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# **Reconciliation and Transitional Justice: The Contribution of Forgiveness Towards Healing and Restoration**

**Ruth Kattumuri and Amalie Kvame Holm**

## **Introduction**

Forgiveness is primarily addressed in the transitional justice discourse as a restorative value, as part of several concepts complementing retributive justice (Braithwaite and Strang 2001). Scholars define restorative justice by emphasising it either as a value or as a process, and the same logic applies to forgiveness. It could be conceived as a process where a group of individuals or societies come together to solve issues. Forgiveness can relieve the burdens created by wrongful actions and intolerable debts and suggests that both victim and perpetrator can start afresh (Digeser 2001). It might even imply the re-establishment of moral equality between the parties. This chapter suggests that forgiveness is a valuable and complementary mechanism for healing and restoration of individuals and societies.

Civil society, through direct contact, provides linkages between all concerned and has the potential for motivating forgiveness by providing a crucial arena for dialogue between individuals, groups and political institutions. Civil society mechanisms, both formal and informal, make them more directly connected with communities and individuals. This provides civil societies with greater insights into the workings of people and multicultural groups (formal and informal; secular and religious), as well as enhances opportunities to enable innovative mechanisms for finding solutions for conflict resolution.

Forgiveness and reconciliation cannot be mandated from the top down but could be a dynamic and interactive process between individuals and civil society actors at grassroots level. However, that implies a need to broaden our understanding of forgiveness as a mechanism for healing and restoration of individuals, social and political groups. A number of researchers (Hartwell 2006, Digeser 2001, Montiel 2000, Andrews 2000) argue that the complexity of the concept highlights the need for a more independent and secular interpretation of forgiveness than that typically used.

The moral and religious connotations might inhibit us from understanding the value of forgiveness as a pragmatic, diverse and complementary reconciliation mechanism. At the same time, it is the focus on values that distinguishes forgiveness from traditional notions of punitive justice. Restorative justice is focused on healing rather than hurting. The traditional notion of responding to the hurt of an offence with the hurt of punishment is rejected – along with its corresponding value of proportionality. ‘The idea is that the value of healing is the key because the crucial dynamic to foster is healing that begets healing. The dynamic to avert is hurt that begets hurt’ (Braithwaite and Strang 2001). Ultimately, seeking forgiveness might be the only way for a society to move on from conflict, as traditional justice is often unavailable or indeed imperfect (Digeser 1998). These things have been important in the last 20 years, at times motivated by civil society, therefore it requires us to understand forgiveness in various forms.

The goal for civil society actors is to develop a collective history, identity and memory as a basis for a new vision of society. The limitations of forgiveness are recognised. Healing is a threefold exercise and constitutes mechanisms of restoration, compensation and reconciliation through acknowledgement of past hurt. Forgiveness enables the opportunity of moving on but cannot be isolated from these factors. The valuable role of

trials and Truth Commissions is acknowledged, however these mechanisms need complementation to achieve restoration and reconciliation.

Justice is considered the established paradigm for social repair and the predominant view is that retributive justice is essential to conflict resolution (Digeser 1998). Fletcher and Weinstein (2002) make a convincing argument for expanding the discourse by asking crucial questions pertaining to whether it is possible at all to find a single answer to the meaning of justice, and if justice is the best way to address feelings of loss and helplessness in any society.

The argument of this chapter is that the reconciliation process ought to include a variety of mechanisms. Among these, forgiveness is one way to help people heal that deserves more attention. The linkage between justice and forgiveness is discussed before we scrutinise forgiveness as a concept – both theoretically and from religious perspectives. This is followed by psychologist Robert Enright's (1991) process model of forgiveness which offers a useful framework for examining how forgiveness can play a role in the reconciliation process. The model lays out a step-by-step process towards unconditional forgiveness, emphasising it as a complex, unilateral process with various pathways. It illustrates an approach to forgiveness that is useful both at the individual and social level, and its benefits are supported by substantial research (Freedman, Enright and Knutson 2005, Hartwell 2006). We then consider examples of personal forgiveness as well as state-led attempts at reconciliation to illustrate the gap between state and individuals in a post-conflict situation. Finally, social healing and the potential benefits of forgiveness for society are discussed.

## **Justice and Forgiveness**

The relationship between justice and forgiveness is fundamental for our understanding of these two concepts, which are heavily interlinked. Digeser (2001) understands justice as 'receiving one's due', while forgiveness is the release of such debts, both monetary and moral. This involves differing approaches to conflict resolution and might also lead to contrasting results. Hence, they are best understood as complementary concepts.

According to the so-called 'normal model of justice', forgiveness simply leaves victims with less than is their due. If justice implies that it is good to receive what is due, and it is possible to obtain justice, how could forgiveness ever be justified? This perspective dominates political theory where forgiveness is disregarded because the availability of 'perfect' justice is considered to trump all other concerns (Digeser 2001). Yet, this argument suggests that it is possible to restore justice adequately, which is a problematic assumption – particularly so in a post-conflict situation.

The assumption that justice represents rationality and politics, while forgiveness is personal, perhaps even irrational, is not uncommon and is enforced by limited scholarly attention given to this subject. In competition with justice, forgiveness does not seem to have good odds:

From a certain perspective, there seems to be something deeply irrational about forgiveness, particularly if rationality is understood as a way to connect available means to desired ends. (Digeser 2001)

Justice is about making the offender pay his or her debt while forgiveness entails achieving a state of reconciliation where the debt no longer serves as the basis for future claims. As such, both concepts seek to settle the past in ways that do not legitimately

impede the future (Digeser 2001). However, values such as forgiveness, compassion and mercy inherently rely on a minimum demand of justice being met.

### **The Concept of Forgiveness**

The last decade has seen increasing scholarly interest in forgiveness; nonetheless, this research has been dominated by psychological approaches (McCullough et al. 2005). The process of forgiveness in post-conflict environments has yet to receive the same amount of attention, and scholars across various academic disciplines such as political theory, anthropology, philosophy and socio-legal studies are starting to examine the issue (Hartwell 2006).

The study of forgiveness raises methodological and definitional problems. It is empirically difficult to examine and no clear definition exists. There is also a lack of thorough understanding of the influences of religion, culture and life situation on people's understanding and experience of forgiveness. McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen (2000) express the complexity of forgiveness through these questions: 'what psychological factors are involved in forgiveness? What are its personality and biological substrates? Is the capacity to forgive largely guided by individual factors, situational factors or the interaction of personality and situation? Is forgiveness an unmitigated psychological and social good, or does it involve costs to the forgiver, the person forgiven, or society?'

There is no consensual definition of forgiveness, but conceptual progress seems to have been made (Worthington 1998). Researchers tend to agree that forgiveness is different from 'pardoning', which is a legal term; 'condoning', which implies justification of the offence; 'excusing', which implies the offender has a good reason for committing the offence; 'forgetting', which implies that the memory of the offence has simply decayed or slipped out of conscious awareness, and 'denying', which involves an unwillingness to perceive the harmful injuries that one has incurred (Enright and Coyle 1998, cited in McCullough et al. 2000).

Nonetheless, all the existing definitions share one common concept that, when people forgive, their responses toward the offender become less negative and more positive. McCullough, Pargament and Thoresen (2000: 9) suggest that forgiveness is 'intra-individual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context'. They view forgiveness as a process by which the forgiver changes when forgiving. Freedman, Enright and Knutson (2005: 393) emphasise how the relationship between victim and offender changes, but in a unilateral way:

People, upon rationally determining that they have been unfairly treated, forgive when they wilfully abandon resentment and related responses (to which they have a right) and endeavour to respond to the wrongdoer based on the moral principle of beneficence, which may include compassion, unconditional worth, generosity, and moral love (to which the wrongdoer, by nature of the hurtful act or acts, has no right).

The core meaning of forgiveness as a way to release hurt remains unchallenged (Freedman et al. 2005).

### **Religion and Forgiveness**

The perceived association between religion and forgiveness and its theological baggage might explain the reluctance of researchers to engage with the topic and further adds to the

perception of a dichotomy between justice and forgiveness. However, considerations of religion and culture for the process of forgiveness and reconciliation are crucial to our understanding of these mechanisms and should not be underestimated (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002: 637, Hartwell 2006). While important to avoid generalisations, it is valuable for social scientists to examine the long-standing and diverse religious conceptualisations of forgiveness rather than understanding forgiveness as a set construct. Perspectives on forgiveness vary across religious traditions, as do interpretations within the respective traditions. However, the importance placed on forgiveness and justice in most societies reflects a commonality across cultures and religions. Elements from different religions or belief systems might in some cultures also be combined. Most studies have focused on forgiveness and Christianity or Judaism and given less attention to the perspective of other religions. Even less work has been done on comparing the concept of forgiveness across religions (Rye et al. 2000).

Nonetheless, structures that encourage forgiveness are found in the major world religions. It is explicitly addressed in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism while in Buddhism it is integrated into the concepts of compassion and forbearance (Rye et al. 2000). At the same time in most religions the availability of religious doctrine, which justifies measures of retributive justice and revenge, is noteworthy (McCullough et al. 2005). Religion as a meaning system might be abstract enough to offer justifications for both forgiveness and revenge, providing individuals with rationalisations for their motivation for either forgiving or not forgiving (Tsang et al. 2005).

In the Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) humans are expected to imitate God, who has a forgiving nature. Forgiveness is encouraged in Islam and both Allah and Mohammad function as role models for forgiveness (Tsang et al. 2005). In Judaism forgiveness is defined as the removal of a violation, making a renewed relationship between victim and offender possible. However, forgiveness is not required under all circumstances and reconciliation is not necessarily part of the forgiveness process (Dorff 1998, cited in Tsang et al. 2005). Forgiveness is central to the Christian doctrine, and unlike Judaism it does not rely on a remorseful offender. In Hinduism, forgiveness is one of several ethical concepts to be followed on the path to righteousness. According to both Buddhism and Hinduism, unresolved issues will reappear in subsequent reincarnations. Islam, Christianity and Buddhism appear to encourage forgiveness irrespective of whether the offender expresses repentance, or the severity of the crime. Judaism, on the other hand, has clear rules about when one should forgive, and Jews question whether forgiving the Holocaust is possible or desirable (Rye et al. 2000).

Forgiveness in Buddhism is less straightforward. According to Charles Hallisey, a Buddhist scholar, the category of forgiveness per se is not central in Buddhism, but forbearance and compassion are key religious virtues that combined can resemble forgiveness (cited in Rye et al. 2000). Compassion eases the pain and suffering of the offender while forbearance abstains from causing more suffering, both for oneself and others. Hallisey interprets forgiveness as a twofold exercise where the call for retribution is dismissed and resentment and other negative sentiments towards an offender renounced (cited in Rye et al. 2000). Forbearance is considered more inclusive than forgiveness, as it entails enduring the suffering caused by the offender as well as renouncing anger and resentment towards that person. In addition, the virtues of compassion and pity leads the Buddhist to empathise with the suffering of the offender as well as taking steps towards easing this suffering. However, the main difference from a traditional, 'Western' understanding of forgiveness is Buddhism's focus on the interconnectedness of things. There

is no 'offender' to be forgiven, as the victim and the offender are not necessarily seen as separate entities (Higgins 2001, cited in Tsang et al. 2005). It is in the self-interest of the victim to overcome resentment through compassion and forbearance, independent of a remorseful offender. Resentment, the opposite of forgiveness, causes suffering according to karma, the law of moral cause and effect (Hallisey 2000, cited in Rye et al. 2000). As we shall see, there are similarities between this unilateral understanding of forgiveness and unconditional forgiveness as described in the Enright process model.

### **The Process Model of Forgiveness**

The process model of forgiveness, developed by the psychologist Robert Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1992), pioneered forgiveness research (Hartwell 2006, Freedman et al. 2005). The model describes a step-by-step approach to forgiveness and includes elements of revenge and justice until the ultimate goal of genuine forgiveness is reached, which results in the final unconditional release of all animosity by the victim. The sequence is not meant to be rigid but serves to explain how forgiveness is a process with great individual variation. In addition, it highlights the long-term timeframe and the complexities involved in forgiving (Freedman et al. 2005).

The process of forgiveness occurs in 20 units which are further divided into four phases serving as guideposts that most people experience. The first phase is about uncovering the pain and injustices experienced while the second is when the decision to forgive is made, even though the person might not feel ready to forgive at the time. The third phase, called the work phase, involves reframing the offender and the offence by trying to see both the situation and the offender in context. This leads to a better understanding of why the hurtful action happened and an acceptance of the pain and its consequences, and might lead to feelings of compassion and empathy. The last phase represents the outcome. The offended person experiences healing when 'giving the gift of forgiveness' to the offender (Freedman et al. 2005).

One of the main implications of the model for the use in post-conflict situations is its focus on unilateral forgiveness, which does not rely on any action from the perpetrator. A relationship between the victim and offender, where the latter apologises and shows acts of remorse, might make forgiveness easier, but is not necessary for the forgiveness process to move forwards. The goal is unconditional forgiveness.

The two last stages, named 'Forgiveness as Social Harmony' and 'Forgiveness as Love' in Enright's 1992 version of the model, are particularly interesting for the purposes of this chapter. In the penultimate phase justice is perceived as a social contract and it entails the acceptance of a variety of opinions. Forgiveness supports social harmony and the view that forgiveness can restore harmony in society and decrease friction is motivating to the forgiveness process. Coercion is not involved, but the focus is still on the obligation towards others rather than on an internally driven will to forgive. Hartwell (2006) observes that the discourse of reconciliation and forgiveness under the South African Truth Commission, post-Apartheid, fits into this description.

In the final stage of the forgiveness model, justice is seen as being a universal and ethical principle about all members of society being ends in themselves. Justice is to maintain the individual rights of all persons. This understanding of justice is, according to the model, considered to lead to a sense of forgiveness as love. The victim has developed compassion for the offender, and realises that a hurtful action by another person does not alter that sense of love, not unlike the Buddhist emphasis on compassion. According to the

model only this last step entails genuine and unconditional forgiveness and a complete abandonment of revenge. This stage is an act of self-love and positive group identification. The burden of the offence is released by the victim. Hence forgiveness is not depending on an offender, social context or a process of negotiated action. This type of forgiveness involves the acknowledgement of the past injustice while releasing the hurt of the act. The victim decides to respond to the injustice with compassion, even though it is not a duty, rather than simply seeking justice through retribution. This is considered the final solution to the offence and it ought not to be revisited by the individual or the group involved (Enright 1992, cited in Hartwell 2006).

## **Examples of Individual and State-Led Attempts at Reconciliation**

### **Personal Forgiveness**

Concrete examples of individual forgiveness illustrate how complex forgiveness is as well as how discreet the process can be. Our understanding of forgiveness as a mechanism for social healing is enhanced by knowledge of both the interaction between individuals and groups in such a process, as well as by studying how individuals deal with the enterprise.

Gladys June Staines chose to publicly forgive the murder of her husband and two sons in Orissa, India, shortly after the crime (Howell 2009). In 1999, the Australian missionary Graham Stuart Staines was burnt alive by Hindu extremists while sleeping in a van together with his two sons, aged ten and eight (BBC News Online 2005). Four years later, one man was given the death sentence and twelve others life imprisonment for the crime. By that time the widowed Staines had forgiven the perpetrators. In a statement after the conviction, Staines said: 'I have forgiven the killers and have no bitterness because forgiveness brings healing and our land needs healing from hatred and violence. Forgiveness and the consequences of the crime should not be mixed up' (Das 2003). She continued to run the leprosy home that she had set up with her husband despite the continuation of systematic violence against Christians in Orissa (Howell 2009). Staines also oversaw the completion of the Graham Staines Memorial Hospital in her husband's name. In 2005 she was awarded India's second highest civilian honour the Padma Shri by President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam for her social work. At the investiture ceremony Staines said: 'When people come to me and express solidarity with me, I feel that though I have lost my family, I have found another one in all the Indians' (BBC News Online 2005). She once again stressed the importance of forgiveness in an interview with the BBC *Woman's hour*:

If we don't forgive men of the wrong that they do, then how can we be forgiven? ... Altogether, I think if we don't forgive, and hold grudges against people, then it affects us, creates bitterness in our own life. (BBC 2005)

Staines encouraged forgiveness and religious tolerance in the public discourse in Orissa and lobbied the government to take more responsibility in the reconciliation process between religious communities. Her exceptional ability to forgive was a positive influence towards reconciliation in the local community. Forgiveness does not come naturally to people and evidence suggests that even though genuine forgiveness does release all feelings of revenge, it must be internally driven and unconditional, making it an extraordinarily difficult state for many to attain (Hartwell 2006).

Even though forgiveness is a desirable restorative value, some crimes might be considered too serious or delicate to be dealt with by most individuals and through a social process. Victim movements caution against putting pressure on victims to forgive by arguing they'll feel better afterwards, as a superficial 'forgive and forget' approach might work

against its intentions (Braithwaite and Strang 2001). Ash (1997) points out that forgiveness is far from desirable or possible in certain situations as taken to the extreme it might actually lead to injustices. Forgiveness might imply sacrifices on behalf of victims, setting aside other important values, making certain acts unforgivable by the human spirit (Digeser 2001). In 2006 the Anglican vicar Julie Nicholson resigned as a priest in Bristol, UK, primarily because she could not forgive the loss of her daughter Jenny in the London bombings the previous year. Nicholson publicly announced that she stepped down because she could not forgive the suicide bomber:

I believe that there are some things in life which are unforgivable by the human spirit. It's very difficult for me to stand behind an altar and celebrate the Eucharist, the Communion, and lead people in words of peace and reconciliation and forgiveness when I feel very far from that myself. So, for the time being, that wound in me is having to heal. (BBC 2006)

Nicholson said that not only could she not forgive the killers, but she did not want to forgive: 'I will leave potential forgiveness for whatever is after this life. I will leave that in God's hands.' Nicholson expressed publicly that she had no compassion for the perpetrators and that she simply could not forgive that they chose to take life. 'I believe some acts are humanly unforgivable and rightly so. That does not mean that in absence of forgiveness is the need for revenge and anger and bitterness' (Murray 2006). Nicholson pointed out that even though forgiveness is connected with reconciliation, it is possible to work towards the latter while leaving forgiveness aside. She also warned against feeling pressure to forgive, either from society or religion. When asked whether it was not her Christian obligation to forgive, Nicholson quoted Dostoyevsky's book *The Brothers Karamazov*:

When your child has been thrown to the dogs a mother dare not forgive. All she can hope to forgive is the pain and anguish caused to a mother's heart, she dare not forgive the act that took her child's life, that act of wickedness ... As a mother I dare not forgive. I have to speak as I feel, not how I feel I should feel according to a doctrine. Forgiving would be like saying this is okay. (Murray 2006)

Nicholson's account of how difficult, if not impossible, forgiveness after personal loss can be, illustrates how intricate the concept of forgiveness is, and highlights the need for an approach which is sensitive to individuality. A public forgiveness discourse should leave space for individual diversity while taking steps towards a collective narrative of reconciliation.

### **State Justice and Forgiveness**

Reintegration and reconciliation were the driving motives behind the historic apology from the Australian government to its indigenous Aboriginal population in 2008. The case illustrates how civil society actors are often needed to negotiate the reconciliation process between the state and individuals. First of all, such an apology relies on the preposition that a state or a nation can be accountable for the actions of individual citizens (Digeser 1998: 701). Political forgiveness is distinct from personal forgiveness as it operates from the top down. The state is mediating or even imposing the process of reconciliation by seeking to normalise social relations, while at the same time relying on the ideas of personal forgiveness to operate (Derrida 2001, cited in Moran 2006). The official apology by the Australian government, for policies of assimilation that took place from the nineteenth century to the early 1970s, shows the weakness of limited reconciliation attempts. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised in parliament to all Aborigines: 'we apologise for the laws



and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians' (BBC News Online 2008).

The move was met with a mixed response from civil society. A spokesperson from the rights group the National Aboriginal Alliance said 'the word sorry is one that Stolen Generation members will be very relieved is finally being used' (BBC News Online 2008). At the same time, a number of Aboriginal leaders criticised the fact that the apology was not accompanied by any compensation. As one leader put it: 'Blackfellas will get the words, the whitefellas keep the money' (BBC News Online 2008). The Prime Minister outlined a new policy of commitment towards the Aborigines and annual assessment of progress made. In February 2010 the annual report on the status of indigenous Australians was publicised and Rudd admitted progress towards improving living standards of Aborigines had been slow and far from satisfactory. Indigenous children under the age of five are still twice as likely to die as non-indigenous infants, referred to by the Prime Minister as a 'shameful statistic'. While Rudd pledged to provide extra government funding for support services to mothers and babies, he also described the issue as a top priority (Bryant 2010):

Generations of indigenous disadvantage cannot be turned around overnight. We know it will need unprecedented effort by all parts of the Australian community. But there is no greater social challenge to Australia than closing this yawning gap.

Moran (2006) is sceptical of this narrow focus on symbolic reconciliation and points out that making a distinction between symbolic and material aspects of the process has proven unsuccessful in post-conflict processes in countries such as South Africa, Argentina and Chile. By not offering compensation or other measures of justice, the Australian government seemed to ask for its crimes to be forgiven and forgotten rather than fundamentally seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Rudd was hoping the apology would mend the breach between white and black Australians and move the nation towards reconciliation and recognition. According to the study 'Bringing Them Home', at least 100,000 Aborigines were taken from their parents - they are the Stolen Generations (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997). The official apology came almost 40 years after the programme ended.

When is the attempt to seek forgiveness and apologies good enough? As is the case with Truth Commissions, the creation of a common narrative by acknowledging wrongful actions needs to be linked with concrete efforts at reconstruction. Its impact would otherwise be weakened. Simply telling the 'truth'— Rudd recognising what happened — is unlikely to help individual victims who rely on some tangible response such as reparation in order to avoid being left with a sense of helplessness and being sacrificed for the sake of society or state (Fletcher and Weinstein 2002). In this case, the long-term characteristics of forgiveness as a process seem to have been underplayed and not sufficiently complemented by other measures of justice. Unhelpfully, political forgiveness is often depicted as a rational and detached response to violence and injustices even though it is unlikely to be removed from the emotional aspect of healing after conflict.

Moran (2006) concludes that the history of reconciliation in Australia has been far from successful: 'Irrespective of which understanding of Australian reconciliation one adopts, it is plain that it has not achieved the desired results.' She points out that the existing framework for reconciliation, based on the state, has constrained the process towards transformation of society: 'Australian reconciliation has, for the most part, been a

federal government policy — initiated, implemented, limited and finally “provided” by the various governments and governmental bodies’ (Moran 2006: 132).

Hartwell (2006) suggests that the acknowledgement of the complexity of the interaction between group and individual is key to a positive social transformation, an element that has been lacking in Australia. A top-down approach to reconciliation and forgiveness simply cannot lead to healing and a new collective narrative.

Truth Commissions highlight the tension between justice, forgiveness and reconciliation in a public context. As an official body set up to investigate human rights abuses or violations of international law, it is often referred to as having a cathartic effect on society by officially acknowledging a silenced past (Hayner 1994). Its aim is social rather than legal justice, as a Truth Commission does not seek formal legal accountability in order to prosecute individuals responsible for crimes (Hayner 1994: 604). Truth and reconciliation commissions can offer an important complement to both traditional trials and forgiveness, but the contribution is somewhat ambiguous.

Moon (cited in Skaar 2009) raises a number of important questions about such commissions which are directly relevant to the forgiveness discourse: ‘does truth lead to reconciliation? Does truth heal? Can there be reconciliation without an account of past atrocities?’ In her recent book *Narrating Political Reconciliation: South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, Moon shows how such assumptions became part of the reconciliation process in post-Apartheid South Africa, but only partially capture the truth. She argues that reconciliation is a political practice rather than a normative or purely moral enterprise. Political reconciliation was the main goal of the truth and reconciliation commissions rather than restorative measures, even though it also promoted interpersonal forgiveness and acknowledgement. This conflict was problematic for the victims. The perpetrators were granted immediate amnesty in return for full confessions, rather than remorse. Victims, on the other hand, had to wait years for financial reparation by the government (Moon, cited in Skaar 2009). This critique stresses the tension between justice and forgiveness as well as between individual and social forgiveness. Society or the state cannot forgive on behalf of individual victims. Because of the ‘emotional’ nature of forgiveness, it needs to be addressed in a way that is sensitive to the individuals involved. It is vital to avoid the perception of forgiveness being imposed by the state or political institutions.

Through collective dialogue civil society can play a key role towards reconciling a new vision of society with a shared history and identity. An official account of past atrocities and acknowledgement of responsibility by the relevant parties is important, however difficult it might be to establish ‘the truth’. Such steps ought to be combined with restorative measures as well as approaches towards forgiveness.

### **Forgiveness and Civil Society**

By accommodating forgiveness, civil society actors can play a crucial role for conflict resolution and can motivate reconciliation and justice by mending the gap between state and individuals. As we have seen, reconciliation is not an action that can be easily mandated by the international community or the state.

Reconciliation involves the acknowledgement of past hurt, compensation as well as the establishment of a new vision of society (Moran 2006). It is most fruitfully understood as both a short- and long-term development. In the short term, it is a pragmatic cooperation

process between former enemies seeking to rebuild economic, political and social institutions. In the long term, it is a procedure which might encompass multiple generations. The process of social healing is strongly influenced by three main factors: the interaction between various perceptions of justice, the formation of identity as either victim or perpetrator and finally, the personal and political processes of forgiveness as well as revenge (Hartwell 2006). In many cases, the process of establishing who are victims and who are offenders is far from clear cut, making it problematic to suggest who should forgive whom. In addition, it is often the case that the presence or availability of an offender capable of apologising and asking the victim for forgiveness is lacking. The offender might be unavailable or unapologetic. The quality of local, national and international leadership is key in this process, as is an understanding of the cultural and societal norms that impact the prospect of reconciliation. Civil society can influence the collective narrative of justice, memory and identity in this fragile process. However, Moran emphasises the importance of the parties in a reconciliation process to share a common language and cultural understanding of terms such as forgiveness, apology and compensation. This is fundamental for their ability to meet with parity in a dialogue mutually conducive to reconciliation (Moran 2006).

Even though the state can only do so much towards social transformation, the determinants that influence individual behaviour both during and after conflict are social. Mass violence is a problem of community and not only individual responsibility therefore the solution post-conflict must be collective. At the same time, even though mass violence is a totalising experience, it is ultimately an intimate and personal one, as noted by Jaspers (1947). It is this individual experience which will influence one's perceptions post-conflict and these voices must be taken into account when considering the best approach to social healing. These issues highlight the potential role in the reconciliation process of all those institutions between the individual and the state: family, schools, private organisations, faith-based organisations, private workplaces, social movements and communities.

As Hartwell (2006) points out, Enright's model for the process of forgiveness opens up the possibility of individuals to forgive other individuals rather than their representative group, and hence might offer a way to overcome the controversial issue of identifying victims and offenders. The model also emphasises that the forgiveness process is fundamentally an individual act based on a choice of forgiving and moving on, which does not rely on the presence of an offender. This approach can equally be shared by a group with common goals and extended to motivate collective decisions that can have tremendous benefits for communities and societies confronting the difficult task of moving on from past atrocities. As we have seen, the interaction between individual and community or society is crucial in this process.

Hartwell (1999) describes the forgiveness process as a 'constantly evolving, dynamic interaction' between bottom-up and top-down actors. Individuals influence group behaviour and identity, while groups led by acknowledged leaders, influence individual beliefs. From fieldwork interviews in post-conflict Serbia, Northern Ireland and South Africa, Hartwell's most significant finding was the long-term nature of the forgiveness process: a phase of passive resentment tends to characterise the current post-conflict generation while a need for seeking forgiveness can be found in subsequent generations or in diasporas. The phase refers to 'a forbearance from revenge accompanied by a reluctance to forgive', an emotionally ambivalent attitude which can be politically useful due to its pragmatism. These findings show the need for a practical approach to forgiveness, such as the one outlined in the process model by Enright (1992).

A point of divergence among forgiveness scholars is the relationship between victim and offender. Can forgiveness be unconditional? Alternative forgiveness models emphasise the dialogue between victim and offender. Andrews (2000) describes a 'negotiated forgiveness' process focused on confession, ownership and repentance as well as a 'positional forgiveness' process where individuals are seen as part of a group. Positional forgiveness is concentrating on the individual's role in the conflict, as offences are more often than not committed as a group member rather than as an individual. Andrews (2000) suggests that such an approach to the offence is fruitful because social position can be confronted, understood and potentially forgiven. However, these methods can be accommodated by the Enright model as earlier stages in the forgiveness process.

Montiel (2000) advocates an approach where forgiveness is acted out collectively in what she refers to as 'socio-political forgiveness'. A whole group of victims release their collective resentment and condemnation of the group considered to be the offenders. Such a process depends on a number of particular factors for it to be effective: leadership, individual support of the public narrative of forgiveness and restoration of intergroup social fairness. The leaders of the victimised groups should be able to relate to the perpetrators in a forgiving, but effective manner and the public declarations of forgiveness have to be sensitive to the positions of the individuals involved. One of the main challenges when encouraging forgiveness is not to underestimate the pain and hurt of the individual who might not be in a position to forgive. Initiatives towards reconciliation and a perception of reinstating justice are crucial and work in combination with the offender's repentance and apology and the individual victim's readiness to forgive. Hence, Montiel (2000) highlights the need for socio-political mechanisms of justice for a productive forgiveness discourse, the point being that forgiveness compliments the traditional justice approach to reconciliation.

## **Conclusion**

A productive approach to the intricate concept of forgiveness is to consider it a process of multiple stages. Even though it is the focus on values that distinguishes forgiveness from other types of justice, a pragmatic understanding of the enterprise as an approach to social healing is valuable. The argument of this chapter is that forgiveness ought to be considered an important complement to traditional measures of justice. However, it does not preclude justice and essential compensational measures.

We have examined the complexities involved in the forgiveness discourse, especially related to the discreteness of the concept and the problem of promoting it top-down from the level of the state. Ultimately, forgiveness does not have to rely on action by the offender, but might in fact be a unilateral process, particularly in its final stages. Nonetheless, it is recognised that unconditional forgiveness is extremely challenging and does not come naturally.

Civil society offers an arena where individuals, groups and political institutions can interact and work together towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Civil society actors can be sensitive to individual concerns while creating a new vision for society based on a collective narrative of history, memory and identity. The process model of forgiveness describes how an 'education' in forgiveness can help individuals towards that goal.

Most importantly, forgiveness must be internally driven and not motivated by external pressure. If internal motivation can be encouraged, forgiveness can release the hurt of past atrocities, enable healing and reconciliation, and offer the parties in a post-conflict situation the possibility for restoration and moving ahead.

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