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**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RECONCILIATION AND  
STRUCTURAL OBLIVION: Is political reconciliation possible without  
forgiveness? An analysis of the South African Truth and Reconciliation  
Commission.**

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**ABSTRACT**

Is forgiveness a necessary precondition for reconciliation in transitional processes? By exploring the relationship between forgiveness, defined as a moral attitude and a metaphysical impossibility, and reconciliation -an empty signifier- this presentation will reveal the paradoxes intrinsic to the restorative model of justice. Standing from a critical perspective on the global industry of transitional justice, it will interrogate the basic principles over which the restorative model is built; namely, the cathartic value attributed to testimony, the extend of the possibilities of enunciation within the space of truth commissions as technologies of truth, the epistemological value attributed to testimony and the commodification of archived memory; lastly, the intricate relationship between forgiving, forgetting and reconciling. The analysis will draw upon ethnographic literature discussing the mandates and praxis of truth commissions, particularly the South African TRC, and philosophical and sociological reflections on the meaning of reconciliation. All in all, this presentation will reveal moral and rhetorical mechanisms over which the fiction of the teleology of transition is built upon, illustrating ways in which transitional policies contribute in very particular contexts to the orchestration of forms of structural oblivion.

**Key Words:** Restorative Justice, Reconciliation, Forgiveness, Politics of memory, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Katharsis, Testimony, Memory and Oblivion.

## **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RECONCILIATION AND STRUCTURAL OBLIVION: Is political reconciliation possible without forgiveness? An analysis of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.**

The Restorative model of justice has become a privileged way of dealing with past atrocities in the last decades. Within this new approach there is a renewed concern with the memory of suffering, consistent with a major paradigmatic change in the historiographic production, now dominated by the study of memory (Ricoeur, 2004, Huyssen, 2003 Young, 1993). The representation of the past in the realm of memory implies a series of significant changes. To start with, it results in a growing concern for narratives and testimonies (Ricoeur, 2004 White, 1992; Trouillot, 1995) so sharp that academics have started to discuss the potentialities and dangers of an “era of the witness” (Wieviorka, 2006) and its characteristic “culture of victimization” (Huyssen, 2003). Secondly, deeply influenced by the psychoanalytical notion of trauma, it places particular attention to memory of suffering (Huyssen, 2003). Lastly, it draws attention to the selective nature of memory, which cannot be understood without its counterpart, forgetting.

Within this episteme, formed in the intersection of the neo-enlightened humanism of Human Rights Discourse and the Politics of Memory, Restorative justice appears as a commendable model, focused on the victim and its suffering. As opposed to looking for punishment (as supports of the approach would have retributive justice), it seeks to restore the damage that was inflicted: firstly, it publicly acknowledges the victim's suffering -an act considered to be precondition for reconciliation; secondly, seeks to amend past injustices – through apologies, restitutions and reparations. Finally, it envisages the restoration of individual dignity, in as it publicly acknowledges the wrongness of perpetrated crimes (Kellenback, 2001). This combination of testimonial, acknowledgment and apologies is considered to have a significant therapeutic value, in as it is held to restore individual dignity. It is likewise considered to “heal” the nation and to hence yield into national reconciliation.

In this line of thought, truth commissions have been implemented along the globe as early as the 1990's - in various distinct historical contexts - in order to disclose the “truth” about past human rights violations, provide spaces for victims to regain their lost dignity and ultimately achieve reconciliation in what are referred to as –post-conflict societies. They are the best-suited institutions to help countries in transition to *leave their past behind and move on to the future*, in as they offer spaces in which individuals are able to narrate their experiences of violence and brutality, which according to the restorative principle, results in personal healing. As technologies of truth, this commissions attempt to establish a victim-centred representation of the past and to hence uncover the truths of past human rights violations based on the value of testimony.

### **SOUTH AFRICAN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION (TRC)**

Subsequent to the dismantlement of the apartheid, the notion of *reconciliation* came to occupy a prominent role in South-African transitional justice, mainly through the operations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC became a paradigm for the application of the restorative approach to justice. As stated by the Chair of the South African Truth Commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his Final Report, the commission believed that “*there is another kind of justice - a restorative justice which is concerned not so much with punishment as with correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships – with healing, harmony and reconciliation. Such justice focuses on the experience of victims; hence the importance of reparation.*” (Tutu, 1998) In view of

this, the TRC was grounded on a restorative conception of justice, focused primarily on alleviating the suffering of victims by healing and testimony and restoring the broken relationship between victims and perpetrators for the sake of social reconciliation. The TRC's definition of reconciliation was a complex one, consistent of three different elements: reconciliation with “painful truths”, reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, and reconciliation at a social level which referred to overcoming racial differences (Moon, 2008:39). With regard to reconciliation at the individual level, both victims and perpetrators were encouraged to adapt to the major political goal which was national reconciliation. Former should do so by forgiving and leaving their grudges behind, and latter by expressing regret and manifesting a change of moral (Kellenback, 2001: Reagan 2008). Perpetrators were exhorted to recognize the wrongness of their deeds and to both manifest contrition and a willingness to repair. In these order ideas, the public hearings became a scenario for the performance of contrition. Because of the influence of Christian ethics in the “new enlightened moralities” (Barkans, 2000:308-09), truth commissions generally, and the TRC particular, become spaces for the *theatrical* performance of forgiveness (Sontag, 1966). This was particularly true for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, which had a mas massive media coverage (Cole, 2007) affecting the vast extend of the population.

## RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS IN THE TRC

The religious and moralist discourse of the TRC was grounded on a consecration of the virtue of forgiveness. The main booster of forgiveness and reconciliation in South Africa was the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chair of the TRC. Tutu considered acts of forgiveness to be “gifts of generosity” which in the face of evil would show the good nature of people (Tutu Ed. Helmick, R & Petersen R, 2001: xii). For Tutu forgiveness was a precondition to Reconciliation. In fact, he would frequently affirm that “*without forgiveness there was no future*” (Tutu, 1999), and argue that forgiveness shows the goodness of which humans are capable of. For this reason, he would think about forgiveness as a manifestation of magnanimity, and hence belonging to the realm of the sacred. “Exhilarated” by forgiveness, he would express his celebrated phrase: “Please let us keep quiet because we are in the presence of something holy” (Tutu Ed. Helmick, R & Petersen R, 2001: xii).

The exaltation of forgiveness as an almost divine virtue is parallel with the dismissal of resentment as a valid sentiment. Forgiveness in Tutu’s rhetoric is informed by a common definition of the concept opposed to anger, bitterness and desire of revenge (Tutu Ed. Helmick, R & Petersen R, 2001: xii). Anger according to Christian morality is evil, whereas forgiveness, humility and sacrifice are elevated to the level of virtues. From this characterization follows an association of forgiveness to peace and to negative moral sentiments, such as anger and resentment as contributors to the cycle of violence (Walker, 2006). This notion is deeply engrained on a wider conception informed by psychology and moral philosophy in which Resentment and anger are directly associated to a desire for vengeance. The corollary of this approach is that victims who wanted peace for South Africa, whom embraced the new national project should overcome their grudges and forgive. In opposition, holding to feelings of resentment threatens the harmonious future of the nation to be (Walker, M, 2006).

*God has given us a great gift, ubuntu ... Ubuntu says I am human only because you are human. If I undermine your humanity, I deshumanize myself. You must do what you can to maintain this great harmony, which is perpetually undermined by resentment, anger, desire for vengeance. That’s why African Jurisprudence is restorative rather than retributive (Tutu, D Mail and Guardian, 17 March 1996 In Wilson, 2001:9)*

There is debate among academics concerned with the morality of the South African model of reconciliation on the question of Tutu's definition of resentment. Authors like David Heydm argue that Tutu actually recognizes the reasons why an individual might feel resentment, nonetheless he asks them to overcome these sentiments which even though legitimate, are considered pervasive for society and for the individuals themselves (Heydm 2004:194 In Brudholm, 2008: 44). He who has resentment is infected with anger and therefore, for its own welfare he should forgive, which means, leave the past behind in order to look at the future. What is certain is that according to Tutu, resentment leaves people prisoners of a "dark past", whereas the "generous" person who forgives makes a "first step" towards a "brighter future" (Tutu, 1999).

The equation of retributive justice and legal punishment with vengeance and retaliation is nowhere particular to the South African interpretation. On the contrary, it is one of the main fallacies and weaknesses of the restorative model as it was theoretically conceived. The restorative model of Justice was born as an alternative model of criminal law (Uprimny, 2006) critical to the model of retributive justice which proposers of the alternative considered repressive and inoperative. Bringing judicial punishment to the level of retaliation defenders of the notion of restoration propended for a model oriented towards reconciliation and social harmony rather than individual punishment (Minow, 1998; Teitel, 2003). This at turn, requires a morality of forgiveness, in which the parts involved declare a willingness to come to terms, forgive and ask for forgiveness for the benefit of society as a whole. However, the problem arises when this model, virtuous in its local application, is co-opted as a Transitional Justice mechanism in its own. Whereas the model concerns criminal Law, Transitional Justice is by definition a normative model for *exceptional spaces* committed to the prevention of crimes against humanity and its judicialization. When, as in South Africa, the differences between transitional justice and restorative justice are confounded, a very particular and dangerous ethic emerges, one that demands forgiveness in the face of brutality and conditions political to individual reconciliation.

#### PRESSURES IN THE TRC TO FORGIVE

*"Personal bitterness is irrelevant. It is a luxury that we, as individuals and as country, simply cannot afford"* (Nelson Mandela In Graibill, 2002:21)

*"The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even more angry, is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness"* (Persnal Interview to Kalukwe Mawila In Verwoerd, 2003: 264).

*"No government can forgive. Pause. Only I can forgive. Pause. And I am not ready to forgive"* (Interview in Garton Ash, 1997: 36).

Many have argued that the TRC did not induce forgiveness, but that it provided the opportunity for victims to forgive, if they were willing to do so: "It was not the intention of the commission to demand forgiveness and pressurize people to forgive, but to create an opportunity where this could take place for those who were able and ready to do so" (Audrey, 2001: 356). This claim, however, contrasts with the praxis of the TRC and it is rather naïve as it ignores the indirect fashions in which commissioners would pressurize victims to reaffirm that the main objective of the TRC experience was to ultimately achieve reconciliation through forgiveness. Reconciliation and forgiveness were evoked in the vast majority of hearings, 70% according to the manual counting of the HRV (Verdoolaege, 2006: 74). Forgiveness was encouraged by tacitly praising someone every time he or she would express signs of such inclination. For instance, by statements such as: "I have been particularly touched by your last paragraph where you say that you are not driven by

vengeance and a desire of revenge, but you are gladdened to coming before the commission, because you have got this quest to *real reconciliation*” (HRV hearing, East London, June 11, 1997 in Brudholm, 2008; my emphasis). Contrary to this, testimonies that expressed the refusal to reconcile and the desire to punish were condemned. More than that, the image of the unforgiving person came to be vilified, whereas those who were inclined to renounce anger and achieve reconciliation were held in high esteem, as “forgiving brothers and sisters” (Tutu, 1966). In short, forgiveness was encouraged in the TRC by both its positive and nearly sacred connotation and by the rejection of alternatives, in particular resentment which was associated with vengeance and bitterness (Walker, 2006). Such a discourse made alternative narratives on forgiveness difficult, if not impossible. The South-African TRC was thus blatantly promoting forgiveness and directly encouraging victims to reconcile with the perpetrators.

Thomas Brudholm's analysis of resentment in the TRC is one of the few academic researches which engage with an analysis of the value of negative sentiments and particularly the virtue of resentment. He provides striking evidence of how during the hearings the primordial aim of nation-building was imposed to victims which manifested reluctance to accept the Amnesty Law. It is evident from the way in which the commissioners led the questions that a refusal to accept amnesty would be detrimental to the process of reconciliation, and therefore would cause a major harm to the country.

Commissioner: Let me put it this way; do you read newspapers and watch TV, not so?

Answer: Yes I do read newspapers and I do watch television.

Question: I assume that you know about this Truth and Reconciliation Commission that is going on, of which Amnesty is part thereof?

Answer: Yes I heard

Question: (...) “Do you know this is done by the Government to foster or to promote reconciliation in the country? (2008: 31)

Answer: Yes I do know that

Question: What is your attitude about this reconciliation process?

Answer: I don't have any comment on that one.

Question: Do you belief in reconciliation?

Answer: Yes I do believe (Brudholm, 2008:31).

Up to present times, the TRC has been the only commission fitted with the juridical power of granting amnesty in exchange of testimonies. This amnesty law has been object of disapproval by academics and victims alike causing a deep sense of injustice. As a matter of fact, one of the main criticisms of those against the restorative model is that it subordinates justice to truth (Mamdani, 2002). In South Africa, the establishment of the TRC had more to do with political interests than moral idealisms. As the anthropologist and TRC's ethnographer Richard Wilson highlights, the collapse of communism and the emergence of a new meta-narrative based on the defence of human rights, provided a common language with which the two major South-African parties, the African national Congress (ANC) and the national party could agree. The Amnesty Law which was central to the foundation of the TRC –a judicial power never granted to a truth commission- was convenient to both major political parties at a time where the only alternative would have been Nuremberg-like tribunals (Wilson, 2001: 7-8). Many of the victims sharing this primordial concern for justice expressed a feeling of betrayal by a government that “allows criminal to avoid punishment”.

The TRC in South Africa as the institution leading and embodying the restorative notion of Reconciliation, ultimately served to silence the claims of justice of victims that did not accept the model and rejected the amnesty law. The notion of Reconciliation served as a moral dispositive to legitimizing the teleology of transition. When analysing the complex negotiations of justice implied in transitional justice the voice of the academic Mahmood Mamdani still echoes when questioning from a moral perspective the effect of the TRC: “If truth has replaced justice in South Africa, has reconciliation then turned into an embrace of evil?” (Mamdani, 2002: 146)

## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RECONCILIATION

The therapeutic discourse of restorative justice marginalizes those who demand justice instead of health and reconciliation (Nagy, 2008: 336) In a sense, the commission failed to acknowledge and incorporate the victim's claims to justice. Since, not all victims seek health and reconciliation, those who didn't accept the official rethoric were left out and had their claims ignored or dismissed as erratic desires of vengeance. This denial was largely a consequence of the above exposed notions of forgiveness and resentment practiced by the TRC. By condemning claims of retributive justice and sublimating forgiveness, victims were left with a bitter taste of injustice, exerted by a system which promoted amnesty and failed to provide justice to the victims. Or as a victim states in a remarkable passage: “I have not been able to, despite extensive therapy and counselling, shed the anger, rage, guilt, feelings of revenge and helpless desperation art the system that allows murderers to escape punishment” (Graybill, 2002: 45 In Bruhdolm, 2008:21).<sup>1</sup> The retributive model of justice in the TRC was stigmatized as a lust for revenge, and the claims for justice were disregarded (Brudholm, 2008). In spite of the fact that the political and juridical literature on the topic demonstrates the difference between vangaence and retribution (Nozick, 1981; Wilson, 2001) There are fewer anaylsis asserting a difference between resentment and vengeance (Minow, 1998; Brudholm, 2008; quote human righs ):

I am against the reconciliation as seen from The Hague perspective. I never wronged anyone. I did nothing wrong. Reconciliation means that we have to meet half way, but that's offensive. I was wronged and almost my entire family was killed. I care about justice and truth” (Tim Judah, 2004: 25 In Bruhdolm, 2008: 198)

Among the four types of truth defined by the TRC, the fourth one was concerned with *Healing and restorative truth*. This corresponds to the main premise of restorative justice which thought of healing the victim by giving it back the dignity that it had lost. This premise is founded on a conception of testimony as therapeutic. The claim that testimonies serve to provide “healing” is a position that Ricoeur defended in *Memory, History and Remembering* (2004). Therein he argued that the TRC was successful in providing a space for victims, who undeniably achieved “*catharsis*” as a result of their accounts of suffering and of the public acknowledgement of latter (Ricoeur, 2004:483).

However, the therapeutic value of testimony proved to be a wrong generalization. Firstly, the premise was overarching and did not recognize individual differences, neither in the reactions towards suffering nor in the private forms of grieving and mourning. The literature shows that some effectively thanked the commission and manifested relief. Nonetheless, as demonstrated by relevant statistics, this was not true for the majority of cases. The Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture in Cape Town calculates that approximately 60 % of the victims expressed an increased

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1 This is the speech of a father whose young daughter had died in the massacre of Heidelberg Tavern. It is addressed to amnesty seekers in an amnesty hearing in Cape Town in 1997 (Bruhdolm, 2008: 187).

sense of unease after having given testimony (Hayner, 2001:144). As most of the victims testified, rendering public testimony reawakened painful and overpowering memories that, in the aftermath of the hearings, would sometimes result in the reappearance of physical symptoms of distress (Hayner, 2001; Brudholm, 2008).

The pressure to forgive actually caused more distressed in those who were reluctant to accept the therapeutic discourse on reconciliation. The psychologist Herman refers to forgiveness as a *fantasy* which becomes an obstacle for mourning: it can be a “cruel torture since it remains out of reach of most individual human beings” (Herman, 1992: In Brudholm, 2008). As opposed to being a condition for “healing”, imposing forgiveness is a cause of more anger in the face of the dismissal of individual opinions. In addition to this, the discourse of restorative justice, according to which victims need to achieve healing, results in a reduction of the experiences of victims to a pathological and ambiguous notion of “Trauma” (Humphrey, 2002). Consequently, anger and resentment border to the field of mental health (Bruhdolm, 2008: 16). The hearings were designed as rituals of healing based on the performance of forgiveness. As the psychologist Brandon Hamber stated in a personal interview by Wilson in 1996: “the word catharsis gets used too often in the TRC. There is a perception that as long as a person is crying then healing must be taking place” (Wilson, 2001:121). However, the consequences of giving testimonies were in a great number of cases negative.

“The hearings were structured in such a way that any expression of a desire of revenge would have been seen out of place” (Wilson, 2001:120). Negative sentiments were seen as obstacles to the healing process, since forgiveness was considered as being liberating for the victim. For Tutu forgiveness was unconditional and independent of manifestations of regret by the perpetrator, since it was a duty of the victim (Wilson, 2001, Tutu, 2004). The TRC was initially concerned with the experiences of suffering of the victims. It therefore acknowledged the subjective component of truth. Because of the administrative and bureaucratic imperatives, caused by the difficulties of archiving memory, the factual and forensic approach to truth replaced the initial concern for the subjective dimension of truth. That is to say, pain was quantified and forms of suffering were classified into the universal categories of humanitarian law. The bureaucratic procedure, to which the commission resorted, reduced the victim's experiences and narratives to statistical facts. That is, to statistical figures used to fill charts that quantified the experience of pain. The aim of listening to the victims was thus abandoned.

## DISLOCATING FORGIVENESS FROM RECONCILIATION

*“Forgiveness is mad, and it should remain in the madness of the impossible” (Derrida, 2001:39)*

*You know, you say you are sorry, but on the other hand, it is also empty words (Paul Van Vuuren In Krog, 2000:117)*

Todorov distinction between Justice, politics, morality and heroism is enlightening to interpret the relationship between forgiveness and politics of Reconciliation in South Africa. According to Todorov moral action is directed towards other individuals, is fundamentally intersubjective. When the action ceases to be directed to an individual and has as its object an abstraction, then it is a form of *heroism* (Todorov, 2000:288) The abstraction being liberty, communism, even humanity, or why not reconciliation. The thesis I am advancing in this paper is that effectively, Reconciliation as it was promulgated by the TRC is a meta-narrative grounded wrongly in a notion of forgiveness which is informed by Christian ethics, and asks from victims to become heroes, leaves the weight of the future of South Africa in the capacity of the victims to

overcome their negative sentiments, to forego their claims of justice, in order to achieve a major political objective. In the process, the notion of Justice is subordinated to the primordial political goal of national reconciliation. The value of the revalidation of resentment is that it is a moral sentiment which leads to claims for *Justice* as it was argued based on Jean Amery's *Morality of Resentment*.

Is there an intrinsic relationship between forgiveness and Reconciliation? There are innumerable criticisms to the shortcomings of the restorative Justice approach. Mainly, they point out to the subordination of the notion of Justice to a metanarrative of Reconciliation and Truth. I will argue that the imposition of Forgiveness is a form in which rightful claims of justice from victims who are not willing to reconcile are delegitimized. For this reason it is important to deconstruct the notion of Forgiveness in order to understand in a more comprehensive way victim's testimonies and claims for Justice. If restorative justice is an approach to Justice as it claims that is mainly concerned with the damaged inflicted and the experience of suffering of the victim, the boosting of forgiveness is a way of imposing the weight of reconciliation on the shoulders of the victims so that they become "victims of reconciliation" (Moon, 2009). It is not within the scope of this paper to analyze the antagonism between retributive and the restorative model to Justice. Nonetheless, I will argue that the commission dismissed the claims of individuals who demanded retribution, by imposing a moral narrative in which forgiveness was exalted as a humane virtue and desires for retribution were associated with a limited notion of resentment and vengeance. In the last chapter it will become evident how in the TRC hearings the testimonies of victims who were not willing to forgive were excluded and how they were pressured to overcome their feelings for the sake of "social harmony". This is asking a heroic attitude from victims which is not far from the position of martyrs.

Derrida's philosophical deconstruction of the notion of Forgiveness as an Aporia, which is an intrinsic impossibility, is suggestive to the need to analyze the way it is co-opted by political, moral and juridical discourses. It provides a basis to de-naturalize and deconstruct the social and political uses of *Forgiveness* in projects of national reconstruction and nation-building, task of particular importance in the current political sphere, in which Forgiveness and official apologies are the way of re-establishing diplomatic relationships and the basis of political reconciliation.

What is the meaning of the response of a mother who is asked if she forgives the killer of his daughter or the torturer of his son? The response of Jacques Derrida is as follows: "Whether she says 'I forgive you' or 'I don't forgive' in either case I am not sure of understanding. I am even sure of not understanding and in any case I have nothing to say" (2001: 55). Through this example he is alluding to the inaccessible realm of experience to which the issue of forgiveness belongs. I strongly endorse this definition of "Pure Forgiveness" as an Aporia (2001) since it focuses our attention to the fact that as soon as forgiveness is performed and used as a means of restoration and "normalization" it ceases to be forgiveness. This is because forgiveness belongs to the realm of the impossible since one can only forgive what is unforgivable<sup>2</sup>. Therefore it "should remain exceptional and extraordinary (...) as if it interrupted the historical course of historical temporality" (Derrida, 2001:32). Furthermore, since it is unconditional it follows that it cannot be demanded or interchanged; it does not obey to an instrumental or economic logic, on the contrary, it operates under the logic of the *gift* (Mauss, 1954). Derrida's emphasis on the pure notion of forgiveness,

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2 Paul Ricoeur devoted his entire work to the analysis of the relationship between memory, history and forgetting (2004). He agrees with Derrida on the impossibility of forgiveness and its unconditional nature, since "the fault is in its essence unforgivable" (Ricoeur, 2004:466).

which “forgives only the unforgivable” (Derrida, 2001:32-33) points out to an important issue to be considered in the rising field of what has been denominated “the politics memory”. Namely, that forgiveness should be divorced from sovereignty (2001: 59)

Jean Amery states this clearly when is presented the ethical dilemma that occupied Simon Wiesenthal’s mind and lead to the publication of *The Sunflower, on the possibilities and limits of forgiveness* (1969). Simon Wiesenthal was captive in a Nazi labour camp, one day he is called to the Nazi Hospital; a nurse asks him if he is Jew and then he is led to the bedside of a dying SS member. The young soldier wants to be absolved *by a Jew* for his multiple and horrifying crimes. Wiesenthal acted sympathetically but could not pronounce words of forgiveness and remained silent. However, the question whether he acted rightly remained for him a dilemma. This book compiles the answers of important figures who have thought about the question of forgiveness, including among others Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Primo Levi and Jean Amery. The response of Amery based on a rejection of “any metaphysical morality” (1969:106), is that the dilemma is a theological one, and therefore for him is meaningless. If Wiesenthal had been magnanimous and had forgiven the SS soldier or had he refused to do so, either ways the decision was politically irrelevant. However, he emphasizes: “(p)olitically, I do not want to hear anything of forgiveness!” (1997:108; my emphasis). The reluctance of Amery to attend to the question of forgiveness and to its insertion in the political sphere is to be understood as a result of his primordial concern with *Justice* and the remembrance of the affront. This position will become clearer in the following chapter, which will expose his Morality of Resentment and its implication in the politics of Reconciliation. For the time being, it is important to emphasize that forgiveness is just one of many valid ways to cope with an experience of violence, a way of mourning as valid as other responses may be. What is arguable is the legitimacy of state organisms encouraging and even demanding forgiveness from its citizens.

## CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

The main purpose of this paper was to investigate to what extent truth commissions assist in acknowledging the experience of suffering. This was analysed in the case of South Africa and the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The reason for choosing this particular commission is that it is considered to be an exemplary model of an institution which deals with past atrocities, since it focuses on the victims and their experience of pain. The commission put forward a complex notion of truth; one which was particularly concerned with the experience of the victim and the narrative dimension of testimony.

This model is promising since it offers the possibility of an official recognition of the victims' suffering, and a promise of archiving victims' truth as part of the national collective memory. However, the result of the research shows that victims attended the hearings as representatives of a community and not as individuals. Hence, the phenomenological experience of the victims in the TRC hearings was not acknowledged. In fact, the testimonies were conditioned to a major political project of national reconciliation. As a conclusion, national reconciliation was made dependant on individual reconciliation, that is, on the reconciliation between "victims" and "perpetrators". In view of this, forgiveness was formulated as precondition for the establishment of a new South-African nation. The TRC hearings, consequently, became the theatre in which apologies and expressions of regret were performed.

All in all, the research evidenced that the conditioning of reconciliation to forgiveness imposes a civic and moral duty on victims. They thus become victims of the reconciliatory discourse. Furthermore, the therapeutic approach towards the experience of suffering and the metaphors of reconciliation depict resentment as an impediment to "social harmony". Combined with the confusion between reconciliation and forgiveness, this rhetoric limited the discursive space in which the experience could be recounted.

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