In recent years there has been increased discussion regarding the role of forgiveness in post-conflict reconciliation. The most common debate has focused on whether there can be “reconciliation without forgiveness and/or forgiveness without reconciliation”. (Cairns and Roe eds, 2003, 132) Revenge, if mentioned within this discussion, has often been treated as a separate issue and as the antithesis of forgiveness and reconciliation. Though work on deconstructing the relationship between forgiveness and revenge in post-conflict transitions is still in the earliest stages, it has become increasingly clear from fieldwork interviews, conducted between 1999 to 2002 in Northern Ireland, Serbia, and South Africa, as well as observation and relevant research, that they appear to share similar phases or stages within an evolutionary process that can result in vastly different outcomes.

In this analysis, reconciliation is viewed as both a short and long term process. In the short term, it is seen as a pragmatic cooperation between former enemies in rebuilding political, economic, and social institutions; in the long term, it is a process that encompasses multiple generations. During both, but most dramatically during the earliest phases, political actions and reactions are strongly influenced by an interaction between perceptions of justice interpreted in terms of fair or unfair treatment; formation of a victim/perpetrator identity; and personal and political processes of forgiveness and revenge. It is during the earliest phase that the link between perceptions of justice and formation of post-conflict identities assumes a greater significance than had been previously understood. Individuals and groups were observed to re-negotiate their identities by utilising perceptions of justice as fairness which in turn influenced and shaped political processes of forgiveness and revenge, often expressed in terms of political cooperation.

This article describes a basic interactive framework, derived from this research, that identifies key issues and offers an alternative view of examining old problems and reorganising priorities to more effectively address sensitive issues underlying the process of political cooperation in post-conflict environments. The ways in which perceptions of justice and formation of a victimisation identity are linked to a complex parallel, evolutionary, and inevitably political process of forgiveness and revenge during post-conflict transitions are described. This analysis of forgiveness and revenge and its relationship to political processes
present in all national and international political systems raises important questions for the international community as well as for societies struggling to achieve a lasting peace.

**Perceptions of Justice in Early Post-Conflict Transitions**

In the earliest days of a peace process, a cry for justice is the rallying point for traumatised survivors. Broadly and subjectively interpreted, it is a driving force behind formation of post-conflict identities and intertwined with political processes of forgiveness and revenge. Expectations of fair treatment by those involved in recent conflict are a key issue in hypersensitive post-conflict environments and most often expressed as perceptions of justice as fairness. While slow moving formal trials can serve a ritualistic purpose in much the same way as formal truth commissions, the limitations of a criminal trial where punishing perpetrators may not automatically benefit victims, must be confronted in a rapidly changing often violent post-conflict environment. Instead, building a long term social reconciliation that encompasses all members of society -- victims, perpetrators, their beneficiaries, and bystanders - may require other forms of justice in order to understand and develop their place in the new political, social, and economic order. (Mamdani, 1997, 22)

An important and relevant finding of social psychologists who have done much empirical work on the relationship between justice and fairness is the demonstration that people in groups and organizations “react to third-party allocations and dispute resolution decisions by evaluating their fairness, not simply their absolute or relative favorability.” (Tyler, 1994, 850) As Allan Lind noted in his inaugural lecture for the Leiden University Fund Chair in Social Conflict, the terms “justice” and “fairness” can have different implications in the English language. The term justice can evoke a more formal or legal concept of “what is right or due”, while fairness evokes a more general or intuitive perception of the same. (Lind, 1995, 25) The ways in which justice is perceived to be fair are extremely important as “people’s views about what is just and fair are a social facilitator through which the interaction among people and groups is enabled.” (Tyler, 2000, 117-8)

These perceptions of justice as fairness, also known as ‘justice judgments’ while not replacing formal legal trials and other procedures, are formed early by all groups in order to rapidly assess their individual and group status in an unstable environment. They strongly impact the formation of post conflict identities, both on an individual and interactive group level, tend to be inflexible, and are especially influential in the formation of a sense of victimisation. These perceptions of justice as fairness are especially important to external aid donors and military peacekeepers as they directly shape ways in which external actions are interpreted as fair or unfair by internal populations.
As described in this article, they are also an integral part of the phases of political
processes of forgiveness and revenge in early post conflict environments.

Assumption of a victim identity was common among all groups in each of the
three countries where interviews took place. While still focused on conflict-
defined groupings, they were less concerned with inter-group grievance than with
all groups’ perceptions of themselves as victims of violence. In each case the
formerly dominant group was especially vulnerable to assuming this identity and
an articulation of victimhood was often found to have been a motivating factor for
this group in initiating or prolonging the original conflict. (Hartwell, 2004; Hartwell,
2005, Chapters One, Two, Six)

There is much evidence to suggest that justice is a “socially created concept” that
“has no physical reality” existing “only in the minds of the members of an ongoing
interaction, a group, an organization, or a society.” For justice to be effective,
studies of procedural justice judgements have revealed that individuals and
groups must feel that the process of decision making has been fair. (Tyler, 2000,
117-8) Tyler has stated that this sense of fair treatment is usually derived from
four key factors: opportunities for participation or “voice” in stating ones case and
making suggestions, neutrality of the authorities and forum, the degree to which
the motives of authorities are trusted, and the degree to which all parties are
-treated with dignity and respect. (Tyler, 2000, 117,121)

There is ample evidence in both fieldwork interviews and literature that
perceptions of justice are treated as reality and acted upon accordingly. In its
early days, the war crimes trial of Serbia’s former leader Slobodan Milosevic at
the Hague, was treated with suspicion and cynicism by many anti-Milosevic
Serbs who had felt that justice had been served by throwing him out of office and
forming a new government. For them the international trial was serving the
needs of the international community rather than addressing Serbia’s huge
economic problems. In Northern Ireland, prisoner amnesties included in the
1998 Good Friday Agreement have been equally contentious for civilians on all
sides as it gave blanket immunity for crimes committed by both the IRA (Irish
Republican Army) and Loyalist paramilitaries who had worked separately and
together while still incarcerated in the Maze prison to broker peace deals leading
to the final agreement. While giving testimony in the formal Truth and
Reconciliation Commission (TRC) may have had a cathartic effect on the teller,
many South Africans found that truth telling on its own did not guarantee social
healing and reconciliation. Amnesty given in exchange for testimony was a
problem for many, and the emotionally charged Human Rights Violations
hearings tended to promote a view that was exclusively religious and Christian in
its interpretation of rituals of confession and forgiveness. (Hartwell, 2005,
Chapter One; Hartwell 2004)

The social significance of justice as fairness was extensively explored by political
philosopher John Rawls, one of the twentieth century’s outstanding contributors
to the ongoing debate. This debate, for Rawls and others, centred on development of social justice with a primary focus on the ways in which major social institutions, especially ones that define fundamental human rights and duties determine the division of political, social, and economic advantages through social cooperation and a shared concept of what is “good” or best for the society as a whole. (Rawls, 1999, 6)

In his original (1971) and later revision (1999) of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls presented his interpretation of justice as fairness as an important part of the theory of rational choice and as an example of what he called a “contract theory” which conveys the idea that principles of justice could be conceived as the choice of rational persons, whether applying to relationships between several persons or groups, and in this way could be both explained and justified. To Rawls the use of the word contract embraced a plurality and condition that “the appropriate division of advantages must be in accordance with principles acceptable to all parties”. (Rawls, 1999, 14-5)

While Rawls accepted the notion of deep inequalities within a society, the context in which he examined ways in which to approach and implement his theories was within the limitations of a “well-ordered society” where “everyone is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions”. He assumed that a deeper understanding could be gained in no other way and that the “nature and aims of a perfectly just society is the fundamental part of the theory of justice”. (Rawls, 1999, 8)

In his work *Political Liberalism* (1993) that followed his first edition of *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, Rawls expanded his concept beyond sole dependence on rational behaviour to include a notion of reasonableness. Stating that “reasonable persons …are not moved by the general good as such” but by a desire for a “social world in which they, as free and equal, can cooperate with others on terms all can accept”, will insist on cooperation with each other as “cooperation involves the idea of fair terms of cooperation” and “fair terms of cooperation specify an idea of reciprocity” as all those who cooperate and who follow the rules and procedures required will in turn “benefit in an appropriate way as assessed by a suitable benchmark of comparison”. (Rawls as quoted in Knight, 1998, 430)

While there are inherent strengths to Rawls' philosophy of justice as fairness, he clearly stated that his theories presumed “strict compliance” and an assumption of the presence of a well-ordered society and some form of working government, as distinct from “partial compliance theory” that comprised theories of punishment, doctrines of just war, justification of ways to oppose unjust regimes, from civil disobedience to military resistance and revolution. (Rawls, 1999, 8) A problem in applying Rawls theory of justice as fairness to societies recovering from conflict is that neither of his conditions may be present.
As Lind observed, the advantage of former enemies using justice judgements to evaluate fairness when addressing contentious issues is that it allows them to circumvent obvious differences while freeing them to “construct their social identities and contribute to the common good”. It eliminates the “need to calculate all of the potential consequences of co-operative actions and to attempt to guess the probability of others’ favorable or unfavorable behaviors. It is enough to decide that the relationship is fair”. (Lind, 1995, 15-16)

**Formation of Post-Conflict Identity**

One of the most contentious post-conflict issues among all groups is identifying who is a victim and who is a perpetrator. “It is not uncommon for groups in conflict (that is sharing the same history) both to claim victimhood and to accuse the other of victimizer”. (Cairns and Roe, 2003,175) During peace, formation of identity is a fluid and evolutionary process, influenced by culture, race, religion, ethnicity, nationalism, and territory with the resulting social identities manipulated for the political, economic, and social gain of groups and their members. However, once a conflict begins the parameters of one’s identity become frozen, rigidly drawn and defined by enemies.

During conflict, defining who one is becomes brutally simple and crucial to survival - you are simply *not* whoever or whatever your enemy is. In circumstances where racial difference is used as the defining criteria, such as in South Africa, enemies are easier to visually identify, but as has been illustrated in Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, and other conflicts such as Rwanda, regardless of similarities shared in physical appearance, language, food, and lifestyle, intricate social coding laden with symbolism can be used to define the Other. While ethnic/national identities remain rigid, there are at least three new identities that emerge and interact during the conflict; victim, perpetrator, and observer. The victim can be defined as the individual/group acted against by the perpetrator who is the initiator and/or enactor of the grievance or crime. The role of the observer is far more ambiguous, usually not neutral, and involves some level of passive complicity with or support for vengeful, violent actions carried out on behalf of their group by others. There may also be an external collaborative link to the perpetrator, or an independent fourth perspective, from an individual, group, or country that stands to profit directly or indirectly by the retaliatory action. (Mikula and Wenzel, 2000, 128-9)

As these identities are not clearly defined and open to debate, it is important to understand their interaction and to identify the possibility of multiple roles in conflict situations. While some situations are public and well understood such as well-documented genocide and targeted killings, others are less publicly acknowledged in an ‘eye for an eye’ retaliation by the offended group which results in an equally vicious settling of the score. This pattern, familiar to those who have engaged in conflict, is usually not well understood by outsiders such as external interveners, aid givers, international governments, peacekeeping forces,
diasporas, and others with physical and/or generational distance from the conflict.

In early post-conflict transitions, overall identity formation becomes flexible once again and against the background of a hypersensitive environment is highly reactive to perceptions of threat to personal and group security. During this time many individuals and groups form political identities based on interpretations of ‘winning and losing’ by observing which group they perceive to be receiving the greatest amount of support and attention from external sources. This issue strongly impacts internal perceptions of justice as fairness, as the delivery of humanitarian aid, financial reconstruction assistance, and international military protection is slanted in favour of the ‘victims’ as designated by the same community.

Misunderstandings surrounding this issue can lead to a disproportionate amount of financial aid available for one side’s ‘victims’ support groups. This situation has been observed in Northern Ireland where the European Union and other international funders made generous sources of money available for a disproportionate number of Republican victims groups in Belfast working class communities, while their equally vulnerable Loyalist neighbours had significantly less access to funds for parallel organisations. While this type of funding can be of significant and positive value, it also often incorporates a type of public shaming of designated perpetrators by the international community that can lead to increased resentment and lack of cooperation between members of marginal socio-economic groups formerly in conflict, who both see themselves as equal victims of an unfair system. This process of forming a post-conflict identity reflects what anthropologist Richard Jenkins has described as two interdependent but separate social interactions, “internal definition” and “external definition” that operate separately but interactively on an individual, group, and institutional level. (Jenkins, 1997, 72, 166)

The result is that a perception of unbalanced access to political power and privilege by one group over another, can contribute to shaping both an individual and group identity of victimisation. Despite the perhaps dubious palatability of a formerly dominant groups’ claim to victimisation implicit or outright designation of victims and perpetrators, and winners and losers, by the international community, can impede the internal process of political cooperation. As James Boyce has noted, "the need to consider the political effects of assistance is important since aid does not flow to countries in the abstract, but rather to specific groups and individuals. In doing so, aid inexorably affects the relative influence of different parties within the recipient countries... yet donors often turn a blind eye to the political impacts of aid." As many civil wars end with the signing of a peace accord in situations where the opponents are “roughly equal in terms of power, resources and goals”, the acquisition of financial aid can swing the balance of power. (Boyce, 2002, 25-6)
Groups who form a post conflict victimisation identity based on perceptions of treatment by the international community can become a danger to sustaining peaceful coexistence. This sense of collective victimisation directly motivates a negatively focused socio-historic construction that goes beyond simple commemoration to emphasise “judgements of blame and responsibility” that are being constantly reconstructed in response to fluctuating circumstances. (Cairns and Roe, 2003, 16)

Political leaders have fully understood and successfully manipulated this identity in mobilising groups to fight. The Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, the Protestants in Northern Ireland, and the Afrikaners in South Africa, all constructed a siege mentality and identity based on a view of themselves as victims of unfair treatment that justified aggressive action. Milosevic, under whose leadership nationalist propaganda and actions led to the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia, reinforced Serb victim imagery through reminders of Croat action against the Serbs in World War II, successfully triggering perceptions of threat that led to aggressive action. The same imagery of threat by Albanians to Serbs was used as justification for the invasion of Kosovo. In Northern Ireland, exclusion of Catholics by Protestants was portrayed as preserving a morally superior and upstanding English work ethic, under threat by the unmotivated Catholic minority within the province, and the larger Catholic population to the south in the Republic. In South Africa, a beleaguered Afrikaner victim/survivor identity, constructed after a humiliating defeat and internment by the English in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, was used as justification for apartheid in the twentieth century (Hartwell, 2005, Chapters Four, Three, Five).

By manipulating real and perceived slights against their group as justification for revenge, and by ignoring subsequent retaliation enacted in their name, these groups set the stage for constructing a one-sided version of current and recent events that aided in creating a new generation of perpetrators. In unstable early post-conflict environments, this perception of unfair allocation of scarce resources, can be enough to motivate one group to seek revenge by arming itself and attacking, while the other fights back to settle the score. As Hewstone and Greenland have noted, many “apparently pointless conflicts become more understandable when viewed as, at least in part, attempts to establish, maintain, or defend cherished social identities”. Many groups in conflict often differ in status and a change in these status relations and perceived legitimacy are "crucial determining characteristics of intergroup relations". (Hewstone and Greenland, 2000, 138-9)

Forgiveness and revenge in post-conflict transitions

As previously indicated, one point overlooked in many depictions of forgiveness and revenge in post-conflict scenarios is that identification of victims and perpetrators is often extremely contentious making the question of who should forgive whom very problematic. Another problem has been the assumed
presence or availability of an offender who is capable of apologising to and asking forgiveness from the victim. This is often an unrealistic scenario as the perpetrator may be dead, unavailable, or unrepentant. This situation emphasises the need for a more independent and secular interpretation of forgiveness that depicts an interactive process of political cooperation, while at the same time allowing space for the offended to individually internalize a process that acknowledges and releases the past. Most importantly this work stresses that there is a great deal of ambiguity in the early formations of forgiveness and revenge. The quality of local, national, and international leadership, prevailing cultural norms, and the type of conflict that has just taken place, influence the ways in which these processes are expressed.

The relevance and importance of internal individual/group perceptions of justice as fairness and formation of post-conflict victimisation identity to a peace process is highlighted when individual and group expectations of benefits to be reaped from peace intersect with the slow reality of change on the ground. This does not mean that a peace process has been unsuccessful, rather just different to what had been imagined. This especially applies to continuation of violence following a formal declaration of peace. Instead of the instantaneously non-violent society envisaged, certain types of criminal acts, domestic violence, and ‘score settling’ such as harassment, vandalizing, physical intimidation, punishment beatings and targeted murders, enacted by individuals and/or gangs or paramilitaries, may increase. (Hartwell, 2005, Chapter Seven; Hartwell, 2006)

Northern Ireland, which has had one of the longest running conflicts, while now arguably pursuing one of the more difficult but determined peace processes, reflects many of these problems. This situation has been equally observed in Serbia and South Africa, and is one of the most challenging phases for all sides. The significance of understanding processes of forgiveness and revenge in relation to these problems has been attracting serious consideration since the mid 1990s, when survivors of the increased number of civil wars and the international community began searching for more effective ways to facilitate post-conflict cooperation and reconciliation between formerly warring individuals and groups.

Forgiveness in Northern Ireland

“There is no forgiveness in Northern Ireland”, was the sardonic reply when I described my research project to a Belfast librarian and veteran civil rights marcher in April 2000. While this proved to be untrue it did point out several cultural aspects regarding its discussion. In Northern Ireland, a distinction between politicians and/or political groups, and individuals was often made. While working with forgiveness discussion groups in Northern Ireland, it was observed that “based on the link between forgiveness and trust” most found it easier “to forgive an individual than to forgive a group, because it is easier to
place trust in an individual”. It was also thought to be “harder to forgive leaders of a group than its members”. (Cairns and Roe, 2003, 138-9)

As Cairns noted, “few politicians in Northern Ireland appear to be prepared to risk alienating their electorate by speaking openly about the need to forgive” as early prisoner releases have continued to remain a serious point of controversy. Fear of intrusion on personal grief, and the fact that “some groups may feel that acts of violence have been a justifiable means to an end and that forgiveness is, therefore, not necessary”, have also contributed to the silence. (Cairns, 2003, 134) Norman Porter has also noted that open discussion of forgiveness is “either thought to muddy the waters of reconciliation or not to be relevant to political discourse”. (Porter, 2003, 23)

The bulk of my Northern Ireland interviews took place during the extremely tense environment of the February 2000 suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Although this turned out to be first in a series of suspensions, it was perhaps one of the most uncertain, as tensions were running high and this action had removed the only formal political institutional setting in which all could debate and solve grievances. Many individuals I spoke to, from all sides, were under death threat, a common situation, and well aware that it was only their and others’ determination to have peace that prevented the conflict from exploding again. During Belfast interviews, politicians were often referred to when discussing forgiveness. A Republican woman insisted that “…Politicians are playing a game with us all. I think Unionist politicians don’t want peace. Ordinary Protestant people want peace but politicians are the problem.” (Northern Ireland Interviews, April 2000, Survivors of Trauma).

Another man felt that a key acknowledgement needed to be made by all parties in N.I. and in Great Britain that “there had been a war on” and that the best possible action by leaders of political parties would be to apologize and ask for forgiveness on behalf of the members of their party as a symbolic way to advance political reconciliation. This, he felt, would send a signal from the top down to individual group members, creating space for individuals and groups in opposing communities to work together. (Northern Ireland Interviews, April 2000, Survivors of Trauma) When asked about how he thought IRA prisoners/Republicans/ Catholics would react to a police apology (then called the Royal Ulster Constabulary or RUC, since renamed the Police Service of Northern Ireland or PSNI), one Republican ex-prisoner, initially looked stunned, then thoughtful, saying that an RUC officer had once told him that there had been “some bad apples in the bunch”. (Northern Ireland Interviews, April 2000, Ex-prisoner)

Following a conversation with a member of the police force several months later, I asked if the RUC had ever considered making a public apology. He said yes they had talked about it but discussion had focused on who should apologise to whom and for what. Many in the force felt that the police had been following
orders of others who were accountable as well. When I described the reaction of the ex-prisoner to the concept of an RUC apology, he stopped, deep in thought for a moment, and replied that sooner or later the police and the paramilitaries were going to have to sit down face to face and talk to each other. (Northern Ireland Interviews, November 2000, Belfast)

One reason is that while on the surface the Good Friday Agreement holds, and groups have ceased fighting each other in open conflict, “Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. The legacy of a generation of violence has left scars of bitterness and fear among citizens of all religious and political persuasions”, and a “climate of mistrusts exists between large numbers of unionists and nationalists”. (Porter, 2003, 25)

In his book, The Elusive Quest, Reconciliation in Northern Ireland (2003), Norman Porter has noted that the concept of reconciliation is still a debated issue in Northern Ireland. While he feels that a majority of people have declared themselves to be in favour of reconciliation, “what they understand by it is often too vague or too weakly held to withstand the assaults of its detractors”. (Porter, 25) Long standing cultural differences between unionists and nationalists remain and continue to create tense situations, particularly during the summer marching season, and “housing and educational segregation between Protestants and Catholics in working-class areas of Belfast…is virtually complete and shows little sign of changing.” (Porter, 2003, 3)

Despite official and pervasive pessimism about the situation, there have consistently been signs that people in Northern Ireland are thinking about forgiveness. “If people do not forgive to live in peace”, they “won’t fulfill that element of life – no forgiveness turns into hatred”, you “have to let it grow”. “Genuine forgiveness is a process” like, “planting a furrow”. (Northern Ireland Interviews, April 2000, Survivors of Trauma)

A Republican woman whose husband had been killed, readily spoke about forgiveness at a community centre in North Belfast.

Forgiveness is personal, it makes you happy. …I don’t think of the people who murdered my husband. I’m happier and the children see another way …the person is remembered as a person not as a something. …I had to forgive my husband for staying here and knowing the threat. I had to forgive myself for knowing. I had to forgive God for letting it happen. …The politicians are the hardest ones to forgive. They are the ranting and raving of very sick men. (Northern Ireland Interviews, April 2000, Survivors of Trauma)

**Revenge in South Africa**
Since the mid 1990s, South Africa has been assumed by many in the international community to be one of the least likely countries to provide material for a contemporary model of revenge (as, for instance, developed by anthropologist Richard Wilson). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) launched the country’s worldwide image as a symbol for forgiveness and reconciliation in a post-conflict environment, and following the 1994 democratic elections, a concept of “reconciliation, restorative justice and ‘African jurisprudence’ known as ubuntu”, was championed by the head of the TRC, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. This concept represented an idealised rural African community that embraced “reciprocity, respect for human dignity, community cohesion and solidarity”, and soon after “ubuntu became a key political and legal notion in the immediate post-apartheid order”. (Wilson, 2001, 9)

In the short term, the significant advantage of what Richard Wilson describes as this “thick” or “religious-redemptive version of reconciliation” consisting of “confession, forgiveness, sacrifice and redemption”, was that it was the “only version of reconciliation with any pretensions to reshaping popular legal and political consciousness”. In the long term, it became problematic in its attempt to construct an encompassing “post-apartheid dominant theology” as it strongly polarized both supporters and opponents. (Wilson, 2001, 122-3)

Upon my arrival in Cape Town on 30 October 2002, the country was reeling from news about an early morning bombing in Soweto, a large township outside Johannesburg, and immediately attributed it to an extreme right-wing Afrikaner secessionist paramilitary group (Hartwell, 2005, Chapter Two). Over the next six weeks, against the backdrop of the investigation, government reaction, and public warnings that this indicated deeper, more pervasive unrest, I conducted interviews in the Cape Town region. Long considered by many South Africans to be one of the most ‘mixed’ and least racially tense areas in the country, I found that while tensions were not as close to the surface as in other areas, hardly anyone viewed the area as having racial harmony or the TRC as having been more than a “good way to write accurate history”. (SA Interviews, 2002, Mattes)

The TRC certainly was not seen as having a long term impact toward advancing reconciliation or in solving any of the most pressing political, social, or economic problems, and there appeared to be much anger and disappointment that things hadn’t changed fast enough. This attitude was reflected both in Cape Town interviews and in stories and articles which appeared in local and national media.

During a meeting near the end of my stay and in subsequent communication with Karin Lombard, who was beginning to coordinate nationwide cross-group responses to a survey called “The SA Reconciliation Barometer”, organized by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, we both questioned the underlying meaning behind the use of the word “forgiveness” by the black population. In conversations and interviews with black Africans and Coloured populations, the possibility had occurred to us that the word was being used as an expression of
tolerance of whites by populations of colour, as many comments had been heard stating that ‘they’, meaning ‘whites’, were never going to change. (SA Interviews, 2002, Lombard)

The fear of black violence has been conveyed as a legacy of apartheid when fear of the African majority was often used as rationale for its continuation. It was perpetuated as necessary to protect the ‘haves’ from the ‘have nots’. During apartheid, the white population was seen as one group by most outsiders, but there had always been tensions between those of English and Afrikaner descent. Despite this split, there was a strong feeling among other groups of colour that the two groups had united to preserve their privileges under apartheid. Resentment of this stance was especially strong in the English dominated Cape Town area.

The “English sons went into military, and they were always anti-Black, always anti-Afrikaners, because they weren’t subtle. The Afrikaner had heavy politics.” The English are “having a hard time today...being English isn’t what it used to be”, they “don’t speak with marbles in their mouth...don’t have an old school tie anymore... during apartheid Afrikaners and English were together ... white English speaking went with what was secure, the protection of property” and persons. “White people were seduced by white privilege.” (SA interviews 2002, Kolbe)

Another, an artist and 1980s activist, of Coloured background, spoke about how his experiences during apartheid had been very different from his English Cape Town contemporaries. The “English, referred to as Anglo Saxons, held sway in the City of Cape Town. The University was a bastion of English language types – the educated and professional class”. They were “extremely arrogant” and “fear” made them “employ whatever means they could to preserve themselves”.

In the “heart of the 1980s” things were very difficult on the Cape Flats (Coloured area adjacent to Cape Town) “in terms of struggle and political actions”. We heard about a writers conference at the University of Cape Town...all interested could come up and deliver a paper”. We attended and “listened to what was happening and thought we were on another planet”. They were “out of sync with the raw experience we were having in the Flats”. (SA Interviews, 2002, Hartzenburg)

As an activist who had fought for the end of apartheid he has found that his vision of the new world is very different from those of young people in post 1994 South Africa. “For myself, something I find partly lacking are structures that people can relate to and work within in a meaningful way to bring people together to see a forward movement. ...What I find distasteful is that the strata that was privileged ...wants to hang on to their supreme position”, it’s “something they haven’t shaken off yet” and “makes for a problematic scenario ...a power positioning” which they haven’t relinquished. “I expected white people to change
but it hasn’t been forthcoming [and we] haven’t created the necessary structures so it can happen.” (SA Interviews, 2002, Hartzenburg)

Instead of the more equitable distribution of wealth as he had envisaged, other groups have assumed superior economic and social positions. He was especially critical of a new wealthy, privileged Indian class centred in Natal. Although hopeful, he expressed disillusionment with the way things have turned out so far as exclusiveness “doesn’t embody a sense of a country in which we can share the future”. (SA Interviews, 2002, Hartzenburg)

Conducting a series of interviews with African township inhabitants in the Vaal region south of Johannesburg, during and after the TRC, anthropologist Richard Wilson found that the Commission’s vision of reconciliation which had emphasised public testimonials, while creating meaning for sacrifice in order to abandon revenge, did not always have a positive effect. On the local level he observed that reaction was split into three categories: “adductive affinities”, where local values and expression of human rights shared the same expression and values; “pragmatic proceduralism”, where victims/survivors participate in human rights procedures in order to achieve personal goals rather than being motivated through sincere belief of related values; and “relational discontinuities’ where victims/survivors resisted the restorative justice model to seek a more retributive and vengeful style of justice.  (Wilson, 2001, xix)

In his work in townships, Wilson found the existence of a “dual consciousness” regarding formal justice as shaped by state institutions and informal understandings of local justice, where humanitarian and Christian values of forgiveness as a form of religious-redemption reconciliation, coexisted with “vengeful notions of punishment”. Following the 1940s’ urbanization of African workers and the subsequent growth of gang culture, two different systems of South African justice had begun to develop. In the townships, where the government did not provide an official police force, perceptions of justice tended to run to a vigilante style of ‘wild’ or ‘rough justice’, where score settling and “popular policing” were handled by gang members. This informal type of policing and justice was tolerated by the South African government. (Wilson, 2001, 156, 190)

Wilson noted that this situation was exacerbated by the way in which the TRC operated. Despite good intentions, the TRC hearings lacked “concrete mechanisms to pursue conflict resolution” and tended to interact with local communities “primarily through progressive mainstream church networks”, without connecting to “punitive structures at the local level—warring party political branches, township courts or Special Defense Units”. While acknowledging that this style of physical punishment was distasteful for many TRC commissioners, Wilson maintained that human rights organisations ignored “popular conceptualisations of justice at their own peril”. (Wilson, 2001, 227)
Wilson pointed out that “despite her public vilification”, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, the former wife of Nelson Mandela who “never quite made the transition from “Mother-of-the-Nation-yet-to-Become to the Mother-of-the-Nation-that-has-now-Come-to-be”, continues to represent “one of the main symbols of black anger and vengeance”. Despite her links to the murderously violent ‘Mandela United Football Club’ and her 1991 conviction for the kidnapping of Stompie Seipei (who was later murdered by the Club), she is still best able to articulate what Wilson describes as the “widespread emotions of anger at the continued racialization of privilege in the ‘new’ South Africa” as well as “the lack of economic betterment for the majority of black South Africans”. She has been an embarrassment to the ANC government, who has tried to break with the “excesses of the 1980s struggle” to create a “new national historicity” by elevating Desmond Tutu as a “symbol of reconciliation” and “continuity between humanitarian motives in the past and present”. (Wilson, 2001, 165)

This disparity between the official government politically correct position and personal attitudes was also observed by a South African journalist in the way a ‘new’ outdoor café eating trend was being practiced in suburban Johannesburg among affluent young whites, whose personal preferences and spending habits were seen as an indicator of how South Africa was succeeding in racial integration.

Notably, many of the restaurants in Johannesburg and their customers are white. Some of the younger customers are black—they tend to be students or scholars, children of those black people who have migrated from the townships. The groups behave non-racially, mainly because the majority are white.

This says two things and they’re not comfortable. Official rhetoric in South Africa oscillates between ‘rainbow nation’, although this is heard less today and a certain retributive criticism of whites for not putting their weight behind the new democracy. The notion of South Africa as one, unified and blending, runs through both official rhetoric and South Africans’ attitudes.

…the eat-out revolution suggests something different, more intricate. First, it suggests a growing gulf between official and unofficial South Africa. Second, it suggests the gulf is between notions of national unity. One notion is of the soup, where flavours blend; the public notion is of the stew where flavours are juxtaposed. Governments use the undifferentiated ‘we’, citizens ‘I’ and ‘us’. Governments evoke a future which they confuse with the present, deliberately or wishfully. (Greig, 2002)

In 2003, the summarizing report of an extensive and ongoing national survey “The SA Reconciliation Barometer”, a project of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation based in Cape Town, found that “30% of South Africans were
unable or unwilling to offer any meaning of reconciliation", that “Black South Africans appear to favour notions of forgiveness above notions of racial integration, which are favoured by Whites", “only one in five South Africans believe they need to take considerable personal responsibility for the national reconciliation process", and that “fully 13% of South Africans think it is justified to resort to violent means” like taking hostages or damaging property” if the government does not protect their human rights”. (Lombard, 2003, 16)

It appeared that one of the greatest disparities in racial opinion was over a response to the statement that “Whites profited from Apartheid and continue to do so today”. While only 22% of the white population agreed, a solid 74% of the black population thought it to be true. Another deep racial divide was reflected in responses to the question, “Do you agree, are uncertain, or disagree with the following statement: I feel that white people should be ready to apologise for what happened to the people under Apartheid”. Three quarters of blacks, 68 % of coloureds, and 57% of Indian respondents agreed, while only 29% of the white population thought an apology was necessary. (Lombard, 2003, 16)

The report notes that

whatever the reasoning, Blacks and Whites differ greatly on this issue. The massive disparity between the majority of Blacks (and Whites) feeling those who suffered should now forgive and the majority of Whites who feel they do not continue to benefit and need not apologise may have long-term repercussions for the nation-building process. (Lombard, 2003, 16)

One black South African in his mid twenties, a member of the first ‘cross-over’ generation, having received an integrated primary and university education, and still living with his family in a township, saw “forgiveness from all points of view”. Mentioning that he still experienced a subconscious type of racism exuded by well meaning whites, he defined two types of forgiveness. One was where blacks wanted apologies from whites “who caused pain” the “white people who passed legislation…white people who dragged them from the back of their bakkies [pickup trucks]”. The other was blacks forgiving each other. “We’re very forgiving…we’re brought up that way…to forgive and be forgiven….Black people need to do it, they caused a lot of harm to each other.” (SA interviews, 2002, Cape Town)

This last point of forgiveness between blacks is important as many colluded with the apartheid regime, directly and indirectly, in ways that resulted in betrayal and abuse and of fellow blacks. One strong point of agreement for the majority of all races in the Reconciliation Barometer focused on a “perceived readiness to gain closure on the past”. As Lombard noted,

In light of the widespread White refusal to acknowledge or apologise for their beneficiation, this comes as quite a relief. Whilst White recognition and acknowledgement of the past does not appear to be a
mandatory pre-condition for forgiveness and moving on, the patience of people who since 1994 have not seen any concerted efforts by Whites to change the apartheid era socio-economic status quo should not be overestimated. (Lombard, 2003, 16)

As Vincent Kolbe noted “Mandela was useful” and the “80s brought all of South Africa together”, but warned that there’s still a “lot of work to be done…still a lot of violence, unhappiness.” (SA interviews 2002, Kolbe)

The survey also made clear that reconciliation and development were perceived as two different issues. Reconciliation was referred to as the “rebuilding of relationships between people”, while development was interpreted as “dealing with unemployment, crime, a lack of housing”, and an array of “so-called socio-economic rights”. (Lombard, 2003, 16)

Regardless of background, there seems to be a general consensus among South Africans that the hard work of reconciliation has only just begun. As President Thabo Mbeki noted,

it’s a very delicate thing to handle the relationship between these two elements…it’s not a mathematical thing; it’s an art…if you handle transformation in a way that doesn’t change a good part of the status quo, those who are disadvantaged will rebel, and then goodbye reconciliation. (Lombard, 2003, 16)

**Serbia**

My fieldwork in Serbia provided an opportunity to observe these processes in their earliest development. My first visit to Belgrade was in late January 2001. This visit, just after Milosevic had been deposed the previous October, and again in April, required an official ‘letter of invitation’. The final trip in June 2002 fell under a new tourism visa in effect during the summer months.

In January 2001, when asked about forgiveness, one student referred to the NATO bombing, about which there were angry feelings in Belgrade, saying it was something she felt “very bitter about”. However, she said she could forgive the United States for the ‘intervention’ because they were a superpower and “that’s how superpowers act”, but what did Britain think it was doing, it was part of Europe? No one spoke directly of the Albanians. (Serbia Interviews, January 2001, Belgrade)

A year and a half later, when anti-NATO feelings had cooled somewhat in Belgrade, they were still running high in Novi Sad, a city located on the Danube River about eighty miles north of Belgrade. Stories of the nightly NATO bombings were vividly recalled and a large bridge that had been destroyed was still being angrily pointed out by locals. An American NGO worker based in Belgrade, who had worked in the Balkans for some time, told me he suspected that the
prolonged NATO bombing in Novi Sad had been carried out to teach Serbs a lesson, as there had been no other strategic reason for targeting the city. (Serbia Interviews, June 2002, Novi Sad, Belgrade)

Acknowledgement of actions against other groups done in the name of Serbs by the government and its satellite paramilitary organisations has been an extremely difficult issue. “Serbs need to know what was done in their name”, maintained Belgrade journalist Bratislav Grubacic when speaking of the massacre at Srebrenica. In order not to repeat another war, Grubacic felt that Milosevic needed to “go to the Hague”; that Serbia needed an “open process where basic elements of Serb nationalism need to be examined and politics adjusted to the modern world”, and that a truth commission needed to be established to “open the eyes of the Serb population. …Responsibility? Individual versus collective responsibility? It’s useful- can’t say they’re all responsible but in fact I believe we are all in some measure responsible.” (Serbia Interviews, June 2002, Grubacic; January 2001, Grubacic)

From the first visit there appeared to be a resigned acceptance for the final parting of ways with Croatia, Bosnia, and even Montenegro. A student interviewed in January 2001 talked about the anticipated split of Serbia and Montenegro as a “divorce”. I was asked at the same time by a group of students about what the outside press was saying about the necessity for sending Milosevic to the Hague in order for Serbia to receive economic aid. The feeling was strong among this group that the outside world was using Milosevic to teach Serbs a lesson. Most in the room had voted him out of office but felt that they would rather try him in Serbian courts than have the world humiliate him, which they perceived as public condemnation of all Serbs. (Serbia Interviews, January 2001, Belgrade)

In 2003 (10 September) a negotiated political forgiveness began to emerge between Croatia and Serbia when the Serb President Svetozar Marovic, made an unexpected apology to the Croatian President Stjepan Mesic during his first visit to Belgrade since the war, “ for all the evils any citizen of Serbia and Montenegro has committed against any citizen of Croatia”. President Mesic spontaneously responded by apologising “to all those who have suffered pain or damage at any time from citizens of Croatia who misused or acted against the law”. While it is uncertain whether these apologies were official or closer to personal, symbolic statements, it has become clear that both countries need to “improve regional co-ordination” if they are to become members of the European Union and other international institutions. (BBC News, 10 September 2003)

The initial apology may have also been motivated by Serbia’s pressing Croatian Serb refugee problem. Of the nearly one million refugees and internally displaced Serbs expelled from Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo since 1991, around 22,000 Croatian Serbs have remained in Serbia’s ‘temporary’ refugee centres, consuming “more than 80% of Serbia’s refugee budget”. Serbia has been
anxious to defuse the tensions their presence has caused among local Serbs by returning them to their original homes in Croatia. (BBC News, 20 June 2003)

While the relationship with the other countries in the former Yugoslavia show signs of settling, for many Serbs, Kosovo is still a volatile political issue. One Serb viewed the situation as one that “will go on for ten years…it will last a long time.” (Serbia Interviews, January 2001, Belgrade)

In commenting on the dangers of the rebirth of the Nationalist Party in the Serb elections of 28 December 2003, David Owen maintained that Milosevic had used his trial at the Hague “very cleverly …speaking directly to supporters in Serbia”. The “referendum on international criminal court at the Hague” is “feeding nationalist forces”. All of us “need to settle this issue of Kosovo”. There “needs to be a commitment from the EU on Serbia” and we “need closure on the issue of Milosevic. …If Serbia continues to go down into the pit…the Balkans would find it very difficult to come out of it. .. Kostunica is a genuine Serbian nationalist.” He felt that we, in the West, “need to engage him and need to be more generous toward Serbia.” (Owen, 2003, BBC Radio Four)

In April 2003, an “exploratory brainstorming” workshop on the Balkans, “Reconciling for the future”, sponsored by the CDRSEE (Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe) was held in Thessaloniki, Greece. One of the first speakers, Elisabeth Rehn, began by acknowledging that “...I think we all agree that today we are still far away from a truly reconciled region.” A divided society exists in the former Yugoslavia along “religious, ethnic, social, cultural and political lines”, with the deepest separation between the Serbs and Albanians. “…Reconciliation does not only mean the mere absence of physical violence, but, in a positive and more ambitious approach, a process in which the persisting pattern of hostility and conflicts is transformed into cooperation and respect of common values”. (Rehn, 2003)

Another contributor, Erhard Busek, Special Co-ordinator, Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, emphasised that discussing reconciliation means that we will have to meet the emotions of many individuals.

We will have to meet people whose emotions were (and still are) mobilised by the media, by the ideological apparatuses of the states, by the ethnic nations. Beyond those emotions – and this might be hard to hear for many of my colleagues present here- we will find that dealing with the hatred, which is a very important emotion in this context, is not going to be the real problem. The real and unpleasant problem ...to face in the future is going to be nothing else but love.

Many among the unfortunate actors of these bloody wars have been ready to kill, and they have actually killed, just for ...patriotism and the like and, therefore, they do not have a feeling of having a bad conscience. They simply do not feel guilty.
Love, therefore, is the problem that is going to be present in our efforts to change the social fabric (at least in socio-psychological terms), not only love in terms of ethno-nationalistic interpretation of patriotism, but also love in terms of internal family relations.

In these terms, the process of reconciliation, as we might understand it, would have to start with an attempt to use some rational concepts, to discuss some concrete elements, not just broad social or moral concepts.  (Busek, 2003)

Marie Therese Mauro, a UN Political Officer based in the Liaison Office in Belgrade, since the early 1990s, felt hopeful about Serbia’s future because people had changed the government themselves, as a bottom-up transformation of power is one of the strongest forms of political change. (Mauro, April 2001, Belgrade) That feeling was also present among students in Belgrade who said that voting out Milosevic had been the “first time in Serbian history that we changed our authorities peacefully”. (Serbia Interviews, January 2001, Belgrade)

In Subotica, Vjolvodina, the northern Serb province and city bordering Hungary, a Croatian woman who had a long standing marriage with a Serb, voiced her hatred for Milosevic and what he had done to the former Yugoslavia. “I don’t have political forgiveness…I hate him, not as a man because I don’t know him” but because if “you’re from Serbia you have a problem wherever you go”. She hated his wife because of her mother’s experience who “didn’t have a chance as a business woman to work like Milosevic’s wife and children. …in my heart I hate him but don’t want revenge”. I “want change but not revenge”. (Serbia Interviews, April 2001, Subotica)

Models of forgiveness and revenge

While it is clear that assessment of the impact of the political processes of forgiveness and revenge on post-conflict environments is still in its earliest stages, it is possible to accurately describe the way in which these processes work by utilising a variety of academic disciplines, such as comparative political literature and theory, social psychology, socio-legal studies, anthropology, philosophy, as well as in-country observations, surveys, and interviews.

One of the most detailed and relevant descriptions of the parallel processes of forgiveness and revenge has been developed by psychologist Robert D. Enright, who is a pioneer in the field of forgiveness research. Based on empirical work with individuals, Enright developed a forgiveness model that depicted the same interaction between forgiveness, revenge, perceptions of justice, and victim/perpetrator identity, that was observed in fieldwork nearly twenty years later. It describes a step-by-step process for varying degrees of conditional forgiveness which include elements of revenge and justice, until achieving the final goal of genuine forgiveness which is the final, unconditional release of all animosity by the victim. Titled “Stages of justice and styles of forgiveness
development”, the first five stages use a form of justice that corresponds with the equivalent “styles” or phases of “pseudo” forgiveness. (Enright et al, 1992, 104-6)

Stage 1 is justice as “Heteronomous Morality. I believe that justice should be decided by the authority, by the one who can punish.” This leaves the outcome in the hands of others, and absolves the person of responsibility for the decision. Style 1 for forgiveness is “Revengeful Forgiveness. I can forgive someone who wrongs me only if I can punish him to a similar degree to my own pain.” (Enright et al, 1992, 104-6) This type of forgiveness is completely dependent upon making an individual and/or group who has been perceived to have committed the original offence, suffer in equal measure as the victim by taking retribution either institutionally through the legal, legislative, or political system, or otherwise.

Justice Stage 2 is “Individualism. I have a sense of reciprocity that defines justice for me. If you help me, I must help you.” Forgiveness Style 2 is “Conditional or Restitutional Forgiveness. If I get back what was taken away from me, then I can forgive. Or, if I feel guilty about withholding forgiveness, then I can forgive to relieve my guilt.” In this case, both depend on the positive action of another party. The individualistic approach is an openness to helping another but only if the victim is the first recipient of a positive overture by the offender. Conditional forgiveness is similar in that an apology is usually demanded from the offender. This is the phase where restitution, usually monetary or in-kind is demanded for suffering caused. Elements of revenge are very much still present in this phase.

Justice Stage 3 is “Mutual Interpersonal Expectations. Here, I reason that the group consensus should decide what is right and wrong. I go along so that others close to me will like me.” Forgiveness Style 3 is “Expectational Forgiveness. I can forgive if others put pressure on me to forgive. I forgive because other people expect it.” Justice Stage 4 is “Social System and Conscience. Societal laws are my guides to justice. I uphold laws, except in extreme cases, to have an orderly society.” Forgiveness Style 4 is “Lawful Expectational Forgiveness. I forgive because my religion demands it. Notice that this is not Stage 2 in which I forgive to relieve my own guilt about withholding forgiveness.”

In both three and four, phases of justice and forgiveness are dependent on external pressure in order for forgiveness to be granted. This is a statement of forgiveness driven by social and/or religious pressure and not internally driven by a genuine readiness to extend a form of justice as fairness or to forgive. While it is not dependent on an apology or direct reciprocal action, it is often a softer and less overtly coercive approach to a similar situation.

Aid conditionality set by the international community, such as external demands for formation of a truth and reconciliation commission, can exert pressure to
make forgiveness statements. Religious pressures can be equally coercive, especially if one is a member of a religion that tells individuals or groups that they must forgive if they want to be members in good standing, without taking into account the differing capacities to forgive.

Justice Stage 5 is a “Social Contract. I am aware that people hold a variety of opinions. One usually should uphold the values and rules of one’s group. Some non-relative values (life, liberty) must be upheld regardless of majority opinion.” Forgiveness Style 5 is “Forgiveness as Social Harmony. I forgive because it restores harmony or good relations in society. Forgiveness decreases friction and outright conflict in society. Note that forgiveness is a way to control society; it is a way of maintaining peaceful relations.” (Enright et al, 1992, 104-6)

While this phase is not coercive, it is still nevertheless tied to a notion of obligation to the good of others rather than an internally driven will to forgive. The exhortations to forgive that were tied to the interpretation of reconciliation during the TRC in South Africa, exemplify Forgiveness Style 5, and were not necessarily indicative of a genuine and unconditional forgiveness.

In Enright’s model, only the sixth step is recognised as genuine forgiveness, as it is an unconditional act of mercy and complete abandonment of revenge. While “forswearing of personal justice”, Justice Stage 6 “Universal Ethical Principles”, states that “My sense of justice is based on maintaining the individual rights of all persons. People are ends in themselves and should be treated as such.” Forgiveness Style 6 is “Forgiveness as Love. I forgive because it promotes a true sense of love. Because I must truly care for each person, a hurtful act on her part does not alter that sense of love.”

Most importantly, this stage of forgiveness is an act of self love and positive group identification where the burden of the offence is released by the victim(s). Forgiveness is no longer dependent on a social context, the presence of an offender, or a process of equivalent negotiated action. “The forgiver does not control the other by forgiving; he releases her.” This version of forgiveness acknowledges the presence of an injustice while releasing the hurt of the act. While the offended realise they have been treated unfairly, and have no duty to show compassion, they decide to go beyond seeking a “fair solution”, tied to a conditional justice of retribution or reparation, to reach for a compassionate one. (Enright et al, 1992, 104-6) This last stage is seen as a final resolution and answer to the offence and it will not be revisited again by either the individual or group involved.

Enright’s description of the process of forgiveness allows individuals the freedom to forgive each other without necessarily forgiving their representative group, and vice versa. It also best shows ways in which it may be possible to overcome the contentious problem of identifying victims and perpetrators. While Enright’s model can be described as a type of “unilateral forgiveness” focused on the
individual, and not dependent or conditional on the action or even existence of an offender, more recent descriptions of varying types of forgiveness fit well within his descriptive framework. A type of “negotiated” and “positional” forgiveness have been identified by Molly Andrews, and peace/political psychologist Cristina Montiel, has defined a form of “socio-political forgiveness” specific to post conflict environments. (Andrews, 2000, 75-6)

Andrews described a “negotiated forgiveness” that is primarily conditional, and dependent on proportional, reciprocal actions. This process is conducted as a dialogue between the offender and wronged, encompassing at least three major steps; confession, ownership, and repentance. “First the wrongdoer must admit that he or she has committed the offending action. Secondly s/he must take responsibility for the action….thirdly, the offending party must express remorse for what they have done”. This action is dependent on the offender acknowledging the transgression and repenting. The offended makes the final decision on whether conditions have been satisfied in order to offer forgiveness. (Andrews, 2000, 75-6)

A type of “positional forgiveness” also observed by Andrews, describes an integrated type of a forgiveness process that is helpful in understanding interaction between individuals and groups during the process of forgiveness in post-conflict environments.

Here, one who has been harmed engages with the position of the offender, while avoiding any direct contact with them. As individuals embody social position and values, an opponent’s motivations may be discernible through an investigation of their belief system, which may or may not entail conversation with them. For instance, one who engages in ‘armed struggle’ does so not only as an individual but as a member of a group, and this position can be confronted, understood and potentially forgiven. (Andrews, 2000, 85)

Peace/political psychologist, Cristina Montiel, has defined a form of “socio-political forgiveness” that occurs when a “whole group of offended people cease their collective resentment and condemnation of another group ...perceived to have caused the social offense”. According to Montiel, when forgiveness is acted out collectively, as opposed to individually, new considerations appear. These include the quality of leadership across boundaries (“Are there leaders among the victimized groups who can simultaneously relate to the perpetrators in a politically effective yet forgiving manner?”); a support of public statements by individuals affected (“Are public declarations of forgiveness sensitive to the pained conditions of other members of the offended social group?”); and restoration of intergroup social fairness. (Montiel, 2000, 95)

For Montiel, it is the combination of the individual victim’s “readiness to forgive” combined with the “offender’s remorseful apology, initiatives toward reconciliation and the attainment of justice” that determine the constructive or destructive
effects of forgiveness on individuals and society. She cites “receiving fair treatment” as the type of justice most effective in order to create a post-conflict environment that reflects “positive social transformations” arising as “beneficial effects of the terminated political turmoil”. (Montiel, 2000, 96) Both negotiated and positional forgiveness can be seen as mid-phases in the Enright model, and Monteil’s socio-political model is a good description of the political relevance of a process of forgiveness in a post-conflict environment.

Throughout this analysis, the process of political forgiveness and revenge has been depicted as a series of steps taken by an individual and/or collectively by a group toward a final goal of unconditional forgiveness or revenge. In a process closely mirroring the Enright model, while incorporating observations included in Andrews and Monteil, the achievement of genuine forgiveness is defined as total and unconditional cessation and release of all desire for revenge. Each phase is depicted as a constantly evolving dynamic interaction of bottom-up, individuals influencing group behaviour and identity; and top-down, groups, represented by acknowledged leaders who influence individual beliefs.

One of the major differences between political versus individual acts of forgiveness and revenge is the necessity for public declaration in the political arena. While personal forgiveness may positively impact public acceptance of a political process it has the option of remaining private. Acts of political forgiveness in a post-conflict environment can be a public declaration of forgiveness for an offence by one individual toward another, or toward a group. It can also be one group officially forgiving another for its actions. Political acts of revenge can be seen as group activities involving rioting, looting, forced removals; and individual acts involving harassment, vandalising, and physical intimidation. Punishment beatings and targeted murders by paramilitaries in the early phases of a post-conflict period can be included.

A key point to remember is that while forgiveness and revenge acted out in the political arena are often presented in terms of rational and dispassionate discourse, in reality they are rarely disconnected from their emotional source. Forbearance from enacting revenge, while simultaneously taking steps toward cooperation with former enemies, appears to be a key to successfully rebuilding a country in the short term. Acknowledgement of the complexity of these interactions on both an individual and group level, their connection to an emotional source, and influence on the political situation, was present in all three countries where interviews took place.

Enright’s and Monteil’s models of forgiveness, both derived from empirical work; Enright’s derived from work with individuals in the United States; and Monteil’s from work in post-conflict environments, proved to most closely reflect realities observed in fieldwork interviews. Especially relevant was Enright’s depiction of the evolutionary, phased and intertwined relationship between justice, forgiveness, and revenge. The most significant finding from my work was
discovering the phase of passive resentment in the current post-conflict generation and the need for seeking unconditional forgiveness in subsequent generations and diasporas (see following discussions). Clearly more work needs to be done in both areas but particularly on relationship between institution-building and passive resentment in post-conflict transitions.

Models of revenge

While less empirical work has been done with the process of revenge, it is still clear that there is an interaction between perceptions of justice, forgiveness and revenge throughout its evolutionary phases. A three phase model called “norms of revenge”, derived from research in Montenegro, where revenge is enacted as part of a social code of honor, was constructed in the late 1980s by Jon Elster. The first phase, based on a rational behavior model, cites the risk of social exclusion if there is no form of retaliation, such as intimidation, and/or perceived unwillingness of the offended to take revenge for an offence, by punishing the offenders. The second phase is revenge enacted in the passion of the moment, where rage and impulse guide the act. The third stage is revenge motivated by shame, anger, embarrassment, and contempt, and dictated by socially shared and enforced rules controlling its enactment. (Elster, 1990, 862-3, 872-3)

In a wide ranging study, anthropologist Alison Renteln found a connection between vengeance and forgiveness in the settling of feuds, where the “process of taking [retaliatory blood] revenge …leads to mutual forgiveness as the “point is not to punish but to restore harmony’. While she cites the standard interpretation of forgiveness as forgiving an act without retaliation, she states that “forgiveness in other social contexts requires action”. (Renteln, 1990, 12-30)

Laying the groundwork for Richard Wilson’s later model, political theorist Robert Nozick listed five ways to distinguish retribution, a limited retaliatory response to a wrong, from revenge, a disproportionate and invariably destructive response to the same situation.

The first is that retribution is “done for a wrong” or what is seen as a concrete offence, as compared to revenge, which may be carried out for a real or perceived slight and “not for a wrong”. The second is that “retribution sets an upper limit on punishment” or proportionality in accordance to the wrongful act while “revenge sets no such limits”. Third, “revenge is personal”, while “agents of retribution need have no personal tie to the victim…for whom they exact retribution”. Fourth, revenge “involves a specific emotional tone-pleasure in the suffering of the punished” while retribution “either involves no such emotional tone” or derives pleasure from a different source such as “justice being done”. Finally, revenge is specifically targeted back toward the individuals or members of groups who perpetrated the original transgression, while retribution is “committed to general principles mandating similar punishment in similar circumstances”. (Wilson, 2001, 161-2)
Utilising both township interviews in the Johannesburg area during and after the South African TRC, and Nozick's definitions, Richard Wilson developed a three-stage model depicting vengeance, retribution, and revenge. The beginning point, vengeance, is interpreted as being linked "to a language and an emotion of reciprocal punishment and suffering of the offender as compensation for wrongdoing or perceived harm". Retribution, "although motivated by a desire for revenge" is seen as a punitive type of justice "dispensed by more institutionalised types of mediation and adjudication", such as in South African townships and magistrates' courts. Revenge is unconditional with "unchecked violent acts of individuals and armed gangs motivated by the desire for vengeance with no element of proportionality". (Wilson, 2001, 162)

Like Elster, Wilson's model shows the process of revenge not as a free-floating and independent discourse, but as a simultaneously emotional and rational reaction to a situation where "more institutionalized forms of retribution (be they state or informal) are lacking". His definition of vengeance and retribution parallels with the early to mid-stages of Enright's forgiveness model, while the final stage of revenge is the antithesis of genuine forgiveness. (Wilson, 2001, 160)

Wilson acknowledges that a "permeable boundary" and inherent ambiguity exist between "institutions of retribution" which "feed off the unrefined emotion of vengeance, channeling it into conventional procedures, but never quite breaking with the expectation of due punishment for wrongs and suffering for the offender". The "raw power of vengeance" supports the legitimacy and power of judges handing down sentences. "Every informal and state court in South Africa albeit in different ways, not only relies upon the construction of these categories but at the same time blurs their limits." (Wilson, 2001, 164) South African Justice Albie Sachs described the court system as a form of "soft vengeance" as opposed to the "hard vengeance" of fighting in the streets. (Sachs, 2003)

In her work on revenge, Wild Justice (1985), Susan Jacoby noted a fine line between retribution and revenge that was often present in the formal legal system.

In determining the role of retribution in society, the ultimate aim of punishment is no less important than the procedure by which it is imposed. The fact that a judge rather than a mob designates drawing-and-quartering as a proper mode of execution is, in strict legal terms, an advance in the social control of revenge, but it also means that the values of those who control the social order are scarcely more advanced than those of the mob. (Jacoby, 1985, 5)

This is echoed in the sentiments of Aladjem (as quoted by legal scholar, Austin Sarat) who claims that "vengeance always cloaks itself in the most current styles of 'justice'. The demand for victims' rights and the insistence that we hear the
voices of the victims are just the latest ‘style’ in which vengeance has disguised itself.” (Sarat, 1997, 171)

Desire for and justification of revenge were rarely articulated in my fieldwork interviews. One notable exception was a woman in Northern Ireland who worked openly with Republicans in a Belfast community group, while simultaneously staying on good terms with her local Loyalist paramilitaries, who she spoke of appreciatively as doing the ‘real’ policing such as disciplining joy riders and petty criminals. Her brother’s death was something she couldn’t forget and she declared unequivocally that she wanted to take revenge on her brother’s killers who had been his fellow Loyalist paramilitary members. (Northern Ireland Interview, 2000, West Belfast)

A key problem with acting out revenge is, as Martha Minow observed in Bosnia and Rwanda, that it can lead to overwhelmingly self destructive excess.

At a personal level, the result can be painful and futile vendettas. At a societal level, as the recent conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda only too vividly demonstrate, memories, or propaganda-inspired illusions about memories, can motivate people who otherwise live peaceably to engage in torture and slaughter of neighbors identified as members of groups who committed past atrocities.” This can result in “devastating, escalating intergroup violence” where “mass killings are the fruit of revenge for perceived past harms.” (Minow, 1998, 11)

Philosopher Hannah Arendt addressed similar issues in the post World War II environment. A Jew who had witnessed the systematic extermination of Jews and others, she sought to better understand how society could reconcile in the aftermath of these acts. She reached the conclusion that the root emotion of both forgiveness and revenge was rage, but with very different results. “Forgiveness is the exact opposite of vengeance, which acts in the form of reacting against an original trespassing, whereby far from putting an end to the consequences of the first misdeed, everybody remains bound to the process…” (Arendt, 1958, 240-1)

Arendt saw acts of revenge as self-perpetuating, unending, and predictable responses which stimulated new cycles of revenge, while forgiveness was depicted as a stronger force that could stop revenge forever.

Forgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it. …Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever…” (Arendt, 1958, 240-1)
A key problem with revenge is that while it can be euphorically addictive, its ‘high’ is of short duration. As one Bosnian Serb, a former paramilitary group member recalled:

We lived off revenge. Sweet revenge. During the history of the Serbian nation, everybody has hated us. We suffered many casualties during the First World War and the Second. Our nation was always threatened …you have to strike back, pay back that evil. Back then, revenge felt very good. Especially when we killed the KLA, [Kosovo Liberation Army] That was back then. Now I can’t sleep, I can’t eat. It hasn’t lasted. (Judah, 2002, 246-7)

Passive resentment

In many early post-conflict environments, it has been observed that if a peace process is to take hold, a point is arrived at when all sides begin to consciously practice forbearance from acting out feelings of revenge. This phase has been identified as a type of “passive resentment”, first coined during conversations with researcher, Frances McLernon, University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. During interviews and in public we had both observed clear indication of a middle ground that combined distinct elements of both forgiveness and revenge. In her work with forgiveness groups in Northern Ireland, McLernon observed evidence of a negative, volatile, but neutral non-action oriented middle ground characterised by anger, frustration, and confusion. (McLernon, 2000) This ‘passive resentment’, a forbearance from revenge accompanied by a reluctance to forgive, has emerged as an emotionally ambivalent but politically pragmatic stance.

A declaration of an “intention to forgive” on both an individual and group level was felt by one Republican woman to be a constructive first step in beginning dialogue with a community with whom one had been formerly engaged in violent conflict. (Northern Ireland Interviews, November 2000, Ballymurphy Women’s Group, Belfast)

In north Belfast, one man told me that an “intention toward forgiveness is OK”, it “means you forgive things that prevent … change. …People tell me they don’t intentionally forgive but don’t blame anyone either. No one has a monopoly on crimes against humanity.” (Northern Ireland Interview, April 2000, Survivors of Trauma) A similar attitude was expressed among six focus groups led by McLernon and others. Two ‘victims’ groups were composed of “Nationalists” (Catholics), one of Unionists (“Protestants”), one of members of church based community relations organisations, another of lay conflict resolution organisations, and one of members of a victim support organisation. One Unionist felt that not holding “all members of the group responsible for the deeds of a few” didn’t mean that “you have forgiven each and every nationalist in the country” but that this prevented one “resenting people just because they are labeled as part of that group”. (McLernon and Cairns, 1999, 34)
Subsequent interviews in Serbia and South Africa reinforced this pragmatic attitude, and also showed that it could be selective. In Serbian interviews and conversations in January and April 2001, a short time after Milosevic lost the October election, it was clear that what independent Belgrade journalist, Bratislav Grubacic called “passive resentment” existed between Croats and Serbs, and Muslims and Serbs, but that outright hostility and distrust characterised most of the relationships between Albanians and Serbs. (Serbia Interviews, January 2001, Grabacic) In South Africa, one former activist made the point that “I can easily live with people who are trying to address issues rather than those not willing to look at them.” (SA Interviews, 2002, Hartzenburg)

A depiction of a forgiveness process that mirrors the definition of passive resentment as well as the first five steps of the Enright framework has been suggested by Michelle Nelson. In her model she describes a type of “detached”, “limited”, and “complete” forgiveness. Detached forgiveness is “reduction in negative affect toward the offender, but no restoration of the relationship” while limited forgiveness is a “reduction in negative affect toward the offender and partial restoration of and decreased emotional investment in the relationship”. In her interpretation, full or complete forgiveness is closest to Enright’s final stage of genuine forgiveness, which includes “total cessation of negative affect towards the offender and full restoration and growth of the relationship”. (Enright et al, 1998, 101)

Monteil has maintained that a form of sociopolitical forgiveness could be especially effective when “a pragmatic combination of forgiveness and justice in post-conflict societies” could help to create “the necessary transformational social power needed to heal both the subjective-psychological and objective-systemic damages of a war”, helping to prevent the “escalation of future intergroup antagonisms”. (Montiel, 2000, 100)

This phase allows individuals and groups to acknowledge feelings of revenge, while allowing cooperation with former enemies. It also embodies a willingness to consider forgiveness. While the decision to forbear from a vengeful act is not the same as extending unconditional forgiveness, it is a good beginning. A sincerely stated intent to forgive, or at least to try, is a definite step in that direction.

As one north Belfast Republican community activist asserted, “people need to meet people.” They “may never see eye to eye politically, but see each other as people” and cause “a break down there” (in hostility). He believed that “leaders of factions” needed “to ask for forgiveness and to extend forgiveness” and that political leaders needed to “ask each other for forgiveness for attacking” the other’s “political base”. There needed to be a “mass movement of people who forgive themselves and forgive each other”. (Northern Ireland Interview, 2000, Survivors of Trauma)
Conclusion

In much of the discussion surrounding forgiveness, one of the most pervasive questions is if its enactment is necessary in order to stop fighting, and if so, who is it necessary for? At the present time, there tends to be a myopic intensity focused on former combatants forgiving each other before they can move on, but as has been indicated, evidence is beginning to suggest that a conscious forbearance from revenge as demonstrated in the phase of “passive resentment” may be sufficient to allow individuals and groups to work together in shaping new institutions in the short term. It is clear from the evidence that while genuine forgiveness does release all feelings of revenge, it must be internally driven and unconditional, making it an extremely difficult state for many to achieve.

Significantly, as made clear by the Enright model, the presence of vengeful feelings is not in itself a deterrent to the process of forgiveness, nor a guarantee of acting out revenge. More importantly, acknowledging the presence of revenge may help the offended to eventually forgive. The link between the two appears to be perceptions of and reactions to justice as fair or unfair treatment, reaction to perceived victimisation, and the way in which they play a prominent and parallel role in the early stages of revenge. It is also clear that what is often heard as a call for ‘justice’—certain types of trials, punitive actions, conditionalities, etc., is driven by a motivation for revenge rather than a quest for fair treatment. Looked at in this light, the continued presence of violence does not necessarily indicate failure of a peace process but instead a post-conflict evolution of internal perceptions and needs. (Hartwell, 2006)

Ironically, it may be the groups who are most distant from the conflict and who have been most disassociated from its costs—the third, in some cases second generations, and diasporas, both contemporary and historic, who may have the greatest need to understand and enact forgiveness. Subsequent generations tend to receive verbal and nonverbal transmissions of anger for wrongs done to their predecessors, while diasporas carry with them an image of a country that no longer exists, creating a new image in a new environment which may exacerbate old grudges and disagreements. Renewal of conflicts often involves direct participation by both of these groups. For them, ritualizing and achieving genuine forgiveness, thus releasing all desire for revenge, could be of the greatest help in moving on.

By better defining the processes of forgiveness and revenge, as well as their relationship to perceptions of justice as fairness and formation of post conflict identities, a more accurate set of concrete indicators which reflect these underlying dynamics can be defined and utilised by policymakers and practitioners to assist in clarifying intentions of individuals and groups. Understanding these processes and how they evolve is directly relevant to security issues on the ground. This awareness will help outsiders to understand
the varying nuances and interaction between coded talk and violent action, and to assist in identifying potential flash points where lethal violence might quickly erupt. (Hartwell, 2006)

Mahmood Mamdani has observed that “There is no Chinese Wall between good and evil; the two are interred in the same bones. The dilemma is how to live with evil: Love Thy Enemy.” He has suggested an alternative paradigm of reconciliation where the “old order” could be redefined “not through a relationship between winners and losers, between its beneficiaries and victims as the majority” but by viewing the number of perpetrators and victims as a minority. In other words, treating perpetrators as “agents of the state”, and victims as “political activists victimized personally and individually”, will circumvent focus on “systemic group disadvantage”, and shift instead to specific individual violations. “Responsibility for the old order is pinned on individual perpetrators, agents, not even on the old political elite. Guilt, evil, is defined in strictly individual terms.” (Mamdani, 1997, 23-24)

This prevents a “quest for justice” that is “unbounded and self-righteous”, which instead “can be framed as historically as was the injustice to which it is a response. The challenge is to bound that quest within a larger objective, the quest for a re-defined political community in which the identities victim and perpetrator, victim and beneficiary, can be transcended as those of survivors of an era gone by.” (Mamdani, 1997, 25)

An acknowledgement of the suffering of all, the extension of dignity and respect for different experiences, and consideration in the way memories of the conflict are transmitted to future generations and diasporas, may be key issues in stopping a renewed cycle of revenge. Changing attitudes toward the concept of transitional justice have resulted in increased local and international willingness to consider a wide variety of integrated, comprehensive, and local judicial and nonjudicial responses to human rights abuses. Goals of transitional justice mechanisms include prosecution of perpetrators, documenting and acknowledging violations through nonjudicial means such as truth commissions, reformation of abusive institutions, providing reparations to victims, and facilitation of reconciliation processes. (ICTJ, 2006, “Our Mission”)

In the end, it is the people formerly in conflict who will decide which path to follow, and it is up to the international community to learn how to better identify and support their steps toward a lasting peace. Similar to “war”, “peace” is an imagined community. As Ignatieff observed, a successful process of reconciliation “must reach into the shared inheritance of the democracy of death” to teach the futility of struggles that avenge “those who are no more. For it is an elementary certainty that killing will not bring the dead back to life”. (Ignatieff, 1998, 190) In post-conflict transitions it is not just a choice between forgiveness and revenge that drives survivors toward an equitable and tolerable solution, but the imagined joys of a peaceful life.
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