades after the end of a *political* peace process. This needs remembering if the goal for societies emerging from mass violence is to create sustainable peace.