

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

‘Forgive me or kill me!’ This melodramatic appeal comes from Gideon le Roux, one of two characters in Athol Fugard’s *Playland* (1992: 44)). The play was one of the first post-apartheid literary texts to raise the need for forgiveness in South Africa. Written in 1992, well after FW de Klerk had announced the advent of democracy on 2 February 1990, it is set a month before this watershed, at the turn of the decade: New Year’s Eve 1989.

The play’s only characters, a white ex-soldier and a black nightwatchman, are both troubled by their past. Both have killed. Gideon le Roux cannot get his life back on track after returning from the border war crippled by a burden of guilt (Fugard, 1992: 11). Martinus Zoeloe has done time for murdering the white man who raped Martinus’s wife. He feels no remorse for his deed, as he cannot forgive the man he murdered – and, indeed, would murder him again if that were possible. As a believer, he understands that he forfeits his salvation, his state of grace, by his refusal to repent – which is at heart a refusal to forgive. This he stoically accepts; his talk is all of judgement. Together these two dramatise, in a particular historical context, Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant, in which both the unforgiven and the unforgiving are ultimately imprisoned, the one for the debt he owes, the other for his refusal to give what he himself had received – mercy from his lord.

Though Fugard’s plays are nearly always concerned with interpersonal dynamics before being political, in this play the historical setting and the characters’ stories suggest that they are representative – they call each other ‘black man’ and ‘white man’ (47). The white man, sent to war, was subjected to all the disinformation of the apartheid state, which Fugard parodies in Gideon’s defence of taking human life: ‘What about self-defence? Or protecting women and children? What about Defending Your Country Against Communism? Those are all times when it’s all right to do it’ (18). Yet Gideon came to realise the true cost of the border war when he participated in flinging the corpses of enemy soldiers into a mass grave, watched by a silent woman, possibly a grieving mother. Later he will articulate, ‘What I had done

was a sin' (56). At the time he loses control, and is found by his fellows wandering in the bush – looking for the old woman, the watcher, who, he feels, is in a position to give him absolution for what he has done (57). He never finds her.

Returning home, he finds that his life is still arrested at that point, and no false cheer or New Year's resolutions can get him out of his captivity, out of Oshakati, his personal hell (35, 59). Now he seeks absolution from the 'watchman', Martinus Zoeloe. Martinus, for his part, feels that to forgive this man would mean to forgive the white man he still hates (whom he still calls, quaintly, 'Andries Jacobus de Lange, the deceased'). Though he has sympathy for Gideon, he cannot bring himself to do this. They have agreed to part on these terms when, unexpectedly, Martinus turns to Gideon to give him a new life by forgiving him on behalf of those wronged. Gideon, for his part, encourages Martinus to 'get out of that little room' where he waited years ago to kill Andries Jacobus de Lange – the point at which his own life was arrested, the choice of revenge (45, 60).

If this is Fugard's play for the pivotal 1990s, as its setting suggests, he appears to portray the advent of democracy in the light of the need for forgiveness, specifically of whites by blacks, for the crimes of the past. Gideon's words to Martinus, 'Forgive me or kill me' (58) starkly present the choice between forgiveness and revenge.

This play ends happily – both men get out of jail, as it were, and walk off together to get Gideon's stalled car going. (The car may itself be a metaphor for the state of society at the time.) But the question remains: is this solution not too easy? In the legal sphere the amnesty offered by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) raised similar nagging questions. Should the guilty be allowed to get away with murder? And, to return to this discourse, is it not facile for a white playwright, despite his undoubted anti-apartheid credentials, to present the transformation of South Africa as a comedy of forgiveness?

In looking at the possibility of forgiveness, of grace, one enters a field of interrelated variables, in which the spoken word is unusually significant and powerful. Transgression – or omission – leads to guilt and debt. Individual guilt and collective guilt are distinguishable but in apartheid South Africa seldom wholly separable, as

with Gideon le Roux's killing or De Lange's rape of a black female employee – or, indeed, Martinus Zoeloe's revenge. Acknowledged guilt can lead to remorse, contrition, repentance for the wrongful act, and confession. There is the question of accountability and retribution, the requirement of justice. Then there is the whole field of reparation, atonement, expiation, propitiation, and vicarious atonement, especially in the form of sacrifice. On the part of the one wronged the possibilities include mercy, forgiveness with or without justice – as these need not be mutually exclusive – and then the vexed question of vicarious forgiveness which Fugard dramatises and which Simon Wiesenthal (1998) so eloquently questions. At the other extreme from mercy lies revenge.

### 1.1 The faces of guilt

It is by now a truism that the past, and the crimes of the past, must be faced. On the delusion of impunity ('the expectation that one can glide through/ history unpunished and rewrite one's own biography') Vaclav Havel writes:

Whoever  
fears to look his own past in the face  
must necessarily fear what is to come.  
Lies cannot save us from lies. (In Ackermann, 1996:47)

Guilt for past deeds or omissions has different facets, and here we turn to Karl Jaspers' four categories of collective guilt, from a lecture delivered after the Second World War, *The Question of German Guilt* (1947). Jaspers distinguished criminal, political, moral and existential guilt. He was in a unique position to examine such guilt, straddling the roles of perpetrator and victim as a German with a Jewish wife, who had narrowly escaped being deported together to a concentration camp (Villa-Vicencio, 1996:133).

It seems wise, at this point, to point to the difference between Nazi war crimes, including the murder of a third of the Jewish population of Europe, and the fundamental injustice and structural violence of apartheid. Though the policy was declared a crime against humanity by the United Nations, and though it spawned

unspeakable cruelties and atrocities committed by agents of the state, it was not on the scale of the Holocaust. There are nevertheless instructive parallels.

Jaspers' first kind of guilt is criminal guilt, over which, after World War II, the court in Nuremberg had jurisdiction. After the war, with the definition of crimes against humanity and the establishment of an international court at The Hague, there arose the concept of imprescriptibility, which both Jacques Derrida (2001) and Paul Ricoeur (2004) raise in relation to forgiveness. Prescriptibility is a legal concept which allows for the cessation of debt and the cancellation of the right, or duty, to prosecute, after the lapse of a prescribed time. (It differs from amnesty in that it does not erase the crime, but blocks the 'path back' to it, as Ricoeur [2004: 472] puts it.)

Imprescriptibility, attached to crimes against humanity, entails the definition of a guilt that can never be cancelled, that must be relentlessly and indefinitely pursued, because of the gravity of the act/s giving rise to it, and, as Ricoeur (2004:10) has pointed out, because 'these crimes themselves have long-lasting effects'.<sup>2</sup> It is the legal equivalent of the unforgivable – though Ricoeur cautions that the two concepts should not be confused ('justice must be done' [2004:473]). In chapter three I will examine the work of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, who grapples with the unforgivable in relation to Eugene de Kock, a man convicted of so many apartheid crimes as to have been dubbed Prime Evil.

It is interesting that Ricoeur, in passing, ascribes criminal guilt to the politicians responsible for political crimes (2004: 476). In South Africa amnesty was given to the agents of crimes which could be proved to have been politically motivated, or committed under orders. The inference is clearly that the primary guilt was not theirs. Yet Colonel Eugene de Kock, commander of the notorious Vlakplaas unit which had committed state-sponsored crimes, was cut loose from his political masters and given a criminal trial (though he later received amnesty for a number of crimes from the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the view of Vladimir Jankélévitch:

The time that dulls all things, the time that uses up sorrow as it erodes mountains, the time that favors pardon and forgetfulness, the time that consoles, settling and healing time, does not diminish (in) the least the colossal slaughter; on the contrary, it never ceases to revive its horror.... Crimes against humanity are *imprescriptible*, that is, the penalties against them *cannot* lapse; time has no hold on them (in Brudholm, 2008:123).

Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC]). Father Michael Lapsley, a letter-bomb survivor, reminds us that when the De Klerk government announced free elections, ‘there were no words of repentance or acknowledgement of evil’ (1996: 20). To date National Party leaders, with one exception, have not taken responsibility for crimes committed under their government and – perhaps in the spirit of reconciliation, or as the result of peace negotiations – have not been prosecuted. Gobodo-Madikizela points out that, whereas at Nuremberg ‘the Nazis never denied involvement in what they had ordered, supported and encouraged’ but had denied that it was criminal, South African nationalist leaders ‘never denied that killing and torturing ... activists was criminal’. What they denied, she writes, ‘was that they were ever involved in it or knew anything about it’ (2003: 66).

The highest-ranking member of the armed forces to stand by his men at the TRC was the Police Commissioner, General Johan van der Merwe, who later also stepped forward, with former Minister of Police Adriaan Vlok, to take responsibility when three officers formerly under his command went on trial in 2007 for the attempted murder of Rev. Frank Chikane (amnesty had not been applied for in this instance). As all traces of their culpability had been erased, these two men themselves supplied the evidence against them in a plea bargain, and were duly convicted with the others and given suspended ten-year sentences. Though the plea bargain enabled them to evade a jail term, this exception still showed up the rule of evasion among their colleagues.

Jaspers’ second category, political guilt, attaches to all ‘who belong to the political body in the name of which the crime was committed’ (Ricoeur, following Jaspers, 2004: 474) and is attributed by Jaspers to all who failed to resist Nazi injustice, and who therefore had to take political responsibility for the actions of the state. Ricoeur rejects the self-exoneration of those who claim to be unconcerned with politics, and quotes Jaspers’ categorical statement: ‘The ethos of politics is the principle of a state in which all participate with their consciousness, their knowledge, their opinions and their wills’ (1947:35; and in Ricoeur, 2004: 475). Political guilt is collective but not criminal: ‘the notion of a criminal people must be explicitly rejected,’ writes Ricoeur (2004: 474).

But Ricoeur raises a question about accountability for political guilt. Having pointed out that '(w)hoever has taken advantage of the benefits of the public order must in some way answer to the evils created by the state to which he or she belongs' (475), he asks before whom this responsibility should be exercised. Jaspers' answer to this, in 1947, was the victor. Ricoeur substitutes 'the authorities representative of the interests and rights of the victims and... the new authorities of a democratic state' (475). Yet he raises the problem that, either way, the new power relations will inevitably affect proceedings. In this regard, the establishment of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, representative of all population groups and political persuasions, was a generous gesture on the part of Nelson Mandela's newly elected government, avoiding victors' justice, as was the inclusion in the Commission's brief only of gross human rights violations, and those committed by all parties. The structural violence of apartheid, from which all whites benefited, was not included.

Political guilt is dealt with through punitive sanctions and reparation to victims, but more important than these, Ricoeur maintains, is 'the word of justice' (475) that establishes public responsibilities and the respective places of perpetrator and victim. In this regard we may compare the words of Terry Dowdall, a psychologist with the TRC, about the importance of breaking the 'culture of silence', because a distorted understanding of rights conferred by power must be corrected:

In many cases the primary message that has been absorbed is the 'process' message – that power confers the *right* to abuse. This is one of the reasons the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is so important to the country as a whole: left alone – just walked away from – the distorted visions absorbed during the period of repression remain unchallenged, uncorrected. The general public does not necessarily rethink its assumptions about the proper use of power.... It remains crucial that it is clearly stated that these things happened and that they are evil. (1996: 36)

Those who formerly assumed such a 'right' to abuse are then clearly shown to be perpetrators who are not above the process of justice.

Jaspers' next category, that of moral guilt, extended to all 'who conveniently closed their eyes to events, or permitted themselves to be intoxicated, seduced or bought with personal advantages, or obeyed from fear' (Jaspers in Villa-Vicencio, 1996: 133). For

Ricoeur this includes the ‘individual acts, small and large, that contributed by their tacit or explicit acquiescence to the criminal guilt of the politicians and to the political guilt of the body politic’ (2004:476). This is the realm of the individual conscience and requires moral honesty, yet Ricoeur observes a ‘structure of entanglement between the private and the public’ (477). In this study moral guilt will be examined primarily in the chapter on Marlene van Niekerk’s *Agaat*.

The most interesting and perhaps controversial of Jaspers’ categories is that of metaphysical guilt, or guilt before God, in which, he argues, we all share by virtue of our common humanity – by implication, therefore, even the victim. Charles Villavicencio (1996: 133) suggests that to acknowledge such guilt is to acknowledge that we, too, could have committed these crimes. It is, one might say, that form of guilt which keeps us from casting the first stone, and it would seem that an acknowledgement of this fallibility can engender the grace to forgive – or at least to withhold judgement. It is especially evident in the writing of Desmond Tutu and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, and will be further discussed in this chapter together with theological aspects of forgiveness.

## **1.2 The limits of forgiveness**

Two strong arguments for the limits of forgiveness have been advanced by Simon Wiesenthal and Jean Améry, both Holocaust survivors. Wiesenthal, who became known as the ‘Nazi hunter’ in his pursuit of Nazi war criminals after World War II, might be expected to take an uncompromising stand on the need for justice. But his autobiographical account of a haunting choice in *The Sunflower* (first published in 1969) is thoughtful, nuanced, and humane, raising the ethical dilemma vested in the question of vicarious forgiveness and the difficult question of the unforgivable crime.

Like Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, whose work is discussed in chapter 2.2, Wiesenthal provides a ‘case study’ in that he recounts his own experience, and his confrontation with a difficult choice. Gobodo-Madikizela’s choices, however, are made from a position of strength, once the state-sanctioned violence and the political philosophy undergirding it belong to the past, and her people are in power. Wiesenthal is asked for absolution while he is a prisoner in a Nazi death camp, a ‘Haftling’ or

‘predetermined victim’ (Levi, 1998:191), with only the belief that his tormentors and those of his people will meet justice, but no sign that this is forthcoming. Primo Levi speaks of a ‘world which was shaking on its foundations... in an atmosphere completely impregnated with crime. Under these conditions, it is not always easy, indeed it is perhaps impossible, to assign an absolute value to right and wrong’ (1998:191). Wiesenthal’s camp comrade Arthur also says, ‘But anyhow nobody who has not had our experience will be able to understand fully’ (1998:75). And Bosnian respondent Sven Alkalaj offers a similar view, concluding that ‘(t)his Bosnian generation (survivors of ‘ethnic cleansing’), as well as the generation that lived through the Holocaust, are among the only ones who have the right to give an answer to the question of forgiveness’ because they have ‘bodily gone through’ experiences others cannot imagine (1998:102).

In *The Sunflower* Wiesenthal recounts a day with a work party of Jewish prisoners at a makeshift hospital set up in the Technical High School in Lemberg, Poland. He is called aside by a nurse to the bedside of a dying young SS man, who tells him, at some length, of his need. Raised a Catholic by non-Nazi parents, the man, Karl, joined the Hitler Youth when he was sixteen, and was sufficiently indoctrinated to have volunteered to join the SS. Sent to the Russian front, he had seen some action before being required to take part in a sadistic mass murder of Jewish civilians. In the town of Dnepropetrovsk, abandoned by the Russians, Jews were herded together and driven into a house which had already been doused with petrol – Karl estimates 150-200 people, mostly women, children and elderly people. Another truckload of Jewish people was then brought, and they, too, were crammed into the same building. Soldiers were ordered to lob grenades into the house and to stand by with guns to shoot those who tried to escape the ensuing flames. As the young man recollects, ‘My God!... The screams from the house were horrible,’ he begins to sweat (Wiesenthal, 1998: 43). His memories are centred on one family: a father who appeared at a second-storey window holding his small child, his own clothes alight, his wife beside him. He covered the child’s eyes before jumping from the window, and his wife followed, as did other burning figures. The SS men kept firing.

‘I cannot die... without coming clean,’ Karl says. ‘This must be my confession. But what sort of confession is this? A letter without an answer...’ (1998:53) This is, as J.

M. Coetzee has pointed out, the predicament of the secular confessant – the absence of absolution. The young man has just spoken of his loss of faith (‘If I still had that faith I am sure death would not be so hard’ [53]), but now his confession has ‘no answer’. Unable to turn to God, unable to atone, unable to seek forgiveness from the dead, he has sought the closest he could find to the people he has murdered: a Jew to speak on their behalf. ‘I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him,’ Karl says. ‘I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without your answer I cannot die in peace’ (54). Wiesenthal is completely convinced of his ‘true repentance’ (53), yet he cannot comply with the request:

Two men who had never known each other were brought together for a few hours by Fate. One asks the other for help. But the other was himself helpless and able to do nothing for him....

At last I made up my mind and without a word I left the room. (55)

Deeply disturbed by the encounter and the choice required of him, Wiesenthal cannot leave the matter there, but raises it in discussion with different people and eventually leaves the question open to the end, when he asks his reader to consider, ‘What would I have done?’ (98) In later editions of *The Sunflower* the replies of a number of invited respondents to this question have been included in the text.

Wiesenthal raises a number of circumstantial factors, from conditions in Poland before the war, and the virulent anti-semitism which was officially tolerated, to the systematic persecution and murder of Jews, even small children, by the Germans. (When Karl speaks of events in Dnepropetrovsk, Wiesenthal knows what to expect: he has heard of two similar mass executions.) He mentions the sadism of camp guards and daily deaths of Jewish inmates. In fact, when he returns from the hospital, five men have been shot, and he considers not telling his friend Arthur about the encounter lest Arthur should say, ‘(H)e can’t forget a dying SS man while countless Jews are tortured and killed every hour’ (62).

Most of the prisoners have lost any faith they may have had, yet all long for an omnipotent God (50); it is the cynical Arthur who warms to the reported comment of an old woman in the Ghetto that God is ‘on leave’ (7-8). Within this numinous vacuum, the ethics of one’s faith seem suspended as well.

Then Wiesenthal employs telling imagery to create a context for the choice he is confronted with. On the one hand the passage of time, while he is in the ‘death chamber’ with the young German, is marked by the moving line between sunlight and shadow which he can see through the window. It is first described as ‘a boundary between light and dark, a defined boundary without any transition’ (33). But inside the room is ‘semi-darkness’: ‘I did not know whether this unreal scene was actuality or dream,’ Wiesenthal at first reports (26). This suggests that discernment will be extremely difficult where he finds himself, in the absence of clear moral boundaries or absolutes.

The sunflower of the title is taken from the view the prisoners have, on their way to the hospital, of a military graveyard in which each grave is marked by a single sunflower. Arthur’s realistic view is included in the narrative: ‘(F)lowers aren’t much use to those rotting under the earth. The sunflowers will rot away like them...’ (63). But to Wiesenthal they are like ‘periscopes’, connecting each of the dead with the ‘living world and butterflies to visit his grave’ (14). Living in the shadow of death, Wiesenthal envisages his own body being piled into a mass grave: ‘No sunflower would ever bring light into my darkness, and no butterflies would dance above my dreadful tomb’ (15). So close a companion is death, that this image continues to haunt him: at the crucial point of decision in the sickroom, Wiesenthal stands and, looking down, imagines that ‘there seemed to rest a sunflower’ between the young man’s folded hands (55). This detail threatens to detract from the story’s claim to authenticity,<sup>3</sup> unless one accepts the context, already supplied, that the prisoners were ‘ready to see symbols in everything. It was a time rife for mysticism and superstition’ (36). The sunflower stands for an enforced difference even in death, even after death, with one marked and mourned, another flung into a mass grave like a beast. The single sunflower of the title is probably that imagined in the German’s hands. He would not be aware of the flower likely to be planted on his grave, nor, it must be said, could he be imagined to derive much comfort from the expectation. Yet what is evoked is an unequal society – of which this must be a supreme example – in which

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<sup>3</sup> The story is presented as autobiographical, but the artfulness of its presentation causes it to read as a short story. Christopher Hollis asks, for example, whether it is ‘wholly autobiographical or in parts fictional’ (in Wiesenthal, 1998:175).

the privileged can take for granted those benefits the excluded cannot hope to share. When Wiesenthal speaks of envying the Germans their sunflowers, he shows that the difference matters, especially here, where he will be treated as less than human.

Another detail concerns the child in the story, whose eyes are closed by the father to spare the little one from too much knowledge. It is this act of care in such extremity which probably forces the indoctrinated soldier to recognise his victims' humanity. But for Wiesenthal the child becomes a child he knew, who has a name: Eli; and in the night after the encounter he dreams of this child: 'During the night I saw Eli. His face seemed paler than ever and his eyes expressed the dumb, eternally unanswered question; Why?' (68) The family, who for Karl have given faces to the many Jews killed that day, are therefore, the child especially, even more personal for Wiesenthal. When he is asked to forgive, he is asked to speak not only for the many, but for the child who has, in his mind, a name and a face. And could one explain to such a child not only why such atrocities occur, but also why one has forgiven?<sup>4</sup>

This question coincides with the view of Wiesenthal's believing friend, Jozek, who feels that Wiesenthal had 'no right' to forgive 'in the name of people who had not authorized (him) to do so' (65). Jozek believes in *Haolam Emes*, life after death, and asks, 'Would not the dead people from Dnepropetrovsk come to you and ask: "Who gave you the right to forgive our murderer?"' (66).

Arthur, in saying ironically, 'A superman has asked a subhuman to do something which is superhuman' (66), perhaps inadvertently touches on a particular quality of forgiveness: it is superhuman not only because Wiesenthal is not qualified to forgive, but also because forgiveness is, even in less impossible circumstances, difficult, and said to be the province of God or dependent on divine grace. Arthur points out that the young man should have asked for a priest.

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus, source of the most demanding teaching on forgiveness, nevertheless reserves his harshest words for those who do eternal harm to children: 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea' (Mt. 18:6). Luke adopts this teaching but places it in the context of forgiveness, adding: 'Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, "I repent," you must forgive him' (Lk 17:3,4).

A later companion, Bolek,<sup>5</sup> who was training for the Catholic priesthood before being arrested by the Germans outside the seminary, believes that the young man's 'genuine sincere repentance for his misdeeds' meant that he 'deserved the mercy of forgiveness' (82) – though he becomes less certain of his stance when the friends discuss the question. Lawrence L. Langer, who has written extensively on the Holocaust and Holocaust testimonies, comments: 'Perhaps unwittingly, Wiesenthal fills Bolek's mouth with questionable platitudes' and points out that words like 'misdeed' and 'wrong', which Bolek uses, minimise the scale and severity of the man's crime (1998: 188).

The difference between Jozek and Bolek is also reflected in the invited responses to the first edition of *The Sunflower*, as a later respondent, Dennis Prager, notes: 'I was intrigued by the fact that all the Jewish respondents thought Simon Wiesenthal was right in not forgiving the repentant Nazi mass murderer and that the Christians thought he was wrong'. Prager and other Jewish respondents point to the fact that in Judaism, one may forgive only offences committed against oneself ('only victims can forgive'). 'Therefore,' he stresses, '*people can never forgive murder*' (1998: 226), making murder unforgivable.<sup>6</sup> Eva Fleischner believes that Christians misunderstand their own teaching: that the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us' should not be interpreted as an injunction to forgive 'those who trespass against others' (1998: 140).

While Wiesenthal himself writes, 'The crux of the matter is, of course, forgiveness' (97), the story raises a number of questions about forgiveness. Central, of course, is the question of vicarious forgiveness: whether anyone has the right to forgive on behalf of others, especially those who have died. There is the severity of the offence: are such atrocities beyond forgiveness? Is there a difference between the ways one responds to acts defined by Hannah Arendt as 'trespasses' and those that are so

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<sup>5</sup> By this time both Arthur and Jozek have died in the camps.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, Prager argues – and this bears relevance to the question of the child in the story – '[e]ven parents cannot forgive the murderer of their child (to assume that parents can forgive a child's murder is to render children property rather than autonomous human beings)' (226). One assumes, however, that such parents can forgive the perpetrator for the pain they themselves have suffered through the murder of their child.

radically evil as to be defined as imprescriptible? There is the question of repentance: does this qualify the offender to be forgiven? And there is another matter Wiesenthal raises in discussion with his friends, and that is the need of the dying: is the responsibility greater to give peace to the dying (who can do nothing any more to atone for their crimes) than it is to those with the expectation of life? In fact, on this last question, Langer, examining the series of choices Karl made, asks ‘why he had to wait until he was dying to feel the time had come for repentance and forgiveness’ [1998: 190]. Yet in Karl’s own story, as conveyed by Wiesenthal, it is clear not only that the young man was deeply troubled, but also that he could not continue killing after this event. When next ordered to attack on the battlefield, the young man recalls, ‘I saw the burning family, the father with the child and behind them the mother – and they came to meet me. “No, I cannot shoot at them a second time”’ [51]. He froze, and so was struck by the shell which blinded him and would eventually kill him.

A striking aspect of Wiesenthal’s account is the pity he is able to feel for the German SS man, though at the time he is ‘himself persecuted,’ as Balic points out, ‘his very existence threatened’ (1998:109). But the German, too, is reduced to a bandaged, dying, desperate figure. When Wiesenthal wants to leave, Karl seems to sense this, dropping his mother’s letter and groping for Wiesenthal’s arm. ‘The movement was so pathetically helpless,’ Wiesenthal writes, ‘that all of a sudden I felt sorry for him. I would stay, although I wanted to go’ (35). (Eva Fleischner comments, ‘Simon was forced to come, he had no choice. But he chose to remain....’ [1998:139]). At one point Wiesenthal also waves away a bluebottle flying ‘round the head of the dying man’, as Karl is identified at this point. Though he cannot see the involuntary gesture, Karl whispers his thanks. ‘And for the first time,’ Wiesenthal recalls, ‘I realised that I, a defenceless subhuman, had contrived to lighten the lot of an equally defenceless superman, without thinking, simply as a matter of course’ (37). Though the subhuman-superman categories are retained, the reality is that both men are helpless, and in this instance Wiesenthal is the less helpless of the two – hence the spontaneous act of consideration for the other’s plight and even dignity.

Wiesenthal seems to say nothing in the entire encounter, but observes the young man closely and records his own fluctuating responses. One telling observation occurs when Karl forces himself to recount the sight of the doomed family and other burning

figures jumping to their deaths: ‘The dying man,’ Wiesenthal says, ‘held his hand in front of his bandaged eyes as if he wanted to banish the picture from his mind’ (43). This gesture, in a blind man who can nevertheless ‘see’, evokes some of the horror even as the most shocking events are told, and it is remarkable that Wiesenthal has the empathy at this point to observe and understand the sign.

Wiesenthal also touches on the questions of political and especially moral guilt, in mentioning the passive witnesses of injustice and suffering, the curious eyes observing their work party, the spectators at a public execution of Jews. After the war he goes out of his way to visit Karl’s mother, and finds both the city of Stuttgart, where she lives, and her street and home, in ruins. There is no sign that he rejoices in these observations.

Wiesenthal distinguishes between those Germans and Austrians who accepted the new regime, flourished in the ‘winners’ camp’ (91), and shared the political guilt, and those who, like Karl’s parents, did not, but felt powerless to oppose it. Of the Jews who used to live in her district, Mrs S says, ‘We are not responsible for their fate’ (92). Yet even Karl’s father, who suffered discrimination in the workplace for refusing to join the Nazi party, kept silent and was therefore morally guilty. Of the mother Wiesenthal writes, ‘Without doubt she must often have shown sympathy for the oppressed, but the happiness of her own family was of paramount importance to her. There were millions of such families anxious only for peace and quiet in their own little nests. These were the mounting blocks,’ he concludes damningly, ‘by which the criminals climbed to power and kept it’ (91). The vast majority of white families in South Africa under apartheid, those who actively supported government policy and those who did not, could be described in these words.

Nevertheless, the author has no desire to punish Karl’s mother. Realising that her memories of her husband and son are all she has among the ruins of her life, he chooses to lie about his encounter with her son, taking his leave ‘without diminishing in any way the poor woman’s last surviving consolation – faith in the goodness of her son’ (94). His merciful choice is clearly born of pity for her suffering.

Of all the respondents, Hubert G. Locke is perhaps the only one to recognise the value of silence in Wiesenthal's encounters with the mother and her son. 'You gave,' he writes to Wiesenthal, 'silent assent to a dying man's truth about himself and... you kept the truth, by silence, about a son from his mother. In your silence, both revelation and concealment are made manifest; is it possible that you said more in your silence than if you had spoken?' (1998: 201). And to Wiesenthal's questions about the rightness of his responses, Locke again posits, against the 'arrogance to pose answers', silence: 'Silence, in fact, may be the better response – our silence to yours – in the hope that by listening quietly and more closely to your experience, we might learn from it, rather than moralise about it' (201).

Jean Améry (born Hans Meier or Meyer, for which Améry is an anagram) is less inclined than Wiesenthal to protect the morally guilty. Writing his collection of essays, *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* ('Beyond guilt and atonement', published in English as *At the Mind's Limits*) in 1964-65, he was not faced, like Wiesenthal, with the ruins of post-war Germany, but with the attitudes of a thriving West German population two decades after the war. He addresses the German public's apparent complacency about the past, an attitude Theodor Adorno described in 1959 as 'wishing to turn the page, wiping it from memory' (in Brudholm, 2008: 90). I wish to examine Thomas Brudholm's work on Améry, *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive*, and his comparative analysis of post-apartheid conditions and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He describes the context in which Améry wrote as one in which 'the criminal trials and political expurgations administered by the Allies immediately after the war were soon followed by amnesty laws and the release from jail, reintegration and rehabilitation of civil servants, lawyers, and other professionals and groups.... (Konrad Adenauer's) government's policies of amnesty and reintegration reflected... a massive popular wish to "let bygones be bygones" or to move on with a *tabula rasa*... that would leave behind painful questions about guilt and responsibility' (2008:90). Brudholm also points out that 'the seriousness that characterizes today's public German memory culture is the result not of a linear development, but rather of a contested debate that was for decades fought by a minority' (91). For Hannah Arendt, noting an 'apparent heartlessness', a 'deep-rooted, stubborn and at times vicious refusal to face and come to terms with what really happened', this was a second moral collapse (in Brudholm,

2008:92). (It need not be pointed out that the post-apartheid drive for reconciliation has left many white South Africans similarly in denial about collusion and complicity, political and moral guilt.)

In the context described above, Améry's essay, '*Ressentiments*' (translated as 'Resentments') seeks to clarify and justify the resentment he still feels, years after the end of the war. Yet he writes that the first post-war years were free of resentment, since 'those who had tortured me... were themselves an abomination to the victorious camp' (in Brudholm:112) and a sense of morality and trust in humanity was restored<sup>7</sup>. Améry's resentment or 'retrospective grudge', as he calls it, arose mainly from what came after that brief period.

According to Brudholm, post-atrocity resentment can arise from a number of factors which arise or remain after the period of trauma, as they did for both Amery and for victims of gross human rights violations in South Africa. Under the heading, 'Nested resentments', he writes of the layers of compounded violation of which the original hurt is only the first. The second, in post-apartheid South Africa, was the 'governmentally-sanctioned amnesty policy that obliterated the right of the victims or their relatives to seek redress in courts of law, both criminal and civil' (74). He quotes Steve Biko's widow, Ntsiki, who, with others, brought a lawsuit before the Constitutional Court seeking to keep the TRC's Amnesty Committee from indemnifying perpetrators of gross human rights violations: 'We all want reconciliation, but it must come with something. It must come with justice' (75). Then, thirdly, the 'powerful public celebration of forgiveness and restorative justice... often discouraged and diminished (victims and relatives') righteous resentment or indignation occasioned by the original offenses and the amnesty policy' (74). In fact, the pressure to forgive, what Brudholm calls the 'boosterism of forgiveness', and the diagnosis of unforgiveness as moral inferiority or psychological damage, compound

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<sup>7</sup> Brudholm (113,114) quotes Martha Nussbaum's account of Elie Wiesel's experience of liberation:

Wiesel was a child in one of the Nazi death camps. On the day the Allied forces arrived, the first member of the liberating army he saw (was) a very large black officer. Walking into the camp and seeing what was there to be seen, this man began to curse, shouting at the top of his voice. As the child Wiesel watched, he went on shouting and cursing for a very long time. And the child Wiesel thought, watching him, now humanity has come back. Now with that anger, humanity has come back.

the injury and, in the case of atrocities or imprescriptible crimes, may trivialise their seriousness. The pressure to ‘move on’, especially with the passage of time, falls into the same category. Vladimir Jankélévitch’s impassioned contribution to the 1965 French debates on statutory limits on war crimes (prescriptibility and imprescriptibility) is pertinent in this context:

The sentiment we experience is not rancor but horror – insurmountable horror over what happened, horror of the fanatics who perpetrated this thing, of the passive who accepted it, and the indifferent who have already forgotten it. This is our *ressentiment*. For *ressentiment* can also be the renewed and intensely lived feeling of the inexpiable thing: it protests against a moral amnesty that is nothing but shameful amnesia; it maintains the sacred flame of disquiet and faith to invisible things. (Jankélévitch 1996:572, in Brudholm: 107)<sup>8</sup>

Seen in this light, resentment can be a moral stance, a protest against the glossing over and putting away of terrible deeds for the sake not only of those who committed them, but also of those who allowed them to be committed and those who prefer not to be reminded of them.

For such deeds as imprescriptible crimes, is closure really possible? It is clear that such closure cannot be forced, but the question also remains whether there will not always be something unfinished about ‘the inexpiable thing’, as Jankélévitch calls it. In his preface Améry writes:

I had no clarity when I was writing this little book, I do not have it today and I hope that I never will. Clarification would amount to disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to aid in preventing precisely this. For nothing is resolved, no conflict is settled, no remembering has become mere memory. What happened, happened. But that it happened cannot be so easily accepted. I rebel: against my past, against

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. these South African responses, also quoted by Brudholm:

I refuse not to be angry and cannot forgive. What is still more difficult is to have someone tell me that I should not still feel like this. (Brian Mphahalele, in Brudholm: 36)

What really makes me angry about the TRC and Tutu is that they are putting pressure on me to forgive.... I don’t know if I will ever be able to forgive. I carry this ball of anger within me and I don’t know where to begin dealing with it. The oppression was bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even angrier is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness.’ (A woman identified only as Kola, quoted first by Charles Villa-Vicencio, and by Brudholm, 54.)

history, and against a present that places the incomprehensible in the cold storage of history. (In Brudholm:89 and 94)

This refusal to accept past events, and even less to accept the present's attempt to do away with them, is not only understandable but a profoundly moral form of righteous outrage. Moreover, the damage done to human beings cannot be undone. Bernard Williams's concept of 'moral remainders' (quoted in Brudholm: 60), refers, then, to both unexpiated wrongs ('the things not made right', as Brudholm calls them) and the ongoing emotional cost to victims in residues such as remorse, shame, guilt, fear and the loss of an ability to trust.

Like Jankélévitch, Améry, although writing in German, uses the word *ressentiments*, deliberately conjuring up Nietzsche's characterisation of the 'man of *ressentiment*' in order to reassess that image of 'self-poisoning, hypersensitivity, deceitfulness, and emotions like vindictiveness, hatred, malice, spite and envy' (in Brudholm: 28). Like Jankélévitch too, he raises the 'inexpiable thing' and the ongoing burden of the past:

*(Ressentiment)* nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past. Absurdly, it demands that the irreversible be turned around, that the event be undone. *Ressentiment* blocks the exit to the genuine human dimension, the future. I know that the time sense of the person trapped in *ressentiment* is twisted around, dis-ordered, if you wish, for it demands two impossible things: regression into the past and nullification of what happened.... In any event, the man of *ressentiment* cannot join the unisonous peace chorus all around him, which cheerfully proposes: not backward let us look but forward, to a better, common future! (68f/128, in Brudholm: 121)

Words like 'ruined' and 'irreversible' express clearly what cannot be undone, but resentment nevertheless cannot accept that it happened at all.<sup>9</sup> The trapped, crucified, lonely, blocked existence of the man or woman of resentment (not unlike the fate of the unforgiving servant) is presented not as a choice, but as that which the unacceptable has inflicted upon one. And, while Hannah Arendt will see forgiveness as the only way to undo what is otherwise irreversible, the only way of restoring a future, she, too, confines forgiveness to that which is forgivable, placing radical evil in the hands of an eternal God of Judgement, whose memory is not affected by the

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Fisher, quoted by Brudholm (125) writes, for example, of the state of mind of one who has witnessed or experienced a terrible crime: 'The imagination returns again and again to the possibility that this did not have to happen to the victim, who still, for a time, retains the full human reality he or she had prior to the crime.'

passing of time any more than that of the trauma victim (Fisher in Brudholm:123-124). Indeed, Arendt, like Jankélévitch and Améry, cannot reconcile herself to that which ought not to have happened:

We shall not be able to become reconciled to it, to come to terms with it, as we must with everything that is past.... Even the famous healing power of time has somehow failed us. On the contrary, this past has managed to grow worse as the years have gone by so that we are sometimes tempted to think: this will never be over as long as we are not all dead. (2003:55, in Brudholm:127)

Améry's views on the predicament of the victim and the justifiability of resentment, together with Brudholm's explication of the conditions which gave rise to his essays, two decades after the end of the Second World War, give caution to the South African reader, for whom similar conditions, similar blindness and denial in the post-apartheid years, are all too recognisable. To speak too glibly of forgiveness is to reduce, to trivialise both the offence and the anguished response to it. To do so when one has not only not experienced the violation of one's rights, but was a beneficiary of injustice, is indeed perilous. Yet this is what I must attempt to do.

### **1.3 Forgiveness**

Since Hannah Arendt (1989), Derrida (2001) and Ricoeur (2004) relate the ethics of forgiveness to its religious source, Biblical teaching on forgiveness will be examined before their views are discussed.

The Judaic principle of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' set proportionate limits for the exercise of retribution in the name of justice. Justice, as Emmanuel Levinas (1998) has stressed, underlies much of Judaism – yet the Lord Yahweh is also known to be 'gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love' (Ps 145:8), and His compassion on occasion overtakes the demands of justice:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!  
How can I hand you over, O Israel!...  
My heart recoils within me,  
My compassion grows warm and tender.  
I will not execute my fierce anger,  
I will not again destroy Ephraim;

For I am God and not man,  
The Holy One in your midst,  
And I will not come to destroy. (Hos 11:8-9)

Mercy is a divine attribute, beautifully elaborated in Psalm 103, in which the God who ‘works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed’ (v. 6) nevertheless ‘does not deal with us according to our sins,/ nor requite us according to our iniquities’ (10) but ‘removes our transgressions from us’ (12).

Arendt, a Jewish philosopher trained in Christian theology, attributes the ‘discovery of the role of forgiveness in human affairs’ to Jesus of Nazareth (1989:238). Jesus draws on the Judaic revelation of a God who ‘desires mercy, not sacrifice’ (Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13, 12:7) and extends the demands of mercy and forgiveness to interpersonal relationships, demanding a humanly impossible standard from his disciples:

‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also...’ (Mt 5:38,39)

This is perhaps Jesus’ most radical demand, in that non-resistance entails the capacity to absorb offence without retaliation, and the turning of the cheek implies not only forgiveness without any sign of repentance from the offender, but the opening of the self to further violation. George Steiner has commented, ‘Christ’s ordinance of total love, of self-offering to the assailant, is, in any strict sense, an enormity. The victim is to love the butcher. A monstrous proposition. But one shedding fathomless light. How are mortal men and women to fulfil it?’ (In Holloway, 2002:71) This ‘enormity’ of self-offering is, I believe, dramatised in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, but complicated in that it is a white character, post-apartheid, who puts into practice this teaching of turning the cheek in the knowledge of past injustice. (And it is this aspect of the novel that has elicited howls of disbelief, and a general acceptance among critics that this example is conceptual only and not meant to be emulated.) Jesus’ injunction is made in the context of His teaching on grace: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven’ (Mt 5:44, 45). Nothing less than divine mercy is expected: ‘You therefore, must be perfect,’ Jesus concludes this teaching, ‘as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (5:48).

It is perhaps for this reason that, as Ricoeur (2004: 467) points out, the great Pauline chapter on love, which is ‘not resentful’ and ‘keeps no record of wrongs’ (I Cor 13: 5,6) is placed within Paul’s teaching on the gifts (charisma: graces) of the Spirit of God. Divine grace would indeed be needed to meet this requirement.

Hannah Arendt’s explication of key terms in the original Greek of Luke 17:3-4 is elucidating. The sentence in question is: ‘And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.’ The terms are *aphienai*, *metanein*, and *hamartanein*. *Hamartanein* (‘trespass’ in the KJV, ‘sin’ in most later translations) is, Arendt writes, ‘very well rendered by “trespassing” in so far as it means rather “to miss,” “fail and go astray,” than “to sin” (1989:240). She herself confines her views on forgiveness to such ‘trespasses’. The word rendered ‘repent’, *metanoein*, denotes a change of mind and, as a rendition of the Hebrew *shuv*, to ‘return’ or ‘trace back one’s steps’. Rather than ‘repentance, with its emotional overtones; what is required is: change your mind and “sin no more”’, writes Arendt, ‘which is almost the opposite of doing penance’. The word rendered ‘forgive’, *aphienai*, means to dismiss or release (1989:240). This liberating nature of forgiveness is, as suggested below, conversely dramatised in the parable of the unforgiving servant, in the imprisonment of both parties.

What has attracted most debate is the reason for forgiveness, first sounded in Jesus’ manifesto, the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy’ (Mt 5:7). One who stands in need of divine mercy cannot, therefore, afford to be unmerciful in relation to others. This is unambiguously declared in the Lord’s Prayer (‘forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors’ [Mt 6:12]) and Jesus’ teaching on it:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses’ (Mt 6:14).

This condition for divine forgiveness (which Martinus Zoeloe in Fugard’s *Playland* understands), the idea of a contract or exchange, has received criticism as being less than truly gracious. It is, perhaps, a last resort accommodating human frailty, for in the parable of the unmerciful servant the order of forgiveness is reversed:

‘Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, “Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, “Pay me what you owe.” So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.’ (Mt 18:23-35)

Though it is hard to conceive that mercy, once given, can be retracted, this parable places the conditionality of divine mercy within the perspective that mercy must be given because it has *already* been received. Not to do so then becomes unthinkable – as is illustrated in the story by the deep distress of those who observe the forgiven servant’s unmerciful behaviour.

The scale portrayed makes this point tellingly: the first servant owes the equivalent of fifteen years’ wages for a labourer – an amount he cannot possibly repay in spite of his protestations – while the second servant’s debt is a day’s wage. Here we find Jaspers’ category of metaphysical guilt portrayed in its enormity. The New Testament atonement by the death of the divine Son also evokes the human impossibility of ever atoning for guilt before God, and the ineffable cost of redeeming the debt.

The fact that the first servant’s ruthlessness comes immediately after his own release from debt depicts him as one who forgets all too soon the state of grace in which he stands. This state, then, is the reason for forgiveness for those who wish to follow Jesus, for, as John puts it, ‘From his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace’ (Jn 1:16). If grace came through Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17), nothing less is required of his disciples.

The psycho-spiritual effects of unforgiveness are also shown in this parable. The second servant, the unforgiven, remains bound to the first, imprisoned, his life arrested. The first servant in the story, because of the scale of his debt, could legally be sold into slavery with his family to cover at least a small part of it, and could spend the rest of his life in labouring vainly to atone for the past. (Such slaves were released in Israel in every seventh year, the Jubilee – a very early indication, in law, of the requirement of mercy tempering justice.) His bondage, however, pales in comparison with the punishment meted out to him for his mercilessness: the Greek word for the jailers who take him into custody is correctly translated as ‘tormentors’. And the parable ends with a stern warning of equal torment for those who refuse to forgive. For both the unforgiven and the unforgiving, then, forgiveness would mean spiritual release (*aphienai*) and the restoration of a future.

Richard Holloway grapples with conditional forgiveness as well as with the injunction to forgive, then moves beyond both to ‘creative forgiveness’, which he sees portrayed in the parable of the lost son (Lk 15:11-31; appendix). This story is usually read as ‘an example of conditional forgiveness at work’ (2002:60) – the condition for forgiveness in this case being the offender’s repentance – as the son comes to himself and returns to the father he has grieved, armed with appropriately repentant words. But in another, radical reading, Holloway sees the central act as ‘the running of the father to greet the returning sinner’ (2002:80):

According to the code which he has already abandoned, he is no longer part of the community he walked out of so contemptuously. If the elders see him enter the village, they will break an earthenware vessel over his head as a sign that he has shattered his covenant with the community and may henceforth be given no succour, no food, no water, no shelter: he is already dead to them and they to him. The pining father sees him before anyone else and runs to meet him. This was in itself an extraordinary breach of the patriarchal code.... The strong love of the waiting father has no interest in his own dignity or status. He rushes out to meet and embrace his disgraced child. It is this abandonment of code and conditionality that is the scandalous heart of the story. The son is clearly forgiven by the father before he can get a word out... (2002:81, 82)

According to this reading, the divine Father, too, loves and forgives unconditionally – because this is His nature. Hosea’s God of compassion, He is moved by pity (v. 11) to

embrace his son and forestall his condemnation.<sup>10</sup> Only in this spontaneous grace (the gift) is Derrida's 'pure' forgiveness (discussed below) to be found for Holloway. Such a gift of creative forgiveness has the potential to restore and change the recipient, and Holloway (2002) notes that in the story the son does not complete his prepared speech, omitting a planned opportunistic request.

Yet it must be added that the New Testament covenant of grace does not abandon the code of justice, but meets its requirements in the sacrificial death of the Lamb, through whom forgiveness is then freely given. God Himself in the Person of the Son provides the propitiation for sin and guilt, 'in his body of flesh by his death', to render believers 'holy and blameless and irreproachable before him' (Col 1:22). This is also the foundation for interpersonal reconciliation.<sup>11</sup>

As indicated earlier, Hannah Arendt concerns herself with the forgiveness of 'trespasses' which, by definition, are less serious offences. Of Jesus' teaching, from which she quotes extensively, she writes, 'The reason for the insistence on a duty to forgive is clearly "for they know not what they do" and it does not apply to the extremity of crime and willed evil... Crime and willed evil are rare... according to Jesus, they will be taken care of by God in the Last Judgement... and the Last Judgment is not characterised by forgiveness but by just retribution (*apodounai*)' (1989:239-240). Yet, while it may be true that those who crucified Jesus did not see Him as the Son of God, if one considers that His words, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do,' were uttered on the cross, and pertained to all who had contributed to His death, including the religious leaders who had plotted to kill an innocent man and had achieved this through an illegal night-time trial, and who were at this point

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<sup>10</sup> Eva Fleischner points to the roots of Jesus' teaching in that of the rabbis, quoting this story from Pesikta Rabbati, 184b-85a:

A king had a son who had gone astray from him on a journey of a hundred days. His friends said to him, "Return to your father." He said, "I cannot." Then his father sent a message to him saying, "Return as far as you can and I will come the rest of the way to you." In a similar way God says, "Return to me and I will return to you." (1998: 140)

<sup>11</sup> This is clarified in Paul's teaching of the reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile believers, and can, with a mind to the parables already dealt with, be applied to forgiveness:

'For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of codes and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in the place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end' (Eph 2:14-16).

still taunting Him, and if one considers the enormity of shedding blood, which from the death of Abel calls for divine vengeance, it would seem to me that no crime is beyond forgiveness.

Yet forgiveness need not exclude the course of justice, as amnesty does: the victim of a crime, for instance, can forgive the perpetrator even as legal retribution is exacted by the state. Such an offender is released from the moral, but not the legal burden of the crime. This occurred when victims and survivors forgave perpetrators of crimes before the TRC, quite independently of the Commission's decision on the recommendation of amnesty.

The question raised by Arendt and others – and one thinks of Ntsiki Biko and her co-petitioners – of the just requirement of retribution for 'crimes and willed offences' is an important one. Her concept of crimes being the province, in Jesus' teaching, of divine judgment is in line, interestingly, with the views of two therapists writing for survivors of child abuse. Hancock and Mains, having made the point that forgiving is not excusing and that child victims sometimes need to understand the offence against them, then posit as the first step in a process of forgiveness, the transfer of one's case to a higher court (1987:65). Whether such authority is a court of law or, for believers, the possibility of divine judgement, the victim of the offence gives up the right to exact revenge, on the understanding that justice will be done. This is in line with the prophet's word: 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the LORD' (Romans 12: 19). In this view the requirement of justice, far from being in conflict with the ethics of forgiveness, is acknowledged and not abandoned so much as yielded to a higher authority as an aid to forgiveness.

Struggle theologian Willa Boesak reminds readers in his 1995 text *God's Wrathful Children*, that the divine right of judgement, elucidated in Romans 12 in the context of teaching on mercy, is also said to be delegated, immediately after this, to 'governing authorities' (Rom 13:1); such authority is 'the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer' (v.4). Boesak comments, 'The civil authorities become God's avenger, bringing God's wrath on the transgressor.... The apostle does not postpone the vindication of God's angry children to some exclusively future, heavenly realm.' (1995:198-99). In a paper published in the following year, Boesak argues that

a failure by just civil authorities to execute such judgement leads to ‘God’s wrathful children’ taking revenge themselves. ‘The violence entrenched in our society seems senseless,’ he writes, ‘but is in fact a consequence of centuries of colonial oppression, alienation and extended suffering.... Understanding God’s wrathful children in our context requires the ability to see within their deeds of despair and hear within their cries of rage the cry of justice’ (1996:66-67). He therefore argues for punitive and reparative justice. ‘A theological ethic of vengeance and wrath cannot be built on a distorted notion of forgiveness in which the tie between punitive justice and the goal of reconciliation has been severed,’ he writes, arguing not for the indictment of apartheid criminals so much as of ‘those at the top level who gave the orders’ (1996:67-68). I believe this failure of accountability and its consequences is dramatised in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*. This will be further discussed in chapter three.

One of the apartheid state’s victims, Catholic priest Michael Lapsley<sup>12</sup>, stresses that forgiveness may never be cheapened by a lack of accountability:

Forgiveness, yes – that is always the Christian calling – but no one should suggest that forgiveness is glib, cheap or easy. What does it mean to forgive those who have not confessed, those who have not changed their lives, those who have no interest in making it up to the relatives and victims and the survivors of their crimes? If you forgive a murderer, does that mean there should be no justice? (1996:22)

And Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, who is sometimes seen as too easily advocating forgiveness, stresses the importance of acts of reparation: ‘Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing,’ he writes, quoting Jeremiah on ‘healing the hurt (of God’s people) lightly’ (1999:218).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lapsley came to South Africa from New Zealand in 1973, soon joined the resistance movement, and was expelled from the country in 1976. In Harare, in April 1990 (after the De Klerk announcement of the ANC’s unbanning) he received a letter bomb hidden in a religious magazine. He lost both hands and the use of an eye in the attack. Craig Williamson confessed at the TRC to having sent the bomb.

<sup>13</sup> Tutu seems mindful of his role as priest, for this is taken from the indictment against prophets and priests who ‘deal falsely’ and do not bring about true reconciliation:

They have healed the wound of my people lightly,  
Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’  
When there is no peace (Jer 6:14).

The requirement of justice needs to be carefully distinguished from revenge, another form of retribution. Hannah Arendt sees vengeance as the ‘natural, automatic reaction’ to an offence, which keeps everyone ‘bound to the process, permitting the chain reaction contained in every action to take its unhindered course’ (1989:240-241). While revenge is a predictable re-action, forgiveness, its ‘exact opposite...acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven’ (240-241) – much as is dramatised conversely in the parable of the unforgiving servant. Both forgiveness and its alternative, punitive justice, bring a matter of offence to an end. In a circular argument, she sees unforgivable offences as those that are so radically evil that they cannot be punished (‘men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and... they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable’ [241]). This, then, is in line with the legal concept of imprescriptability, as there is no appropriate or proportionate punishment for offences so defined.

While noting the liberating effect of forgiveness on both perpetrator and victim, Arendt stresses its capacity to restore a future to the trespasser in particular: ‘The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done...– is the faculty of forgiving.... Without being forgiven, released from the consequence of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to a single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever, not unlike the sorcerer’s apprentice who lacked the magic formula to break the spell’ (1989:237). (The fact that Arendt’s use of the first person, ‘we’, places her in the camp of the guilty is significant, when one considers that she could speak equally as a holocaust survivor.)

*No Future Without Forgiveness* is the title Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has chosen to give to his memoirs on the TRC. The restoration of a future is also touched upon by several of Wiesenthal’s respondents, who mention the importance of forgiveness not only for the perpetrator but for the one forgiving as well. ‘One should forgive,’ writes Matthew Fox, ‘not out of altruism but out of the need to be free to get on with one’s life’ (1998:148). Harold Kushner also argues that forgiveness is ‘not something we do for another person’, but sees it as a ‘letting go of the sense of grievance, and perhaps most importantly a letting go of the role of victim’; it is

saying, 'I refuse to give you the power to define me as a victim' (1998:186). Sven Alkalaj, A Jewish Bosnian who witnessed the genocide in his country, is perhaps the most eloquent. Like Boesak, he argues that genocide cannot go unpunished: 'It cannot be stressed enough that the punishment of the guilty and some measure of justice are absolutely necessary for forgiveness or reconciliation even to be considered' (1998:104). He will consider forgiveness 'if there is a genuine recognition of guilt', and concludes that 'reconciliation must be the end goal for a return to the inherent beauty of living' (105).

Like Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida also notes the unexpected nature of forgiveness. He has called forgiveness a 'madness of the impossible'. True to his ethics of 'haunting' consciousness with the highest ideal, Derrida writes, 'It (forgiveness) can only be possible in doing the impossible. For, in this century, monstrous crimes ("unforgivable" then) have... been committed' (2001:33). In this he differs radically from Arendt. Yet, in spite of its impossibility, forgiveness 'arrives ...surprises, like a revolution, the ordinary course of history, politics, and law' (2001:39). Derrida draws on the Abrahamic tradition (so including three religions) to posit 'pure' forgiveness, pure because unconditional. For Derrida, the amnesty offered by the TRC in the service of reconciliation is not 'pure' forgiveness because it serves another interest: 'each time forgiveness is at the service of some finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by a work of mourning, by some therapy or ecology of memory, then the "forgiveness" is not pure' (2001: 31-32).

Unlike Arendt and Améry, Derrida states axiomatically that 'forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable' (2001:32) and should be unconditional in order to be pure – not dependent, for example, on repentance on the part of the offender. He criticises a logic of exchange (repentance for forgiveness), using a similar lexicon to that of Paul Ricoeur, who describes the 'economy of grace' as 'characterised by the logic of abundance, which distinguishes the logic of forgiveness from that of reciprocity belonging to justice' (2000:18, my translation).

Ricoeur, in a 2002 lecture, speaks of forgiveness in the context of nations as well, in terms of the possibility of healing. Yet he concludes elsewhere, ‘regretfully’, that peoples cannot forgive (2004:485): forgiveness cannot be institutionalised, and attempts to do so create only a ‘caricature of forgiveness’ in amnesty, ‘the institutional form of forgetting’ (2004: 488). But for the individual, forgiveness, though difficult, is attainable: ‘the impossibility of forgiveness replying to the unpardonable nature of moral evil’ (2004: 458).

Ricoeur relates forgiveness to a form of work, of labour – it would seem almost of travail – in the context of healing: ‘I would like to place forgiveness at the culmination of labour that begins in the sphere of memory and proceeds into that of forgetting’ (2000:13, my translation). Borrowing the German philosopher Koselleck’s vocabulary, he speaks of a relationship between the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation’. Our inheritance, the filtered traces of our past, form the basis of all we anticipate, both good and bad. Musing about the possibility of an excess of memory in some nations, and a paucity of remembering in others (mentioning as examples French forgetfulness about the Vichy government and Algeria), he quotes a 1914 study by Freud on compulsive repetition as a defence against memory, where ‘acting out’ takes the place of the act of remembering. He turns to Freud’s labour of ‘working through’ (*Durcharbeitung*), which entails the courage to dredge up suppressed memory and own its hurt or sickness. This is possible in the act of telling: ‘memory becomes language in telling’ (2000:15). (One assumes such *Durcharbeitung* on the part of the victim, but the perpetrator needs to return to the pain of facing past acts as well.) Ricoeur makes the point that learning to tell the story from the position of the other facilitates communal memory.

Working through, then, has a dual effect: as it moves from remembering into the sphere of forgetting, the project changes. Quoting Raymond Aron on the ‘retrospective illusion of fatality’, Ricoeur (2004: 382) rejects the notion that, in contrast to the openness of the future, the past is fixed and closed. The facts of past events, he concedes, cannot be changed, but the meaning we give to them can – not only our interpretation, but the moral burden of the past can be changed, as occurs in release from guilt. Significantly, this retroactive activity also comes into play when we try to tell the story from the perspective of the other. (This possibility is raised in

Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*, and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela provides a case study in recovering the story of the other.)

Choosing to forget, then, is the antithesis of the earlier escapist forgetting – it is active and liberating. Ricoeur now links Freud's concept of the labour of remembering to his work of mourning, which is a process of letting go of the loved – and also hated – object. It is at this conjunction between remembering and forgetting, retrieving and letting go, that Ricoeur places forgiveness – in forgetting the blame, not in letting go of the memory. What forgiveness adds to this work – for forgiveness itself, Ricoeur maintains, is not labour – is grace; it is generosity. 'Forgiveness asked is not forgiveness owed' (Ricoeur quoted in Antohi, 2005: 18); it is a gift.

While guilt can be collective, forgiveness is inter-subjective: it is an individual act of will. And then only people (not systems) can be forgiven, and it is the person, not the deed, we forgive (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003: 95). Arendt speaks of the relationship established by forgiveness as an 'eminently personal one...what was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it' (1989:241).

Forgiveness is a choice, yet therapists stress that survivors of wrongs inflicted may never be pressed to forgive, though authentic forgiveness would be an important step in their healing process. (In another context, José Hobday, a Native American, quotes the words of his Seneca mother, 'Go to an elder and ask for the medicine that will turn your heart from bitterness to sweetness. You must learn the wisdom of how to let go of poison' [1998:174-175].) In a practical guide for survivors of child abuse, Hancock and Mains (1987:65-66) outline 'steps' in the process of forgiveness, which have links with Ricoeur's more scholarly description, and which I will paraphrase and comment on briefly. The first, already mentioned, is that of acknowledging the injury done to one, and transferring the case to a higher court, so forgoing the right to exact vengeance oneself. The second, related step is giving up resentment as an act of will. The third, which to my mind is the most profound, is a willingness to take upon oneself the pain inflicted, to 'own' it (much as Jesus did in claiming to lay down His life willingly, though in the gospel account He is predominantly the victim of others')

actions<sup>14</sup>). It is this absorption of pain, replacing resentment, which is suggested by the metaphor of the turning of the cheek. It is also this choice, I believe, which liberates the injured person from the perpetrator's power and from victimhood. Hancock and Mains' last phase is a waiting stage, allowing release to follow as grace takes effect.

Forgiving is not excusing. Desmond Tutu (1998) stresses that the act must be named and its wrongfulness acknowledged by the perpetrator seeking forgiveness. This is the act of confession, secular counterpart of a church sacrament. 'The words are what the victim wants to hear, to touch,' writes Gobodo-Madikizela. '*The words themselves*' (2003: 131). (Her description of an effectual apology is outlined in chapter 2.1.) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was founded on the notion that such truth-telling, in so far as it was possible, was essential for survivors and for the nation.

What is sometimes overlooked is that confession, saying that it is so, is equally important for the victim as for the transgressor. The importance of naming the wrong done to one, speaking, even much later, what Justice Mahomed has called 'the truth of wounded memories' (in Tutu: 1999:29), is an important step in the healing process. When Ackermann (1996: 54) quotes Solle on the stages of suffering, the first is one of muteness, incomprehension. The second phase is lament, or speaking, crying pain. This stage is vital for healing and release to follow.

If forgiving is not excusing, neither is it tantamount to forgetting. Ricoeur speaks instead of the 'appeased memory': 'The appeased memory does not seek to forget the evil suffered or committed. It seeks to speak of it without anger' (2004:11). In fact, most of Wiesenthal's respondents understandably emphasise the importance of not forgetting, not silencing past atrocities. 'What you and I went through,' Jean Amery replies to Wiesenthal, 'must *not happen again, never, nowhere*' (1998:108).

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<sup>14</sup> 'No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (Jn 10:17-19).

#### 1.4 Guilt and forgiveness in selected post-apartheid texts

A number of early and later post-apartheid texts deal with questions of guilt and forgiveness. As might be expected, white writers in particular have been preoccupied with these themes. Where they occur in the work of black writers, guilt often takes the form of having caused suffering to others in the cause of the struggle against apartheid. The extreme example of this must be in John Kani's play, *Nothing but the Truth*, in which a struggle hero exploits and betrays his brother's loyalty and support, while Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* touches on the open secret of the exploitation and abuse of women during the struggle. In Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (2000), on the other hand, the focus is on the guilt incurred by black PAC-aligned youths who killed exchange student Amy Biehl, and Magona tries not to excuse or minimise guilt, but to create a fictional backdrop for understanding the environment that can create such hatred and violence – much as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela tries to understand the society that created Eugene de Kock.

When Kani's *Nothing but the Truth* was first performed in 2002, it was hailed by critic Darryl Accone as the play South Africa had been waiting for (in Kani, 2002: v). Having co-authored the influential struggle plays *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973), Kani was now seen as making a contribution to a form of theatre which enacts the possibilities of reconciliation.

In the play Sipho Makhaya's daughter Thando is working as an interpreter at the TRC. But Sipho is strangely reticent about the past. He has arranged to bury his brother Themba, a former struggle activist and local hero, who has died in England after not returning from exile. To his consternation Themba's daughter Mandisa arrives with her father's ashes instead.

Mandisa is appalled after spending a day at the TRC amnesty hearings with Thando. '(S)omebody must be made to pay,' she protests (29), but Thando defends the process: 'If all those who suffered can forgive, then so can you' (30). 'Oh, please!' Mandisa exclaims. 'That's the attitude my father always talked about. "The generosity of the African people." I call it giving in too easily.' 'I call it African humanity,' Sipho counters.

But Sipho's own adherence to *ubuntu* is tested, as the job he has deserved for some time, that of chief librarian, is given instead to a young man from Johannesburg with the right political connections. Yet, as Sipho says later, 'I was part of the Struggle. I too suffered as a black person. I went to the marches like everyone else.... The thousands that attended those funerals on Saturdays, that was me. The thousands that were tear gassed, sjambokked by the police, mauled by Alsatian dogs, that was me.... I WAS THOSE THOUSANDS! I too deserved some recognition, didn't I?' (51-52). His belief that his 'time has come' with Mandela's release (51), as has that of the other faceless thousands, is cruelly betrayed by a policy of rewarding ANC loyalists. At the end of the play he resolves to write to President Mbeki: 'I want to remind him that I voted for him. I put them in power. I paid for this freedom. I paid with my son's life.... They must never forget the little people like me.... We have dreams too.... It is our time now' (58). The name Sipho ('gift') is fairly common, suitable for the representative of the 'little people' he speaks for. In raising the needs and expectations of the struggle's footsoldiers, and the betrayal of their dreams for political expediency, Kani is perhaps the first to touch on what was to become an enduring issue under ANC rule.<sup>15</sup>

Sipho, a little drunk, finally reveals those aspects of the past he has not wanted to revisit. 'It's time,' he says (35). As Themba was their father's favourite, he has always had to defer to his younger brother's needs and wants. He could not attend university himself, but when his father sent Themba, Sipho worked to help support his brother. Themba repaid them both by taking 'five wonderful years' (33) and not working after graduation, so that Sipho continued to support the family, while Themba took to activism at no personal cost to himself: 'Calling for stayaways when he himself was unemployed.... He supported the schools boycott when he did not have a child at school. Called for consumer boycotts when he knew who bought the food he ate.... Proposed rent boycotts when he did not have a house. He stayed with me in my house' (47). Yet Sipho's son Luvuyo is taken in by Themba and as a result is killed in the struggle. The litany of loss and theft continues, for it transpires that Themba also seduced Sipho's beloved wife, causing the break-up of their marriage.

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<sup>15</sup> The possibility had, however, been raised by Zakes Mda long before the end of apartheid, in his play *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1979).

Sipho finally faces Luvuyo's death and wants to know who killed his son. He rehearses all the steps required for retribution in the new South Africa. Only when the law has taken its course, can a guilty man apply for amnesty from his prison cell. When Thando challenges Sipho about the possibility of forgiveness, he says, 'You don't get it, do you? This whole fucking country doesn't get it. It's not about me.... It's about justice. So that my soul can rest. So that I can say to myself "yes, justice has been done"'. (54) The TRC process which shadows the play is seen at this point to sacrifice justice to mercy. The play continues to merge the conflict between the brothers with the larger political struggle and the choice between justice and forgiveness. Both come to a head in the responsibility for Luvuyo's death, for which, until now, Sipho has chosen to blame Themba. 'If I can forgive all the white people for what they did to us,' Sipho concludes, 'how can I not forgive my own brother?' (56). His desire to have Themba stand before him and say 'I'm sorry, my brother' is fulfilled vicariously by Mandisa, who apologises on her father's behalf. When he is alone, Sipho picks up the urn with Themba's ashes and is able to express his love for his brother (59). Here, as elsewhere, the spoken word is the medium for remembering, apology and forgiveness.

Kani therefore dramatises the conflict between two brothers in the struggle, and also raises questions about the new injustices occurring post-apartheid. While Sipho's choice to forgive is not substantiated as eloquently as is his need for justice, the importance of remembering and facing the past, with its 'whole truth', is seen to be a painful but potentially healing experience.

Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) is perhaps the most complex examination of the entangled strands of guilt and retribution, where those related to a political activist, Silas Ali, pay a price for his part in the struggle for justice. A security policeman, Du Boise, rapes Ali's wife Lydia when taking Ali into custody, and she continues to bear the psychological scars. Lydia 'acts out' her repressed memory when she is reminded of the rape years later, by trampling on broken glass. Their only son, Mikey, discovers, by reading his mother's diary while she is in hospital, that he is the child of

that rape, and goes in search of du Boise<sup>16</sup> in order to take revenge. Though the former security policeman is dying of cancer, Mikey shoots him before leaving the country himself. This novel presents post-apartheid South Africa as a country where, on the one hand, former activists have government posts (Ali works for the ministry of justice), but on the other, former security men are also still walking free. Mikey will not allow the man who raped his mother to die a natural death, but commits patricide to avenge the wrong done to his parents and himself – as though cleansing himself of the taint of rape and its historical context. Ali's bitter fruit includes the loss of his wife, who leaves him, and his son.

Shane Graham has pointed out that the novel's three section headings, 'Memory', 'Confession' and 'Retribution', set out to suggest, but finally subvert, the trajectory envisaged in the TRC: 'memory is damaged, confession is always hampered and embittered, and reconciliation is undercut by revenge' (2009:94). Silas, who works at the TRC, is thought to be 'good at his job, helping the country to forget and therefore to forgive, a convenient kind of amnesia' (Dangor, 2001:110; Graham, 2009:96). Though amnesty and amnesia share the same root, amnesty is not amnesia any more than forgiveness is grounded in denial – yet the possibility that the past might be suppressed in the very act of memorialising, in being archived in order 'not to keep it alive, but to keep it contained', as Graham has put it (2009:96), is reflected in Silas's work for the TRC. Paul Ricoeur's views on memory and history support this: 'True testimony... is a living voice,' he writes (Ricoeur quoted in Antohi 2005:12). '(A) document is already a rupture with memory, since it is written and since the voices have already turned silent.... (M)emory is oral.... (a)nd the reduction of memory to writing marks the turning over of memory to history' (2005: 11-12). At a time when leaders like Mandela and Tutu were advocating reconciliation, Dangor therefore seems to warn against a too easy forgetfulness, a too hurried putting down and putting away of the past, reminiscent of Améry's refusal to consign irreparable wrongs to the 'cold storage of history' (quoted in Brudholm 2008: 72).

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<sup>16</sup> The unusual surname stresses not only the policeman's European heritage, but is a disguised form of 'from the bush': an ironic inversion of racist whites' aspersions on levels of civilization amongst Africans, and a reflection of the barbarity involved in du Boise's abuse of unjust power.

J.M. Coetzee is quoted on the back cover of the Kwela publication of *David's Story* by Zoë Wicomb (2000), as saying that Wicomb shows what the 'literature of the new South Africa will look like'. Wicomb had certainly shown the way in her earlier short story cycle, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), which, although published in the apartheid years, had envisaged a new society, the re-appropriation of the land, its symbols and language by the dispossessed, and the psychological liberation from the effects of apartheid. But *David's Story*, set in the transition years, is a disappointment, its complication of narrative point of view, in the use of a frustrated amanuensis, leading to obscurity. David Dirkse, a commander in the anti-apartheid movement, relates his story to her but seems to retain narrative control through concealment – a possible reflection of the silencing of the darker aspects of the struggle. David suffers guilt, but the source remains murky. Nor is it clear whether or why he seems to fear agents of his movement as much as he does agents of the old state apparatus. The lines are equally blurred in the identity of the agents responsible for the torture of his comrade Dulcie Oliphant, though guilt within the movement is strongly suggested. David dies in what may be a suicide or a murder. Wicomb has not set out to write a realistic novel, but seems merely to emphasise that the 'truth' about the past will always be someone's construction (depending, possibly, on who gains the ascendancy in the jostling for power characterising the transition). It is as difficult to come by as the truth about the uneasy present of the transition period. Her courage in pointing out that the struggle against apartheid could not be entirely innocent, as events at the ANC's Quatro camp (mentioned in the novel [2000:100]), and especially the abuse of women, testify, deserves mention, as does her apparent caution against a new nationalism, a new heroic myth in the recovery of history, in this case that of the indigenous Griqua people.<sup>17</sup>

Far more accessible is Wicomb's later novel *Playing in the Light* (2006). Here the site of guilt is not in the struggle; instead, guilt takes the form of collusion with an unjust system – a temptation faced by coloured people under apartheid, caught in the margin between black and white, but 'classified' as black. Marion Campbell, the owner of a successful travel agency, is troubled by nightmares which point to the origin of her own deep inhibitions: her parents' having 'played for white', betraying their relatives

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<sup>17</sup> I am indebted to Dr Sopelekae Maithufi for this suggestion.

and living with secretiveness and its concomitant anxiety, which Marion has unknowingly absorbed. While her parents have justified their actions as being ‘for the sake of the child’, and the daughter has indeed enjoyed the advantages of apartheid’s beneficiaries, her life is nevertheless blighted. The contrast between a post-apartheid perspective (Marion and a librarian burst out laughing in trying to make sense of the wording of the Population Registration Amendment Act of 1962 [2006:121]), the freedom with which Marion is able to investigate her past, and her parents’ nervous, ever watchful project of avoiding disclosure and shame under apartheid, reveal Wicomb’s sensitivity to the realities of the past. John Campbell, the surviving parent, cannot be brought to reveal what he has for so long suppressed; though Marion is angry she cannot blame him outright. Moreover, she remembers her own betrayal of a childhood friend whose father transgressed the Immorality Act. It is Marion’s employee and friend Brenda, who still lives with the disadvantages but also within the warmth of a poor Coloured community, who befriends John Campbell and tries to understand his story – and it is she who at the end of the novel comes to be most closely associated with the narrative point of view. The novel is therefore more an indictment of the system and its effect on people than of those who, with limited freedom of choice, paid a heavy price for colluding with it.

Guilt in the work of white writers lies on the other side of the divide. In Damon Galgut’s *The Good Doctor* (2003), the first person narrator’s life is arrested by the guilt he incurred as a young doctor conscripted into the army, in having colluded in and remained silent about the torture of a political prisoner. A minor character, the former ‘commandant’ who had been responsible for interrogations, and whose direct guilt is far greater, seems to suffer no such consequences. He may epitomise Arendt’s ‘banality of evil’ (her conclusion about Eichmann), a term that seems to point to an absence of the sympathetic imagination required to comprehend fully the nature of the wrong one has done to others. It is the man of conscience whose life is blighted, in the absence of any absolution.

The notion of sacrifice, of vicarious atonement for the sins of the past, is found in another early post-apartheid text, Etienne van Heerden’s *Leap Year* (1997) (translated from *Die Stoetmeester*, 1993). Biblical messianic overtones are introduced in the centrality of a flock of fall-goats, sacrificial goats which faint at the slightest shock,

and so are kept with a flock or herd as an easy quarry for predators to save the lives of the other animals. When the novel's narrator, the lawyer Seer Wehmeyer, is killed by white supremacists, his death becomes a catalyst for possible reconciliation between polarised racial groups. The sacrificial nature of his death is underscored by the blood of a fall-goat kid – both a scapegoat, in the Old Testament code of justice, and a Passover lamb, looking forward to the new covenant – on the lintel of his door (330, 356). This is the New Testament reconciliation of the claims of both mercy and justice, although the latter claim is satisfied vicariously.

The guilt of complicity is explored in Galgut's *The Impostor* (2008). Adam Napier, retreating to a small Karoo town, becomes the unwilling confessor to his neighbour, whom he knows as Blom. 'Blom' is the man's adopted name, as he seems to have been an apartheid operative, who has undergone a religious conversion and is now in the witness protection programme. 'That the dark and dirty past of South Africa should have taken form and come to visit Adam at home, wanting absolution... well, it's too much' (161-162). With Blom's hand on his knee, Adam listens, thinking, '*with that hand. You did it all with that hand*' (159; author's emphasis). When he breaks free, it is 'more to break free of the hand than the words' (159). Yet his repudiation of Blom's deeds rings hollow when the perpetrator reminds him, 'Everything I did, I did for you. And other people like you' (160). Like other beneficiaries of apartheid, Adam is drawn into collective guilt, and chooses to deny it.

Adam's brother also reminds him that people who committed atrocities were '(o)rinary guys, just like you or me' (162). Though Adam believes himself to be a moral person, he finds himself contemplating the murder of a friend, Kenneth Canning, when tempted by Canning's wife, with whom he is already having an affair. He resists the temptation, but is faced with a second crucial choice when he is warned that he is to be murdered because he knows too much about Canning's corrupt business dealings, involving international criminals and local politicians. He realises that the assassin will be sent to Blom's house instead, but leaves without warning Blom, who is killed in his place. Once he has resumed a middle-class existence in Cape Town, he reflects on this chapter of his life as being, thankfully, 'all very much in the past' (227). (Blom's fate is revealed, in passing, just after this.)

Adam also finds himself indirectly responsible for the fate of an elderly black couple, Grace and Ezekiel, who have worked for Canning's father and the son all their lives. They are summarily fired on spurious grounds by Canning's wife, after Grace has inadvertently discovered her affair with Adam. Ragged, cold and hungry, they arrive at Adam's door. In this case he tries to atone, cursing the fact that he has no money to throw at the problem. He takes them in, cooks and cleans for them, and sleeps on the floor while they sleep in his bed – but he insists that they leave with their son, who has even less room for them, arguing that, as their son, Lindile is now responsible for them. His moral awareness and sense of debt clearly have their limits.

To Lindile, who harbours resentment for the past, Adam says, 'Oh, come on.... For God's sake. The whole country's moved on since then. Everything's changed. Can't you move on too?' (210). Lindile's reply, 'No. I can't move on,' is reminiscent of Améry's notion of *ressentiment*, resisting societal pressure to let go of outrage with the passage of time.

Change and attempts to erase the past shadow the novel. The small Karoo town has a new name, as yet incomplete in white stones on a hillside, as though reflecting an imperfect transition. While little has changed for its coloured residents, who remain poor, jobless, and without hope, its white residents bemoan the effects of a new road passing the town, which should bring prosperity but has also increased prostitution and crime. (The old road is in ruins and, with its collapsed bridge, is a possible metaphor for the old South Africa.) The new road is a commercial venture, a toll road built by Liberty Vision, a company whose forward-looking name belies its corrupt nature. (It has also, quite cynically, created the New Hope settlement to provide labourers for its projects.) Various characters have changed their names and reinvented their lives: Canning's wife Baby, Adam's neighbour Blom, and a criminal sought by the law in several countries, now known as Genov.

But the attempt to wipe out the past is most spectacularly, vulgarly evident in Canning's revenge on his hated father. Having inherited his father's game farm, Gondwana, which was Canning senior's attempt to realise his lifelong dream of a return to the past of natural history, the younger Canning sets about destroying a potential national heritage site. Gondwana is a small Eden, a green oasis in the midst

of the Karoo, housing both a paleontological site and Bushman paintings. Circumventing environmental laws and tender procedures, Canning and his cronies summon an ‘army’ of workers and a ‘battery’ of machines to destroy the exquisite natural environment and create an upmarket golf course (which will risk the area’s limited water supply) and a dinosaur theme park. It is in this atmosphere that Adam reflects, from the height of a hovering helicopter, on the relativity time brings to both suffering and morality: ‘up close, human life is a catalogue of pain and power, but when enough time has gone past, everything ceases to matter. Nothing that people do to each other will carry any moral charge eventually.... Murder and rape and pillage – in the end, they are just colourful details in a story’ (185-186). The fruit of this reflection is evident in Adam’s later choice to sacrifice his neighbour’s life to save his own.

The amoral environment which, from a certain perspective, the new South Africa has spawned provides a fitting background for this fall. The novel opens with Adam’s refusing to pay a bribe to a traffic policeman, and ends with his appearance in court for his failure to pay his fine. His moral indignation, which briefly and now rather incongruously flares up again, fades as the day in court wears on, and, now with money at his disposal, he simply pays the fine. This is a country where a criminal kingpin, protected by the apartheid government, can simply befriend the new breed of politicians and continue to sow death and corruption, aided by politicians who are cleared by commissions of enquiry.

The remainder of this study will explore both non-fictional texts and three novels. The second chapter, which examines representations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in particular the work of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and her reflections on her dialogue with Eugene de Kock, is intended to serve as a transition between the first chapter and the final three. What emerges from these texts is often the difficulty – even impossibility – of giving voice to traumatic experience, and the cost of doing so. This has implications not only for the process envisaged in the search for truth and, possibly, reconciliation, but also for a communal historiography. Gobodo-Madikizela provides an exercise in telling the story from the position of the other (as envisaged by Ricoeur), and provides valuable comment on the question of forgiveness even as she exercises her own capacity for empathy and mercy.

The three novels discussed in the final chapters, though not selected for this reason, all fall into the genre of the farm novel. The *plaasroman* or pastoral story of an Afrikaans family has a particular and politicised history in South Africa, and an introductory note on the genre is included.

*Disgrace* (1999), the first of the three novels to be discussed, created a stir when it was first published, shortly before J.M. Coetzee emigrated from South Africa. (After reading the novel, many white South Africans felt like following him.) The absence of grace in public affairs, and the blight of guilt, denial and revenge seemed to be portrayed remorselessly. The novel's apparently unremitting pessimism, its bleak portrayal of the new South Africa, the play on words (though devoid of etymological substance) in the title ('dis/grace'), created a minor storm in the popular media and a growth industry in literary criticism. This study will examine the profound ethical dimension which nevertheless pervades the novel, and its repudiation of cheap answers to or superficial atonement for historical injustice. The intertext of the Biblical account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac will be related to the novel, together with Derrida's and Girard's views on the story.

*Agaat* (2006), the second *plaasroman*, was first published in Afrikaans in 2004. It has received numerous awards and has been widely acclaimed. The novel was also considered untranslatable, but Michiel Heyns, in 2006, provided a creative translation which has itself won awards. *Agaat* tells the story of a rich white woman who adopts a disabled and abused coloured child, then sets out about playing fairy godmother, only to relegate the child, named Agaat, to servanthood when her own child is about to be born. The novel is set many years later, in the post-apartheid era, when the mistress, Milla, is paralysed and terminally ill, and is cared for by Agaat, who, using Milla's diary, confronts her mother/mistress/patient with her past choices and actions. Though her intention is to accuse, to call to account, Agaat, perhaps unwittingly, dredges up her own suppressed memories and, in reading aloud from Milla's diary, learns to tell the story from the perspective of the other – and she is changed by the experience. The analysis will consider the ways in which the novel situates questions of guilt and forgiveness in a pastoral setting, which in turn draws on the Biblical

pastoral, relating the possibility of forgiveness to Ricoeur's description of the process and Derrida's notion of pure forgiveness.

The underlying question in the farm novel, that of land ownership and the correction of colonial and apartheid injustice, is 'resolved' in both these novels with land ownership being transferred to black South Africans.

The third novel, Mark Behr's *Kings of the Water* (2009), is skilfully written but does not punch with the same moral weight as the first two, groundbreaking novels. It employs what has become a common plot motif in recent South African fiction: the return to the family farm, and the juxtapositioning of then and now, with questions of memory and identity, as well as the attribution of guilt and the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation, the last of which occurs mainly between family members. The motif of the prodigal son's return is overtly employed, and Holloway's views on this parable are brought into the discussion. Insofar as racial and economic injustice is raised, it centres on the figure of a female farm worker who has had all the odds stacked against her. The fact that she is resilient and generous-spirited, and warmly receives the protagonist, provides this novel with an evasion rather than a resolution of historical guilt, though the question of land ownership, which is always present in the South African pastoral genre, is foregrounded here.