Forgiveness and reconciliation in transitional justice practices

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ABSTRACT. In the last decades, the notions of forgiveness and reconciliation have been applied more and more in the public sphere. This paper claims that forgiveness in transitional justice practices is often difficult if not impossible to achieve, and that it could generate counterproductive processes. It is unclear what ‘collective forgiveness’ is, if it is a realistic concept at all. The expectation of forgiveness seems to generate much resistance, even when former oppressors take up responsibility or show regret. Often past-sensibilities are too strong, and in many victim-groups self-respect is lacking. Moreover, the role of emotions in public (and mediated) settings remains obscure. These complexities raise the question of whether forgiveness is an appropriate ideal to aim at in transitional justice practices, especially when participants are involved in attempts at reconciliation in more or less coercive ways. To give up the ideal of forgiveness, however, does not imply that reconciliation is unattainable. Alternative accounts of reconciliation are presented which do not start from forgiveness. These alternative accounts show that reconciliation is possible, but it seems important for former victims to regain some sense of self-worth and recognition by others first. Only then people can enter into the long process of rebuilding relationships of trust with former wrongdoers.

KEYWORDS. Collective forgiveness, reconciliation, transitional justice, truth commission, trust, identity-formation

1. INTRODUCTION

Until recently, the notions of forgiveness and reconciliation were typically applied in the realm of private life. However, in the last decades these notions have been applied more and more in the public sphere. Restorative justice conferences and truth commissions as a way of accounting for gross human rights violations are just a few of the examples where forgiveness and reconciliation are at stake.
Questions arise about when, what, and whom to forgive. Forgiveness manifests compassion for wrongdoers but does this mean that the gift of forgiveness is always a moral act? How does forgiveness relate to our feelings of justice? Is there such a thing as unforgivable evil? Forgiveness is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand it is a free gift; on the other hand it can be subject to conditions or an attitude of the wrongdoer (e.g., repentance, acknowledgment). Even more problematic is the notion of forgiveness if victims are already dead. Is it possible to ask someone else than the primary victim for forgiveness? But conversely, is it possible to refuse forgiveness on behalf of the dead? What if a group of people is responsible for a certain wrongdoing: can there be such a thing as collective responsibility or collective guilt? These questions are even more urgent when forgiveness is reflected upon in the public sphere. In the private sphere forgiveness is generally viewed as a prerequisite for reconciliation. However, given the problematic aspects of forgiveness in the context of transitional justice processes, this would lead us to conclude that reconciliation is impossible to achieve. This conclusion however is premature. Alternative accounts of reconciliation are presented that do not start from forgiveness. These alternative accounts show that reconciliation is possible, but it seems important for former victims to regain some sense of self-worth and recognition by others first.

The present paper aims at presenting an inventory of scholarly interpretations and views on forgiveness and reconciliation in the context of transitional justice practices. Starting from the notion of forgiveness, the typical aspects of the transitional justice context are discussed. These are successively: the collective involved, the public context, and the promotion of forgiveness by others (institutional setting). From this discussion it will follow that forgiveness in the context of transitional justice is a highly problematic notion and that forgiveness is unlikely to occur. The third section focuses on reconciliation. After discussing the relation between forgiveness and reconciliation, different accounts of reconciliation are presented, together with the conditions for reconciliation. Conclusions are drawn in the last section.

Forgiveness is usually viewed as the overcoming of feelings of revenge, moral hatred, indignation or some other feelings that are related to anger (Roberts 1995). As such it implies an identity transforming process within the victim. So far most scholars (more or less) agree. However, where some authors defend a unilateral view of forgiveness, making it an issue of the victim irrespective of attitudes of the wrongdoer (see, e.g., Holmgren 1994, Enright et al 1994), the majority of authors defend a bilateral view of forgiveness. According to this view, forgiveness is conditional upon the attitude of the wrongdoer. Acknowledgment, repentance, and accountability are just some of the possible conditions. Since transitional justice is about giving an account of the past, forgiveness in this context is necessarily a matter of both victim and wrongdoer and hence, conditional to attitudes shown by them. If we translate these conditions for forgiveness into the context of transitional justice practices, problems arise, which are discussed in the remainder of this section.

Collective aspects of forgiveness

The notions of acknowledgment, repentance, and accountability are problematic when a wrong is committed by a group of people, which is often the case in the situations that are at stake in the context of transitional justice practices. Who is responsible for the wrong committed? Can groups show repentance? And if collective forgiveness is about the overcoming of feelings, similar to forgiveness in the private sphere, how must we view those feelings: can groups have feelings? Except for the topic of collective guilt and collective responsibility, which is widely addressed (but not solved!) in philosophical and legal literature, the collective aspects of remorse, resentment, and other moral feelings have received scarce attention in literature. Only few authors explicitly discuss this collective aspect of the emotions involved.
Govier and Verwoerd (2002a) discuss the practice of institutional apology. Following the work of sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis (1991) and philosopher Jean Harvey (1995), they defend the claim that it is not a categorical mistake to think of an institution or collective as being responsible for wrongdoing, apologizing, and seeking to make moral amends. However, offering forgiveness on behalf of a group goes further than speaking the words ‘I forgive you.’ Where apologizing can be viewed as a form of speech act, forgiveness has the character of a process involving emotions and the commitment not to act from hostilities rooted in the transgression by the wrongdoer (Pettigrove 2006, 486).

Pettigrove discusses two ways that we might meaningfully speak about collective emotions. First, collective emotions might refer to emotions experienced by a significant percentage of the individuals comprising the collective. A second way of speaking about collective emotions refers to the structural features of the collective that reinforce the experience of certain emotions among its members. These can be either formalized structural features or informal features. The author gives the example of the anti-Japanese sentiment reflected in the Chinese educational curriculum and the government’s encouragement of anti-Japanese protests (Pettigrove 2006, 491). Whereas the former emotion refers to the emotion shared by (a part of) the collective, the second type of emotion refers to the collective itself (the collective’s emotion). However, if we conceive of collective emotion as the emotion shared by the majority of its members, it remains to be seen to what extent it differs from the emotion at the individual level. It seems that forgiveness is then still something that happens at the individual level, be it in a public context. In that case, it is important to see how these ‘public aspects’ affect the emotional dynamics. If we conceive of collective emotion in the second sense (i.e., as the collective’s emotion) I think forgiveness is not the right concept to apply. The kind of emotions that are at stake in forgiveness processes reflect how the victim conceives of herself and the wrongdoer. Forgiveness therefore requires a significant intellectual and affective effort by the victim. It
involves a transformation that goes further than the revision of certain beliefs about the wrongdoer. The victim comes to see herself and the wrongdoer in a new light of shared humanity instead of the dualistic good (victim) and bad (wrongdoer) distinction (Griswold 2007, 57-58). To speak of this personal effort in relation to more or less ‘institutionalized emotions’ seems out of place. So, even though we might speak of harms committed on the level of the collective, forgiveness is something that happens between individuals. Hence, if we speak of collective forgiveness it is not as much the collective aspect that is important, but it is the public aspect.

Summarizing, there are conceptual objections to the notion of collective forgiveness. Either forgiveness occurs between individuals that make up the collective – and hence it is not a collective that forgives or is forgiven but it is the individual who forgives or is forgiven – or it is not forgiveness but something else that is at stake. In the former case, it is important to know how the public context affects the individual’s emotional dynamics. In the latter case, it does make sense to speak of “normalized relations between groups in which the policies of one are no longer hostile to members of the other” (Pettigrove 1991, 496). But to talk of ‘normalized relations’ is something different than identity transformation and the overcoming of feelings of hatred and revenge.

Public aspects of forgiveness

The previous subsection demonstrated that to be able to speak of forgiveness in the context of transitional justice practices, we should take a deeper look into the public aspects. To make sense of public forgiveness, we should look in detail into the emotions of the individuals and how these are affected. The literature shows some hiatus on the topic of emotional dynamics involved in public forgiveness and reconciliation attempts. Although mostly viewed as similar to forgiveness in the private sphere, i.e., as ‘the overcoming of feelings of resentment and anger,’ public
forgiveness is not widely discussed in terms of feelings and emotions. An exceptional case is forgiveness in the context of restorative justice conferences, in which ample attention is paid to the role of moral emotions such as shame, guilt, remorse, etc. In the literature on transitional justice, on the contrary, these emotions are almost viewed as given. To put it bluntly: victims have pain and acknowledgment and the uncovering of the truth will help to overcome that pain. However, following the bilateral view of forgiveness, it seems to be a perilous undertaking to discuss forgiveness, promoted by a commission, without paying attention to the emotional dynamics involved between the victim and the wrongdoer. The function of feelings such as shame, guilt, and remorse in the public forgiveness process needs closer examination. They can multiply in the presence of public attention, and eventually interact with economic and political interests (Griswold 2007).

In this regard, philosophical analysis might be supplemented with insights from social sciences. The study described in Manzi and Gonzaléz (2007), for example, is a valuable first attempt to gain insight into the role of cognitive and emotional dynamics in post-conflict situations. They empirically studied forgiveness and reparation related to important cognitive (victimization, demand for outgroup remorse, and demand for truth) and emotional (anger, collective guilt, and shame) variables. It was found that forgiveness does not convey the same meaning for groups in conflict and that they are associated with different cognitive and emotional variables. They concluded that people appeared not to be ready to forgive unless their feelings of anger towards the opposing group have diminished. Svašek (2002), in her study of ‘transitions’ in post-socialist Europe, found that emotional dynamics might provide a locus of resistance to change, and consequently, hamper further reconciliation. Research in restorative justice has shown that victims often question the sincerity of the emotions shown by the wrongdoers (Daly 2003, 2004). As such, the public setting offers fewer opportunities for rapprochement.
In summary, emotions play a crucial role in public forgiveness practices. Scholarly literature, however, focuses on economic, political, legal, and social dimensions of these transitions. Further research is needed on how the emotions, aroused by the public context, affect the victims’ attitude towards their former wrongdoers and vice versa. Neglecting these emotions may hamper the possibilities of genuine pacification. Contrary to intimate relationships, where people are more prone to be touched by emotions, the public setting will hamper rather than trigger empathetic resonance. As such it is questionable whether forgiveness is an appropriate ideal to aim at.

The promotion of forgiveness by others

The third aspect of forgiveness that I will discuss is the institutional promotion of it, for example by a Truth Commission. This promotion can be twofold: first, the atmosphere during hearings of a Truth Commission can encourage people to forgive, and second, the granting of amnesty to former wrongdoers can be considered a way of promoting forgiveness.

The promotion of forgiveness to individual victims has to do with the unofficial culture during the hearings of a Truth Commission. For the South African TRC hearings, for example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s repeatedly asked people to forgive their former wrongdoers. His well-known assertion that “there’s no future without forgiveness” seems to reflect this view. As such, the victims were strongly encouraged to offer this forgiveness. This seems to be at odds with the common view that people should themselves decide whether or not to forgive and, if so, when. This informal culture of forgiveness promotion was reinforced by the institutionalized amnesty arrangements. For some of the victims, granting amnesty felt like a lack of acknowledgment of their own suffering. As such the institutionalized amnesty arrangement encouraged the victims even more to follow the commission’s demand for forgiveness.
If a society pays no heed to brutalities and offences suffered by many of its citizens, it further damages these vulnerable people because the disregard can be as devastating as the original wrong itself. In literature on penal law, therapy, and treatment, this lack of acknowledgment has been termed secondary victimization (Govier and Verwoerd 2002a: 71; Symonds 1980). Although noticed by some (including Boraine 1996; Elster 2000; Gutmann and Thompson 2000; Hayner 2000; Rotberg 2000; Govier and Verwoerd 2002a), not many authors who describe (the dilemmas involved in) reconciliation processes explicitly address the question of how the commission’s emphasis on forgiveness affects the victims. It is questionable whether people really feel free not to offer forgiveness if forgiveness is being promoted on such a large scale. The result will most probably be false forgiveness and a resistance to further reconciliation (Cf., Svašek 2002; Huyse 2003).

Griswald (2007) conceives of forgiveness and apology as valuable private and civic virtues that run the risk of corruption when put to social and political use. An officially encouraged culture of forgiveness and apology runs the risk of politicizing the two. One can think of the ‘re-education’ camps in China and Cambodia where coercion or pressure by a group reduces the gesture of forgiveness to a theatrical gesture on the political stage. Hamber (2003) states that the individual healing is often at odds with political, social and international political demands on people to leave the past behind. If not sufficient social justice is ensured to complement the individual healing process, the national forgiveness attempts can be experienced as ‘false reconciliation’ by the victims, especially in the absence of full truth and justice. This feeling of ‘false reconciliation’ is intensified when victims feel that the social place in which they can vent their anger is closed down.

The limited effect of the institutional promotion of forgiveness by the TRC is confirmed by empirical studies. Some victims who testified to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) felt that they were forced to reconcile or expected to forgive the perpetrators (Ham-
ber 2007, Hamber, Maepa, Mofokeng and Van der Merwe 1998). Based on an analysis of transcripts of the South African TRC, Chapman (2007) found that former victims and members of their families who testified at the violations hearings rarely mentioned the topics forgiveness and reconciliation unless prompted so, and that those who did were generally not inclined to forgive the perpetrators. Concerning the perpetrators, they appeared to be reluctant to acknowledge their wrongdoing or to offer meaningful apologies, expressions of regret, or some form of compensation to those who had suffered. Based on these data, the effect of the TRC in terms of the promotion of forgiveness seems limited. Moreover, although most scholars clearly state that forgiving is not the same as forgetting, victims often equate forgiveness with pardoning or think that it implies forgetting. As such the promotion of forgiveness might be an unintended offence to the victims who feel that they simply need to forget the harm done to them. According to the view of social scientists working in political science, this feeling is not unfounded. The political push toward forgiveness can too easily be exploited by politicians to hide the truth about the past (Hamber 2007).

Summarizing, this section discussed three problematic aspects of forgiveness in the transitional justice practices. Apart from the conceptual objection to collective forgiveness, empirical research is needed into the emotional dynamics involved in pacification processes and the institutional setting of forgiveness. In the next section, we will see that the foregoing does not force us to give up the ideal of reconciliation altogether.

3. RECONCILIATION IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PRACTICES

Reconciliation and forgiveness are often mentioned together. Except for the conceptual distinction between the two – forgiveness refers to the identity transforming process within the victim, reconciliation involves the coming together of two (or more) people – reconciliation is also the
more secular notion of the two. Forgiveness, as a moral act, has a strong religious connotation, with different meanings in different religious communities (Haas 2004). Reconciliation, on the other hand, can be framed both from a religious and from a secular perspective. Its central place in transitional justice is just one illustration of how the notion of reconciliation transcends the boundaries between the sacred and the secular and enters the political domain.

Rather generally, reconciliation prevents, once and for all, the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict (Huyse 2003). Some authors explicitly define reconciliation as the end of a process, the ultimate goal (see, e.g., Roberts 1995; Yandell 1998; Coleman 1998; Foster 2000; Pollefeyt 2004). According to this view forgiveness is the necessary means to reach reconciliation. Roberts (1995), for example, states that “the teleology of forgiveness is reconciliation” (299). Pollefeyt (2004) argues that “forgiveness is possible without reconciliation. Reconciliation, however, is not possible without forgiveness. A relation that is transformed, but in which the evildoer is not forgiven, cannot be called a relation in the fullest sense of the word” (63).

It is questionable whether this reasoning holds for a public context as well. First, in the private sphere, people can choose to engage in a relationship. The kind of relationships that are at stake in the public sphere have a more ‘unavoidable’ character: Israeli people cannot ignore the presence of Palestinian people, while the black South Africans cannot pretend there are no white South Africans, and so they must try to find some way of living together. Second, to forgive someone, one may need to talk to the wrongdoer, hear his or her narrative. The identity transformation we speak of if forgiveness is at stake, at least requires a reframing of the wrongdoer by the victim. It is questionable whether this reframing can occur without trying to get into some sort of dialogue, and hence relation, with the wrongdoer.

It seems that reconciliation can occur at different levels. Most authors who hold the view that forgiveness involves more than reconciliation
defend a view in which reconciliation can take place in varying degrees. It is not an all-or-nothing concept (see, e.g., Villa-Vicencio 2000; Knight 2004; Govier & Verwoerd 2002b; Verwoerd 2007). Reconciliation implies “the restoration and sometimes the establishment of a hitherto non-existent relationship of trust” (Villa-Vicencio 2000, 208) or the “coming together after a rift, a rift that undermines trust between the parties” (Govier & Verwoerd 2002b, 185). The emphasis on trust building allows for a more fine-grained conception of reconciliation. Although at all levels, reconciliation aims at the building and sustaining of relationships with sufficient closeness and trust to handle future conflicts and problems, this (re)building and sustaining of trust relations can occur at different levels: from very intimate relationships of friendship to the ability to work together or to peaceful co-existence. As such, not forgiveness but some form of trust is the prerequisite for reconciliation. Reconciliation can also point to the aim for an enlarged sense of human connection and responsibility. A confession can be restorative and healing, a movement towards relational wholeness. If a relation is restored in its wholeness, this may lead to forgiveness. In other cases, it may not lead to forgiveness but to the promise of reconciliation. Not forgiveness but engagement and relational wholeness are the central notions according to this view (Knight 2004).

Applied in a public context, this layered approach of reconciliation seems to be more promising than the view according to which forgiveness is the *sine qua non* for reconciliation. It is rather the other way around: reconciliation may – but does not necessarily do so – provide a way to forgiveness.

**Conditions for reconciliation**

Given this layered approach of reconciliation, how can we frame reconciliation at the macro-level and what are the conditions for reconciliation to take place? Grob (2004) discusses reconciliation in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and he points to the self-critique that lies at the
heart of all genuine reconciliation. Each side of the conflicting parties must “radically call into question the dominant story or narrative that has guided its adoption of positions during the course of conflict” (200), hereby not suggesting that there is only one Palestinian narrative or one Zionist narrative. Susan Dwyer (1999) goes further. Not just the calling into question of existing narratives but the construction of a new master narrative lies at the core of a genuine reconciliation process. She defends a notion of reconciliation in terms of tensions in personal narratives. Reconciliation, according to this view, can be understood as the incorporation of those tensions. In the light of the South African TRC, Dwyer tries to give an account of reconciliation at the national level. The core notion is that of bringing apparently incompatible descriptions of events into narrative equilibrium. This is why uncovering what happened is so important. The first thing that is required is a clear view of what happened: who did what to whom and when. But the task is then to move beyond the mere statements of agreed-upon facts, and move toward mutually acceptable interpretations of those events. The latter does not require that all involved agree on a single interpretation, only that they are mutually tolerant of a limited set of interpretations.4 Dwyer makes a clear distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation. Arriving at such a narrative equilibrium might, but need not, involve an apology and an offer of forgiveness. As such, neither an apology from the wrongdoer nor forgiveness offered by the victim is prerequisite for reconciliation, but “the construction of a coherent narrative that encompasses both atrocities of apartheid and the hope for a peaceful, respectful coexistence of political equals.”

The emphasis on personal narratives seems to overlook the nature of the tensions. People and their relationships – not their narratives – are alienated from one another and need to be reconciled (Govier and Verwoerd 2002b). Govier and Verwoerd argue that the reconciling of what were incompatible accounts of events is not strictly necessary for individuals or groups to reconcile. People may agree to come together, even
while continuing to differ on contested events. However, even if congruency between different people’s narratives is not a necessary condition for reconciliation, it does point to an important aspect of rapprochement. If the different parties are willing to come together without agreeing on what exactly happened, they still have to agree on what is acceptable and what is not. Even if people do not agree on the content of other people’s narrative, they should adopt a sort of meta-consensus concerning the legitimacy of other people’s narratives, comparable to a Habermas’ notion of communicative rationality, which does not require substantive uniformity of rationality but which does require some procedural or formal agreement on what counts as rational (Habermas 1992).

Given that narrative equilibrium is not a necessary condition, is it a sufficient condition for reconciliation to take place? To answer this question, it might be a good starting point to look at an important obstacle of reconciliation. Especially for victims, the experience of being wronged can dramatically affect their feeling of self-worth and consequently their trust in others, which is conceptually elaborated by Axel Honneth (1992). Honneth’s account of identity-formation requires the recognition of others. The normative self-image of each and every individual is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others. Those who have been wronged by others can develop a negative self-image, which “carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse” (1992, 131 – 132). If we follow Honneth’s account of identity-formation, one’s relationship to oneself is an intersubjective process. It requires the capacity to trust one’s own sense of what one needs or wants (self-confidence), a sense of possessing universal dignity, which has to do with viewing oneself as entitled to the same status and treatment as every other person (self-respect), and the absence of systematic denigration from outside one’s subculture (self-esteem). This capacity is a precondition for self-realization in any human community.

This brings us back to the problem we found with the collective interpretation of forgiveness. In the discussion on forgiveness, we found that
forgiveness, because it requires an identity transformation by the wrong-
doer, cannot be framed collectively. But here we see that a similar prob-
lem holds for reconciliation. Before we can consider reconciliation at the
macro-level, people need to develop the capacity for identity formation
first. As such, the narrative account of reconciliation moves too fast, and
maybe too far, in its quest for reconciliation. The gap between question-
ing one’s own narrative and accepting the other’s might be a gap too wide
to bridge if one is deprived of the basic feelings of self-worth. For vic-
tims to be able to reconcile with their former wrongdoers, it seems impor-
tant to regain some sense of self-worth and recognition by others first.
Only then people can start to rebuild relationships of trust with their for-
mer wrongdoers.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The previous sections showed that the notion of forgiveness in the con-
text of transitional justice practices is a difficult undertaking. First, there
is the conceptual objection against the notion of the collective that is at
stake when we talk about forgiveness in transitional justice practices. Sec-
ond, and maybe more importantly, there are empirical objections. How
do the emotions involved affect the pacification process and what kind
of forgiveness can be offered if forgiveness is publicly promoted? With-
out a thorough understanding of the emotional dynamics involved, paci-
fication attempts may be fruitless (in the positive case) or counterprod-
ctive in the worst case scenario.

These complexities raise the question of whether forgiveness must be
viewed as a necessary condition in peacemaking at all. In collective
processes, it is questionable whether forgiveness is an appropriate ideal to
aim at, especially when participants are involved in attempts at reconcili-
ation in more or less coercive ways. For communities that have suffered
under severe violence and humiliation, it seems more important to regain
some basic sense of self-worth and trust in one’s own identity. Reconciliation, in its most general form, should aim to prevent the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict. Sustainable reconciliation requires that people have some basic sense of self-worth and recognition by others. Only then can people enter into the long process of rebuilding relationships of trust with former wrongdoers.

WORKS CITED


**NOTES**

1. Alternative interpretations of forgiveness are possible in which forgiveness is bilateral but not conditional to attitudes or acts shown by the wrongdoer. Van Tongeren, for example, conceives of forgiveness as an intersubjective process. It is an act happening between victim and wrongdoer rather than performed by them. This makes the subjects dependent on something they cannot control. As such, forgiveness may be called conditioned, but without the acts to be performed being conditional (Van Tongeren 2008).

2. Svašek (2002), for example, studied the ‘transitions’ in post-socialist Europe, and she found that the emotional dynamics involved in these transitions have been virtually ignored by scholars in favor of economic, political, legal, and social dimensions of these phenomena.

3. From a conceptual point of view, the granting of amnesty can be defended as being a form of tertiary forgiveness. Just as there are primary, secondary (relatives of primary victims), and tertiary victims (the society), it is possible to offer primary, secondary, and tertiary forgiveness (Verwoerd 2007). E.g., parents of a son who has been shot by a racist killer can offer forgiveness for...
the wrong done to them, viz. the killing of their son, but they cannot offer forgiveness on behalf of the dead son. Analogously, the state can offer the same wrongdoer forgiveness for the tertiary harm, i.e., violating the law. As such the offering of amnesty as part of a transitional justice project can be considered a form of tertiary forgiveness. Accordingly, the conceptual difference between primary and secondary victims on the one hand and tertiary victims on the other allows for these institutionalized amnesty arrangements. After all, amnesty is considered a form of tertiary forgiveness and hence it is up to the tertiary victim to decide whether or not to offer forgiveness. From a more empirical point of view, this solution seems rather academic. For a society recovering from a traumatic past, the question of how the granting of amnesty relates to the people’s feelings of justice seems more important than the question whether a government has the ‘right’ to offer this tertiary form of forgiveness.

4. Dwyer uses the word ‘congruency’ to refer to this situation of narrative equilibrium. However, given the fact that people don’t have to agree on one single interpretation the word congruency would be due here.

5. Cf. Zalaquett’s remark that “reconciliation is not possible if the two main parties do not have a secret agreement about what they see as mutually important” (quoted in Antjie Krog, 1998, 132).