

# MEANING OF FORGIVENESS: ANALYSING POLITICAL AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES

By

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TKLANE002

Submitted in full fulfilment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Philosophy at the University of Cape Town, in the Department of Sociology.

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July 2022



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## DECLARATION

I, Anelitha Tukela, hereby present this mini dissertation in FULL/PARTIAL fulfilment of the requirements for my degree. I know the meaning of plagiarism and declare that all of the work in the dissertation, save for that which is properly acknowledged, is my own. I hereby grant the University of Cape Town free licence to reproduce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever of the above dissertation.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to send a special thanks to my supervisor Dr Ruchi Chaturvedi for being patient with me throughout my research journey, I really appreciate her guidance, wisdom, knowledge and understanding, it helped me a lot throughout the writing of this thesis. Thank you.

I would like to thank everybody who has contributed to making this thesis possible. I would love to thank Zizo Apleni for inspiring my thesis, her healing and forgiveness journey influenced me to conduct this research.

I can never forget my family and friends for their love and support, I love and appreciate them.

## Abstract

This study investigates the meaning of forgiveness in instances of political and sexual violence in contemporary South Africa. Truth Reconciliation Commission (TRC) proceedings about the well-known St James church massacre, Brian Mitchell, and Thapelo Mbelo case guide my understanding of the role of forgiveness in instances of political violence. Memoirs and secondary literature revolving around four relatively little-known instances of rape in contemporary South Africa inform my analysis of the role of forgiveness in instances of sexual violence. The study explores what motivated the victims of violence to consider forgiveness and also investigates the role of forgiveness in criminal and social justice. Through comparative work, the research aims to develop a new understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and violence and help the reader understand the purpose of forgiveness in violence, the power it has, and how it helps the victims of violence. Using inspirations from the interpretive sociology, the study draws from the theological and sociological writings which were influenced by sociology of emotions, social psychology, social and political theory, and South African history.

# CHAPTER 1: Introduction

“Meaning of forgiveness” is a study that investigates the meaning of forgiveness in instances of political and sexual violence in contemporary South Africa. For political violence, I am mainly interested in the role that forgiveness plays in the cases that appeared in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); specifically, the cases of the St James church massacre, Brian Mitchell, and Thapelo Mbelo. For sexual violence, I studied and interpreted the meaning of forgiveness found in some sexual violence cases; these cases are Thandeki Mlilo’s case, Zizo Apleni’s case, Dumisani Rebombo’s case and Thordis Elva’s case. The study explored what motivated the victims of violence to consider forgiveness, and through comparative work, I developed a new understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and violence.

The questions I have investigated are:

1. What does forgiveness mean for victims of sexual and political violence?
2. What has motivated victims of sexual and political violence to forgive their assailants?
3. How has the act of forgiveness impacted the lives of victims of sexual and political violence?

These questions have been addressed through a review of theological, social and political theory and social psychology literature on forgiveness, Ubuntu, justice and reconciliation. This will be followed by an explanation and critical investigation of the acknowledged cases based on journals, recordings, memoirs, articles, transcriptions and books, with some reflections on these cases that are available in the secondary material.

## Aim

The study aims to assist the reader understand the purpose of forgiveness in violence, the power it has, and how it helps the victims of violence. The relationship between forgiveness and violence is a complicated one since most victims are expected to consider punishment instead of forgiveness; I looked at how the relationship is considered complex and how forgiveness

intervenes in the cases of violence. This study is important in the academic field because it may help change peoples' perspectives on the notion of forgiveness in violence, and shed light on the notion of forgiveness. Moreover, the project will help to develop knowledge in the academic space as scholars may use it to reflect on forgiveness in violence to better understand the concept of forgiveness.

## Research problem

The practice of survivors of violence forgiving their perpetrators has predominantly been studied using victims that appeared in the TRC hearings, but there has not been a significant amount of research done on survivors of sexual victimization forgiving their offender. Few academic writings discuss acts of forgiveness in instances of sexual violence. Sexual violence is significant and positively correlated with avoidance, punishment and revenge, but cases of sexual violence are not related to kindness and forgiveness. I believe that there needs to be more knowledge on the subject of forgiveness practices in violence, especially with regards to sexual violence. This study examined how the meaning of forgiveness in sexual violence differs or is comparable to forgiveness discussed in political violence. This may help the reader see the possible meaning of forgiveness in all kinds of violence and understand the importance, impact and value of forgiveness in violence.

## Research methodology

The research method of this study is inspired by interpretive sociology, as the study also draws on political history of South Africa, social psychology and theological writings. Interpretive sociology is a method that is rooted in the word understanding, to have a meaningful understanding of something (Norkus, 2000:260); it is concerned with the explanation of human actions (Norkus, 2000:261); and it is also concerned with how people define and make sense of their situations (Adorjan & Kelly, 2017:1). This type of methodology was inspired by Max Weber, who was one of the first sociologists to recognize the role human understanding and

interpretation plays in social action and the making of social order. The study reflects on both theological and sociological understandings of forgiveness in violence, which means I could not separate the two writings when examining forgiveness although my thesis is a sociological study, because forgiveness presented in this study is mostly influenced by religious beliefs as well as social circumstances, desires, aspirations and pressures. The social psychological, sociological and theological aspects frequently emerge as intertwined.

This methodological inspiration is appropriate for my study as it is also influenced by sociology of emotions, violence, punishment and justice. The sociology of emotions applies sociological propositions and methods to the study of human emotions (Bericat, 2016:495), such as loneliness, hate, fear, horror, grief, trust, sadness, joy, anger, and an uncountable number of other feelings that occur in specific social situations (Bericat, 2016:495). The study engaged in sociology of emotions, political and social theory, drawing on narratives of victims of political and sexual violence with special attention on the negative emotions that are caused by violence and how victims let go of negative emotions and have positive ones.

I have collected data using a qualitative approach, I studied literature based on the lived experience of victims of sexual and political violence and examined the existing literature on forgiveness. I used memoirs written by victims of sexual violence to understand their journey of healing and these memoirs provide an understanding of humane sympathy, meta-feelings and imagination. I analyzed the transcripts presented by the TRC to understand the role of forgiveness in the cases that appeared in the TRC, even though working with TRC transcripts has its limitations, as it is argued that these transcripts could lack contextual information, nature of the hearings and emotional content. But using these transcripts helped me gain a good understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation.

## Literature review

The literature reviewed in this research may help the project with interpreting the use of forgiveness in violence, to understand what impact it had on the lives of victims and what meaning can we present it with. This section will also help the research with investigating how

forgiveness found in political violence differs from that of sexual violence or what similarities they could have, and it will also look at literature that examines forgiveness in cases of sexual violence.

The study used the word “victim” whenever it is referring to those who were affected by sexual violence and political violence. The term “victim” is applied in “South African legal documents and policy regarding a person who have experienced harm through acts that interrupt criminal law” (Steinbrenner, 2014:4). The term “victim” is used in this research to analyze the experiences of political and sexual violence from their perspective and see how they transform from being victims to survivors of violence. It makes sense to use the term ‘victim’ instead of ‘survivor’ because I intend to take the reader through the experience of those who survived sexual and political violence as victims and focus on how acts of forgiveness transformed the victims into survivors of political and sexual violence.

Firstly, this section will define the concept of forgiveness and intend to review the existing literature on forgiveness; it will then address the topic of the TRC and discuss the insights that critics of the TRC and its concept of forgiveness offered; followed by a discussion on forgiveness in sexual violence. This section then highlights the role of forgiveness in violence and lastly, key concepts surrounding the issue of forgiveness in violence will be unpacked, using seminal case studies of violence as examples.

Denton (2018:1) defines forgiveness as a method that deals with problems of inequalities, battles in power and control, unashamed offenders and the related interaction between judgment and grace, revenge and punishment, responsibility and regret. The value of forgiveness in cases of violence is to restore victims' dignity, help victims find healing and closure (Denton, 2018:1). According to Derrida (2001:45), “the principle of forgiveness is in forgiving the unforgivable, forgiveness becomes a madness of the impossible where it is called upon to forgive the unforgivable”. Forgiveness is a change process where an individual becomes more positively inclined and less negatively inclined towards their offender (Dewi & Fadilah, 2014:239).

There are several different types of the meaning of forgiveness that are studied and argued by scholars, but the study reviewed literature based on the relationship of forgiveness and violence to achieve the possible meaning of forgiveness that can be found in instances of political and

sexual violence in South Africa. According to Marshall (2001:263), forgiveness has different meanings depending on one's condition and the nature of the harm suffered. All those meanings of forgiveness depend on one's suffering and the motivation to forgive (Marshall, 2001:268).

Many people believe that forgiveness can bring people together, heal victims, and decrease the resentment and anger caused by violent wrongdoings of the offender. Several academics have sought to explain the purpose of forgiveness in the course of the violent 20th century. Nevertheless, there is still a need to find the aim and objectives of forgiveness, especially forgiveness that might occur between the victim and offender. A significant part of the existing literature examines forgiveness in the light of religious beliefs and suggests that acts of forgiveness take place mostly among the religious (Enright & North, 1998:3). Emphasis on forgiveness amongst religious people overlooks many other instances and contexts in which acts of forgiveness have taken place (Enright & North, 1998:3-4). The South African TRC foregrounded the concept of Ubuntu while addressing forgiveness. As Tutu (1999:29) argued, a person inclined towards Ubuntu is available and open to people, supports people, and does not feel vulnerable that people are able and good, that one has a good self-confidence that comes from knowing that one fits in a greater whole. Therefore, such an attitude creates dispositions for acts of forgiveness.

In South Africa, forgiveness was used before in the cases of violence during the TRC hearings, as a tool to unite two opposite sides that committed acts of violence to each other. After the negotiated settlement reached in the period between 1990 and 1994, the TRC was formed in 1995 to address the impact of "human rights violations" during the apartheid period (Moyo, 2017:2). The TRC was formed in terms of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995. The work of the TRC focused on the period from the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960 until 1994. The TRC sought to gather evidence and uncover information from both victims and perpetrators. However, those crimes that were motivated by political agenda were granted amnesty, forgiveness and reconciliation would be encouraged. But those who, according to the Commission, committed crimes based on personal greed or interests were mainly convicted for their crimes. Here forgiveness was used to heal the nation, to achieve unity and reconciliation (Tutu, 1999:45).

Similarly, issues of sexual violence have also prevailed in the South African landscape, where skyrocketing statistics have become infamous globally, whereas, sexual violence is a sensitive issue that is not always associated with forgiveness. In everyday life, many people do believe it is impossible to forgive your offenders in cases of sexual violence. A key strength of this project is that it will appeal to the observations of actual victims of sexual crimes. There is currently little research data regarding forgiveness in instances of sexual violence, whether victims of sexual violence want to forgive, or it can be helpful for them to forgive their offenders.

I am inspired by Sheila Young Steinbrenner's PhD dissertation published in 2014, which was based on exploring the "lived knowledge of help-seeking behaviors of South African women after sexual offence victimization". Steinbrenner during her research did an experiment based on victims of sexual violence to investigate the "lived understanding of help-seeking behaviors of South African women" after the sexual offence and the results of the study have found that these victims of sexual violence seek to forgive to achieve healing.

In continuing with this theme of forgiveness in sexual violence, Sharon Lamb's article called "*Forgiveness, Women, and Responsibility to the Group,*" which deals with forgiveness in sexual victimization and also still broad-stroked, historicizes the way of rape recovery and matters of forgiveness over the last thirty years. While her work exists in discussion with many other scholars, and while some of those declarations and standpoints are also present in chapter 4, Lamb's work incorporates many of the key issues I have discussed such as recovery and forgiveness.

As I have stated above, the study focused on the relationship between forgiveness and political violence and zeroes in on three cases that were part of the reports of the TRC, specifically the St James church massacre, Brian Mitchell and Thapelo Mbelo.

The St James church massacre is one of the cases that became a compound for reconciliation in South Africa. From their Christian principle, victims spoke of their ability to reconcile and forgive, offenders asked for forgiveness and showed a preparedness to unite in the democratic South Africa. In this case, the members of the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) (the armed wing of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)) attacked St James Church in the Cape Town suburb of

Kenilworth in July 1993 during the church service. Using automatic weapons and two grenades, the APLA members killed eleven parishioners and injured 58. This case is of particular relevance to my research project as the victims of the massacre granted forgiveness before they could meet their offenders and hear their confessions.

The testimony of Brian Mitchell is also crucial for our understanding of forgiveness as in this particular case forgiveness was granted accompanied by conditions, that an apology was expressed through actions. Brian Mitchell was a police captain who gave orders to a group of special officers to attack UDF supporters in 1988. Whereas they misinterpreted their instructions and attacked the wrong target. Instead of striking the UDF supporters, they attacked eleven people, mostly women and children who were at a vigil at the Trust Feed community. Thapelo Mbelo's case also known as "Gugulethu seven" is mostly known as one of the utmost compound cases that appeared before the TRC. This case during the TRC brought the language of forgiveness, reconciliation, and apology into the public focus after political violence. Thapelo Mbelo was a police informer who infiltrated seven young black activists from Gugulethu in Cape Town, in March 1986.

For the investigation of the meaning of forgiveness in sexual violence, I have selected some sexual violence cases that I studied and interpreted.

The first case is Dumisani Rebombo's case. He committed rape when he was 15 years old in 1976, in Limpopo province. Dumisani and his friends raped a young girl from their school. Twenty years later he searched for the woman he raped to beg her for forgiveness. The second case is Thordis Elva's case; she was raped by her boyfriend at the age of 16. After several years of irritation and pain, at the age of 25 years, she reached out to him, whereas the offender showed remorse and confessed his crimes. Both parties worked together to achieve reconciliation, and their forgiveness and reconciliation were motivated by the South African TRC. The third case is Zizo Apleni's case, she was raped by her biological father from the age of seven until she was pregnant at the age of 13 years. She is now 26 years old. She forgave her father and reconciled with him though he is still serving his sentence in jail. The last case is Thandeki Mlilo's case, who was sexually violated by her father from a young age. Her father's sexual violation sustained for many

years until Thandeki left home and become a holy sister, at that time she initiated her help-seeking experience.

The relevance of these particular case studies to my thesis is that I believe they are suitable for my research in a way that helped examine the relationship between forgiveness and sexual violence and in these cases, forgiveness is an important discussion argument.

## The overall argument of the thesis

The TRC brought the philosophy of forgiveness, reconciliation and apology after huge violence into public focus and academic debate. I believe forgiveness has played an important role in uniting South Africa. Its critical power inspired me to investigate its potential in other instances of violence, especially sexual violence. The TRC shows acts of forgiveness can occur in the midst of the unforgivable. Apartheid violence was profound and could have inspired revenge or punishment, but reconciliation and forgiveness occurred. The possible meaning of forgiveness in political violence is the process where a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude about a violent act against them to gain their humanity, restore their lives, heal and find closure. This kind of forgiveness found in political forgiveness can be influenced by religious beliefs, empathy, Ubuntu and humanity as I have shown in the TRC cases (see chapter 3). Forgiveness found in political violence helped to reconstruct the society, reduced anger and revenge which also restored the humanity of both the victim and the offender.

I extended that interpretation to study acts of forgiveness in sexual violence cases. Correspondingly, the possible meaning of forgiveness in sexual violence is the process where a victim changes feelings and attitudes about their sexual victimization past to achieve self-esteem, healing from the trauma, closure, and becoming a survivor of rape. This means that forgiveness in sexual violence helps the victim to move on from their past trauma and helps the victim to stop defining themselves through the past. However, the kind of forgiveness found in sexual violence can be influenced by religious beliefs, healing, South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, confession and remorse (see chapter 4).

As noted above, forgiveness is an understudied topic that can open up new ways of conceiving justice. I believe that forgiveness can occur during calls for retributive and restorative justice, in the wake of reconciliation and the absence of reconciliation. A victim could forgive and reconcile with the offender and discard the notion of retributive justice or one can forgive and reconcile and still let the law take its course. However, forgiveness does have a relationship with justice (see chapter 2). Therefore, forgiveness builds a foundation for victims to let go of the past, anger and help victims reconnect with the world.

## Summary of chapters

Chapter 2 is based on forgiveness in criminal and social justice, mainly focusing on the role of forgiveness in social and criminal justice, to examine the link between forgiveness and justice.

For Chapter 3 I listened to the recordings, read the transcriptions and consider the available secondary material on each selected case of the TRC. I used that to establish the meaning of forgiveness in political violence and described and analyzed each case in detail for a better understanding of the implementation of forgiveness.

Chapter 4 focuses on the meaning of forgiveness in sexual violence. To understand its meaning the chapter discusses the selected sexual violence cases in detail for an improved understanding of the use of forgiveness in these cases.

Chapter 5 compares results of the meaning of forgiveness found in sexual and political violence to offer some conclusions on the notion of forgiveness.

# CHAPTER 2: Forgiveness in Criminal and Social Justice

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of forgiveness in criminal and social justice. Justice is defined as a particular sense of re-established “moral order and moral rightness” of response following a misbehavior or offence (Wenzel and Okimoto, 2013:463). Forgiveness seems to sacrifice justice, abandoning it or even oppping it (Wenzel and Okimoto, 2013:464). But this study suggests that justice and forgiveness are compatible. Using the example of the Khulumani support group and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), this thesis explores the relationship concerning justice and forgiveness. In this chapter, I investigate the role of forgiveness in achieving both social and criminal justice. I begin by discussing the concept of criminal justice in South Africa, and then focus on restorative justice since the latter promotes forgiveness, Ubuntu, restoration, and reconciliation over punishment.

## The criminal justice system

The criminal justice system is defined as delivery of justice to those who have committed unlawful crimes; it is also a general term that refers to the laws, procedures, institutions, and policies that work before, during, and after the commission of a crime (Daly, 2011:2). The criminal justice system is associated both with retributive and restorative justice. Retributive justice operates by punishing offenders, sinking their status and power, and characteristically excluding them; it also promotes social distance, reducing the base for empathy and a shared identity concerning the victim and the offender (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2013:466). Retributive justice does not seek to foster remorse or forgiveness and its central focus is punishment. Restorative justice, on the other hand, promotes forgiveness, encouraging apologies and remorse. It is an approach to criminal justice intended at restoring the damage caused by a criminal act to victims and/or the society. It seeks to promote healing for victims, hold offenders responsible for their crimes, re-

establish the relationship among the offender and the victim, and re-establish the emotional and substantial damages of victims by providing a variety of chances for conversation, compensation, mediation, and problem-solving (Armour and Umbreit, 2006:123). Scholars argue that forgiveness is mostly found in contexts that encourage restorative justice and rarely in ones that promote retributive justice (Karremans and Van Lange, 2005:290-7).

## The politics of restorative justice

In the 1970s, the term “restorative justice” was used to define a one-to-one mediation program with a professional mediator between the victim and the offender. Restorative justice became a “global movement in the 1990s”, with examples of native practices from the oral traditions of Maori in New Zealand and indigenous peoples in North America. (Ferguson, 2009:10). In the restorative justice system, crime is defined as a struggle among victims, communities, and individuals who were harmed by offenders; justice is defined in terms of compensation and recovery. Communities and victims engage in the process of justice to restore the damage they have suffered (Ferguson, 2009:12). The purpose of restorative justice is reconciliation, not punishment, and healing, not revenge (Wormer, 2009:107). Restorative justice can be used at many different phases of the criminal justice system, including post-conviction, as part of a sentence, or pre-sentencing (McGlynn, Westmarland & Godden, 2012:216). Reconciliation and healing in restorative justice processes mostly include forgiveness (Wormer, 2009:107).

The four models of restorative justice that are most applicable to women's ill-treatment are “healing circles, community reparations, victim-offender conferencing, and family group conferencing”. Victim-offender conferencing gets together victims and offenders for the sake of “resolution and righting the wrong” (Wormer, 2009:110). Victims express their feelings to offenders, for them to know the impact of their actions and the pain they have caused. The aim is to help offenders’ progress sympathy for their victims and to regret their actions, it helps victims and offenders to be in touch with their emotional state and may prepare them for the recovery process (Wormer, 2009:110). Family group conferencing is used by “child welfare departments in cases of child mistreatment and negligence”. This method focuses on helping

mothers with difficulties in caregiving to take better care of the child. “Healing circles are used in Native American services to work with victims and survivors by providing family and community support” (Wormer, 2009:110). During the process, those involved in the victimization are seated in a circle to offer personal support after the trauma caused by violent crime. Community reparation is a “form of restorative justice that operates outside the scope of criminal justice and child protection” (Wormer, 2009:110).

There are various concerns with restorative justice; in the contexts of sexual and domestic violence, for example, some people believe victims can forgive their offender, whereas others do not. The latter group believe that forgiveness forsakes the possibility of justice. Tsang and Stanford (2006:654) argue that forgiveness does not mean to excuse or condone; in some cases of domestic and sexual violence, forgiveness has been granted from a distance without active engagement and reconciliation with offenders. Restorative justice involvements may be regarded as a “soft” response that fails to punish and possibly recasts the offence as a relationship problem (Hargovan, 2010:26). According to Hargovan (2010:27), some feminists argue that it can also be a disadvantage to use restorative justice in sexual or domestic violence cases. For example, opting for familial and community forms of intervention might lead to the re-privatization of sexual or domestic violence. The public dimension of restorative justice can cause victims to be silent about their abuse as they may be ashamed of the incident and not want others to know about it. Various feminists propose that if retribution is made part of the restorative justice process, then the problem of taking offences seriously may be reasonably addressed (Hargovan, 2010:26). They argue that sexual or domestic violence deserves a powerful response which should combine basics of punishment of the offender and the safety of the victim against more abuse (Hargovan, 2010:26).

Despite these concerns, restorative justice processes are needed. There is cumulative support for these processes as long as some broad principles are followed. This means that mediation between the victim and the offender should not be attempted *unless* the victim specifically requests it and only once safety concerns have been properly dealt with (Dissel and Ngubeni,

2003:3). In cases of domestic or sexual violence, restorative justice has played a huge role in gathering some of the expectations and needs of victims. By giving victims an expression with which to communicate how they have been harmed to offenders or the community, granting them an extent of control over the conduct of their complaint, and helping to certify that their experience is honoured, victims advance some amount of justice (McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012:239).

“In the framework of political violence, the South African TRC is possibly the most successful example of a Truth Commission that employed restorative justice principles to date” (Ferguson, 2009:10). It was well-known to reveal the truth about previous violations of human rights under apartheid and to allow the method of reconciliation. Ferguson (2009:10) states that “the TRC aimed to produce a record of the violations of the past and make recommendations to prevent them from ever happening again, acknowledge the suffering of the victims and assist in their rehabilitation, offer amnesty to past offenders, and facilitate healing and reconciliation for the nation”. The TRC Report (Vol. 1:127), states that “restorative justice challenges South Africans to build on the humanitarian and caring philosophy of the South African Constitution and emphasizes the need for reparation rather than retribution”. The Report (Vol. 1:128) highlights the fact that “the commission was intended to help restore the human and civil dignity of victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their accounts of the violations they suffered”.

According to Gade (2013:25), restorative justice is meditative of the African notion of “Ubuntu”, or “interconnectedness”. ‘Ubuntu’ is known as a “communal humanistic morality” that focuses on the welfare and interests of each member of society. He argues that “Ubuntu is the idea that no one can be healthy when the community is sick”. For example, “Ubuntu says I am human only because you are human. If I undermine your humanity, I dehumanize myself. It characterizes justice as community restoration” (Gade, 2013:25). Although the term “restorative justice” may be moderately new to South Africans, the spirit of the idea is intensely rooted in the history of African society through the concept of “Ubuntu” (Gade, 2013:25).

## Forgiveness and justice

Forgiveness is defined as a shift in the “victim’s motives and attitudes towards the offender from negative to positive emotions”, reducing the desire for revenge or retribution, and reducing avoidance and increasing compassion towards the offender. Forgiveness involves feelings of sympathy, kindness, and selfless love towards others (Wenzel and Okimoto, 2013:464). Forgiveness does not include forgetfulness; the victim may continue to recall what occurred to them as part of their life experience and to tell their story to others, but they will also no longer impugn the offender for his or her offence. Forgiveness doesn’t automatically mean a full restoration of the past relationship. But forgiveness involves optimistic regard for the offender. For some victims, the lack of negative emotions is enough for them to achieve restorative justice (Philpott, 2013:402).

Forgiveness focuses on reducing negative emotions rather than sacrificing justice. Some findings show that the application of criminal justice process, which means punishing offenders, could increase the level of victim forgiveness. I believe retributive justice could promote forgiveness; the fact that the offender has received a punishment could motivate the victim to forgive them (Karremans and Van Lange, 2005:290-7). According to Karremans and Van Lange (2005) “there is a place for forgiveness in the criminal justice system”. Sometimes, when the victim feels that justice has been done, they consider forgiving the offender and letting go of negative emotions thereby gaining a new identity (Worthington, 2000:1725). Wenzel and Okimoto (2013:464) argue that justice and forgiveness are well-matched. Justice and forgiveness might seem to be competitive responses, yet each is relevant whenever an offence occurs in religious groups, the justice system, the workplace, or between cultural and intimate relationships (Strelan, 2007:882). Forgiveness can constitute an “important element” of the restorative justice process because it can signal to an offender that “compassion has been granted from the perspective of the victim and the community” (Strelan, Feather and McKee, 2008:1539).

Justice and forgiveness can be independent of each other: the victim may (or may not) forgive the offender regardless of their sentence, or they may demand that the offender must be

punished, even when willing to forgive. It is also possible that “justice and forgiveness are not only compatible but functionally linked”: forgiveness can help re-establish a logic of justice and restoring justice can facilitate forgiveness (Wenzel and Okimoto, 2013:463). Forgiveness may be the justice that you give yourself as a victim. Forgiving the offender is the first step in the process of healing. Forgiving allows you, as the victim, to begin to move forward. The criminal justice system cannot truly use forgiveness to deal with crime. At best, it can challenge the simple mercy of restorative justice (Worthington, 2000:1730).

## Politics of social justice in South Africa

The concept of social justice is of more recent than the concept of criminal justice. Hage, Ring and Lantz (2011:2795), define social justice as “the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and religious or spiritual background”.

In South Africa, the question of social justice dominated the anti-apartheid movement’s discourse, which not simply called for the elimination of racial discrimination but also the promotion of the rights for women, workers, less privileged and other vulnerable people. Despite the political transition in 1994, the country remains one of the most unequal in the world (Brankovic, 2020:1). “In the post-apartheid era, social justice struggles in South Africa concern themselves with economic justice, public participation, socio-economic rights, accountability, and improved access to services in a range of different spheres”.<sup>1</sup>

“South Africa’s dual oppressions of colonialism and apartheid were dehumanizing, necessitating complicated social justice efforts to regain humanity. This focus on regaining humanity is very different from the focus of liberal humanism on individual fairness” (Subreenduth, 2013:586). Apartheid subjugation and discrimination was based on racial classification as a means to protect and secure “white privilege”. It is also significant to note that race was used in apartheid South

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sji.org.za/what-is-social-justice/#>

Africa to control entrance to “physical space” and the economy “as a way to manage white and black life” (Subreenduth, 2013:588). During the liberation struggle, “there were apparently clear differences between what was fair or unfair, who was oppressor or oppressed, and this permitted for the growth of a united sense of solidarity in the struggle to end apartheid” (Subreenduth, 2013:588). “Social justice efforts were rooted in helping the oppressed to regain a sense of humanity, dignity, equity, and empowerment” (Subreenduth, 2013:588). “The sense of solidarity in the fight for human rights and the empowerment of the oppressed served as the foundation for the ideology of social justice that emerged in South Africa’s post-apartheid constitution and that continues to drive educational legislation and policies” (Subreenduth, 2013:588).

“The Khulumani support group is a national social movement for survivors of apartheid violations started in 1995. It argues that democracy cannot be fully realized until the country addresses its inequality” (Brankovic, 2020:1). The initial aim of Khulumani was to support survivors to gain access to the TRC (Hamber, Nageng and O’Malley, 2000:20). Khulumani aimed to help victims of apartheid restore their dignity, provide individual and group counselling for victims as they delivered their testimonies in the TRC, and integrate them back into society (Makhalemele, 2004:2). Khulumani states that “by connecting activism for redress for past abuses with activism for social change in the present, survivors model a transformative approach to dealing with the past that goes well beyond current transitional justice practice in the country” (Brankovic, 2020:1). I chose Khulumani as my case study to analyze the use of social justice in South Africa because the group calls for continuing and endless engagement with issues of transition “in the form of accountability, reparations, truth recovery, and institutional reform via typical transitional justice measures, and in the form of socio-economic transformation via participatory democracy, redistributive measures, and inclusive economic development” (Brankovic, 2020:3). I believe using the example of the Khulumani support group will help me critically analyze the failure to achieve social justice by the TRC (see Chapter 3). The use of Khulumani as a case study is relevant to my thesis topic in that the group fights and vouches for a kind of social justice that is linked to forgiveness.

In South Africa, the concept of reconciliation encouraged by the TRC included both individual and collective aims. “The TRC’s discourse around individual reconciliation became strongly tied to notions of forgiveness, whereas when ideas of collective reconciliation were deployed these were largely tied to the notion of promoting national unity” (Evans, 2018:6). The form of reconciliation that was promoted by the TRC was critiqued by scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani. Mamdani (cited in Evans, 2018:6) argues that South Africa’s post-apartheid transition represented a challenge to produce “reconciliation without justice”. He states that the ‘injustice’ that was considered in the TRC was not the ‘injustice of apartheid’, such as pass laws, forced removals, and broken families, but rather a form of injustice restricted to abuses within the legal context of apartheid such as murder, detention, and torture (Mamdani cited in Evans, 2018:6). According to Evans (2018:8), the type of reconciliation that was encouraged in the TRC was not associated to addressing socio-economic injustice or to wider societal change. “The TRC’s narrow focus on perpetrators of judicial killings, disappearances, and torture let apartheid’s offenders and beneficiaries off the hook too easily” (Evans, 2018:8).

As I discussed above, the TRC and the democratic transition left several issues unresolved, such as access to the TRC archives, national reconciliation and compensations for those found by the TRC to be victims of “gross violations of human rights” (Norval, 2009:313). Khulumani members did not see the TRC as the only/even the key concept for a just transition in South Africa. Members of Khulumani argue that even though South Africa achieved democracy, “many families continue to be subject to spatial apartheid despite democratization” (Brankovic, 2020:2). Poverty is racialized and most poor people live far from “economic centers and face restricted access to information, quality education, and skill-building programs, as well as employment opportunities and social networks. Inadequate social facilities in their neighbourhoods do not help address these consequences of apartheid” (Brankovic, 2020:2). Hence, there is a link between “transitional justice” and spatial dimension of social justice: transitional justice can be used to “come to terms with the legacy of large-scale past abuses”, to certify responsibility, and accomplish reconciliation. The great failure of the TRC was not to put the question of social justice on the agenda (Mamdani, 2010:10).

## Forgiveness and social justice

Oelofse and Oosthuysen (2014:258) argue that forgiveness lays the foundation for reconciliation, which creates a peaceful society. This method results in individuals being set free from their painful memories and allows them to move on and be part of a reconciled humanity by letting go of their bitterness, hate, and anger. “Forgiveness can set free both the person forgiving and the person who is forgiven” (Oelofse & Oosthuysen, 2014:258). “Refusing to forgive may make the victim's life hopeless, as well as negatively affecting those around them” (Oelofse & Oosthuysen, 2014:258). However, Oelofse and Oosthuysen (2014:258) highlight that “forgiving a person can never be forced; it can only happen if the victim is willing”.

Desmond Tutu claimed that the forgiveness advocated by the TRC would achieve social justice, national reconciliation, and result in a rainbow nation. Forgiveness was supposed to inaugurate equality between the oppressed and the oppressor. The actual creation of the Commission became a national exercise involving the public, which was encouraged to support the definition of its mission, objectives and procedures. Tutu (1999:208) claimed that “with an act of forgiveness, we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that wronged us”. Tutu, as a chairperson of the TRC, followed this approach and recognized the role of truth-telling, liberty, forgiveness, and reparation in the promotion of national reconciliation. “Reconciliation and forgiveness are therefore intertwined with each other; reconciliation implies the need for forgiveness, while forgiveness is aimed at reconciliation and the wholeness of community” (Krog, 2008:356).

The TRC not only required to bring about the “material reconstruction of South Africa through reconciliatory means, but also its spiritual reconstruction through the non-obligatory processes of cultivating remorse and forgiveness” (Mohoang, 2017:15). Evans (2018:11) claims that “where reconciliation is taken to require forgiveness there is a danger of undermining the agency of those affected. This is especially the case when reconciliation is put forward as necessary for society but dependent upon individual forgiveness. Here individual victims are treated, at least to some

degree, as a means to an end". However, forgiveness could also inspire a will to encourage social justice in a general logic (Vorster, 2009:378). Confession, remorse and the request of social justice must be responded with forgiveness, which involves the end to all hostility, the removal of bitterness, and the will to start new relations with a clean slate (Vorster, 2009:379).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have dealt with the concept of criminal and social justice and critically examined their importance for South Africa. I have also investigated the link between forgiveness and justice. I focused more on restorative justice than retributive/criminal justice because, as I have stated above, restorative justice focuses on restoration, reconciliation, and forgiveness rather than punishment. With respect to the notion of social justice, I traced the use of such justice in the TRC using the case study of the Khulumani support group to achieve a better understanding of social justice and its application in South Africa. My argument in this chapter was that forgiveness builds a foundation for victims to let go of the past and reconnect with the world. The act of forgiving can be regarded as a form of justice by some victims as it places the victim in control. When it comes to social justice, forgiveness lays the foundation for reconciliation, which creates the possibility for a peaceful society.

# CHAPTER 3: Forgiveness in Political Violence

## Introduction

This chapter discusses the kind of forgiveness found in frameworks of political violence. In the first part of the chapter, I give a brief background on political violence in South Africa and discuss the formation of the TRC. In the second part of the chapter, I argue forgiveness within the framework of the TRC, mainly in the amnesty hearings. In the argument section, I present different kinds of frameworks in which forgiveness can occur. To analyze the role of forgiveness in the reports of the TRC, it is essential to differentiate among the different kinds of relationships in which forgiveness plays a role. I have selected three cases to assist me to analyse how forgiveness plays a role in these different cases, namely, the “Brain Mitchell”, the “St James church massacre”, and the “Thapelo Mbelo”. I describe each of these in turn below. I study these cases through TRC transcripts, which are found on the TRC website at: <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>; I discuss each case in detail below.

## The concept of political violence

Balcells (2015:2) defines political violence as a “set of collective actions that involve great physical force and cause damage to an opponent in order to achieve political aims”. Political aims include strengthening the position of the powerful and/or weakening an opposing side seeking to address or obtain state power in the name of a collective. Political violence is mostly distinguished from other methods of violence by claims to a different public or moral legitimacy for the hurt and harm done to the targets of these acts of violence by state agents such as police or army (du Toit, 1993:6). Mahmood Mamdani (2015:63) claims that what distinguishes “political violence from criminal violence is qualitative, whereas political violence requires more than just criminal activity, it needs a political constituency”. Mamdani, (2015:63) argues that “Political violence needs supporters, not just perpetrators...political violence is held together and

mobilized by an issue. Not like criminal violence, political violence is issue-driven". In South Africa, "political violence has deep historical roots including the violence of conquest, the violence of frontier wars, the violence of apartheid and the struggle against apartheid" (du Toit, 1993:4). All these forms of violence can be justified and located or criticized from political, social, moral and humanitarian perspectives (du Toit, 1993:6). The political violence that I will focus on in this chapter includes both the violence initiated by the apartheid state and the violence of resistance against that state.

The political violence initiated by the state can violate human rights, obstruct democracy, and undermine the relationship of fairness, transparency, and trust upon which good governments are built (Bardall, Bjarnegard and Piscopo, 2019:916). The violence of resistance is mostly akin to the fight to bring about justice. Resistance violence is also considered political violence that can violate human rights even though the people who enact it experience pain and suffering, detention, torture, and death. Apter (1997:1) claims that forms of political violence that obstruct democracy not only divide people, but separate them according to race, ethnicity, religion, language, class. These forms of political violence are mostly initiated by the state against their citizens, but can also be enacted by non-state actors looking to take state power. According to Balcells (2015:2), this type of political violence includes occurrences that range from mass protests, rebellions, and terrorism, to uprisings, massacres, ethnic cleansing, and genocides. In the next section, I will link violence with power and show how they can either work together or contradict one another.

## Power relations and violence

Power is often defined as the "capacity to influence other people; it emerges from control over valuable resources and the ability to control rewards and punishments. The power approach theory suggests that power increases goal-directed activity" (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi et al., 2006:1068). Foucault (cited in Menge, 2019:11) claims that "power is the ability to have an effect on other agents' actions or on their disposition to act". Power is one of the most dominant and problematic notions in sociological theory and forms the basis of the conflict model (Ronderick,

1971:240). Power relations in current social science discuss sub-sets of relations between social elements such that the behaviors of one or more elements depend in some conditions on the behavior of other elements. This means that the behavior of the one in power affects and/or causes the behavior of the other (Ronderick, 1971:241).

“Power can be legitimate or illegitimate depending on whether it is used within a society's established norms, goals, and purposes” (Hamilton and Sharma, 1997:555). Power can be linked with force, authority, rule, control, dominance, and impact. Power is an inspiring strength in the operatives of organizations, governments, families, societies, and interpersonal relationships, and it is used by groups and individuals to accomplish their anticipated ends (Hamilton and Sharma, 1997:555). When power is practiced through violence, society is controlled, manipulated, and instrumentalized in a subject-object relationship, which is about one actor trying to dominate the other in struggles to preserve power and/or to oppress others and prevent them from obtaining it (Menge, 2019:19). Power in that sense equals violence. Foucault (1983:224) stresses the “relational nature of power: power relations are rooted in a system of social networks”.

According to Arendt (1970:56), “power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites, where the one rules, the other is absent”. Arendt cited in Menge (2019:4) claims that “power is essentially non-violent since violence is by its very nature incapable of creating power”. Arendt characterizes “power as the human ability not just to act but to act in recital” (Menge, 2019:4). According to Arendt (1970:46), a critical distinctive of violence is its “instrumental character”. This also means that violence does not entail acting in concert; violence is always used as a means to an end. In my understanding, Arendt does not provide an upfront description of violence in her work such as *On Violence* (1970) and *Human Condition* (1958), but her “examples suggest that she is primarily concerned with actions that cause pain to, injure, or kill others, or that damage or destroy things that are important to humans” (Menge, 2019:4). For Arendt, “power is legitimate whereas violence can never be legitimate but only justified, instrumentally appealing to the short-term goals of self-defense or freedom from oppression” (Breen, 2007:358).

According to Arendt (1958:203), “violence appears where power is at risk, but left to run its course it ends in power's disappearance. Violence can destroy power, but it is incapable of creating it”. This means that Arendt is not only arguing that the terms “violence” and “power” mean dissimilar things or that their referents are not identical. She claims that “power” and “violence” are by their nature mismatched or in tension with each other (Menge, 2019:4). Arendt (1970) requests two major reflections to support her claim that “violence” and “power” are opposites. The first consideration is the “contrast between power’s communicative nature and violence's merely physical nature. Physical violence can destroy the communicative relationships that power is based on by obstructing people from communicating and acting jointly. But since violence is incapable of speech” (Arendt, 1990:19), it cannot create new communicative relations. “Violence can be used as a last resort to keep the power structure unbroken against individual challengers” (Arendt, 1970:47), or to destroy violent rules that stop such relationships from developing. According to Arendt (cited in Menge, 2019:5), “violence can sometimes negatively or indirectly facilitate the emergence of power but violence cannot generate power”. Secondly, Arendt claims that “power and violence are, in virtue of their nature, each governed by different forms of practical reasoning. Arendt believes that the instrumental reasoning that governs the use of violence is likely to overwhelm the collective practice of deliberating about ends, where violence is no longer backed and restrained by power” (Arendt, 1970:54). The practice of violence can terminate power not just by creating communication physically impossible, but also by discouraging the non-instrumental character of political dialogue and action (Menge, 2019:5).

Taking everything into account, I am persuaded by Arendt's claim that “power and violence are not the same” (Arendt, 1970:56) and that violence destroys power. This means that violence is applied when power is no longer effective, where those in a position of power use violence to control the onlookers. Arendt is accurate to argue that social power cannot occur where the complete instruction of violence has demolished all communicative relationships.

## Political violence in South Africa

Apartheid is “an Afrikaans word meaning ‘separateness’; it was a policy of segregation on the grounds of race. This policy was implemented after the National Party won the elections in 1948 and began enforcing policies of racial segregation against non-white people” (Peffer, 2009: xv-xvi). During the application of apartheid, the National Party was against any equality between races and maintained social and residential separation to avoid racial mixing. However, racial segregation was not unique to apartheid; the policy was an extension and intensification of historical segregation that began in the colonial period (Clark and Worger, 2013:37).

As I have described above, South Africa has a long and unpleasant past of political violence. Prior to the twentieth century, when the South African government imposed minority rule and apartheid, the colonial regime had implemented a policy of segregation and a land act that reserved the majority of the best land for whites. The 1913 land act restricted Africans from owning more than thirteen percent of the land and the land reserved for them was of poor value that could not meet the desires of an increasing population (Clark and Worger, 2013:23). By the early twentieth century, the colonial regime was collapsing and there was a need, from the perspective of whites, for new minority rule, white authority, and implementation of apartheid. “The anti-apartheid struggles of the second half of the twentieth century evolved from political protests to popular uprisings and the armed struggle” (du Toit, 1993:12). With the anti-apartheid forces increasing, the apartheid government was concerned about their power and they regularized police violence and the killing of African leaders to maintain ‘peace’, which resulted in many massacres (Clark and Worger, 2013:57).

The political violence in South Africa captured the world’s attention and revealed that apartheid was not about maintaining peace but about destroying humanity (Clark and Worger, 2013:94). South Africa reached a critical juncture in the early 1990s as the “politics of violence” gave way to the “politics of peace” and opened a path for negotiations and a “transition from minority rule and apartheid to a non-racial and democratic South Africa” (du Toit, 1993:7). These negotiations between the National Party (NP) and the African National Congress (ANC) at the Convention for

a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) included a variety of political organizations. “The CODESA was a forum to negotiate the principles of a new constitution and the composition of an interim or transitional government to manage the transitional period” (Mamdani, 2015:68). The CODESA declaration stated: “South Africa will be a united, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist state in which sovereign authority is exercised over the whole of its territory” (Mamdani, 2015:68). This transitional process took the “essentially non-violent form of a sustained attempt to reach a negotiated settlement and to introduce a new constitutional order” (du Toit, 1993:7). The CODESA offered a new way of thinking about justice and distinguished between political, criminal, and social justice, prioritizing political justice over the other two (Mamdani, 2010:7). CODESA required a balance among amends for the past and reconciliation for the future.

“Transitional justice concerns the process through which a state moves from war to peace or from authoritarian rule to democracy by addressing a particular legacy of human rights violations that occurred on a massive scale” (Kobe, 2014:2). Questions of justice and reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa have to take standard of the transitional progressions which got underway in the early 1990s to change the country into a constant and unbiased society as well as aspects of that transformation that are still ongoing (du Bois and du Bois-Pedain, 2008:1). “Justice and reconciliation were the key themes during the transitional period. They at once articulated goals and identified means” (du Bois and du Bois-Pedain, 2008:2), but the complications of the relationship among reconciliation and justice were just as significant. Specifically, it became clear during the transition process that justice and reconciliation were regularly in tension with each other, with the rise of reconciliation threatening to avoid the quest for social justice and vice versa. “South Africa’s attempt to mediate this tension, trying to put it to creative use, became one of the hallmarks of the transitional period and one of the main reasons for the intense international interest in it” (du Bois and du Bois-Pedain, 2008:3). The South African TRC was intended to occupy a central place in managing this tension between justice and reconciliation (du Bois and du Bois-Pedain, 2008:3).

## The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The commission was well-known to bring about a peaceful change from the apartheid authority to the new democratic South Africa (Allan 2000:191). The key objective of the Promotion Act was to promote the “welfare of society as a whole, rather than that of individuals”. In defining ‘victims’, the Promotion Act stated that the term “victim” includes a “person who suffered harm in the form of physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss, or considerable damage of human rights” (Mohoang, 2017:48).

The main aim of the TRC was to create a broad picture by evaluating the reasons, nature, and degree of the “gross human rights violations” which were perpetrated by the apartheid government on South Africans during the period of apartheid (Mohoang, 2017:13). The TRC sought to provide opportunities for reconciliation between the victims and offenders. The guiding concept was that by hearing the truth about past violence and crimes, people would be liberated from violence, discrimination, racial and class conflicts, hatred, and un-forgiveness (Worthington et al., 2015:11). Therefore, the TRC sought to create the fate and whereabouts of victims and to re-establish their human and civil dignity (Mohoang, 2017:13).

The TRC was divided into three different committees, each with its own purpose and goal. “One of these committees dealt with human rights violations” (Mohoang, 2017:13). The Promotion Act defined “human rights violation” as the “homicide, kidnapping, cruelty, or severe ill-treatment of any person, or any attempt, scheme, provocation, initiation, command, or obtaining to commit such an act” (Mohoang, 2017:48). Mamdani argues that “the commission defined gross violations of human rights in a manner that left out human rights violations such as detention without trial, the jailing of people for pass law offences, and the many forms of racism that characterized ordinary life in South Africa” (Mamdani, 1996:183). Instead of addressing the relationship among the government and the public, the TRC pointed its effort to reconciliation between state agents and political activists. The Commission claimed it could not acknowledge other human rights violations such as forced removals because these violations were not “gross” as per the Promotion Act (Mamdani, 2013:73). The commission believed that “gross human rights violations

such as murder and abductions needed more attention and consideration than other human rights such as forced removals, [and] this means that other human rights violations were less gross and cannot be prioritized more than those that took lives of innocent people” (TRC Report Vol. 1, 1998:34). Therefore, the TRC was limited to examining that portion of human rights violations which resulted in direct physical harm or death and were experienced in the course of the physical violence and conflicts produced during the apartheid era (TRC Report Vol. 1, 1998:29).

“The commission was empowered to grant amnesty to those who committed gross human rights violations during apartheid, as long as the crimes were politically motivated, comparable, and there was full disclosure of truth by the person seeking amnesty” (TRC Report Vol. 1, 1998: 83). Victims had the right to challenge applications for amnesty if they sensed that these conditions had not been met (Tutu, 1999:45). However, the political requirement “was that a violation of human rights within the prescribed period (1960-1994) was found to constitute a gross violation of human rights if it was advised, planned, directed, commanded, ordered or committed by any member or supporter of publicly known political organizations or liberation movements on behalf of or in support of that organization or movement, any employee of the state (or any former state employee) or any member of the security forces of the state (or any former member) in the course and scope of his or her duties and directed against a publicly known political organization or liberation movement engaged in a political struggle against the state” (TRC Report Vol. 1, 1998:83). The TRC further stated that “the violent act in question must have been committed with the objective of contradicting or otherwise resisting the apartheid struggle” (TRC Report Vol. 1, 1998:83).

The commission held information of human rights violations and considered amnesty applications including from the state, the liberation movement, and other political organizations. “A total of 7,116 applications were received, of which 1167 were granted amnesty” (Kobe, 2014:4). The rules of the TRC stated that those who committed a crime due to personal greed or a violent disposition were not to be granted amnesty. The naming of the commission as the TRC, was meant to inform the offenders and the victims of its nonviolent and the non-retaliatory purposes. “It was to highlight the intention that the commission’s work would facilitate the the

spiritual and material reconstruction of South African society” (Mahoang, 2017:15). Henderson (2004:43) argues that “the commission created an environment where victims could hear and observe wrongdoers, where explanations were offered, contributions made, guilt admitted, apologies offered, and/or remorse conveyed. The commission did not offer long-term solutions to dealing with the traumas that were experienced by victims”.

However, according to Mamdani, the TRC concentrated on human rights violations arising from “the *conflicts* of the past rather than on the *policies* of apartheid”. The TRC concentrated on the human rights violations that were *already* considered “gross” under apartheid (Mamdani, 2002:33). The TRC identified *individuals* as offenders rather than *groups* or *communities* and tied compensations to individual victims as opposed to communities or groups (Mamdani, 2002:33). According to the interim constitution, there was no blanket amnesty in the TRC, meaning no group amnesty would be granted. Each offender would have to be recognized individually and would have to own up to their guilt (Mamdani, 2002:33). The TRC also individualized when identifying the victims of apartheid, whereas apartheid targeted entire population for indigenous and racial policing and cleansing (Mamdani, 2002:33). Therefore, Mamdani (2002:58) argues that the TRC paid little consideration to the “gross violations” suffered by the majority of the South African population.

Mamdani (2010:6) argues that the “TRC held individual state officials criminally responsible, but only for actions that would have been defined as crimes *under* apartheid law. It did not hold them accountable for violence that was authorized *by* apartheid law”. The point that Mamdani (2010:6) is trying to make is that apartheid state officials “were not held responsible when they acted as institutional implementers, but only when they acted as individual perpetrators of violence. They were held accountable for violence *beyond* the law”. Mamdani’s argument is that by setting out to recognize only egregious violence and violence that surpassed political orders, the TRC ended up justifying political violence authorized by apartheid law. Mamdani (cited in Mahoang, 2017:29) states that by overlooking the violence that was approved by the apartheid government and its laws, the TRC had failed to identify the political violence of apartheid as a system. “The TRC recognized only those violations suffered by political activists or state agents, but it ignored apartheid as experienced by the broad masses of the people of South Africa”

(Mamdani, 2002:38). The TRC concentrated on violations of physical integrity and the rights to life that were typically experienced by state actors and political activists, rather than on the experiences of regular people in terms of pass laws, forced removals, forced labour, and other apartheid laws (Christodoulidis and Veitch, 2008:15). Therefore, the TRC failed to secure justice concerning those accountable for the rules that produced death squads and resulted in other things such as imprisonment torture, and murders (Pillay and Scanlon, 2007:19).

However, in Vu Lan's (2014:6) view, the TRC accomplished several positive things including that it contributed to the emergence of a more united South Africa. It recognised that both sides committed acts that violated human rights (Vu Lan, 2014:6). The TRC considered amnesty applications from members of the apartheid state as well as liberation forces and all political parties (Vu Lan, 2014:6). Some regarded that as a failure, arguing that the TRC should have made "a moral distinction between the side which fought for equality and the side of the oppressors" (Vu Lan, 2014:6). But perhaps the TRC achieved the goal of some level of reconciliation because it recognized the point that both sides played a part in the violation of human rights and in producing a broken nation. Therefore, the achievement of reconciliation was needed for both sides to move on, according to Vu Lan (2014:6). Even though the TRC ignored the systemic and socio-economic violence, it importantly addressed the excesses of physical violence. This matters because the TRC aimed to achieve reconciliation and national unity. I believe quest of national unity, the welfare of all South Africans, and peace required reconciliation among citizens and the reconstruction of the society.

## Reconciliation

Reconciliation means restoration and it implies repairing or rebuilding relationships (Kohen, 2009:407). Reconciliation is a process that involves the healing of relationships and the restoration of dignity and rights to those involved. The reconciliation process can occur between individuals, groups, or communities who have been in conflict or disagreement. It is also one of the most important steps someone can take when they've experienced harm. By reconciling with others, one can obtain peace and understanding for everyone involved (Kohen, 2009:407).

Reconciliation tends to be used to “facilitate integration in those instances where a perpetrating and a victimized community are forced to coexist in full knowledge of the past” (Muldoon, 2003:186).

“The concept of reconciliation has been grossly misunderstood, misappropriated, and softened” (Maluleke 2008:684). According to Maluleke (2008:684), “the notion of reconciliation appears to have been thoroughly abducted into the discourse of the ruling classes in South Africa”. “From this perspective reconciliation appears to be something which the powerless must do for the powerful; it seems to be a necessity for the wronged and an optional extra for recipients and perpetrators; reconciliation comes across as some ritual to be performed by the poor; a rite for Blacks and a right for Whites; something women should consider more seriously than men” (Maluleke, 2008:684). Maluleke’s (2008) argument is that the way in which reconciliation was represented at the TRC benefited the perpetrators more than it did the victims, who were obliged to reconcile with those who had hurt and pained them.

Many observers of the TRC have examined whether the TRC achieved much in terms of reconciliation. Borraine (2000:340), argues that “the commission has certainly told some truths and uncovered important knowledge about the past, but it offered very little in the way of reconciliation”. “Krog (1998) stands such critics by highlighting the African roots of the profound understanding of reconciliation entrenched in the narratives emerging from the TRC. She argues that it was also the first commission to allow both offenders and victims of the conflict to testify at the same forum and was the first step towards changing into a more humane self that would include victim and perpetrator” (Kobe, 2014:7). According to Gobodo-Madikizela (2008:280-2), “the public acknowledgement of injustice and the suffering and pain experienced by victims constituted an important restorative step, not only for individuals who were victims and survivors but also for the broader society” and she argues that the TRC carried terms such as “apology”, “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” after mass violence into public focus and academic debate. Despite scholarly critique of the methods of the TRC, it provided a chance to regular South Africans who were neither offenders nor victims of violations of human rights to reflect on their past and future and to achieve reconciliation where possible (Kobe, 2014:6) Based on my observation and understanding of the TRC, it did more to promote the purposes of national

reconciliation than it is often given credit for: reconciliation was achieved indirectly, by staging a instant of relief and providing a prompt for additional consideration between ordinary South African citizens.

## The role of forgiveness in the TRC

Forgiveness is a generous response to an offence that mitigates the desire for vengeance and encourages more kind motivations toward the offender (Worthington et al., 2015:5). Exline, Worthington, Hill, and McCullough (2003) distinguish between two types of forgiveness: decisional and emotional. “Decisional forgiveness is defined as the behavioral intention to disown revenge and to treat the offender as a person of value. Emotional forgiveness is defined as the replacement of unforgiving emotions such as resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear with positive other-oriented emotions of empathy, sympathy, compassion or love” (Worthington et al., 2015:5).

The role of forgiveness that was presented in the TRC revolved around the problem of political violence. The type of forgiveness offered in the TRC hearings was linked with acts of giving and accepting acknowledgement of the wrongdoing of a political agent or entity (Grisworld, 2007:136). The TRC was about national reconciliation, which necessitated political forgiveness in order to resolve apartheid's egregious human rights violations. Many scholars say that in order for societies like South Africa to heal, previous human rights atrocities must be confronted, acknowledged, atoned for, and remembered collectively (Kobe, 2014:37). Political forgiveness is a rare phenomenon that occurs when many acts of personal forgiveness occur within the same society and are combined into a common story (Inazu, 2009:311).

According to Shriver (1995:7), “a political concept of forgiveness need not be associated with personal religion and morality as is traditionally assumed, but must be situated in the secular political field”. Shriver (1995:47) argues for “a concept of forgiveness in politics that suggests the need for political space for verbal instead of violent disputes; political forgiveness involves an act that joins moral truth, moderation, empathy, and a commitment to repair broken human relationships”. According to Arendt (1958:243), “such an act cannot be based on moral

sentiments such as pity". Forgiveness in politics must allow similarity to descriptions of relief from problems and reduction from liability or political violence. Political forgiveness needs to free victims from their pain and repair injuries in the past so that their magnitude is undone. Therefore, in my understanding, political forgiveness must target at healing the wounded party from the past to encourage a necessary future, to support achieve social justice and afford a base for political reconciliation. The significance of forgiveness in the perception of politics is linked with the idea that without forgiveness the victim of political violence won't be able to move on from the past to find healing. With the assistance of forgiveness, we can hope to develop the feeling of of being part of something larger than ourselves, of being connected to others (Misztal, 2015:2). This means that forgiveness can shape the basis for democratic civil humanity.

But the TRC could not simply order people to forgive one another. Instead, it had to engage with common understandings of the term. In the process of national unity, the TRC's mission was offered as making chances available and enrolling the country into its new mission. "Forgiveness in the TRC was presented as a turning point, a doorway to a new era where people would be able to go forward into a future in which they could live normal lives" (Leman-Langlois and Shearing, 2008:209). In many beliefs the space occupied by forgiveness is characterised by religious principles and practice. Christian tradition, among others, has set the meaning and function of forgiveness in western societies (Leman-Langlois and Shearing, 2008:209). Theological scholars argue that in the Christian tradition, "the command is not to forgive and forget, but to remember and forgive. Forgiveness begins with remembering, a moral judgement of wrong, injustice, and injury" (de Ridder, 2010:31). Christianity played a considerable character in outlining the forgiveness that helped transitional justice in South Africa but this does not mean that the ability to forgive is restricted to Christians.

There is a difference between forgiveness that is influenced by Christianity and forgiveness influenced by Ubuntu. Christians forgive because they believe that God wants them to do so. The reward for this forgiveness will be in heaven. Such forgiveness also grasps the probability that reconciliation will occur (Krog, 2008:357). Christianity contains the opportunity of reconciling *without* forgiving; one can live in peace with sinful neighbours. Whereas Ubuntu grants forgiveness with the aim of healing the victims. Here, the struggle is to achieve full personhood

on earth. This means that “forgiveness can never be without the next step which is reconciliation and reconciliation cannot take place without fundamentally changing the life of the one who forgives as well as the one who is forgiven” (Krog, 2008:357).

## Truth and Reconciliation Commission cases

In the next section, I unpack the nature of forgiveness at play in each of the cases outlined above. I believe these cases are suitable for my analysis because they present the two different sides of forgiveness – decisional and emotional. Forgiveness was evoked differently in each case and motivations to forgive also differed from case to case. My analysis of the three cases I discuss below will help expand our understanding of the meaning of forgiveness in contexts of political violence.

### The St James church massacre

The St James church massacre became an important cornerstone for discussions about reconciliation in South Africa. It allowed the notion of reconciliation to permeate public consciousness. The importance of religious belief in this case created greater receptivity for the idea of forgiveness.

“On Sunday July 25 1993, at 7.30 p.m., 11 people were killed and 58 injured when gunmen entered the St James church in Kenilworth, Cape Town, threw hand grenades and opened fire on the congregation with AK 47 rifles” (Geslin, 2001:198). There were 1000 people inside the church when the attack happened. The attackers were members of the African People’s Liberation Army (APLA); the St James Church Massacre was one of a series of APLA attacks.<sup>2</sup> Bassie Mkhumbuzi, Gcinikhaya Makoma, Sichumiso Nonxuba and Thobela Mlambisa were found guilty of the attack and sentenced 23 years in prison. All of them applied to the TRC for amnesty. Nonxuba died in a car accident before the TRC process was concluded.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/st-james-church-massacre>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/st-james-church-massacre>

The PAC, of which APLA was the armed wing, was one of the key political organizations that fought against apartheid and was later banned by the apartheid government (Kobe, 2014:68). “On 6 April 1959 the PAC was formed at Orlando Community Hall in Soweto by Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe”, who became the president of the organization.<sup>4</sup> The ideology of the organization was Pan Africanism, which includes principles of African nationalism, socialism and continental unity. “Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe’s philosophy of African nationalism was essentially the basis for the complete unity of the African people. It was also the basis for the achievement of national freedom for the African people as a step towards a well-developed democratic order in South Africa”.<sup>5</sup> “APLA was formed in the 1960s, after the banning of the PAC and other political organizations” and supported the PAC ideology of “iZwe ngelethu” (Africa is ours) and “Mayibuye iAfrika” (Bring back Africa). During the 1980s, APLA came up with the provocative slogan “One Settler, One Bullet”. “APLA killings and attacks on white farmers were believed to be motivated by this slogan”.<sup>6</sup>

During the amnesty hearing in the TRC, Makoma, Mkhumbuzi and Mlambisa confessed that they were responsible for the attack on St James church. Makoma was arrested ten days after the attack. Mlambisa, Nonxuba and Mkhumbuzi were arrested and charged for their crimes in 1996 (Kobe, 2014:68). Mkhumbuzi, already a member of the PAC, was 17 years old when he joined APLA. He was under the command and training of Sichumiso Nonxuba. Nonxuba was the APLA commander in charge of the St James church operation. Nonxuba chose Makoma, Mkhumbuzi and Mlambisa to be part of the operation. Mlambisa had been recruited by Nonxuba to join the APLA when he was still in school. He was the driver during the St James church massacre, he never went inside the church or attacked parishioners. Makoma was 17 years old. He was introduced by Nonxuba to APLA three weeks before the attack on St James church. At the time he was already a member of the PAC.<sup>7</sup> In the TRC hearing all claimed that “they only realized the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/pan-africanist-congress-pac>

<sup>5</sup> <http://nhmsa.co.za/news/the-political-thinking-of-robert-sobukwe-and-the-pac/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/azanian-peoples-liberation-army-apla-disbands>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

nature of the operation when they arrived at the church. It was Nonxuba, their commander, who selected the target and he was the only one who knew about the details of the operation”.<sup>8</sup>

During the TRC process, Mlambisa, Makoma and Mkhumbuzi argued that they were following orders from their commander and that they had “no prior knowledge of the fact that they would be attacking a church”. During the hearing, Makoma said:

“To those relatives whose loved ones have been killed and those who had injured, and those who were badly hurt, as I was deeply involved in that mess, I threw a hand grenade, I fired shots obeying the instructions from my Commander (Mr Nonxuba), that resulted in what we are talking today about, I do regret and please forgive me because it was the situation in South Africa at that time. I am so sorry, please forgive me. To those who had been injured and their loved ones who passed away, I know there is no one who had the right to kill. But the situation in South Africa led us as we were young as we were, to do those things because we grew up in a violent country. We were seeing our fellow Africans being shot and killed by the Whites. We were not involved in the struggle because we wanted to; we were forced by the situations. If you do forgive me, or you don't, it is all up to you. But the information you wanted to know who did this, I as Khaya, I told them what I did and how was I involved.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Makoma, Mlambisa and Mkhumbuzi, “Nonxuba selected the church because he believed that the apartheid government was using churches to oppress black people”. Mkhumbuzi justified Nonxuba’s selection of a church by saying that

“...the Whites were also using churches to oppress the Blacks. They took our country using churches and Bibles as we are reading the history. We as the oppressed ones. And attacking the Whites, we knew and we read from the books that they are the ones who took the land from the Africans. That was the main reason for us to attack the Whites”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

The attackers argued that “killing white people was a way of putting pressure on the apartheid state to return the land of black people”. I quote below from Mlambisa cross-examination at the TRC hearings:

Adv Bembridge: “How did you think this attack would make the White people give your land back?”

Mr Mlambisa: “Like now, we are free. We can come forward and tell the truth, we are not radicals any more, we are the peace-loving people”.

Adv Bembridge: “How did the attack contribute to that though?”

Mr Mlambisa: “Because democracy”.

Adv Bembridge: “How did the attack lead to democracy?”

Mr Mlambisa: “It was a pressure to the government by the APLA. The government noticed that their people are dying, so they must do something”.<sup>11</sup>

According to Mlambisi, “white people were genuine targets as they were complicit in the government rule of apartheid”. But Lorenzo Smith, a parishoner of St James, argued that the church was never white-only but had members of all races and even visitors from Russia. Smith was one of the survivors of the massacre, he and Dawie Ackerman represented the victims and survivors at the amnesty hearing. Many of the other victims and survivors were also present.<sup>12</sup> During the amnesty hearing, Smith maintained that he and his fellow parishioners could not understand how the church was targeted as a white-only church by the attackers. Smith testified to the TRC that:

“I feel that the church is a place of sanctuary and looking at the way it was constructed, it was preplanned and being preplanned, the church itself has got no political aspect as to what is actually put across the board. If it was that which I see looking at it, whoever came

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

to the church to preplan it, they could actually identify the amount of people and the different nationalities that were at the church at any given time on a Sunday evening or any other evenings... We have Russians, we have Muslims, we have Christians, Black, White, Chinamen, you name it, attends the church.”<sup>13</sup>

Victims and survivors of the massacre disputed the “legitimacy of the claim” that APLA cadres attacked the church because it was a “white congregation”.

The TRC was moved by the response of survivors and victims to the attackers. “Survivors of the attack gave vivid accounts of the sequence of events in the church that evening. They also described the effects of the attack on them as individuals, on their families, and on their subsequent ability to function effectively in their work environments and communities” (TRC Report Vol. 6, 2003:399). Dawie Ackerman was one of the survivors of the massacre. His wife Marita Ackermann was killed by the attackers. Ackerman was working as the secretary of Bargaining Council for the clothing industry. After the incident he was diagnosed with anxiety and depression and had to resign from work.<sup>14</sup> He testified to the TRC about the day of the attack and how his wife died:

“As the attack was progressing was horror. My ears were zinging from the gunshots and then especially from the two grenade explosions. I was afraid. I had visions of the attackers walking up the aisle and shooting the people between the benches as they were laying down. My concern was for my wife and my one son who was in the service. I knew my wife was sitting at the entrance. One part of me thought she can't escape, another part of me hoped that she had escaped. The attack certainly did not last more than a minute. When I got up and people, there were people screaming, but immediately after the attack, it was as if a deathly silence, apart from a few screams and groans here and there, settled on the church. And it was like a whoosh as the people went for the exit

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

doors. I went forward to my wife, saw her still sitting upright. I thought that she might have survived, but she had not.”<sup>15</sup>

Ackerman’s testimony helped the TRC see a clear picture of what happened inside the church from the victims’ perspective. Ackerman also described what his life was like after the incident. He claimed that “about a year later after I was already suicidal. I was hiding it, I was in a leadership position at the time of the attack. I had resigned from these leadership positions because I just felt I was not capable of performing them. And I was not getting help and I was hiding the fact that I was suffering from anxiety depression at that stage.”<sup>16</sup> But with all the pain he had suffered he told the commission that “I hold no personal grudge, I do not hate the attackers and I stand by that. I also held out reconciliation to them, and I believe with all my heart because I had experienced reconciliation with God, through Jesus Christ, that it is available to everybody, including to them.”<sup>17</sup>

“The Amnesty Committee heard of the extreme psychological and emotional consequences of the attack on individuals and on the congregation. The victims spoke of their ability, deriving from their strong Christian convictions, to forgive the attackers and to move on with their lives” (TRC Report Vol. 6, 2003:399).

After Ackerman completed his testimony, he looks at the attackers and said, “I would like to hear from each one of you as you look me in the face, that you are sorry for what you have done, that you regret it and that you want to be personally reconciled. You can speak in your own language directly to me, you don't have to worry about the microphone.”<sup>18</sup> The attackers asked for forgiveness from the victims; they also expressed openness to reconciliation. Makoma said,

“We are sorry for what we have done. It was the situation in South Africa. Although people died during that struggle, we didn't do that out of our own will. It is the situation

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

that we were living under. We are asking from you, please do forgive us. All that we did, we can see the results today.”<sup>19</sup>

Mlambisi stated, “I am also asking for an apology. As we were working under orders, we didn't know that this will come to such a place. We wanted to be where we are today. We were working under the orders. As the TRC is alive today, we hope that this will come to an end. I hope that you do forgive me, because I ask for forgiveness.”<sup>20</sup>

Mkhumbuzi said, “I also want to say I do apologize to those people who were in the church at that time, while there was that shooting. We also thought that we would meet with the church members, those who were there. Even if we can also go to the church to show that we want reconciliation with them under the circumstances that we were, I also say please forgive me to everybody who is White and Black, who are in this new South Africa.”<sup>21</sup>

After receiving apologies from the attackers and asking them if they would like to reconcile with him, Ackerman said,

“I want you to know that I forgive you unconditionally. I do that because I am a Christian and I can forgive you for the hurt that you have caused me, but I cannot forgive you the sin that you have done. Only God can forgive you for that and I plead with you, when God saved me, he gave me something that I can't explain and that is love. A love for people, all people to have what I have. I can't explain it; He just gave it to me. When I look at you and I think of your Commander I think it was Vusi<sup>22</sup> that has died in an accident, I can only think that he had died without Christ, you still have a chance and I appeal to you, to return to the faith of your parents. I understand that you were all brought up in Christian homes. I appeal to you to go back to your parents, to ask them for forgiveness too and that you

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<sup>19</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

<sup>22</sup> Vusi was one of the APLA commanders who gave Mkhumbuzi military training, but in this quote Mr Ackerman was referring to Sichumiso Noxuba, the APLA commander that gave orders of the operation. I believe he forgot Noxuba's name.

would consider the Christian gospel, Christ as the mediator, the person that can forgive you from eternal sin.”<sup>23</sup>

“The victims and survivors argued that they forgave the perpetrators unconditionally because Jesus forgave them their sins. From their Christian beliefs, victims spoke of their ability to forgive and reconcile; the perpetrators asked for forgiveness and showed a willingness to unite in the new South Africa. The TRC pointed out that the act of killing civilians was a gross violation of human rights, and a violation of international humanitarian law, but based on truth, and given that the crime was politically motivated, the commission granted the perpetrators amnesty” (TRC Report Vol. 6, 2003:400). In the TRC report, the St James church massacre was termed as a catalyst for reconciliation in South Africa.

After the amnesty hearing, the victims met with the offenders and publicly reconciled with them. After the attackers had testified about the massacre, told the truth, apologized, some victims, such as Ackerman, considered reconciliation with them. The survivors of the massacre, including Bishop Retief, the pastor of St James church, were taken to a private room where they held a meeting with the attackers (Makoma, Mkhumbuzi and Mlambisi). Each of the attackers “walked around the table addressing each survivor, shaking their hands, and whispering individual messages of condolence” (Kirsch, 2014:312). Kirsch (2014:313) claims that “the Ackerman’s family remains divided over the TRC and the role that Ackerman played in forgiving the men that killed his wife and supporting the amnesty they received”. According to Kirsch (2014:313), Ackerman concedes that “none of killers seemed really sorry about what they had done,” but he accepted the amnesty process as necessary for the nation to move ahead.

Brian Smart, a survivor, was shocked by the ages of the attackers at the time of the massacre. He said: “They were only seventeen years old, and I could relate to that. When I was eighteen years old I was in the South Africa Air Force and sent out in defense of the realm...The only difference between myself and them was that I was operating under controlled military orders” (Kirsch, 2014:312). This shows how apartheid’s legal violence was excused and overlooked under the TRC

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<sup>23</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

because of the ways the commission defined its scope and was circumscribed by the category of human rights violations and gross violence.

In the case of the St James massacre the victims were willing to offer forgiveness because they realized that the perpetrators were fellow human beings harmed by the violation of human rights of the apartheid government (Conradie, 2013:60). For example, “Danie Ackerman observed that apartheid was an evil system”. He said:

“In retrospect through the testimonies of the APLA operatives I can see now that the apartheid government was an evil government, that in some respects the opposition to it was legitimate. The expression of remorse opened a door into genuine forgiveness.”<sup>24</sup>

Survivors and victims also offered forgiveness because the offenders confessed, apologized, asked for forgiveness, and wished to be reconciled (Conradie, 2013:61). Such testimony opened the way for sympathy from the victims. I believe that without a confession from the perpetrators, even though I doubt it was genuinely remorseful as claimed by Ackerman, he would not have been able to express such sentiments. The victims acknowledged the evil of apartheid, and seemed to grasp the justifications that the perpetrators offered for their actions (Conradie, 2013:61).

In my view, influenced by Gobodo-Madikizela (2008), the victims also need “forgiveness as part of the process of becoming human again”. The victims need forgiveness to complete themselves and take away the power of the perpetrator to destroy them. Far from being an unsettling proposition and a difficult moral sacrifice, forgiveness can be deeply therapeutic and restorative (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008:169-188). The victim now becomes the gatekeeper to the perpetrator’s desire to be accepted again in the human community. However, forgiveness does not overlook the deed but rather rises above it. Therefore, the act of humanization involves both punishment and rehabilitation (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008:169-188).

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<sup>24</sup> [https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown\\_stjames.htm](https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_stjames.htm)

Gobodo-Mdikizela (2008:169-188) argues that “forgiveness alone will not restore a broken relationship and there is a need for both forgiveness and remorse. She argues that when perpetrators express remorse, it humanizes them in the eyes of victims. They transition from being prime evil to being regarded as human beings with feelings”. In this case, even though victims were open to reconciliation and forgiveness, they also longed for justice and punishment and believed that the attackers should pay for their crimes. Dawie Ackerman, Bishop Retief, and others, did not want the victims to get off “scot-free”. “They wanted justice to take its course for the crimes they committed. Some of the victims and survivors of the massacre, who argued that they hold no grudge and that they forgive the perpetrators, nevertheless opposed the applications of the perpetrators for amnesty at the TRC” (Kobe, 2014: 72). In their statements to the media, such victims expressed their wishes that the offenders should not go unpunished even though they forgave them (Kobe, 2014:72).

## The Brian Mitchell case

“In December 1998, Brian Mitchell, a policeman at the time, instructed a group of special constables to attack supporters of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the Trust Feed community. He did so in association with the leaders of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Trust Feed is a rural community situated northwest of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. The area has a long history of peaceful co-existence, but this changed in the mid-1980s as a result of political tensions between the UDF and the IFP” (TRC report Vol. 5, 1998:394).

The IFP is a South African political party. Before it became a political party, "Inkatha" was a social and political movement in existence since 1924. The early Inkatha aimed to promote Zulu unity and Zulu culture (Maninger, 1994:28) and may have originated as a project to restore Zulu nationalism. After the 1970 establishment of Zulu Territorial Authority, which was the forerunner of the 1972 KwaZulu legislative assembly (Maninger, 1994:29), Inkatha was re-energized by Mangosuthu Buthelezi in 1975 in the form of a Zulu cultural movement.<sup>25</sup> Ideologically and culturally it was driven by the idea of Zulu nationhood (Maninger, 1994:28) and promoted ethnic

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/inkatha-freedom-party-ifp>

nationalism. Buthelezi also recognized the Black Unity Front for nationalists, both inside and outside the homelands system.<sup>26</sup> After early years of positioning itself as an anti-apartheid force, Inkatha went on to collaborate with the apartheid government.

In 1983 the UDF was launched in Cape Town (Seekings, 2000:1). It was formed to organize resistance to the national party government reforms and contest its attempts to introduce the “Tricameral parliament” which would provide racially segregated representation of Coloureds and Indians in the central government (Seekings, 2000:2). Due to the effective ban of political organizations in 1988, the UDF operated under the show of a mass democratic movement associated with the independent trade unions (Seekings, 2000:3). “The UDF played a central role in the transformation of South Africa; it inspired and mobilized South Africans to resist the state’s institutions and policies, helped to build an unprecedented organizational structure from local to national levels, and coordinated diverse protests and campaigns” (Seekings, 2000:3). In Trust Feed it also functioned as a crisis committee consisting primarily of tenants and coordinating anti-eviction struggles, resisting forced removals, and upgrading facilities in the community (Clark, 2012:201). The UDF was not a party, it did not have membership but had structures at the national, regional and sub-regional levels; these structures organized events and campaigns, produced media, helped to build affiliates at both local and national level (Seekings, 2000:15).

The IFP viewed the UDF as pro-ANC, governed by the latter’s ideology and principles. The relationship between the UDF and the IFP was always tense and mutually aggressive (Maninger, 1994:69). The ANC-Inkatha relationship turned to bitter hatred, with the ANC branding Buthelezi as a “counter-revolutionary force”.<sup>27</sup> In broad strokes, Inkatha was fighting for representatives of homelands who argued for the imposition of the tribal structure and the rule of chiefs, absent in the area of Trust Feed. The UDF, on the other hand, was fighting for the institution of a democratic government. The standoff between the UDF and IFP led to an alliance between Inkatha and the police (De Haas, 1992:65). In Trust Feed the tensions between UDF and Inkatha were most intense. “In 1988 the community of Trust Feed was divided by a power

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/inkatha-freedom-party-ifp>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/inkatha-freedom-party-ifp>

struggle. Upper Trust Feed became known as UDF territory and lower Trust Feed belonged to Inkatha"<sup>28</sup>. According to Buthelezi, the UDF was trying to create a 'no-go' area for his organization in KwaZulu Natal. The IFP regarded the UDF as threatening its existence. Buthelezi claimed that the UDF was used as the front by the ANC in exile (Mare and Hamilton, 1987:148). On the other side, the UDF accused Buthelezi of working with the apartheid government (Mare and Hamilton, 1987:148).

The local police unit of KwaZulu Natal colluded with the IFP to wipe out the UDF, which both the state and the IFP perceived as a common threat. According to Mitchell's testimony in the TRC, the main reason for the alliance between the police and IFP was to make the Trust Feed community an Inkatha territory. Mitchell said, "the driving force behind alliance and the attack and behind the motives of the security establishment was to drive the opponents, which is the UDF members, out of Trust Feed community so that it is left within the hands of say in this case Inkatha, that it becomes a no-go area and they can within themselves exist."<sup>29</sup> This led to the arrangement of the attack that resulted in the Trust Feed massacre in December 1988 (Clark, 2012:201).

"The massacre was directly related to the secret activities of Brian Mitchell, station commander at the New Hanover police station at the time. Mitchell's special constables mistook a night vigil in the village of Trust Feed as a gathering of UDF members and opened fire. Eleven members of the Trust Feed community paid for this mistake with their lives. The youngest victim was a four-year-old boy and the oldest a 66-year-old woman" (TRC Report Vol. 5, 1998:394).

"In April 1992, Mitchell was sentenced to death eleven times for his role in ordering the attacks. His sentence was converted to life imprisonment in 1994. After serving a prison term of about five years, Mitchell applied for amnesty. Though they did not formally oppose amnesty, the Trust Feed community were furious and seemed not to have forgiven Brian Mitchell. The hurt was profound and the community went through a process of re-experiencing the original anger and

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<sup>28</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode13/section4/transcript1.htm>

<sup>29</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode46/playlist.htm>

pain” (TRC Report Vol. 5, 1998:394). The lawyer that represented the Trust Feed community in the TRC claimed that:

“The attitude of the community of Trust Feeds is that they do not wish to give evidence in this matter in view of the fact that the civil claims have been settled. They have indicated that they do not at this stage - they do not at all wish to give evidence to oppose the application [amnesty application]. The community is not happy that Mr Mitchell be given amnesty, and be released without paying the full price of his actions and serving the full sentence that has been imposed on him by Court, but they wish to make clear to the Amnesty Committee that they will leave the decision relating to whether amnesty should or should not be granted to the discretion of the Committee, as they believe that it is in the interests of reconciliation to take our country out of its dark past, particularly as Mr Mitchell has indicated, to an extent unofficially through his counsel, that he wishes that some kind of forum be established to enable him to obtain full forgiveness from, and reconciliation with, the community and family members whose lives he has so tragically affected. The community of Trust Feeds has also requested me to advise the Amnesty Committee that they will try to forgive Mr Brian Mitchell if he becomes actively involved in the reconstruction of the community that he was responsible for destroying. The application itself is not being opposed, it is merely left to the discretion of the Amnesty Committee. Thank you, Mr Chairman.”<sup>30</sup>

Due to the statement of the Trust Feed community, Mitchell was cross-examined about reconciliation and forgiveness. He promised the commission that he was willing to make amends:

Mr Naidoo<sup>31</sup>: “Mr Mitchell, are you now desirous of making amends?”

Mr Mitchell: “Yes, I am. Although it may be impossible to do it, but I am desirous of that”

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/pmb/mitchell.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Mr Naidoo was Brian Mitchell’s legal representation

Mr Naidoo: “Insofar as you've set yourself down in paragraph 161, that you've become a Christian and understand the value of forgiveness, will you let us have your thoughts on that?”

Mr Mitchell: “Yes. I understand that forgiveness does not come cheaply. It is something that comes deeply from the heart. And I can just ask the people that were involved directly or indirectly and who have been affected by this case to consider forgiving me.”<sup>32</sup>

Mitchell requested a meeting with the Trust Feed community to apologize to the victims and achieve reconciliation. At the end of the amnesty hearing, the members of the commission were given a chance to give their perspectives on the case. Mr Naidoo, who represented Mitchell, argued that: “Brian Mitchell must be released.... I then exhort the Committee to give Brian Mitchell that chance to make amends, because he comes here having served five years in prison. He comes here also as an individual who has also lost everything. Yes, I would agree and concede that he has not lost as much as the victims have lost, but the whole purpose of granting of amnesty is so that one may have reconciliation.... Brian Mitchell has told you (referring to the commission) that he wants to make amends. He should be granted amnesty for him to go and involve himself in the community then the door to forgiveness is still open. And this grant of amnesty would then also assist in bringing about that reconciliation”.<sup>33</sup>

In 1997 the commission granted amnesty to Mitchell (TRC Report Vol. 5, 1998:394). “The commission found that Mitchell had made a full disclosure of all the relevant facts of the killings and that he did have a political motive as the incident had been part of the then government’s onslaught against liberation movements like the UDF”.<sup>34</sup> The commission arranged a meeting between Mitchell and the Trust Feed community, the purpose of which was for Mitchell to make amends, to ask for forgiveness, and to achieve reconciliation. Some of the critical features for reconciliation were already in place: Mitchell had confessed, he appeared to regret his terrible deeds, and had requested forgiveness. “At the same time, the community of Trust Feed was still

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<sup>32</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode46/playlist.htm>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/pmb/mitchell.htm>

<sup>34</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode32/playlist.htm>

in pain and needed time to heal its wounds, but paved the way for forgiveness by asking Mitchell to commit himself to play a part in the reconstruction of the Trust Feed as an explicit act of remorse. The TRC facilitated the various stages of the process” (TRC Report Vol. 5, 1998:394).

“Brain Mitchell had revealed the truth about the killings during his amnesty hearing. Community members were able to work through their feelings to the point where they were willing to meet Mitchell. Mitchell returned to Trust Feed to address the community and to ask for forgiveness” (TRC report Vol. 5, 1998:395). “He pledged to honour the community’s request to help reconstruct itself. The reconciliation meeting was held in July 1997 and was well attended by the Trust Feed community including both ANC and IFP members” (TRC report Vol. 5, 1998:395). Based on an SABC news video about this meeting, most people that attended the meeting were old men and women, probably between 40 to 60 years of age, and few young people. “The community was given enough time to express its feelings and ask direct, clarifying questions to Mitchell. Mitchell was also given an opportunity to express his feelings and ask for forgiveness” (TRC report Vol. 5, 1998:395). In this way, two parties that were divided by negative feelings of resentment and rage were able to come together with the common purpose of reconciliation. For the Trust Feed community, which was polarized and separated by critical forces, it presented a chance to help re-establish broken relationships and produce a stronger logic of togetherness (TRC report Vol. 5, 1998:394). At the meeting one of the victims, Mavis Madondo, expressed her feelings to Mitchell, saying:

“I have eight children and he [her husband] died on the 3rd of December 1988. There is not even a cent that I am getting. I have to look after myself. I wash clothes for Indians in Durban because I want to take care of my children. I have children that have passed matric and they have not furthered their studies because their father is not here anymore, who died because of Mitchell. When we were at the TRC hearings Mitchell said that he is determined to work hand in hand with us. Where I wish for help is that he should support my children. I have no home; my house was burnt down. I have nothing. I stay in rented

rooms. There is nobody who provides for me; there is nobody buying food for my family. Brian Mitchell should tell me what he will do for me and my children.”<sup>35</sup>

Thenjiwe Mdunge, another one of the victims, said to a journalist present:

“I have nothing to say to him. I want to build my house because I am living in the mountains. I have nowhere to stay. I stay in a small house. I have no children anymore. Brian Mitchell wiped out all my children. I forgive him. Even though the Lord is watching some days I would sleep without eating because I could not eat. He has killed the children who provided for me.”<sup>36</sup>

After community members had expressed their feelings, Mitchell replied and said:

“I’d just like to thank the community for allowing me to come here today and for gathering together in this fashion. Without your goodwill to allow me to come here none of this could have taken place. I have come here because I know it’s the right thing to do. I cannot financially help my family and I cannot financially help anybody at this stage. I just want to take this opportunity, as I did at my amnesty hearing to say to the community I’m sorry for what has happened to them.”<sup>37</sup>

“More importantly, he sought to demonstrate his remorse in more concrete ways, by asking to be involved in helping to reconstruct and rebuild what his actions had destroyed. Expressing his admiration for Mitchell’s concern to give something back to the community” (Clark, 2012: 201), Tutu (1999: 138) argued that, “while one or two of the victims were not keen to forgive him, the majority were glad he had come, and by the time he left things had improved so much that they were waving him goodbye quite warmly”. Jabuliswe Ngubane, who had lost both her mother and her children in the attack, told a journalist: “It was not easy to forgive, but because he

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<sup>35</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode46/playlist.htm>

<sup>36</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode46/playlist.htm>

<sup>37</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode46/playlist.htm>

stepped forward to ask for forgiveness, I have no choice. I must forgive him” (Meiring, 2013:12). Mavis Mdonondo who lost her husband during the attack said: “I forgive him because he has come and asked for forgiveness because there is nothing we can do. They are dead. But all I would like to appeal for is that they should help with my eight children.”<sup>38</sup> “What was critical was not simply the revealing of the truth but also how both sides dealt with the truth; Mitchell by trying to do something positive for the community and the residents of Trust Feed by being open to the idea of forgiveness” (Clark, 2012:201).

“The reconciliation meeting was a success and the spirit of goodwill and willingness to forgive by the Trust Feed community was touching. The community’s sense of trust was still very fragile and needed to be sustained by Mitchell’s long-term commitment to his offer. The fact that the community opened its heart to Brian Mitchell made it vulnerable to secondary violation and traumatization should Mitchell fail to honour his offer of reconciliation. The meeting was the beginning of a long process of reconciliation. Reconciliation at the meeting led to the healing of community tensions between UDF and IFP members. During the meeting, leaders of both parties expressed a great willingness to work together as a united community and committed themselves to follow-up meetings” (TRC Vol. 5, 1998:395-6).

The story of Brian Mitchell introduces people to a different kind of forgiveness and reconciliation. Here forgiveness was granted due to the conditions to restructure the community and build long-term reconciliation. Mitchell acted upon his remorse by helping the community regain what was lost due to his operations, helping physically with reconstruction, but he did not contribute financially. In spite of the tensions and uncertainty, this case became an example of forgiveness and reconciliation. In October 2003, Jacob Zuma – then the deputy president – described the story of Trust Feed as “a microcosm of the story of South Africa, a story of pain and suffering, followed by forgiveness, reconciliation, reconstruction and development” (Clark, 2012:201).

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<sup>38</sup> <https://sabctr.c.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode46/playlist.htm>

## The Thapelo Mbelo case

Thapelo Mbelo was a “black police informer who infiltrated a group of seven young black activists” from Gugulethu township, in Cape Town (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011:545). Mbelo pretended to be a “member of the then banned ANC sent by his commander in exile to train the young activists” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011:545). Since the activists had no previous “military training”, they were given a “crash course” by Thapelo in the use of firearms (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011:545). According to Gobodo-Madikizela (2011:545), “this was a strategy used by apartheid security police throughout the country: they trained young black activists, and once the activists were ready to fight the system they would be entrapped by the police and killed”. Gobodo-Madikizela (2011:545) claims that “these incidents were reported in the media as terrorist attacks that were obstructed by the police”. The apartheid security police aimed to impart fear in South Africa’s black population, especially the anti-apartheid formations, and to display the security police as well-organized in fighting opponents of the state (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011:545).

After their training was completed, the youth activists wanted to attack a police bus transporting senior policemen to the nearby Gugulethu Police Station. Mbelo discussed this with the activists and then reported his conversation with them to the apartheid security commanders. Mbelo then led the activists to the wrong location, where they came across the police forces and were killed (Kobe, 2014:81). This incident was known as the “Gugulethu seven” and occurred in March 1986. “The police claimed that the deceased were known terrorists who had been killed during a legitimate anti-terrorist operation” (TRC Vol 3, 1998:451). In 1997, Mbelo applied for amnesty through the TRC. He confessed that he trained the activists and then entrapped them leading to their deaths. However, Mbelo claimed that events did not occur as planned and that the seven young men were not supposed to have been killed but rather arrested (Kobe, 2014:81). The TRC commission granted Mbelo amnesty for his full disclosure of the incident (Kobe, 2014:81-2).

At the TRC, Mbelo requested to meet with the families of the victims. He met with the “Gugulethu Seven” mothers and asked for their forgiveness. The SABC news reported that Mbelo’s meeting with the mothers was difficult. This is because the mothers did not only ask him questions, but

also expressed disgust for his crimes.<sup>39</sup> The mothers of the victims spoke angrily to Mbelo and accused him of selling his blood to the apartheid government (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011:546).

Mbelo apologized and asked for forgiveness:

“As I am asking for forgiveness some will forgive me, others will not. I know that I will die with a guilty conscience for I have done a terrible thing. I am asking for the parents of those sons, who were there on that day, I ask them for forgiveness from the bottom of my heart.”<sup>40</sup>

In response one of the mothers, Mrs Ngewu, said:

“I am the mother of Christopher. He was the bread-winner at home. Inside of you, you knew that you were going to kill your own brothers. How did you feel about that?”<sup>41</sup>

Thaphelo Mbelo replied:

“Mama, I am still feeling guilty.”<sup>42</sup>

Another mother, Irene Mnxinwa, said:

“He says he was forced to do what he did and that he didn’t want to do it. But he was working for the system. He did it to his own brother like Cain did it to Abel.”<sup>43</sup>

One of the victims’ sisters said:

“We feel sorry for you. You said you were used by the system. And you were saving your own life. We can’t forgive you. This was my only brother whom you sold out. We can’t forgive you.”<sup>44</sup>

The brother of another victim said:

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<sup>39</sup> <https://sabctrc.saha.org.za/tvseries/episode75/playlist.htm>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

“I’m willing to forgive you my friend, but speak the truth. I’m willing to forgive you. I’m really, really willing.”<sup>45</sup>

After all the victims had expressed themselves, Mrs Ngewu spoke to Mbelo, saying:

“I understand that Thaphelo means ‘prayer.’ I hope you live up to your name. I understand you are the same age as Christopher. I forgive you although I know this will not bring my child back from the grave. It will serve no purpose not to forgive you. God will punish me for that. As the Bible says, we should forgive those who sin against us.”<sup>46</sup>

At the end of the meeting, Mbelo was forgiven by the victims’ mothers and reconciled with them. In this case both reconciliation and forgiveness were achieved, even though the process was difficult. Mrs Ngewu claimed that not offering forgiveness to Mbelo would not serve any purpose: “It will serve no purpose not to forgive you. God will punish me for that. As the Bible says, we should forgive those who sin against us.”<sup>47</sup> According to Krog (1998:109), following this meeting, Mrs Ngewu said on SABC radio: “this thing called reconciliation ... if I am understanding it correctly ... if it means this perpetrator, this man who killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, then I support it.” According to Krog (2008:356), “Mrs Ngewu’s words mean that she understood that Mbelo killed because he had lost his humanity”. Krog (2008:357) argues that Mrs Ngewu understood that to forgive the offender would open up the opportunity for him to regain his humanity and to change intensely. According to Krog, Mrs Ngewu understood that “the loss of her son affected her own humanity and that if indeed the offender felt himself driven by her forgiveness to regain his humanity, then it would open up the possibility for her too to become fully human again” (Krog, 2008:357).

According to Krog (2008:357), “the ability of victims to offer forgiveness and reconcile with the perpetrators of gross human rights violations is rooted in African Traditional Religion (ATR). She argues that although there are no ten commandments to identify sin and evil in ATR, evil is

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.irisfilms.org/films/long-nights-journey-into-day/guguletu-7>

constituted as anything that disturbs the interconnectedness of human beings. In ATR a human being is a human being through other human beings, a concept known as Ubuntu". Krog (2008) argue that forgiveness at the TRC was rooted in this notion of interconnectedness. Conradie (2013:60) argues that "sometimes victims show the willingness to forgive perpetrators because they realize that both victims and perpetrators may have been victims of the apartheid system". In the Mbelo's case victims offered forgiveness because they realized that the damage cannot be undone, as evidence by Mrs Ngewu's comments above.

## Argument and conclusion

The form of forgiveness found in the three cases discussed above differs from case to case. In the St James church massacre case forgiveness was influenced by religious belief, whereas in the Brain Mitchell case it was accompanied by the condition that the apology was followed by concrete actions. In the Thapelo Mbelo case, forgiveness was influenced by empathy, humanity and Ubuntu. In all three cases the victims of political violence granted forgiveness to regain their humanity, find closure, restore what had been destroyed by the offender, and heal from the past violence for a better future. In each case, there was will and unwill by the victims or their relatives to forgive the offenders.

According to my analysis, the St James church massacre case is different from the other two cases. One of victims, Dawie Ackerman, asked for signs of remorse from the perpetrators and also asked whether they would like to be reconciled with the victims. After perpetrators gave such signs of remorse, victims offered forgiveness, even though it might be argued that offenders offered those signs of remorse because they wanted amnesty. The victims in the St James church massacre claimed that as Christians, they have to forgive as Jesus had forgiven all sinners. Victims presented forgiveness since they realized that offenders were also victims of the apartheid. Some victims acknowledged with the offender' pain against an unfair system, while others presented forgiveness as they realized that they too were offenders during apartheid in some way or another.

The Brian Mitchell case, on the other hand, offers a different perspective on forgiveness. The forms of forgiveness and reconciliation found in that case included conditions of restructuring and restoring the community the perpetrator had destroyed. The victims in that case claimed that once the community was fully restored then reconciliation would be achieved and forgiveness granted.

In the Mbelo case, there were visible signs such as regret from the offender, which led victims to offer forgiveness. Those signs were one of the reasons victims considered forgiveness. I also believe that truth-telling, apology and reconciliation were the main reasons that influenced most of victims' forgiveness in the Mbelo case. Although there may have been visible signs of regret, confession and an apology, victims preserved that to offer forgiveness is not only significant for the offender, but also for themselves, and the country. They argued that there is a need to forgive "in order to be human again and for reconciliation to take place". Therefore, the victims argue that not granting forgiveness would not assist any resolve; instead, God would punish them for not granting forgiveness to those who had wronged them. They argued that God also forgives them for their sins, as I demonstrated through citations in the discussion above.

As I said at the beginning of the chapter, my aim was to explore two forms of violence: political violence initiated by the state and the violence of resistance. The TRC cases I choose reflected these forms of violence: two cases were based on state violence (Brian Mitchell and Thapelo Mbelo) and one was about violent acts of resistance (St James massacre). Based on my argument in this chapter, the possible meaning of forgiveness in political violence is the process where a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude about a violent act against them to regain their humanity, restore their lives, heal and find closure. This kind of forgiveness can be influenced by religious beliefs, empathy, Ubuntu and humanity as I have shown in the three cases discussed above. My understanding of the role of forgiveness in political violence is that it helps to reconstruct the society, reduce anger and vengeance, and restore the humanity of both the victim and the offender. Forgiveness becomes political forgiveness when performed in response to political injustices. The significance of forgiveness in the context of politics is associated with "the idea that without forgiveness the past cannot return to its place as the past". On the other

hand, *with* “the help of forgiveness we can hope to build up the feeling of being linked to others, and of being part of something larger than ourselves” (Misztal, 2015:2).

# CHAPTER 4: Forgiveness in sexual violence

## Introduction

This chapter will focus on examining the meaning of forgiveness in sexual violence. Firstly, I give a brief history of sexual violence going back to the era of slavery and early years of colonialism. Secondly, I examine and study forgiveness in cases of sexual violence using secondary and primary literature. Lastly, I study the possible meaning of forgiveness in the framework of sexual violence and present and study different kinds of forgiveness using selected cases of sexual violence, which I discuss in detail below.

## The concept of sexual violence

Sexual violence is the sociological term (Smetana, 2020:3) referring to any sexual act or effort to acquire a sexual act by violence or force, or acts focused against a person's sexuality, regardless of the relationship to the victim (Petersen, Bhana and McKay, 2005:1234). Pumla Gqola (2015:21) claims that sexual violence is a global phenomenon that occurs across huge phases of human history and it is not particular to South Africa. Feminists define sexual violence as the communication of patriarchal power, enforcing submission reigning in, and punishing disobedience (Gqola, 2015:21). It is an extreme act of violence and power. Sexually violent acts take place in many different settings and sceneries, such as rape of non-romantic associates; rape in marriage or dating relationships; gang rape; and sexual harassment. Any sexual activity that is not consensual is considered rape (Dartnall and Jewkes, 20134).

## The historical roots of sexual violence in South Africa

The Dutch East India Company was formed in March 1602 to enable Dutch merchants to challenge the Portuguese monopoly over the spice trade in Asia, and also to better compete with British merchants. The Dutch gave the company rights to challenge whatever monopolies existed while establishing its own monopoly and refreshment station in 1649 at the Cape of Good Hope.

Jan van Riebeeck led a group of men to the Cape, where they colonized and enslaved Africans (Gqola, 2015:42). Cape Town housed slaves owned by the Dutch East India Company (Gqola, 2015:42). South African history reminds us of the rape of slaves, which was an essential part of the architecture of Cape society in 1679. The Dutch East India Company were the first to own slaves and sex workers and operate a brothel in South Africa. Women were raped and prostituted, and children produced from rape were enslaved from birth (Gqola, 2015:42).

The rape of slaves was routine within the slave culture which emerged at the time. Ideologies were created by the colonizers to justify raping slaves. These ideologies included the idea that violence against slave women could not be categorised as rape because they were objects and legally incapable of being violated. This means that even freed slaves could not be sexually violated (Gqola, 2015:43). Gqola (2015) argues that the rape of slaves was used as means of exercising power over women.

Rape was used as a weapon of war during the colonial era (Gqola, 2015:49). War and conquest contributed to the occurrence of rape in South Africa. During the colonial period and throughout the apartheid era, rape was used by those in power as a weapon to ensure control, submission and interracial conformity (Britton, 2006:145). During apartheid, the death penalty was used to punish sex offenders. However, men (both white and black) were never punished or hanged for raping black women, only black men were convicted and only if they had raped a white woman. During the apartheid era rape was rationalized through race by the apartheid government, creating the idea that black women cannot be raped; sexual victimization was only considered when it affected white people (Gqola, 2015:52). "Apartheid's enforcers used the threat of sexual violence as a tool of political control. State guards and interrogators used the threat of rape and sexual abuse to terrorize women held in political detention. Police and military employees also sexually abused women outside prison. Although apartheid alone did not cause the rape problem in South Africa" (Anderson, 2000:791), it contributed to it alongside many other social ills such as poverty and violence (Anderson, 2000:793). This history of colonial and apartheid sexual violence is connected to post-apartheid sexual violence. The colonial problem continues to haunt

people in the present day. Rape has become a societal norm that is used by men to control women or maintain their power as men (Gqola, 2015:63).

## The politics of sexual violence

Apartheid violence and trauma contribute to sexual violence in contemporary South Africa. The specific damage that was done to “black men's self-esteem” is one of the problems in post-apartheid society (du Toit, 2014:103). Research reveals that sexual violence in South Africa speaks to the particular humiliation experienced by black men under apartheid. Black men were called “boys”, treated as children, and denied respect. Du Toit (2014:103) suggests that “men affirm and perform their masculinity through sexual violence in an attempt to heal their sense of themselves as damaged or incomplete”. But if that were the case, it would follow that after a political transition South African man would act differently and yet there doesn't seem to have been a significant change in men's behaviour (du Toit, 2014:104). In most cases men felt like women were favored by the political transition (du Toit, 2014:113). Du Toit (2014:114) argues that “men are understood as experiencing a loss or crisis in masculinity due to the new democratic win that threatens to undo patriarchy or undeserved male privilege”. “Financial liberation and sexual self-sufficiency, or at least political claims on the part of women”, are taken by men as a general insult to their masculinity, even to the point of emasculating them (du Toit, 2014:114). Sexual violence becomes “a socially endorsed punitive project for maintaining patriarchal order”, since men feel like they are losing power over women (du Toit, 2014:115).

Women were also deeply injured during apartheid. South African history provides evidence that women fought alongside men during apartheid as they did in other African liberation struggles (du Toit, 2014:105). Women's roles in the “anti-apartheid struggle” positioned them in risk of detention, torture, exile and sexual harassment. The violence women experienced during the struggle against apartheid included rape and gang rape, and electric shock therapy (Britton, 2006:149). South African Defense Forces often raped black women, regardless of whether they were citizens or part of the revolutionary forces (Britton, 2006:149). “Women were at risk not only from the opposing forces, but were often also subjected to rape or harassment by their

comrades, including in the ANC camps in exile. This abuse often went unreported out of loyalty to the fight against apartheid” (Britton, 2006:149). Violence during the struggle was not entirely against women prisoners or fighters, men also were exposed to sexual violence. The TRC hearings revealed how men often experienced sexual violation at the hands of the regime, such as electric shocks to the genitals as a means of torture and a method of intimidation (Britton, 2006:149).

During TRC hearings, there was no category for sexual violence against women. The sexual violence that women faced was addressed under the category of “severe ill-treatment”. According to the Khulumani Support Group, this category also included “solitary confinement”. Even when women reported instances of sexual victimization to the commission, the acts were classified as “severe ill treatment” rather than gender-based violence (Anderson, 2000:789). The TRC did not fully investigate and document the sexual abuse suffered by women. The commissioners failed to inquire into the experiences of women arrested and harassed (Anderson, 2000:789). The women who came before the TRC were questioned about everything *except* sexual violence.

I believe that if the key origins of the current sexual violence in South Africa were located in the past, then after twenty years of democracy one would at least start to see positive trends in male behaviour due to the successful political transition (du Toit, 2014:104). But this has not been the case. Rape cases in South Africa increase every day. The reported occurrence of rape increased with the democratic transition and South Africa has regularly had the most rapes reported per capita in the world (Britton, 2006:146).

## Forgiveness in contexts of sexual violence

Forgiveness has many different meanings that depend on what motivates the victims to forgive and the situation that is forgiven. For instance, the meaning of forgiveness for victims of violence perpetrated in a marriage might be different from the meaning attached to forgiveness by childhood trauma victims. But there are also similarities that can be found in these different meanings of forgiveness such as what motivated forgiveness or the reason for granting forgiveness. According to Marshall (2001:263), forgiveness has different meanings depending on

one's condition, the nature of the harm suffered and one's motivation to forgive. (Marshall, 2001:263).

The literature on forgiveness is challenged by some scholars, such as Lamb and Murphy (2002), who raise a number of objections. These objections are articulated in their book *"Before Forgiving: Cautionary Views of Forgiveness in Psychotherapy"*. Lamb (2002:6) argues that there is no general agreement concerning the definition of forgiveness. She argues that some authors promote forgiveness only *after* the offender has made amends and other scholars promote forgiveness no matter what the response from the offender is. Another concern is that there is little explanation for the concepts developed for the forgiveness process (Lamb, 2002:6). According to Lamb (2002:6), in debates about individual forgiveness, "authors tend to consider only the benefits to the forgiver and rarely the possible losses he or she might experience". The works on forgiveness is full of expectations about the relevance of forgiveness to all kinds of individuals, to all groups, no matter how injured or wounded (Lamb, 2002:6). Murphy (2002, 2003) cited in Lamb (2002:8) suggests that releasing negative and spiteful feelings may be equal to "letting go of self-respect, self-defense, and allegiance to moral order".

The principle of forgiveness may be challenged, as it could be claimed that victims are pressured to forgive; forgiveness may be unjust in placing the problem of reparation on the victims, who have already been injured and objectified by violence or other injustices (Philpott, 2013:401). Difficulty in forgiving depends on issues such as the seriousness of the offence and the relationship among the victim and the offender. Forgiveness is a complex journey with significant individual differences depending on one's circumstances (Freedman, 1998:202).

In *"Forgiveness, Women, and Responsibility to the Group"*, Sharon Lamb rightly critiques forgiveness therapies that "fit all too effortlessly into an individualized psychological view of victimization that removes the social and gendered context in which such harm has been carried out" (Lamb, 2006:46). Her main argument is that the request of these rehabilitations to victims of violence is challenging (Lamb, 2006:46). Forgiveness therapy, she argues, suggests what kind of victim you ought to be – the kind that lets go of negative emotions such as hate, and looks back on "one's injury" with a reserved non-emotional eye (Lamb, 2006:57).

“In recent years, forgiveness has received a lot of attention from researchers as a therapeutic tool that may be useful in addressing some of the distress encountered by victims of crime” (Field, Zander and Hall, 2013: 236). A meta-analytic review by Lundahl et al. (2008) (cited in Field, Zander and Hall, 2013:236) concluded that forgiveness involvements can have generally positive effects as well as improving self-esteem. “In light of this research and given the high levels of distress that victims of crime have been shown to experience, a more detailed understanding of the meaning of forgiveness to victims of crime seems timely” (Field, Zander and Hall, 2013:236).

Forgiving, as I understand it, is a form of emotive hostility. When victim the forgives the offender, victim takes distance from the attributing feelings formerly established as a response to the offence. I believe that a victim does not forget the offence or how they felt about it. As I have argued in chapter 2, forgiveness does not disturb the procedure of justice or disregard the punishment the offender deserves for their behavior. The victim can forgive and still seek criminal justice. However, forgiveness occurs inside the victim’s self and frees them from hate and suffering post-offence. The conviction and trial processes of the offender for his behavior are independent of this process (Prieto-Ursúa, 2021:2).

Forgiveness processes often begin with a clear increase in victims’ self-awareness. This usually involves an understanding of the deep influence the offence had and continues to have on the victim’s life generally and their psychological well-being (Field, Zander and Hall, 2013:241). Failure to forgive the offender is related to intensify psychological suffering, because forgiveness assists the victim release the pain and distress of having been injured, harmed, or victimized by other people (Kandemiri, 2019:1045). Forgiveness concentrate on more than just reducing anger and growing self-esteem. Forgiveness includes a focus on the contradictions of ranging kindness and goodwill to those who were not kind to the victims (Freedman and Enright, 2017:6). Forgiveness can be found in sexual violence cases and its existence in those cases does not necessarily interfere with justice. In the following section I will examine cases of sexual violence where forgiveness *and* justice are present.

## Cases of sexual violence

I have selected cases of sexual violence that occurred between 1976 and 2001 where forgiveness was present. I chose these cases because they help me to explain the relationship between forgiveness and sexual violence and to look at how recovery is achieved after sexual victimization and what forgiveness means during victims' recovery processes. I will study these cases through memoirs written by victims, articles that are based on their cases and interviews done by offenders and victims. A memoir is used to document the human complexity to understand one's life experiences; these memoirs that I will closely study are based on traumatic experience of the victims and documenting their journey of healing. I however begin my analysis with the case of an offender that has been studied by scholars such as Smith (2009) and Basu & Mabuse (2012).

### The Dumisani Rebombo case

Dumisani Rebombo was 15 years old when he became a sexual offender. He tells his story to encourage men not to rape but to protect women and children (Smith, 2009). I chose this particular case because of how it shows how forgiveness can heal and change the life of both the victim and the offender.

The boys in his village of Blinkwater, in Limpopo province, used to mock Rebombo because he didn't herd cattle like any other boys in his village. Instead, he would go home to assist his sisters. He also didn't have a girlfriend. Because he seemed to be different from other young boys, he was challenged to demonstrate his manhood. The conventional means to do that was by having sex; this included forced sex. Rebombo always rejected such behaviour until the day he gave in to peer pressure. Two of his friends picked out a girl for him to rape. The girl was picked based on her behavior, she was perceived of as thinking she was smarter than the village boys, whom she refused to date (Smith, 2009).

Rebombo was frightened by his friends' behavior and what he was about to do because he had neither had sex before nor engaged in rape. Later that evening he met his friends who were drunk

and high on marijuana. They started raping the young girl. The first boy raped her, then the second. Finally, it was Rebombo's chance. The only thing Rebombo could remember was that the girl was screaming the whole time (Basu and Mabuse, 2012). Once it was over, Rebombo felt awful, wracked with remorse and terrified that his parents would find out. But he never gave a thought about how the victim was feeling. The girl Rebombo raped never reported what occurred to her and Rebombo and his friends were never charged. Rebombo claims that the reason the victim never spoke about the rape to anyone was that she was scared of the societal judgment that comes with rape (Basu and Mabuse, 2012).

Few years after the incident, Rebombo was working at a "gender equality organization", "where he spoke with rape victims about the different emotional stages they went through after being sexually violated". It was here that he started thinking about his victim and about the fact that she did not even have a chance to seek counselling. "Rebombo began feeling the need to make amends for his actions". He went back to his village to try to do so. He was too nervous to go to the victim's house because she was now married. Instead, he decided to meet her in the local clinic (Basu and Mabuse, 2012).

I believe the reason Rebombo sought forgiveness was that he understood better the effects and consequences of sexual violation since he started working with victims of rape. Another reason he sought to make amends was that he wanted his victim to know that he felt bad about the violence he had caused and that he was a changed man, now working with other men to prevent rape. Rebombo was ready to take responsibility for his actions. The offender and victim sat down together. Rebombo was prepared to go to jail if that would serve as justice for the victim. He told her how sorry he was for what he had done and that he understood the damage he caused in her: "I realize I caused you pain 20 years ago. I understand how wrong this was and I came to apologize" (Smith, 2009). The victim cried and told Rebombo how her life had turned out after she was raped: "after you, two other men raped me. I've never told anyone that. Every time I think of it my whole-body shakes. I've never really been well" (Smith, 2009). She shared that, "...when her husband touches her, she jumps, even though she is happy with him. She suffers

from nightmares. She felt her life was dysfunctional because of Rebombo's actions" (Basu and Mabuse, 2012).

Rebombo asked for forgiveness from his victim. The victim told Rebombo that she thought he meant well and she would try to get the resentment out of her heart and forgive him. She told him that "the fact that you've come 600 miles to apologize helps me believe you and I'm grateful. Do me a favor. Teach your son not to do what you did to me" (Smith, 2009). After the reconciliation process was over, Rebombo felt guilty and humiliated but also angry at himself that he had gone on with his life when the victim was living in sadness (Basu and Mabuse, 2012). According to Rebombo, forgiveness unloaded a lot of weight he had been carrying all these years but making amends also made him realize how much pain he had caused the victim. The reconciliation process also gave the victim a chance to express herself to her offender and to find closure and move on. I think the forgiveness offered in this case was a gift Rebombo got from his victim and that made him change his behavior and his way of thinking. Here forgiveness meant the release of anger and bitterness towards the offender. My argument, in this case, is that forgiveness was granted as a gift to the offender not because he deserved such a gift but because the victim gave forgiveness for the sake of her own well-being (Marshall, 2001:265).

Rebombo now works for "Sonke Gender Justice Network" as the national manager of "One Man Can", a project to promote healthy relationships between men and women. He states that "Violent acts must stop" and silence of men who witness such acts (Basu and Mabuse, 2012). The existence of forgiveness in that reconciliation process influenced the offender to work on changing the national mindset so that men will no longer think disrespecting women is a good thing (Basu and Mabuse, 2012).

## The Zizo Apleni Case

Zizo Apleni was born in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Her childhood was normal and like any other child she was loved and cherished. She did not know that that was to be short-lived and she learnt in a hard way that not all adults were loving and kind (Apleni, 2019:21). Apleni wrote a book about her rape story to capture the experiences she had as a young child. The purpose of

the book was to inform people about the signs of child sexual abuse; it offers support to victims of sexual violence and shows the importance of forgiveness. Apleni wrote her book with the help of Dinga Fatman, an editor with Mpilo Publishing, and with the guidance of her pastor.

At the age of 6, Apleni lived with her father and stepmother (Apleni, 2019:26). Her home life was dysfunctional and her father would constantly abuse her and her stepmother. Her stepmother would often leave her husband and go live with her family leaving Apleni alone with her father (Apleni, 2019:32). One day when Apleni and her father were left alone, he asked her to touch his genitals. At the time she thought it was a normal thing for a father to do with his daughter (Apleni, 2019:34). She was seven years old when her father began raping her (Apleni, 2019:6). He would get rid of the evidence of his crime by making sure that he cleaned her genitals. Apleni claims that her father continued to rape her frequently (Apleni, 2019:39). Her father normalized the rape and made Apleni think that fatherly love comes with pain (Apleni, 2019:41). Apleni writes that being raped by her father made her feel 'self-conscious' and different from other children, she preferred her own space and she started isolating herself (Apleni, 2019:42).

After a year Apleni went back to live with her mother, but she never told her that she was being raped by her father. Although she lived full time with her mother, during school holidays she would visit her father, and when her stepmother was not around he would continue to rape her. According to Apleni, this behavior continued for years (Apleni, 2019:46-47). Her father would threaten her with physical and emotional harm if she told anyone what he was doing. He told her that no one would believe he had raped her, and that no one would love her, even her mother, and Apleni believed him and never told anyone what he was doing to her (Apleni, 2019:64).

In 2007, Apleni fell pregnant with her father's child (Apleni, 2019:86). When she told her mother about the rape incident and who the father of the child was, her mother took her to the police station and reported the crime. Her father was arrested for rape. Apleni was relieved that her mother believed her (Apleni, 2019:96-7). Her father did not confess or feel sorry for what he did to her but acted surprised by the allegations and claimed that he had no knowledge whatsoever of the rapes (Apleni, 2019:100). Since her father denied the allegations the hospital tested the

DNA of the unborn child for evidence (Apleni, 2019:102). Apleni later had a miscarriage (Apleni, 2019:107).

Apleni's family was divided: some believed her and others did not. She suffered from depression and post-traumatic stress, sometimes thinking she saw her father even when he was not present (Apleni, 2019:121). Apleni described that "I felt like my father would come to school and abduct me" (Apleni, 2019:135). A few years later, she began diverting emotional pain by cutting herself (Apleni, 2019:135).

Apleni's court case against her father didn't go as anticipated. The justice system kept failing her and the court case dragged on for five years (Apleni, 2019:129). In 2017, her father decided to confess to his crime and Apleni was called by correctional service and told that he had been convicted. He even repeated the confession in front of her and her family (Apleni, 2019:174). Apleni insisted on hearing the confession and also requested that her father confess in front of his family members, who did not believe Apleni. Apleni says she was happy that the truth came out and she could now fully move on from the past. In her book, Apleni claims that she had forgiven her father by the time she met him in prison to hear his confession, she said that she had no resentment towards him and she did not even fear him (Apleni, 2019:175). Apleni states that: "I had a chance to tell my dad how the whole ordeal damaged me, he could not answer me when I asked him why he did what he did" (Apleni, 2019:175). When the reconciliation meeting was over, Apleni claims that she hugged her father and got the closure she needed for such a long time (Apleni, 2019:175).

Apleni's journey to forgiveness and healing was not influenced by the arrest of her father. Instead, she received wisdom and guidance from the church and she allowed God to take control of her life. This was not an easy journey for her and she questioned God for allowing such traumatic experience to happen to her; if God loved every individual then why would he allow her father to make her feel so much pain? Apleni describes that "as I get ready for church with that anger, little did I know that day was my day of salvation" (Apleni, 2019:171). During the church service, she claims that the pastor called "all those fighting inner battles" to come and accept Jesus in their lives (Apleni, 2019:171). Apleni writes, "I was struggling so much with

internal conflict and did not know how Jesus fitted in this new life of mine. I did accept him but it seemed nothing was getting better... until I was fully committed to make Jesus alive in my life. I received the wisdom and guidance to make Jesus alive in my life and things started to fall into place” (Apleni, 2019:172).

The first journey to healing was forgiving herself and stopping beating herself up for something her father did to her (Apleni, 2019:172). She then forgave her younger self and her father and focused on healing. Apleni claims that her healing and forgiveness journey was hard but with the help of God she waded through it and began to understand the emotions and thoughts that come with being victimized at a young age (Apleni, 2019:174). Apleni had a chance to tell the offender how the situation damaged her and that helped her find the closure she needed (Apleni, 2019:175). Forgiveness made her find herself and allow herself to transition from being a victim to be a survivor of rape. According to Apleni, forgiveness helped her to redefine herself, share love and inspiration with other people and not to define herself through her past (Apleni, 2019:182). Here forgiveness was granted without an apology from the offender; Apleni managed to find forgiveness even though her father initially showed no remorse. By the time her father showed remorse and asked for forgiveness, she already forgave him and herself and that is why she showed no hatred towards him. In this case forgiveness was influenced by religious beliefs.

## The Thandeki Umlilo Case

South African author Thandeki Umlilo’s (2002) memoir *Little Girl, Arise! New Life After Incest and Abuse* describes her experience of sexual abused by her father, uncle, and others. Umlilo’s sexual abuse began when she was in preschool, at the age of four (Umlilo, 2002:83). Umlilo claims that she does not write as one who has authority on the psychological aspects of sexual violence, but she hopes her story gives hope and healing to victims of childhood sexual abuse. She wrote her book with the help of her counsellor.

Umlilo grew up in a normal family household with her mother and father and her six siblings. Her father was an alcoholic and when under the influence of alcohol, ruled the household through violence (Umlilo, 2002:2). Umlilo’s sexual violation started when “her father called her into her

parent's bedroom and told her to touch his penis" (Umlilo, 2002:4). Because he was her father she did not argue. For long time Umlilo's parents' marriage had been very tense and abusive, and Umlilo speculated that as a result, her father used her to achieve his sexual needs. "Her father's sexual abuse continued for many years until Umlilo left home to become a nun; at that time, she began seeking help" (Steinbrenner, 2014:76).

Umlilo (2002:19) "kept her father's abuse a secret for many years. Even when her mother asked her if her father was abusing her she did not tell her secret". In her mind, she reasoned, that silence would create peace in the family (Umlilo, 2002:18). She describes how she attempted to separate herself from the abuse, a terrifying secret that lay buried deep within her that she tried to wash out of her consciousness the best she could (Umlilo, 2002:15). Umlilo declared that: "this was no easy task. By the time I reached my teen years, sexual abuse was the order of the day. It happened anytime, anyplace" (Umlilo, 2002:15). Umlilo was always around her father, helping him with his job, and he frequently raped her.

Her feeling of shame was overwhelming and caused her to experience dissociation and separate herself from others and be secretive. In her book she writes that,

"Traumatic experiences, unhealthy relationships and abuse breaks down the good self-image and forms a terrible pain which we call shame; toxic shame. It cuts deeply and is felt within. It divides us from ourselves and others. Because of the personal rejection, we disown ourselves. This demand covering up. This covering up can lead to a strong tendency to withdraw and to hide in a cloud of secretiveness and oblivion" (Umlilo, 2002:13).

Keeping the secret made her feel safe. However, her place of safety slowly became a place of misery and anger, not finding peace and closure for her pain and not healing from the pain made her life a living hell. Umlilo described her world "collapsing around her when she was 40 years old". She states that she then "understood why people commit suicide and she believed if she was that way inclined she may have well taken that road as an escape from her reality" (Umlilo, 2002:1). "She had, over the years, sought help and had received some very brief informal

counselling from a teacher as well as from others in her religious order. But it was not until she turned 40 and was at a critical juncture that she was able to find the help she needed to move towards healing” (Steinbrenner, 2014:99). It was not until she went into counselling that she was able to break free from the state of brokenness, anger, bitterness and keeping things to herself. She sought help because she was tired of surviving and she wanted to begin to live her life without being miserable. She committed herself to the journey of healing, so she could go through her pain, not past it (Umlilo, 2002:52).

Umlilo recognized much of her understanding of moving forward to forgiveness of what had occurred in her past. Forgiveness was a very significant aspect of her religious beliefs. With the help of psychological counseling, Umlilo began her healing journey. According to Steinbrenner (2014:101-2), there are serious stages in women’s mental health when a sexual offence has occurred. These moments are described as serious because they either function to help lead women victims into help-seeking or led them into undergoing a more weakening in their mental health. Psychological suffering can happen at any time after a woman has been victimized and when she receives counseling. Counseling is found to contribute to victims’s healing and forgiveness journey (Steinbrenner, 2014:102).

“As part of her process of moving towards healing, Umlilo wrote poems and stories and drew pictures that she said helped her access her past” (Umlilo, 2002:55-7). Umlilo argues that “as her counselling continued and as she dealt with the hurt, the shame, the anger, and all the other feelings and emotions that were so profoundly part of her past she felt empowered” (Umlilo, 2002:137). Umlilo claims that: “this empowerment means that we have dealt with much of our pain and in the process have become more fully human, more in touch with the sacredness of our being, more the vibrant person we were ordained to be” (Umlilo, 2002:130). In her process of healing, she faced and forgave her father and uncle through her imagination and dreams (Umlilo, 2002:138-42). She then confronted her brothers and non-family members who had sexually violated her, and expressed how she felt about the situation and how it had affected her life (Umlilo, 2002:142-6). Umlilo used the world of imagination to do this because most of her abusers were dead (Umlilo, 2002:130).

During her healing process, she came to realize that she was angrier at her mother than anyone who had violated her. She felt like her mother turned a “blind eye” to her sexual victimization and that she should have protected her. She confronted her mother through her imagination and in the end, she forgave her (Umlilo, 2002:149-52). All these reconciliation processes happened through her imagination, dreams, drawings and poems. For Umlilo, “it was very important to find forgiveness because of her religious beliefs”. In Umlilo’s case, forgiveness was influenced by religious beliefs. Umlilo argues that, “some say that forgiveness is not the ultimate aim, but as a Christian, I had no peace until I extended to each perpetrator the hand of forgiveness” (Umlilo, 2002:130).

According to Walton (2005:201), “the offender's unwill to apologize does not stop the victim from revealing the offence”. The victim can confess on behalf of the offender as she disrupts the silence and shares the specifics of the offence with someone such as a friend, legal authority, or therapist. By revealing, “the victim removes herself from a world of misperception in which she felt humiliation and hesitancy for anyone else to know about the abuse she experienced” (Walton, 2005:201). The victim will now be ready to place the blame where it belongs: on the offender. “To forgive, the victim needs to distinguish that something was wrong and someone was at fault. Once that is recognized, the process of forgiving and healing can proceed” (Walton, 2005:202). In this case, Umlilo confessed on behalf of the offenders through her imagination and broke her silence by speaking to a therapist.

## The Thordis Elva Case

This case is quite different from the other three cases; it is not a South African case, but it was inspired by South African TRC. The reconciliation meeting between the victim and the offender in this case happened in Cape Town. Thordis Elva was born in Iceland. She grew up in a normal family with her two siblings. As a teenager, she developed an eating disorder due to keeping things to herself (Elva and Stranger, 2017:57). Her boyfriend Tom Stranger was an 18-year-old exchange student from Australia. He came to Iceland through an exchange program (Elva and Stranger, 2017:69).

When Elva was 16 years old she believed sexual abuse was something that took place in dark alleys perpetrated by knife-wielding psychopaths. She had no idea that someone could be raped by someone they loved. Her perspective on rape changed after she became a rape victim (Elva and Stranger, 2017:12). Tom Stranger was her first love and she “felt like the luckiest girl alive to be going with him to the school Christmas dance”. However, that night was also the first time she drank alcohol and, as a result, she became brutally ill, drifting in and out of consciousness (Elva and Stranger, 2017:103). Stranger offered to take her home. She felt grateful to him as he laid her down in the safety of her bed. But that gratitude soon turned to horror as he proceeded to take off her clothes and rape her. Elva claimed that the pain was blinding and for her to stay stable, she silently counted the seconds on her alarm clock. That’s how she knew that there are 7,200 seconds in two hours (Elva and Stranger, 2017:104).

Two days later when she was still hobbling from pain, Stranger came by her house to end their relationship. Elva argues that “the rape tied her to a block of cement and the rejection pushed her over the edge. The shame and confusion made her withdraw from her friends and family who assumed she was suffering from her first heartbreak”. Elva claims that a few years later she was wading up to her knees in self-hate. She struggled with an eating disorder, alcohol abuse, and self-harm. Despite all her achievements, she doubted everything: her career choices, her romantic choices, and her self-worth. She was at war with the world, never really sure who the enemy was (Elva and Stranger, 2017:12).

Thordis claims that after nine years of bottling up her pain, she knew she had to do something to break the cycle and so she reached out to her offender. Along with an account of the violence that he had subjected her to, all she wished for was to find forgiveness even though she knew Stranger might not be open to reconciliation. She argues that “I realized that this was my way out of my suffering because regardless of whether or not my offender deserved my forgiveness, I deserved peace.”<sup>48</sup> Thordis wrote a letter to Stranger, she claims “I felt that I owed it to myself

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/527940389>

to speak my truth, to break my silence. So, I decided to send the letter. The very last thing I expected was the email that I got back”<sup>49</sup>

However, Elva received a typed confession in return, full of disarming regret. The reply from Tom Stranger read:

“Thordis, I don't know where to start. When I saw your name in my inbox, my spine went cold. My memories are still as clear as day. Please believe me when I say I have not forgotten what I did, and how wary I have to be of myself. I don't know how to reply. I want to call myself sick (but I know I am not), I want to say that you are so strong, so strong to be able to write to me and recall the events and my actions. I want to thank you for not hating me, although I'd like you to. It would make it easier for me. Without looking for a scratch of sympathy, I want to tell you that the events and emotions I was party to in Iceland have replayed in my head many times, usually when I am by myself for any length of time. They flash past me, vividly accurate, and then, shortly after the denial and positive character reinforcement, comes the question: 'Who am I?' It is a dark part of my memory. I've tried to suppress it. But this is not about me. Whatever I can do or offer you, I am more than willing. The question is where to go from here. You tell me” (Elva and Stranger, 2017:4).

This was the start of a long communication which, although helpful to Elva's healing still didn't bring her closure. “After eight years of writing to each other, she gathered the audacity to suggest a wild idea that they should meet up and face their past together in Cape Town”; Stranger was living in Australia and Elva was living in Iceland at the time<sup>50</sup>. Elva proposed this idea because she was tired of being a victim, tired of being sick and seeing herself as unlovable, and she believed she could move on if she could just look Stranger in the face and confront him (Elva and Stranger, 2017:26). When Elva was interviewed on TED radio hour she said that “the whole idea was ridden with doubt, I had multiple doubts along the way... this was, in very many ways scary but I felt also a necessary step for me to take. Even though I was not afraid of Tom. I would never have

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/527940389>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories-library/thordis-elva-and-tom-stranger/>

undertaken this journey if I would have thought that it posed a risk to my physical safety. But it was scary to face up to some of the pain of the past and to try and set myself free from it and that might or might not work.”<sup>51</sup>

Elva chose South Africa because she was inspired by the country’s history of forgiveness and the TRC (Elva and Stranger, 2017:18). Stranger argued that “the city of Cape Town itself proved to be a stunningly powerful environment to focus on reconciliation and forgiveness. Nowhere else has healing and rapprochement been tested as it has in South Africa. As a nation, South Africa sought to sit with the truth of its past and to listen to the details of its history.”<sup>52</sup> Elva claims that “no matter how I looked at my situation, I couldn’t think of a place better suited to prove to myself that violence can’t destroy my life or control my choices” (Elva and Stranger, 2017:18). Elva wanted a place where they could both leave their past behind (Elva and Stranger, 2017:33).

Stranger and Elva spent a week in Cape Town. They visited the Waterfront, Sea Point, Robben Island and other places. These tourist destinations helped them to open up their hearts instead of sitting around and talking (Elva and Stranger, 2017:53). Elva writes that during the days that her and Stranger were in Cape Town she got to know the person to whom she wished to grant forgiveness; their interaction was not only based on the traumatic experience they shared but also on what had since happened in their lives (Elva and Stranger, 2017:56). “At times, their search for understanding in Cape Town felt like an impossible quest and Elva wanted to give up and go home to her husband and son. But despite their difficulties, the journey resulted in a victorious feeling that finally something constructive could be built on the ruins”<sup>53</sup>.

Stranger’s life, since the assault he committed, had not been a good one and he was filled with guilt. Stranger confesses that he lived in denial of his problem and betrayal of his victim, Elva. Stranger distracted himself from what he had done through substance abuse and thrill-seeking and kept on trying to convince himself that he wasn’t a bad person. When he received an email

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/527940389>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/527940389>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories-library/thordis-elva-and-tom-stranger/>

from Elva in 2005 openly naming what he had done to her, all that he was in denial about become a reality. Elva's words bought back all the memories. That made Stranger face the damage that he has done and recognize his past brutality (Elva and Stranger, 2017:84).

Stranger apologized to Elva and also admitted that he raped her, stating "Forgive me for raping you, Thordis" (Elva and Stranger, 2017:104). Stranger said to Elva, "I knew it was wrong, even though I was just an 18-year-old kid who'd only been with one woman before you. Hell, even my ten-year-old self would've known that that was wrong. I've searched my soul for years trying to find the answer to how I could betray you like that. That's the least of what I owe you. But I haven't found anything. I have no answers" (Elva and Stranger, 2017:105).

Elva forgave Stranger and ordered him to "forgive himself, if for no other reason than that his guilty conscience wasn't helping him". Elva's forgiveness was not selfless, but it did offer Stranger some courage to face his responsibility. I believe that her forgiveness was an act of self-preservation, it comes intense from the heart and soul, its purpose is solely to serve the ties between the victim and offender, achieve reconciliation and for the offender to be human again.

The trip to Cape Town helped Elva to transform from being a victim of rape to being a survivor (Elva and Stranger, 2017:11). For Stranger, it has been a long journey to being able to acknowledge that he committed rape and to comprehend how Elva had to live with the effects of his actions. The forgiveness that Stranger received from Elva gave him hope about his future and helped him accept his responsibility and forgive himself.

In her interview with TED Radio hour, Elva said,

"So, for me, forgiveness is not something sacrificial that you give to someone else. It's very much an act of self-interest and an act of self-empowerment. And, first and foremost, release from negative emotions that, in my case, were very emotionally taxing and were taking a toll on all of my relationships and also on my well-being. But I also want

to make it clear that I do understand people that find other emotions empowering, such as anger. For some people, lingering in anger is a place where they feel empowered.”<sup>54</sup>

In this case, forgiveness helped both the victim and the offender. They were both stuck in silence and living in a dark past. Forgiveness helped them to let go of the past and to rewrite their future. Even though Elva granted forgiveness for her own sake, her gift of forgiveness to Stranger released her from his betrayal. The fact that the victim and the offender wrote a book together, which documented their experiences of reconciliation, shows that forgiveness has a great impact in people’s lives. Based on Elva and Stranger’s experience, I believe forgiveness helps the victim to rewrite their life story without being affected by the traumatic experience and in this case, forgiveness helps to rewrite the story of the victim and that of the offender. Thordis in her interview with TED Radio hour claims that “forgiveness and reconciliation resulted in a deeper understanding that helped her let go of self-blame and shame and questions that were keeping her up at night. So, in that sense, it's symbolic of this journey that she undertook to hand over responsibility that she wrongfully shouldered for many years to the person to whom it rightfully belonged so that she could move forward into a future that was as deeply marked by the past”<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, in this case, reconciliation and forgiveness were achieved successfully and benefited both the offender and the victim.

## Argument and conclusion

These cases have shown that forgiveness is important to how recovery is achieved after sexual victimization; I have reflected on what forgiveness means during the recovery process. Forgiveness is an action that places the person doing the forgiving in an empowered position relative to the person receiving the forgiveness.

I showed that the will to forgive can be moderated by several features including religious beliefs, current socioeconomic status, availability of physical and emotional support, and the level of

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/527940389>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/52794038>

trauma experienced. “This discovery needs to be considered by mental health practitioners when incorporating forgiveness in therapy” (Kandemiri, 2019:1054). Each case was similar in that forgiveness was granted for the sake of the victim not that of the offender; victims believed that forgiveness would help them find closure and healing. The impact of forgiveness in victims’ lives was for self-healing, peace, to regain their true selves and to stop living in the past.

The difference in these cases is what motivated the victims to consider forgiveness. In each case the motivation to forgive was different, except Umlilo and Apleni’s case wherein forgiveness was motivated by the victims’ religious beliefs. The relationship between forgiveness and sexual violence is a very complicated one since victims are expected to consider punishment instead of forgiveness. But forgiveness is important in sexual violence for the victim to find closure and be able to heal from the past, even though justice is served. Forgiveness does not disturb the procedure of justice or disregard the punishment the offender deserves for their behavior. In the cases of sexual violence, I studied above, forgiveness helped the victims to redefine themselves as survivors and stop defining themselves through pain. Forgiveness also helped the offender to redefine themselves, take accountability and responsibility, change their behaviour, and educate people to stop sexual violence. The value of forgiveness is powerful more than we think it is.

Based on my argument in this chapter, the possible meaning of forgiveness in cases of sexual violence is the process where a victim changes their feelings and attitudes about their sexual victimization to achieve self-esteem, healing from trauma, closure, and become a survivor of rape. This means that forgiveness in cases of violence helps the victim to move on from their trauma and helps the victim to stop defining themselves through the past. The kind of forgiveness found in sexual violence can be influenced by religious beliefs, healing, the example of the TRC, confession, and remorse. The role of forgiveness in sexual violence is to help the victims heal and let go of negative emotions such as hate, revenge, self-blame.

The study notes that the question of forgiveness in studies of sexual violence as well as forgiveness in the absence of reconciliation has not been fully researched. While there has been much research in the field of forgiveness, few researchers have taken forgiveness *without* reconciliation into consideration. Therefore, I will conclude this chapter by arguing that

forgiveness in sexual violence is based on healing and closure, even though in many cases reconciliation and an apology is not in place. This chapter has shown that forgiveness is granted for the victim's well-being not that of the offender.

## CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

In concluding my research, I will examine the measures and strategies required to empower change in humanity. I will examine the use and understanding of the concepts of forgiveness in violence. This will be done by firstly reflecting on what I have studied. Secondly, do an assessment of the effectiveness of forgiveness in violence, through case studies of sexual and political violence. Lastly, I will compare the meaning of forgiveness found in both political and sexual violence, to search for what could differ between the two kinds of violence and investigate the similarities that can be found.

In this study I have investigated the role of forgiveness in justice through social and criminal justice, in this context I made a distinction between justice and forgiveness. The distinction aimed to show how forgiveness is mobilized in the criminal justice that is common-sensically associated with punishment as a way of obtaining retributive justice. I have discussed practices of restorative justice which focuses on restoration, reconciliation and forgiveness not just on punishment. The research studied that forgiveness in restorative justice recognises the offence, impact of the offence and continues to be lived by the victim, but transcends it. Restorative justice in cases of domestic or sexual violence has played a huge role in meeting some of the expectations and needs of some victims, by giving victims a voice by which to tell of their harm to offenders during the restorative justice programs. Whereas in South Africa, the TRC employed and applied restorative justice, its application was a success for some people and was not for many. Therefore, restorative justice has forgiveness-promoting element since it suggests a value agreement between victim and offender.

In investigating the role of forgiveness in social justice, I studied the politics of social justice in South Africa which include the Khulumani support group and the TRC. The study analysed the failure to apply social justice in the TRC, failure to bring socio-economic injustice to a wider societal range, whereas, it was argued that the type of reconciliation that was presented in the TRC did not achieve social justice, even though it vouches for forgiveness. The TRC aimed to mandate justice as criminal justice, and that moves the concentration from a concept of justice

as social. Therefore, the TRC neglected social rights and social justice and mainly focused mostly on human rights violations, as the Khulumani support group argue that we achieved a democratic country but we still live in an unequal society.

The main purpose of the study was to find the meanings of forgiveness in violence, using sexual and political violence case studies. For political violence, I have particularly studied the role that forgiveness plays in the cases that appeared in the TRC. I explored what motivated the victims of political violence to consider forgiveness, which helped to develop a new understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and political violence. For sexual violence, I critically examined how victims of sexual violence regard the act of forgiveness, whereas the TRC cases established the tone for my analysis. Studying forgiveness in violence presented an impact and value that forgiveness has on violence, I got to examine the power of forgiveness, motivation for forgiveness and the influence forgiveness has on victims of violence. Therefore, this research attempted to understand social phenomena that involve forgiveness in violence from the standpoint of those involved in it, which were victims of sexual and political violence.

Taking everything into account, forgiveness in violence can be the set of motivational changes whereby the victim becomes decreasingly motivated to react against the offender, and also forgiveness is granted for the victim's well-being not that of the offender. The possible meaning of forgiveness in political violence is the process where a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude about a violent act against them to gain their humanity, restore their lives, heal and find closure. In instances of sexual violence, we see a process unfolds where a victim changes feelings and attitudes about their sexual victimization past to achieve self-esteem, healing from the trauma, closure, and becoming a survivor of rape. Therefore, the value of forgiveness in cases of violence is to restore victims' dignity and help victims find healing and closure.

In political violence cases, in each case, there was a will or unwill by the victims or their families to grant forgiveness to the offender; there were visible signs of remorse in some cases, the absence of remorse may or may not have played a part in the will or unwill to grant forgiveness. Therefore, I claimed that victims may be willing to grant forgiveness based on the regret, admission of guilt, and a will to offer suitable methods of restoration by the offender. However,

in sexual violence case studies, in each case, there was openness to forgiveness; victims believed that forgiveness will help them with closure and healing; confession of guilt; and visible or absent signs of remorse. So, I argued that victims were willing to grant forgiveness based on availability of physical and emotional support, religious beliefs, the level of trauma experienced, and current socioeconomic status.

What could differ between the meaning of forgiveness found in sexual and political violence is that in political violence, forgiveness that was offered was mainly for the sake of nationwide reconciliation, and repairing of relationships between peoples to live calmly as neighbours in the democratic South Africa. As the TRC hearings aimed for national reconciliation through confession of guilt, amnesty, restoration and forgiveness. Whereas, in sexual violence, forgiveness that was granted was mainly for the sake of the victim not that of the offender or the community. Similarly, the meaning of forgiveness in violence is mainly the change of feelings or attitude about the violent act and the victim chooses healing and restoration over revenge. Therefore, forgiveness found in violence, can bring individuals together, restore the wounds of victims, and reduce the resentment and anger caused by the violent wrongdoings of the offender.

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