

Article

Political Atrocities, Moral Indignation, and Forgiveness in African Religious Ethics

Simeon Ilesanmi

Department for the Study of Religions, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC 27109, USA;
ilesanmi@wfu.edu

Received: 1 October 2020; Accepted: 29 October 2020; Published: 20 November 2020



Abstract: Scholarship on transitional justice has oscillated between the pedagogical value of moral magnanimity, shown by victims of past atrocities who choose to forgive their wrongdoers, and the deterrent effect of imposing punishment on the offenders, which includes making restitution to the victims of their wrongful actions. This article examines the views of two African thinkers on this issue, Archbishop Desmond Tutu who argues for forgiveness, and Wole Soyinka who defends restitution as a better way to express respect for the dignity of both the victims and the rule of law. The article contends that while traditional African values play important roles in the perspectives of these thinkers, they do not, in themselves, justify either of the two positions they advance. The article further contrasts the positive role Tutu and Soyinka assign to historical memory and truth-telling with the strategies of social forgetting and public silence embraced in Sierra Leone and Mozambique in their quest for political reconciliation.

Keywords: forgiveness; restitution; dignity; ubuntu; omoluwabi; memory; social forgetting

1. Discourse on Forgiveness: Personal and Political

A discussion of forgiveness from the standpoint of religious ethics places us at the intersection of two distinct yet overlapping normative modes of discourse, namely, religion and ethics. Regardless of how one thinks about religion and ethics—whether as traditions, features of culture, disciplines, or fields of conversations—they have historically shaped human understandings of a wide range of issues and patterns of human interaction. Mundane questions about how humans should treat one another, as well as deep ponderings of the meaning and purpose of human existence, are often addressed in terms of either or both of these modes of discourse. Even when the guidance they provide is less helpful and illuminating than we would like, religion and ethics continue to be among the main organizing frameworks within which persons seek to sort out the complexities of life. It is therefore not surprising that the literature on forgiveness is dominated by scholarship in religious studies and ethics; the sensibilities and perspectives that forgiveness unfolds are both religious and ethical.

However, religion and ethics do not have a monopoly on discussions of the meaning of forgiveness and the conditions under which it is appropriately extended. While forgiveness is often invoked in contexts of divine–human relationships and interactions between two or more persons, the upsurge of scholarly interests in the concept of forgiveness, especially since World War II, has been driven largely by developments in national and international politics and law. The atrocities and brutal human rights violations associated with the holocaust, the apartheid policy in South Africa, the Rwanda genocide, and the devastating wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Sudan, among others, have inscribed a new grammar of citizenship into our political and legal lexicon, which places the status of humans qua victims of human rights violations alongside the more familiar categories indexed by nationality, gender, race, religion, and others; and confronts us with the difficult challenge of adjudicating and

balancing the interests of victims and the offenders who coercively thrust this mark of identity upon their victims.

The tasks of adjudication and balancing have generated vigorous debates in virtually every society, regardless of the particularities of sociological compositions, whether culturally and religiously homogenous or heterogeneous. There is wide agreement, however, that these tasks require following different procedures, and they anticipate dissimilar outcomes for victims and perpetrators. For many theorists, adjudication is understood as a formal, typically secular, process for determining the blameworthiness or culpability of a wrongdoer and apportioning a punishment that is commensurate with the scale of the wrongful conduct. Its goal is to secure justice for both the victim and the perpetrator of wrongdoing, with the former experiencing justice in the form of relief, compensation, and closure, while the latter receives it in a more punitive and retributive form. In contrast, the task of interests-balancing, even when it resembles adjudication in some ways, is conceived as a more subtle, nuanced, and complex process. It is predicated on the imperative to restore a sense and structure of equilibrium to damaged relationships. It is imbued with moral and anthropological realism, which asserts that neither side should be completely defined by the experience of a terrible, tragic situation. Moreover, the concept of balancing comprehends the interests at stake more expansively and holistically than the adjudication paradigm; other parties beyond the two immediately affected are incorporated into the zone of bona fide stakeholders, some of whom, especially in the African context, are human entities in the invisible realm.¹ In short, the interests-balancing paradigm seems to be more concerned about the restoration of organic harmony and peace to the whole society as a unit than about parceling out discrete measures of justice to the specific parties involved in historical conflicts or disputes. The two approaches illustrate for us, in rough approximations, the moral debate and difference between communitarian and liberal conceptions of justice, to which I will now turn as articulated in the African context.

In this essay, I examine the works of two African personalities and thinkers who work freely across ethical, religious, and political-legal modes of discourse. Both figures believe that African religious traditions and cultural worldviews have resources that can guide people in thinking about wrongdoings and in drawing inferences and conclusions about the ways societies should deal with atrocities that citizens commit against fellow citizens. I do so against the backdrop of two very different approaches that were taken by other war-torn African countries. More significantly, I argue that while traditional African values play important roles in the perspectives of these thinkers, they do not, in themselves, justify either of the two positions they represent. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka are household names in Africa and the world community. One is a theologian and the other a literary scholar and critic with unabashed philosophical disposition toward political liberalism. One is South African and the other is Nigerian. Both have witnessed and personally experienced atrocities and human rights violations committed by fellow citizens and also by governments. For Tutu, the apartheid system in South Africa served as the laboratory for the manifestation of the scale and depth of evils that humans can unleash on their fellows. Soyinka experienced the same phenomena in his country and other parts of Africa through a succession of military dictatorships, oppressive civilian regimes, and protracted civil wars characterized by wanton destruction and brutalities. It was, however, the end of apartheid that provided both men with an opportunity to engage each other in a vigorous debate about how societies with the kinds of South African or Rwandan or Nigerian history should deal with their pasts. How should such societies respond to the commission of despicable acts in public life? How much of their pasts should societies acknowledge? Should they prosecute and punish those responsible for past gross human rights abuses? What is the best way to recover a more just and peaceful state of affairs?

¹ In short, adjudication is “the legal process of resolving a dispute” or “the process of judicially deciding a case,” while a balancing test “measures competing interests . . . and decides which interest[s] should prevail.” See (Garner 1999).

In her book, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, Martha Minow formulates the moral dilemma facing post-atrocity societies as having to do with “[h]ow to treat the continuing presence of perpetrators, and victims, and bystanders, after the violence has ended.” She admits that the options available are not easy to negotiate. There are dangers of either “wallowing in the past or forgetting it. Too much memory or not enough; too much enshrinement of victimhood or insufficient memorializing of victims and survivors; too much past or too little acknowledgment of the past’s staging of the present; these joined dangers accompany not just societies emerging from mass violence, but also individuals recovering from trauma.”²

Tutu deploys the concept of *ubuntu* to accomplish this end, while Soyinka relies on the Yoruba idea of *omoluabi*. In Soyinka’s words, their respective approaches illustrate “two strategies of confrontation within one’s history . . . from within the same continent.”³ Both depend on “a process of baring the truth of one’s history in order to exorcise the past and secure a collective peace of mind, the healing of a bruised racial psychology.”⁴ Interestingly, both thinkers link their respective value preferences to African humanism and communal ontology, which understand individual human flourishing as an integral part and extension of the collective good. They differ, however, on the strategies to repair a rupture of this holistic vision of life. As Tutu articulates the *ubuntu* ideal, any moral remedy a society deploys in its efforts to heal from the wounds of its past has to be evaluated by how well it aligns with the complex interests present in that society and by how well it would enable the society to build a viable future. Tutu extols the *ubuntu* principle for its inherently egalitarian and optimistic view of human nature, which affirms the humanity of both perpetrators and victims of evil. This explains his transparent confidence in the ability of the participants in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to be forgiving of each other, regardless of their positions, status, and conducts during the troubled years. His usual refrain during the hearings was: “if you live with hatred and revenge in your heart, you dehumanize not only yourself, but your community.”⁵ In contrast, Soyinka is less sanguine about human nature, citing the continued widespread occurrence of brutalities as evidence of its moral weakness. He argues that from the perspective of *omoluwabi*,⁶ it is not enough to acknowledge past human rights abuses, it is also necessary to put in place structures and mechanisms that would deter similar acts in the future and promote peace and human rights, which are best assured if violators are punished and victims adequately compensated. Otherwise, using a non-retributive strategy of forgiveness to pursue reconciliation between wrongdoers and victims would be tantamount to erecting a building on a lopsided foundation; it may be more effective to pay back a wrongdoer in his own coin.

Their differences in strategy notwithstanding, Tutu and Soyinka agree on the important task of acknowledging the past. Without such moral homage to the past, it would be impossible to overturn the lies told by previous regimes to cover up their abuses, lies that usually included, especially in the African contexts, codes of silence that enshrouded policies of violence and methods of control. They further agree that when oppressive regimes combine violence with secrecy, which they often do through legislative mandates, strict enforcement, and threatened or actual punishment of those who publicly express sympathy with critics and victims of the government, the entire society suffers because of the chilling effects of such policy on the political culture. Thus, Tutu and Soyinka embrace the rationale behind a process that would help reveal, disseminate, and discuss aspects of the truth about the past because it would not only signal the obsolescence of the previous regime, but also facilitate the establishment of a new culture of transparency and accountability. The success of this project would inevitably entail a re-reading of the society’s history, such that the details of its past, its present,

² (Minow 1998).

³ (Soyinka 1999).

⁴ Ibid., p. 21

⁵ See (Tepperman 2002).

⁶ Literally translated as a thoroughly virtuous person, someone whose core character trait consists in respecting the rights of other people.

and the envisioned future are seen in their interdependence and intersectionality. Specifically, it would require the society to guard against the temptation to build its future upon collective amnesia rather than an honest confrontation with its past, as such a future would essentially be an illusion because an unresolved past will inevitably return to haunt the citizens. It seems reasonable to expect that “when the wounds and the rage left by violent oppression are ignored or pasted over, they resurface and cause new unrest.”⁷

2. Healing through Social Forgetting and Public Silence: Mozambique and Sierra Leone

It is one thing to agree on confronting the past as a prelude to building a viable political future, it is another thing to know the manner of engagement the present generation should have with its past, or to know the appropriate action to take in response to what is revealed about the past. As already indicated, this is where Tutu and Soyinka disagree. Before discussing their disagreement, it is instructive to note that not every society traumatized by gross human rights abuses considers a collective journey to the past an essential ingredient of its healing process. For instance, as Mozambique and Sierra Leone sought ways to recover from their civil wars (1975–1992 and 1991–2002, respectively), both of which were internationally notorious for particular forms of violence,⁸ they adopted techniques of healing and reintegration that were apparently at odds with the prevailing norms for such efforts within the international community. In contrast to the UN-backed and NGO-promoted paradigm of truth-telling—the verbal recounting of personal memories of violence, abuse, and torture, modelled after South Africa’s TRC, the anthropologist Rosalind Shaw points out that the local people and communities of Sierra Leone pursued healing “through practices of social forgetting.”⁹

Mozambique’s former Prime Minister, Pascoal Mocumbia, described the support a similar strategy of “public silence” enjoyed in his country from “a broad constituency” who believed that time is the best healer of wounds. The key words in both contexts are “social” and “public” in that the locus of agency for the suspension or muting of memory about the horrors and traumas of wars was the society in its organic selfhood, rather than its individual members. More importantly, social *forgetting* or public *silence* had a narrow and limited meaning within the contexts of these communal healing practices. They denoted a moratorium on “explicit verbal recounting”¹⁰ of the war events in the public; however, neither was a cultural mandate that individuals should erase their memories of the events, a requirement that would have been existentially impossible and psychologically burdensome. Since perpetrators and victims would still continue to live side by side, both societies considered it unwise to be speaking about the war in public as doing so would encourage “its return, calling it forth when it is still very close and might at any moment erupt again,”¹¹ or as Mozambicans believed, it might even “open the space for the malevolent forces to intervene.”¹² An inopportune recollection risks further fragmenting the social fabric by reopening dormant cultural suspicions and exacerbating intergroup mistrusts.

To checkmate a perceptibly weak human nature and expedite the process of social healing among previously antagonistic camps, Sierra Leone and Mozambique devised traditional African rituals for purifying both perpetrators and victims of violence. The target of this healing ceremony in Sierra Leone is the human heart, the seat of emotions pertaining to anger and revenge, which has to be ritually “cooled” as a precondition for the ex-soldier’s transformation from a fighter to a civilian. After the ritual, typically performed by the clan head, ex-combatants are tabooed from publicly talking about

⁷ (Daye 2004).

⁸ The litany of atrocities committed during the war included amputation, mutilations of all kinds, and summary executions of civilians. In addition, women and girls were subjected to rape and forced marriage, and children and youth of both genders were abducted, conscripted, and often compelled to commit acts of killing, mutilation, rape, and abduction.

⁹ See (Shaw 2005).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² (Green and Honwana 1999).

the war and community members are reciprocally enjoined not to call child or adult ex-combatants “rebels” or other combatant labels, not to ask ex-combatants about their past actions, and not to discuss the war in public after rituals of reintegration.¹³ Both sides thus chose to “forget” not because they wanted to erase personal memories but because they wanted to contain them “in a form that would enable them to recover their lives”¹⁴ or, in Shaw’s words, “get on with their lives.”¹⁵ Shaw explains that the “process of social forgetting ‘unmakes’ past violence and ‘remakes’ ex-combatants as new social persons. It is not a panacea, but rather a practice that enables and sustains ongoing processes of healing and social recovery.”¹⁶

In Mozambique, traditional healers (*curandeiros*) preside over the purification rituals, which are deemed necessary because of the belief that former soldiers “are vehicles through which the spirits of the war dead might enter and [re]afflict the entire community.”¹⁷ Thus, the purpose of the ceremonies for soldiers is to placate the ancestors and other dead members of the community, especially the war casualties, whose spirits have been contaminated by war and bloodshed. The purification treatment involves a series of symbolic procedures, such as burning military clothes and bathing the soldiers with water mixed with the leaves of the mulala tree, all of which are aimed at cutting the [soldier’s] links with the past. Similar to the proscription of public discussion of war after the “cooling the heart” rituals in Sierra Leone, when the Mozambican soldier gets out of the river he is instructed not to look back, as doing so “is believed to open the door to the war spirits, inviting them to come and haunt him. The past, the war, has to flow away with the river.”¹⁸ In essence, then, without placating the spirits of those killed in war, the soldier risked having those spirits sit on his shoulder and “[bring] him and the community bad luck.” The purification “ceremony re-humanizes the former soldier, allowing him back into the community, where he is accepted . . . almost without question, even by the relatives of their [sic] victims.”¹⁹

While both societies ritually provided for the necessary re-humanization of the ex-soldiers, only Mozambique created a separate purification ceremony for community-based reintegration of victims of war atrocities, especially of sexual assaults. Carolyn Nordstrom witnessed one such ritual cleansing involving a rape victim. As she described it, members of the community helped the woman piece together modest clothing to wear on the special day. They told her stories of other atrocities as a reminder that she was not alone, nor responsible for her plight. On the day of the ceremony, food was prepared and musicians brought in. Highlights of the ceremony, which lasted through the night, included giving her a ceremonial bath, accompanied by songs and stories about healing, dressing her in her new clothing, and feasting. The women then carried her into the hut, surrounding her and stroking her, and speaking encouraging words of healing and rebirth. They then picked her up, and returned with her to the crowd, who welcomed her back into the community. “Throughout the ceremony, the woman was continually reassured with stories of ongoing support; of her need to place responsibility for her plight with war and not her own actions; and of her own responsibility to heal the war’s wounds so she does not inflict the violence [to which] she was subjected on others.”²⁰ Most significantly, and in contrast to the South Africa’s TRC model, the woman, or a similar ritual patient, is not expected to speak, to articulate her trauma, again because of the belief that “recounting and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ (Shaw 2007).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ (Honwana 1999).

¹⁸ Ibid. In fact, there is an amazing similarity in the structure and purpose of the purification rituals in both societies. For example, Sierra Leone’s “cooling the heart” ritual is also believed to reverse the work of the combatant groups that had made the child into a fighter, by “restoring the child’s relationship with God and the ancestors—and thereby also with the family and community—through prayer, the application of consecrated water, and small offerings.” See Shaw, “Memory Frictions,” p. 194.

¹⁹ (Graybill 2004).

²⁰ (Nordstrom 1997).

remembering the traumatic past would be like opening the door for the harmful spirits to penetrate the community.”²¹

If the justification for the very similar practices of social forgetting and public silence that Sierra Leone and Mozambique embraced is their rootedness in and compatibility with traditional African philosophy of social healing, the question is why have other African countries and thinkers been reluctant to endorse them? How do these practices compare with the more widely known mechanism of truth-finding and truth-disclosure as vehicles for post-conflict social healing? I will address these questions by closely examining the perspectives of Tutu and Soyinka on truth-seeking and its implication for forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation. While their views are distinctive, I argue that they are best viewed as complementary.

3. In Defense of Forgiveness: Tutu

Tutu articulated his moral vision in his book, *No Future without Forgiveness*, in which he evaluates the successes and failures of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which he chaired. He defends the Commission’s granting of amnesty to wrongdoers who revealed the truth about their pasts, and he lauds those victims who forgave their abusers. For Tutu, forgiveness is primarily (although not solely) a *personal* act by which one not only overcomes anger and resentment, but also forgoes “a rightful claim against someone who has in some way harmed or offended us.”²² Drawing on the Christian theory of atonement, forgiveness implies for him the healing of the psychological and spiritual scars of past suffering, and involves “the purification of memory,” a situation within which the past no longer has a negative impact on the present.”²³

So understood, forgiveness is a non-retaliatory response to what Hannah Arendt calls the “predicament of irreversibility,” which in some ways makes politics possible because “[w]ithout 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.”²⁴ Since “the one who forgives” and “the one who is forgiven” belong to the same community, Tutu believes that for this community to move forward politically, it must reckon with its past evils rather than adopt “national amnesia” of the kind associated with the Truth Commission in post-General Pinochet Chile, which failed to identify and punish those who were responsible for human rights abuses under the preceding military rule.²⁵

At the same time, he rejects what he calls the “Nuremberg trial paradigm” of both post-World War II and post-Mengistu Haile Mariam’s revolution in Ethiopia. The Tutu-led TRC steered South Africa toward a middle position between these two antecedent positions. As Battle rightly notes, “If Germany and Ethiopia represent one extreme in facilitating the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule—that of prosecution—then Chile represents the other end of the spectrum—blanket amnesties for those who committed gross violations of human rights.”²⁶ Tutu did not hide his belief that victims should not press charges against persons who violated victims’ rights, and the state should not make accused perpetrators “run the gauntlet of the normal judicial process” of adjudication and impose punishment on those who are found guilty.

Tutu offers practical and moral arguments against applying the Nuremberg precedent to South Africa. On the practical side, he expresses the familiar view that if trials were the only means of reckoning with past wrongs, then proponents of apartheid would have thwarted efforts to negotiate a transition to democratic rule. The South African court system, biased as it was toward apartheid,

²¹ Graybill, “Pardon, Punishment, and Amnesia,” p. 1126.

²² See (Volf 2001).

²³ See (Villa-Vicencio 2009).

²⁴ (Arendt 1998). This interpretation suggests that forgiveness, as a non-retaliatory act, has both personal and political dimensions.

²⁵ (Battle 2000).

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 175–76.

would not have reached reliably just verdicts and sentences. In addition, trials are inordinately expensive, time-consuming, and labor-intensive—diverting valuable resources from such tasks as poverty alleviation and educational reform. As Martha Minow similarly observes, prosecution is “slow, partial, and narrow,”²⁷ which was the reason the Rwandans also became disillusioned with the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) as an avenue for pursuing justice after the country’s genocide.²⁸ Tutu favors the TRC’s approach in which rights violators publicly confess the truth while their victims ideally respond with forgiveness.

There are two main aspects to Tutu’s moral argument against the Nuremberg paradigm. First, he rejects the infliction of punishment, albeit with certain qualifications, on the ground that (a) punishment is retribution, (b) retribution is vengeance, and (c) vengeance is morally wrong. Although he accepts the common distinction between vengeance (a privately-administered system of punishment) and retribution (a state-administered public system of punishment),²⁹ he finds both morally wrong because they involve the intention to inflict harm on a person in response to his prior wrongdoing. As such, he laments that “retribution, resentment and revenge have left us with a world soaked in the blood of far too many of our sisters and brothers.”³⁰

Second, he advocates for the moral imperative of African *humanism*, encapsulated in the concept of *ubuntu*, which prizes forgiveness, reconciliation, and harmony over retribution and vengeance. I will dwell more on this second aspect of Tutu’s argument because of his disagreement with Soyinka on the interpretations and socio-political consequences of African humanism, which, as already indicated, they both believe is captured in the intertwined concepts of *ubuntu* and *omoluwabi*. Yet before discussing Tutu’s understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation, it is important to note that his views on punishment are qualified, rather than absolute. Tutu devotes considerable space to a discussion of other aims that trials can have besides the punishment of offenders. These aims can include vindicating the rights of victims and generating truth (i.e., having offenders confess) about past wrongs. According to him, victims of past wrongs have the right—at least a constitutional right and perhaps also a moral one, grounded in their dignity, to press criminal charges against and seek restitution from those who abused them. Yet he extols the “magnanimity” of individuals who, like former South African president Nelson Mandela, have not exercised this right but are willing instead to forgive and seek harmony (*ubuntu*) with their oppressors. These statements suggest that Tutu regards trial not merely as a means of retributive punishment but also as a way to affirm, vindicate, and promote the rights of victims.³¹

Tutu also endorses the credible threat of punishment, as a social tool to encourage perpetrators to tell the truth about their wrongdoing. The TRC did not grant a blanket amnesty to human rights violators or pardon all those convicted of rights abuses committed during apartheid. Instead, the TRC offered amnesty to *individual* perpetrators *only if* (1) their disclosures were complete and accurate, (2) their violations were politically motivated, (3) their acts of wrongdoing were proportional to the ends that they hoped to achieve. According to Tutu, individuals who failed to meet any of the three conditions would have no strong incentive to apply for amnesty and reveal the whole truth. It is precisely because violators were threatened with trial and eventual punishment that they realized that making no application for amnesty or lying about their wrongdoing was too risky. Without such

²⁷ Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, p. 30.

²⁸ Andrew England writes that “The trials tend to be tedious, drawn-out affairs dominated by debates over the minutiae of international law. There are no juries—just judges prosecutors, lawyers, clerks and witnesses separated from the public gallery by bulletproof glass in three fish tank-style courtrooms.” See his (England 2003).

²⁹ For a helpful discussion of the similarities and differences between these concepts, see (Kaufman 2013).

³⁰ (Tutu 2007). Although Tutu is in company with Bishop Joseph Butler and Jeffrie G. Murphy on the conceptualization of forgiveness as requiring the ‘forswearing’ of resentment, Murphy qualifies his position by offering what seems to be a robust justification of resentment. This is because of a double harm that a willful and wrongful act inflicts on the victim, namely, the injury itself and the implicit statement of superiority that the perpetrator conveys by the conduct. A reactive attitude of resentment by the victim is thus a rejection of this claim of superiority; it is a counter assertion of that person’s self-worth. See his “Forgiveness and Resentment,” in (Murphy and Hampton 1988).

³¹ Battle, *A Theology of Community*, p. 176.

a threat of trial and punishment, the TRC was unlikely to have the number of perpetrators it did, who came forward to confess gross wrongdoing. In addition, requiring offenders to confess or tell the truth was informed by what Tutu frequently invoked as the traditional African sense of justice. For example, the Yoruba people have a saying that “*Bi iku yo pani aa gbo tenu eni; opitan ni nfi itan gba ara-a re kale*” (If death will kill one, it should listen to what one has to say; he who tells tales may by that means deliver himself. That is, one should not impose punishment before hearing from the offender).

Despite this reluctant utilitarian or pragmatic use of punishment for the sake of recognition and as a deterrent, Tutu’s core theological position is that retributive justice generally prevents or impedes reconciliation. He understands reconciliation as “restorative justice,” which he regards as the highest if not the only goal in South Africa’s reckoning with past wrongs. Tutu defends amnesty and forgiveness as the best means to promote reconciliation. He defines restorative justice (in contrast to retributive justice) as reconciliation of broken relationships between perpetrators and victims. Drawing from the moral wisdom of another African proverb, Tutu believes that “*Bi a ba ri oku ika nile, ti a fi ese ta a; ika-a di meji*” (“If one sees the corpse of a wicked person on the ground and one kicks it, there are then two wicked people.” That is, ‘if one returns evil for evil, one joins the ranks of the evil’). In Tutu’s words: “We contend that there is another kind of justice, restorative justice, which was characteristic of traditional African jurisprudence. Here the central concern is not retribution or punishment. In the spirit of *ubuntu*, the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given opportunity to be reintegrated into the community that he has injured by his offense.”³²

Tutu understands the ‘central concern’ of restorative justice to be the reconciliation of wrongdoer not only with his victim but also with the society he has harmed by his conduct. The wrongdoing has “ruptured” earlier relationships or failed to realize the idea of *ubuntu*. As I have shown above, *ubuntu* refers to a kind of social harmony in which people are friendly, hospitable, magnanimous, compassionate, open, and non-jealous. Although Tutu recognized the difficulty of translating the concept, it seems to combine the Yoruba ideal of mutual beneficence, the disposition to be kind to others (*inú rere*), with the ideal of solidarity (*isòkan*). Ubuntu thus prescribes a framework in which all human relationships are understood to be covenantal relationships. To so understand human beings involves believing four truths: (a) all people belong to the same moral community; (b) in this community each person matters in his or her own right and not merely as something useful to the society; (c) everyone participates in the moral community by entrusting him- or herself to and accepting entrustment from other; and (d) in the moral community each member has enduring responsibility to all the others.³³

Tutu regards social harmony or communal harmony as the *summum bonum*, or highest good. He concedes that South Africa must in some way “balance” a plurality of important interests and values—“justice, accountability, stability, peace, and reconciliation.” By contrast, whatever “subverts” or corrodes social harmony “is to be avoided like the plague.” Presumably, whatever maximizes social harmony is morally commendable and even obligatory. Ultimately, then, what *ubuntu* and its concomitant moral covenant community envision is the possibility of mutual recognition by both victims and perpetrators. In the specific context of South Africa, recognition would suggest three novel possible modes of relationship. It might mean to affirm, approve of, or accept the legitimacy of the other, as a government ‘recognizes’ the rightful leader of another government. In this case, it refers to an acknowledgment of another person’s full humanity. Another sense of ‘recognize’ is to see something familiar. Forgiveness requires the victim to ‘recognize’ herself in the perpetrator, or to recognize the perpetrator in herself. Third, if we parse the word, another sense of ‘recognize’ emerges. In this sense, to ‘re’-‘cognize’ is to understand in a new or different way. Like the other

³² (Tutu 2000).

³³ See (Allen 1984).

two senses, this is another transcendent aspect of forgiveness, which entails seeing the perpetrator not for what he has done, but for what he is and could become. And this transformed perspective is possible because of the commitment of both sides to a common future, a common political community, in which citizenship is predicated upon the acceptance of an anthropological insight that all persons are both susceptible to moral evils and capable of moral good. In an important sense, *ubuntu*, for Tutu, requires a prudent balancing of interests among members of the political community, and furnishes more than a therapeutic conception of forgiveness, but also a political one that “emerges as an aspect of the common good, the good-for-we and not only the good-for-me.”³⁴

4. Reconciliation through Restitution: Soyinka

For over six decades, Soyinka has built a solid reputation as a public intellectual, social prophet and human rights activist whose prodigious critiques span a broad gamut of topics—culture, economy, politics, international relations, and religion. His ideas regarding the promise and perils of forgiveness as a mode of intervening in post-violence and post-atrocities situations are most clearly articulated in his book, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*. He assigns a prominent role to memory, seeing it as both a foundation and a tool that can foster a shared future for peoples divided by cultures, races, and other constructed identity markers. As he sees it, a people who do not preserve their memory risk forfeiting their history.³⁵ In the same vein, Soyinka contends that some memories are better than others, and the TRC “failed both in creating an honest memory of South African history and in providing reparations that would permit the country to enjoy a shared future.”³⁶ Thus, like Tutu, he rejects any guises of passive gesture toward the past, whether the extreme of national amnesia or the intermediate strategy of social forgetting; however, the homage that memory pays to the past must be of the right kind, a test that he thinks the TRC failed woefully.

In light of the country’s historical baggage, Soyinka asks, “Is reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressor even possible?” He considers three possible options for initiating a process of “purgation of the past, the creation of a new sense of being . . . after the collapse of a discredited and criminal”³⁷ regime. He rejects the first two for being both extreme and lacking in fundamental justice, and offers a vigorous defense of the third. The first is the “mob justice” model as demonstrated in Ghana by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings between 1979 and 1981 when he took over the government of the country in a military coup on the ground that the previous military government and its intellectual lackeys were irreparably corrupt and unbearably oppressive. To sanitize the system, the 15-member Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), primarily composed of junior officers, which Rawlings inaugurated, carried out the execution by firing squad of eight senior military officers, three former heads of state, all Supreme Court justices, other mid-level military officers, and over 300 other Ghanaians. Rawlings invoked the language of “house-cleaning” to justify his actions. Many other Ghanaians agreed with him. Two voices would suffice to capture the sentiments of the time. The first was in an editorial by a Catholic priest in the Ghanaian *Catholic Standard* (29 July 1979): “This revolution is not a wedding party—this is the time to literally baptize the whole nation . . . We do not love those executed less, but we love our country more . . . Of course, the executions are not the only solution, but they certainly form part of the solution.” The second was from a medical doctor’s contribution to *West Africa* (London, UK, 2 July 1979): “I endorse absolutely the determination of the Armed Revolutionary Council to wash the country clean with the blood of the corrupt . . . I have been telling my friends for some time now that Ghana’s only cleansing lotion is the blood of those who so badly let her down through selfishness and corruption . . . Ghana is so heavily soiled that the blood

³⁴ (O’Connor 2002).

³⁵ Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory*, p. 58.

³⁶ (Boyle 2000).

³⁷ Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory*, p. 19.

of 500 can be enough only for the removal of surface dust. To remove the grime and ingrained dirt, the AFRC has to go a great deal further.”³⁸

Soyinka rejected this approach for its clear lack of justice because “truth” was not a factor in its implementation. As he says, “History teaches us to beware of the excitation of the liberated and the injustices that often accompany their righteous thirst for justice.”³⁹ In a haste to cleanse the alleged corrupt system, the approach jettisons the need to take a proper moral inventory of the society, which a recourse to its past would have afforded, thereby conflating justice with vengeance. Contrary to its desired objective, a hasty and mob approach to justice unfortunately disregards the healing potential of historical memory and fails to accept “both its burdens and triumphs or—better still—its actuality, the simple fact of its anterior existence and its validity for its time.”⁴⁰ To factor memory into the moral project of social and political reconstruction is to “recognize the irrationality of mutual destructiveness on behalf of any values, any values whatsoever, however seductive—cultural, ideological, religious, or race-authenticated—that intervened and obscured or eroded those multiple anteriorities—of whatever kind—from which our being once took its definition.”⁴¹ Most importantly, Soyinka rejects the mob justice approach because he believes it violates the moral argument for proportionality for punishment of crimes as contained in the Yoruba proverb that “*ori bibe ko ni oogun efori*,” that is, cutting off the head is not the medicine for headache.

For similar reasons, he rejects the other extreme that he believes was modeled by South Africa’s TRC-based forgiveness, fearing that it would encourage a “culture of impunity,” which would lead to additional crimes. Specifically, he faulted it on three main grounds. His first concern is that self-confessed criminals were not remorseful or that the TRC did not make genuine expression of remorse a condition of both personal and political forgiveness. Although he agrees with Tutu on the requirement of and insistence upon truth-telling (confession), which may serve as “a therapy against civic alienation,” Soyinka argues that truth-telling is insufficient as “the sole exaction or condition for reconciliation.”⁴² Missing in this important project of social cohesion is the moral ingredient of “remorse and, thus repentance” which, though “too nebulous to assess,” would help to show that participants in the discredited regime have experienced some “sense of credible transformation.”⁴³ What the world saw at the TRC instead, Soyinka complained, was a “risk-free parade of villains, calmly—and occasionally with ill-conceived relish—recounting their roles in kidnappings, tortures, murders, and mutilation, at the end of which absolution is granted without penalty or forfeit,” which is nothing but “a glorification of impunity.”⁴⁴

While Soyinka’s observation about the arrogant countenance of the witnesses at the TRC is undoubtedly accurate, it would be an act of polemical overreach to base the legitimacy of the entire

³⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 62–63.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 12–13.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 35.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 29. Interestingly, Soyinka was not alone in requiring a wrongdoer to pay a high moral price as a precondition for forgiveness. Jeffrie G. Murphy similarly argues that the victim of willful wrongdoing may only forgive perpetrator if (1) he repented or had a change of heart; or (2) he meant well (his motives were good; or (3) he has suffered enough; or (4) he has undergone humiliation (perhaps some ritual humiliation, e.g., apology ritual of ‘I beg forgiveness’); or (5) of old times’ sake (e.g., ‘He has been a good and loyal friend to me in the past’). See Murphy, “Forgiveness and Resentment,” p. 24. Similarly, Alex Boraine, the Vice-Chairman of the TRC, registered his objection to blanket amnesty for South Africa, fearing it would be misconstrued as an enshrinement of impunity whose ills may be worse than the evil the society was trying to correct. According to him, impunity threatens belief in a democratic society; confuses and creates ambiguous social, moral, and psychological limits; institutionalizes and defends lies and denials by the laws of the country; tempts people to take laws into their own hands; invalidates and denies what has happened and thereby limits the possibility of effective communication between fellow citizens; strengthens powerlessness, guilt, and shame; and most significantly, affects belief in the future and may leave a historical ‘no man’s land’ in which there is both an official and unofficial version of events—something that may give rise to historical stagnation, limiting the possibility of moving ahead and creating a common just society. Cited in Dumisa B. Ntsebeza, “The Uses of Truth Commissions: Lessons for the World,” in (Rotberg and Thompson 2000).

process on the absence or otherwise of remorse. Quite apart from what seemed to be the insouciance of some of the witnesses, the moral and symbolic value of the TRC cannot be denied, which includes “its ability to create a sacred space where South Africans in particular, and the international community in general, could express their shared revulsion for those who perpetuated the former exclusionary regime.” In other words, the Truth Commission’s value should be measured in “whether it successfully delegitimated the conduct of the criminals, not whether it reformed them.”⁴⁵

Soyinka’s second concern about the TRC-based forgiveness is that it is unlikely to have any deterrent effect on other despotic regimes in Africa because it was not sufficiently punitive. The deterrence argument here is neither conceptual nor legal—as scholars still disagree on the appropriate penal method to use to deter bad behavior; or whether there is any intrinsic relationship between punishment and deterrence—but has to be understood against the backdrop of an emerging continent-wide political culture in the 1990s. On the heels of South Africa’s belated decision to slough off its ignominious apartheid past, the Organization of African Unity (OAU)—the structure through which African countries had coordinated their activities and policies since 1963—reinvented itself as African Union (AU). The name change was not cosmetic, for a distinctive feature of the new body is the adoption of Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a self-binding instrument that encourages and permits member states to subject their individual internal operations to mutual critiques and imitations. Specifically, APRM “is a tool for sharing experiences, reinforcing best practices, identifying deficiencies, and assessing capacity-building needs to foster policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration.”⁴⁶

As a leading member of AU, Soyinka contends that South Africa cannot be cavalier about the signals it sends to the rest of the continent about norms that are consistent with good governance, at the heart of which are democratic accountability and the rule of law. Moreover, the country need not imitate the crude, sanitizing mass executions adopted by Ghana’s Rawlings to demonstrate its seriousness about deterrence. In fact, neither of the two examples cited by Soyinka to illustrate the constitutive relationship between criminal proceedings and the rule of law involved capital punishment. One was the trial of Malawi’s former President-for-Life Hastings Banda and the other that of Ethiopian former leader Mariam Mengistu. Although neither trial produced the outcome sought by the prosecution—the former was acquitted while the latter’s trial was conducted *in absentia*—the proceedings did contribute significantly to the institutionalization of the rule of law on the continent. For the citizens of Malawi, “the process of reducing the once all-powerful controller of freedom and restraint, of life and death, to an egalitarian uncertainty with his erstwhile victims, is a model of social restitution whose validity cannot be contested.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Mengistu’s trial “goes beyond mere rites of vengeance; it is a process of vindication—vindication of the prolonged agony (and implicit resistant will) of society, whose end-product is restoration of its violated integrity.”⁴⁸

The seemingly easy conditions for obtaining amnesty through the TRC lacked this ingredient of moral vindication, according to Soyinka, and in this respect, his argument tracks Michael Walzer’s conditional defense of reprisals in the context of war. Although the law of war ordinarily takes a dim view of reprisal or retaliatory attack, Walzer permits an exception in what he calls situations of moral horror when the victim state or a third party might resort to reprisal as “a right of deterrence” to reestablish or re-enforce norms of good conduct. The use of reprisal is narrowly tailored, its zone of moral permissibility highly circumscribed; and as Walzer construes it, reprisals function as “a reactive deterrence” to vindicate “the war convention”⁴⁹ and reaffirm the value of lives the convention is

⁴⁵ Boyle, “Gesture Without Motion? Poetry and Politics in Africa,” p. 136.

⁴⁶ (African Union 2017).

⁴⁷ Soyinka, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 30–31.

⁴⁹ (Walzer 1977).

designed to protect. In post-conflict, peacetime situations such as the TRC period, Soyinka believes that a punitive price of some kind ought to be imposed on those found guilty of committing horrible acts through a proper judicial process of adjudication. Such a process, he further argues, would serve as an expressive ritual of moral statement about the limits of acceptable behavior, about how much the country values the lives of the apartheid's victims, and about the country's commitment to the new political and legal dispensation. He accuses Tutu of downplaying the vindictive function of adjudicated punishment by espousing a lopsided morality, which tasks the victims to display "a collective generosity of spirit," but is bereft of the reactive attitude of resentment or indignation about the plight of the victims, or sufficient considerations for how their conditions might be improved.

This, then, raises the question about the kind of punishment that Soyinka considers appropriately deterrent. He leaves no one in doubt as to the criterion by which to make this determination, which is the extent to which any punitive measures contribute to the improvement of the conditions of life of the newly liberated South Africans, another concern that he argues the TRC failed to address. If remorse and repentance are the necessary moral ingredients of any post-atrocities healing strategy, the other leg on which such a strategy ought to stand is "some measure of restitution," especially in a context where the persistent denigration and dehumanization to which the country's official policy subjected its black population took the forms of both physical violence and "dispossession."⁵⁰ The apartheid system did not only violate black people culturally and spiritually, it also materially devastated and savagely repressed them such that the political freedom heralded by its official termination meant little in the face of lingering economic inequities and servitude. Reparations are the moral minimum that can be rightly exacted from the benefactors of the old system, serving the dual purpose of proving the credibility of the new order and a corrective for the exclusionist policy of the past.

Soyinka is skeptical of any proposals about restorative justice that are not undergirded by the principle of reparations; and the keyword is *principle*, rather than the minutiae of how such compensatory damages are to be calculated and disbursed. Cognizant of the varied contexts in which the idea of reparations has been raised and derided, especially for its indeterminateness regarding the identity of the victims and their relationship to perpetrators of prior atrocities, Soyinka argues that critics of the idea failed to appreciate the symbolic significance of reparations, namely, they serve to restore the battered dignity of former victims. Of course, this does not in any way suggest that their dignity can be evaluated quantitatively with a price tag, but a reparations policy signals an acknowledgment of the principle that the society owes a debt, at once a moral and material debt, not the fine points of how much is owed, nor to whom it should be paid.

Following the same logic, Soyinka argues that the debt is owed not just to the black people of South Africa, but to the entire people of African continent, whose *race* was the singular factor the outsiders stigmatized to subject them to the triple humiliations of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. His intervention in the debate about the TRC experiment allowed him to highlight the shared constitutive feature of the collective African experience, which he defines as a "continuum of the slave condition,"⁵¹ an ontological condition that is unique to the continent, "shared by no one else." Slavery, colonialism, and apartheid made Africans not only "the victim race," but also "victims of devaluation" and of "psychological humiliation," subjecting their humanity to a "denial of the freedom of action, ... of choice" and to "bondage [both] of the body [and] of the human will."⁵² In short, the slave condition is an "incubus that makes hunchbacks of [the] invisible being"⁵³ of those in the condition, which must first be expelled if they are to be able to seize and alter their destiny.

Restitution is a critical moral and structural tool toward this end. To show that this is not an ethereal proposal, Soyinka cited Trinidad and Tobago's response to an attempted coup it experienced

⁵⁰ Soyinka, p. 36.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 43, 70.

⁵² Ibid., p. 70.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 72.

in 1990 that led to a brief collapse of law and order and widespread looting. What he found instructive for the South African situation was that the promise of amnesty given by the Chief of Police if looters returned the stolen goods and property had almost a 100% result, confirming for him the “place of restitution in the order of society.”⁵⁴ Although a coup d’état pales in comparison to apartheid, Soyinka asks that we focus less on the disparity of the moral evil and political disorder they each represent than on what one society considered a sine qua non for the rebuilding of fractured relationships from which the other could learn. The template for social healing being proffered here is that restitution is a required condition for receiving remission or amnesty, but also that “truth alone is never enough to guarantee reconciliation,” even if it remains undeniable that the “memory—of what has been, of acts of commission or omission, of a responsibility abdicated—[also] affects the future conduct of power in any form.”⁵⁵ The core lesson from Trinidad and Tobago, Soyinka argues, “has little to do with crime and punishment but with inventiveness—devising a social formula that would minister to the wrongs of dispossession on the one hand, chasten those who deviate from the humane communal order on the other, serve as a criterion for the future conduct of that society, even in times of stress and only then, heal.”⁵⁶ To the extent that South Africa or any similarly situated society fails to adopt this kind of imaginative principle for social healing, it would merely be enthroning “a political culture that appears to know no boundaries—the culture of impunity.”⁵⁷

5. Conclusions: Interfacing Tutu and Soyinka

Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Wole Soyinka represent two distinct approaches to the task of moral healing and political reconstruction of societies emerging from the crucibles of willful atrocities and oppression unleashed on citizens by fellow compatriots often with the connivance of the government. Their common assumption that a critical retrieval and adroit deployment of indigenous African values would assist in this task was belied by their disagreement about which norms to appropriate from a shared cultural provenance and the interpretive directions such norms should entail. However, I have shown that this hermeneutical disagreement did not weaken their conviction that an inglorious past is not a justifiable excuse not to innovate with a new political morality that summons a society towards a future that affirms the free and equal citizenship of its people. Perhaps, this is why both assert that this new political imaginary must begin with memory, “in particular memory that contains a moral judgment of wrong, injustice, and injury,”⁵⁸ a path they deemed more credible than the quick fix that straddles the extremes of social forgetting/public silence and the mob justice of military execution. What they offer us are not necessarily complementary paths toward political reconciliation, but a conceptual space that allows us a dialectical engagement with their respective views, with the implication that the best response, in a given situation, might well or ought to incorporate aspects or insights from both thinkers. To that extent, both thinkers are optimistic visionaries. Their main difference lies in where they locate their optimism, with Tutu anchoring his hope in the redeemability of human nature and Soyinka in the promise of the rule of law as an impartial adjudicator of interests. Hence, their differing suggestions about the kind of sacrifice that citizens would need to make to achieve the political goal of reconciliation to which both are committed. Tutu posits forgiveness as not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition to achieve this goal. Soyinka does not, in principle, object but contends that a sufficiently robust conception of forgiveness will include a legal exaction of restitution.

These divergent strategic prescriptions are predicated on their respective understandings of the greatest dangers to which any reconciliation efforts are susceptible. For Tutu, a future without

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 81

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 81

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 81

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 82

⁵⁸ Daye, *Political Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa*, p. 20.

forgiveness risks entangling citizens in a vicious circle of recrimination, while Soyinka believes that the greater danger to avert is that of cheap reconciliation, which privileges the concerns and perspectives of the dominant groups but ignores the necessary, but painful, work of recalibrating the balance of power and privilege that should accompany any true, fair, and just reconciliation. A restitutionary gesture is not only an effective way to avert this danger, but the least a society can do to affirm the dignity of the victims of past atrocities and indicate its denunciation of a culture of impunity.

Finally, while any previously fractured society that embraces either of the two strategic prescriptions may indeed achieve reconciliation, it is clear that such an achievement would be a result of one or another competing vision of social cooperation. Tutu and Soyinka espouse the respective goals of (1) nonlethal coexistence and (2) democratic reciprocity. What we can infer from the foregoing analysis is that Tutu envisions nonlethal coexistence as a paradigmatic embodiment of reconciliation, which exists when former enemies no longer kill each other or routinely violate each other's basic rights as a *modus operandi* for settling their differences. Nonlethal coexistence is indeed a momentous achievement; however, the moral burden for its realization seems to be disproportionately placed on the victims of a discredited regime who, according to Tutu, must abandon retribution as a dispositional sign of their commitment to forgiveness. Other than the desire for social harmony, it is not clear what the victims will get in return for their willingness to forbear revenge or what the prior oppressors are required to contribute to the emergence of this envisioned condition of civil friendliness.

A vision of nonlethal coexistence predicated on a one-sided sacrifice of forgiveness seems too thin a foundation for social change, especially when the vision has to be enacted in a political domain beyond the more intimate context of interpersonal relations. As strange as this may seem, this is what Tutu asserts as the distinctive contribution of *ubuntu* to the political theory of reconciliation. *Ubuntu* redefines the power relations between two or more previously antagonistic parties, replacing a former status of political inferiority to which the oppressed were subjected with a higher moral status they now occupy as the frontline agents of a reconciled citizenry. Rather than deplore the absence of remorse from the oppressors as a precondition for extending forgiveness to them, *ubuntu* shifts our intellectual gaze upon the morally exemplary compassion shown toward them by the victims. Although Tutu did not sufficiently develop the concept of compassion in his theory of forgiveness, this language is crucial to the realizability of his goal of reconciliation. By occupying a middle position between forgiveness and vengeance, compassion enables us to see reconciliation as a process rather than an event.

Like forgiveness, compassion or empathy⁵⁹ rejects seeing the perpetrators as monsters, as outside the pale of humanity; it means recognizing the other person as human, and therefore as worthy of compassion. For Tutu, compassion does not require socializing with the perpetrator, which may suggest an endorsement of the enemy's cause or actions. With compassion, you do not need to get too close. You do not need to speak, even though it does not foreclose forgiveness. That could happen at some future date. However, compassion has none of the strings that attach to forgiveness. Anyone can do it, and it can be felt toward any other person; even the most despicable human being may be worthy of compassion simply because he is a human being. One can feel compassion toward a murderer without betraying the victim. Far from sharing the perpetrator's views, we feel compassion precisely because we would never want to be in his place. It is this disposition that Tutu hopes would eventually pave the way for the renewal of human and political relationship.

In contrast to the *modus vivendi* of passive tolerance suggested by nonlethal coexistence, Soyinka envisions a more demanding model of social cooperation and reconciliation, which is democratic reciprocity. The model places the burden of remaking the society on everyone by requiring former enemies, which include former perpetrators of atrocities, their victims, and bystanders, to accept a common framework of social and political relationships superintended by an impartial rule of law. Democratic reciprocity is intentionally egalitarian in its expectation of, and belief in, the citizens'

⁵⁹ This is the term Donald W. Shriver Jr. used to make essentially the same point. See (Shriver 1995).

capacity to exercise moral agency, which former victims do by extending forgiveness and former perpetrators do through compensatory atonement. In effect, both sides demonstrate appropriate gestures toward their newly reconstituted society by affirming and respecting each other's dignity.

To be sure, many sub-Saharan African countries that are still divided would be justified in pooh-pooing the ideal of democratic reciprocity as unrealistic and unattainable; it can be argued that the ideal has more to commend it and is easier to pursue than Tutu's theory of forgiveness. One clear difference between them is the moral weight assigned to the interests of each individual citizen in the imagined new political society. By assuming that each and every individual would benefit from the achievements of a larger group, Tutu's *ubuntu*-inflected forgiveness theory threatens each member's autonomy and personal preference. It is not always the case that individuals do benefit from social solidarity because collective life, even as a nonlethal coexistence, is often one in which communal aspirations and individual interests do conflict. Under the regime of democratic reciprocity, there is no reason why individual citizens who were victims of past willful wrongdoings ought not to seek or should be asked to forgo compensation. Rather than insisting on or even encouraging forgiveness, Soyinka prefers a process that allows all sides to be heard and encourages all arguments to be evaluated on their merits. Indeed, it would be a hollow exercise if the pursuit of reconciliation were not linked to other important values, such as truth, compensation, democracy, justice, and individual accountability, which might require a society to indict, try, sentence, and punish individuals who violated human rights.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank my student, Maggie Fox, for her research assistance on this work.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- African Union. 2017. African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Available online: <https://au.int/en/organs/aprm> (accessed on 20 November 2020).
- Allen, Joseph L. 1984. *Love and Conflict: A Covenantal Model of Christian Ethics*. Nashville: Abingdon, p. 17.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1998. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 237.
- Battle, Michael. 2000. A Theology of Community The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu. *Interpretation* 54: 175.
- Boyle, Elizabeth Heger. 2000. Gesture Without Motion? Poetry and Politics in Africa. *Human Rights Quarterly* 2: 134. [CrossRef]
- Daye, Russell. 2004. *Political Forgiveness: Lessons from South Africa*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, p. 20.
- England, Andrew. 2003. *United Nations Tribunal Struggles to Be Model of International Justice in Remote African Towns*. New York: Associated Press, May 4.
- Garner, Bryan A., ed. 1999. *Black's Law Dictionary*, 7th ed. St. Paul: West Group, vol. 42, p. 138.
- Graybill, Lyn S. 2004. Pardon, Punishment, and Amnesia: Three African Post-Conflict Methods. *Third World Quarterly* 25: 1126. [CrossRef]
- Green, Edward C., and Alcinda Honwana. 1999. Indigenous healing of war affected children in Africa. In *IK Notes*. Washington: World Bank, p. 10.
- Honwana, Alcinda. 1999. The collective body: Challenging Western concepts of trauma and healing. *Track Two* 8: 30–35.
- Kaufman, Whitley R. P. 2013. *Honor and Revenge: A Theory of Punishment*. New York: Springer, pp. 93–112.
- Minow, Martha. 1998. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 1–2.
- Murphy, Jeffrie G., and Jean Hampton. 1988. *Forgiveness and Mercy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 14–34.
- Nordstrom, Carolyn. 1997. *A Different Kind of War Story*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 146.
- O'Connor, June. 2002. Fostering Forgiveness in the Public Square: How Realistic a Goal? *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 22: 169. [CrossRef]

- Rotberg, Robert I., and Dennis Thompson, eds. 2000. *Truth v. Justice: The Morality of Truth Commissions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 164–65.
- Shaw, Rosalind. 2005. *Rethinking Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone*. USIP Special Report 9. Available online: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2005/02/rethinking-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-lessons-sierra-leone> (accessed on 20 November 2020).
- Shaw, Rosalind. 2007. Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation in Sierra Leone. *The International Journal of Transnational Justice* 1: 194. [CrossRef]
- Shriver, Donald W., Jr. 1995. *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Soyinka, Wole. 1999. *The Burden of Memory, The Muse of Forgiveness*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 23.
- Tepperman, Jonathan D. 2002. Truth and Consequences. *Foreign Affairs* 81: 134–35. [CrossRef]
- Tutu, Desmond. 2000. *No Future without Forgiveness*. Bournemouth: Image, pp. 54–55. ISBN 9780385496902.
- Tutu, Desmond. 2007. The Doctrine of Revenge. *The Guardian*. November 12. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/nov/13/comment.comment> (accessed on 14 March 2020).
- Villa-Vicencio, C. 2009. *Walk with Us and Listen: Political Reconciliation in South Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, p. 2.
- Volf, Miroslav. 2001. Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Justice: A Christian Contribution to a More Peaceful Social Environment. In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*. Edited by Raymond Helmick and Rodney Peterson. Radnor: Templeton Foundation Press, p. 38.
- Walzer, Michael. 1977. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. New York: Basic Books, pp. 212, 215.

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



© 2020 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).