On 27 April 2013, the Right Reverend Dr Terry Brown released via the internet an as yet unauthorised version of a report drafted by the Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The report, which had been in the hands of the Solomon Islands Government since February 2012, marked the culmination of a three year long reconciliation process initiated in response to the Solomon Islands’ 1998-2003 civil conflict. Precipitated by a complex web of grievances, injustices, ethnic tensions and economic insecurities, ‘The Tensions’, as the conflict is known, left around 200 people dead and more than 11,000 displaced from their homes.  

In addition, more than 5700 human rights violations were committed during the conflict, of which at least 1413 involved torture, and in excess of 60 entailed sexual violence.  

Frustrated at the government’s failure to publish the Commission’s findings, Brown, the editor of the report, sought to make public the truth about The Tensions and end months of speculation over the content of the report. ‘I think there’s an awful lot of rumour around,’ Brown argued in a radio interview, ‘and...rumour is an obstruction to reconciliation.’

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While Brown’s efforts to prevent the Solomon Islands Government from further stalling the national reconciliation process have been applauded in some sectors of the community, the report has precipitated a further set of controversies surrounding its form, contents, mode of distribution, and the role played by forgiveness in the Solomon Islands reconciliation process.\(^4\) Unsurprisingly, questions have been raised about the wisdom of the Commission’s decision to ‘name names’;\(^5\) the accessibility of the report which, running to 1389 pages is not conducive to easy public consumption, and the process by which the Commission’s findings were released.\(^6\) In particular, the Chairman of the TRC, Father Samuel Ata, has argued that Brown’s actions were illegal as any decision to release the report was the sole prerogative of the Solomon Islands’ Government.\(^7\) Perhaps more surprising, however, are the criticisms that Brown has levelled at the emphasis placed on forgiveness in the Solomon Islands reconciliation process. ‘It is not good enough,’ Brown declared in a press statement, ‘to forgive the perpetrators and forget the victims, which seems to be the approach of the Government.’\(^8\) In particular, Brown has been openly critical of the Government’s ‘tendency...to promote forgiveness rather than real recognition of some of the terrible human rights abuses that happened’ during The Tensions.\(^9\) In doing so, Brown has echoed critics of post-conflict forgiveness who raise doubts over the legitimacy of transposing an essentially interpersonal practice, enacted between the victim and perpetrator of a wrong, to the political realm. Sceptical of the role played by forgiveness in post-conflict processes, they question whether states and other collective entities are capable of forgiving and tap into long running debates over whether the right to forgive is the exclusive prerogative of the victim of an injustice. In doing so, critics point to the anguish often felt by the victims of human rights violations and their families when states and institutions committed to reconciliation pressure them to forgive perpetrators of serious wrongs or offer forgiveness on their behalf, sometimes in the form of amnesties.\(^10\)

\(^7\) ‘Release of TRC report illegal, Father Ata’, http://www.islandsbusiness.... The TRC Act (2008) states that ‘The Prime Minister on receiving the report of the Commission, shall cause it to be laid before Parliament and the report be made available to the public.’ (s17).
This article examines the practice of forgiveness at the Solomon Islands TRC. Drawing on two antecedent truth commissions at which the role of forgiveness featured heavily, those of El Salvador and South Africa, it traces the evolving relationship between inter-personal and state-sanctioned forgiveness in their processes, culminating with an assessment of the case of the Solomon Islands. In doing so, it argues that like the cases of El Salvador and South Africa before it, the Solomon Islands finds itself engaged in a precarious balancing act between the often competing demands of inter-personal and societal forgiveness processes. On one hand, this article thus demonstrates that the idea that societal reconciliation is not possible without state-level forgiveness in the form of amnesties remains pervasive among some members of the Solomon Islands community including, unsurprisingly, many ex-combatants who hope to benefit from proposed amnesty laws. Yet, on the other hand, it also argues that unlike the TRCs that have gone before it, the Solomon Islands TRC marks a turn away from the sort of overt, state-sanctioned, institutionally-led forgiveness practices that drew sustained criticism in the Salvadoran and South African cases. In particular, the Solomon Islands’ TRC has set itself apart from the South African model on which it was based by explicitly opposing amnesties for ex-combatants and for arguing that without justice, forgiveness alone is unlikely to achieve reconciliation for the Solomon Islands.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

In recent years, the practice of forgiveness has become strongly associated with reconciliation processes both in general and especially within truth and reconciliation commissions. Although he was by no means the first to associate forgiveness and reconciliation, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s claim that there can be ‘no future without forgiveness’ has become a widely accepted principle of post-conflict reconciliation.\(^{11}\) For its increasing number of proponents, forgiveness is the panacea for entrenched anger and resentment precipitated by the perpetration of injustices such as human rights violations. Left unchecked, these negative emotions inspire revenge, hamper efforts at reconciliation, and ultimately contribute to the re-descent into violence in the post-conflict period.\(^{12}\) According to its supporters, forgiveness thus allows antagonists to move ‘beyond sterile situations of mutual condemnation,’ halts never-ending cycles of revenge, and bestows therapeutic benefits upon the victims of serious wrongs.\(^{13}\)

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Yet despite these laudable endeavours, political forgiveness is not an uncontroversial practice, particularly where human rights abuses are concerned. As we will see, critics of political forgiveness are often uncomfortable with its religious underpinnings, raise doubts over the legitimacy of transposing the interpersonal practice of forgiveness to the political realm, question the true therapeutic benefits of forgiveness, and highlight forgiveness’ potential for undermining the pursuit of justice. Underpinning these criticisms are further, more fundamental debates about the nature of forgiveness and its legitimate place in post-conflict politics.

The nature of forgiveness

At a fundamental level debate about the legitimate role of forgiveness in post-conflict politics rests on contending conceptualisations of what forgiveness itself entails. Although some writers define forgiveness in terms of a decision on the part of the victim of an injustice to relinquish the pursuit of justice for the wrong they suffered, most conceive it in psychological terms.\(^\text{14}\)

In its most common form, forgiveness is conceived as ‘a process of overcoming attitudes of resentment and anger that may persist when one has been injured by wrongdoing.’\(^\text{15}\) Although anger and resentment are natural and understandable responses to undeserved harm, proponents of forgiveness caution that when permitted to exist in excess, they tend toward revenge.\(^\text{16}\) Thus, forgiveness is also conceived in this sense as the counterpoint to revenge. Understood in this way, forgiveness requires the suppression of both the negative emotions precipitated by wrongdoing and the vengeful actions that may result from them. That is, the practice of forgiveness entails a motivational change in the victim of a wrong, from desiring or even seeking revenge against a transgressor to specifically avoiding the pursuit of revenge.\(^\text{17}\) Forgiveness thus demands forbearance, ‘tolerance and restraint in the face of provocation’ and, in this way, is conceived as the ‘exact opposite of vengeance.’\(^\text{18}\)

In contrast to these minimal or restrictive understandings of forgiveness, more expansive definitions mandate the replacement of negative emotions with positive ones and the pursuit

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\(^{14}\) see Peter Digeser, Political Forgiveness, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).


\(^{16}\) Joseph Butler, Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel, (1726), IX, 2.


\(^{18}\) Bole, Christiansen and Hennemeyer, Forgiveness in International Politics, p.41 & 47; Arendt, The Human Condition, 240.
of positive interactions with the wrongdoer. Thus, Enright and the Human Development Study Group do not simply define forgiveness as ‘a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behaviour toward one who has unjustly injured us’ but add the positive requirements that the victim of a wrong foster the ‘undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward’ their transgressor.\footnote{19} This understanding of forgiveness does not simply entail cold indifference toward one who has caused harm but includes positive expressions of emotions, cognition, and behaviour. Forgiveness, conceived in expansive terms, is thus more than ‘accepting or tolerating the injustice’ and more than ‘ceasing our anger toward the injurer.’\footnote{20} It is not a passive relinquishing of the hurt and all that goes with it, or ceasing to express a negative judgment of the wrongdoer’s actions, but an active undertaking on the part of the forgiver.\footnote{21}

At its most demanding extreme, forgiveness thus seeks the active reestablishment of right relationships between victims and perpetrators of wrongs. It is a demanding practice that forms part of the process of reconciliation although it is not synonymous with reconciliation.\footnote{22} Although it is conceived as an outcome in some contexts, reconciliation is most commonly understood as the ‘process of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships.’\footnote{23} It may entail some or all of the following practices: acknowledgment, reparations, restorative punishment, apology, forgiveness, repentance, remembering, and making promises.\footnote{24} Thus, while it is possible to forgive in a minimal sense without reconciling, complete reconciliation requires some form of forgiveness.\footnote{25}

**Political forgiveness**

For proponents of forgiveness, the benefits of forgiving are clear for victims and perpetrators of wrongs alike. Focusing on the psychological impact of anger and resentment, Baumeister, Exline and Sommer suggests that embracing ‘suffering, weakness and distress as part of one’s identity’ leads individuals to ‘relinquish important possibilities for happiness.’\footnote{26}

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item Daniel Philpott, ‘Reconciliation: An Ethic for Responding to Evil in Global Politics’ in Renee Jeffery (ed.), Confronting Evil in International Relations, (New York: Palgrave, 2008).
\end{itemize}}
Second, proponents of forgiveness argue that where revenge potentially commits both victims and perpetrators to iterated cycles of violent retaliation, forgiveness ‘attempts to put an end to something that without interference could do on endlessly.’\(^{27}\) Revenge, it is commonly assumed ‘can generate a never-ending violent cycle, trapping both sides in a dynamic of blow and response, eventually destroying all those involved.’\(^{28}\) Although studies have suggested that revenge may, but need not always generate an on-going cycle of violence, some interpretations of international history afford the desire for revenge a ‘small but indispensable role in spawning two world wars’ and countless other conflicts.\(^{29}\) Forgiveness thus makes it possible for transgressors and those to whom their actions are directed to escape from what Arendt called the ‘predicament of irreversibility.’\(^{30}\) That is, forgiveness allows both victims and perpetrators a means of addressing wrongs, even where the injustice committed cannot be undone.

It is for this reason that Hannah Arendt argued that forgiveness is a necessity in politics. ‘Without being forgiven,’ she wrote, ‘released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences for ever.’\(^{31}\) Forgiveness thus allows both individuals and societies to avoid revenge, overcome resentment and rebuild fractured relationships.\(^{32}\) For this reason, proponents of political forgiveness state that there simply is ‘no future without forgiveness.’

Yet political forgiveness is not an exclusively good, wholly unproblematic practice. In addition to concerns regarding the religious foundations and therapeutic benefits of forgiveness,\(^{33}\) it is in the transposition of the interpersonal practice of forgiveness into politics that many of its most significant problems lie. First, on a fundamental level is the question of whether or not states and other collective entities are actually capable of forgiving. Devoid of

\(^{27}\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 241.
\(^{32}\) Shriver, ‘Where and When,’ 31; in Bole, Christiansen and Hennemeyer, *Forgiveness in International Politics*, 76.
emotions, states cannot resent or overcome resentment.\textsuperscript{34} Of course, states and their representatives ask for and offer forgiveness on a relatively routine basis. But, when states offer forgiveness, are they doing the same thing as individuals? At best we can argue that the sort of forgiveness offered by states on behalf of their communities is of a different character to that granted by individual victims. Political forgiveness will, as Charles Griswold notes, ‘share some characteristics but not others with interpersonal forgiveness.’\textsuperscript{35} In particular, political forgiveness is not necessarily tied to ‘any specific sentiment’ nor does it ‘require the giving up of resentment on the part of the injured.’\textsuperscript{36} Thus, when states ‘forgive’, what they are actually doing is making a commitment to cease behaving toward an offender on the basis of the negative judgment that followed their unjust act. In practical terms, this often amounts to the granting of amnesties, a further problematic aspect of the practice of political forgiveness to be discussed shortly.

What states thus engage in when they offer forgiveness is thus a form of ‘partial forgiveness’ that does not necessarily imply any sort of emotional change on the part of the victim of a wrong. For some critics of political forgiveness, this disjunction is the source of a second controversy surrounding the transposition of interpersonal forgiveness to the social realm. In particular, underpinning their complaint is the widely held principle that ‘only the victim of a crime has the right to forgive the perpetrator.’\textsuperscript{37} Where wrongs have been committed on a purely interpersonal level, upholding this principle is relatively straightforward. In post-conflict contexts, however, where individuals, families, communities, societies and even states have been damaged by wrongdoing it is less so: after all, each of these entities may legitimately claim to be a victim of the injustice committed. While individual victims of human rights violations may claim to be the primary victims of the crime in question, acts of abuse may also harm the primary victims’ families (secondary victims) and communities (tertiary victims). In this sense, proponents of political forgiveness argue that societies and even states may have ‘something to “forgive” – on behalf of the national community.’\textsuperscript{38} Yet, as we will see in the case of South Africa, redefining who counts as a victim does not eliminate the sense of disenfranchisement that the primary victims of serious harms and their families experience when states and institutions pressure them to forgive or offer forgiveness on their behalf.

Finally, the transposition of the interpersonal practice of forgiveness to the realm of politics raises controversies surrounding the sorts of actions that states perform when they forgive.

\textsuperscript{34} Charles Griswold, \textit{Forgiveness}, 179. There is an emerging literature that explores the question of whether states and other collectives can experience emotions. I am yet to be convinced that, in the absence of a body capable of experiencing the physiological aspects of emotion, they can.
\textsuperscript{35} Griswold, \textit{Forgiveness}, 138.
\textsuperscript{36} Griswold, \textit{Forgiveness}, 137.
\textsuperscript{37} Schimmel, \textit{Wounds Not Healed}, 8. Wiesenthal, \textit{The Sunflower}. Although others argue that respect for the person requires that anyone can and ought to offer forgiveness in response to sincere repentance, the notion that only the victim of a wrong can forgive that wrong remains the dominant view.
\textsuperscript{38} Biggar, ‘Conclusion’, 316.
This is particularly the case where the granting of amnesties to the perpetrators of serious wrongs is concerned. Despite the protestations of many proponents of forgiveness (who argue that amnesty and forgiveness are unrelated concepts), amnesty is commonly portrayed as an act of ‘political forgiveness’ or as the public expression of forgiveness.\(^{39}\) In particular, several recent amnesty laws have been defined and even explicitly justified in terms of forgiveness. For example, Annex 6 of the 1994 Lusaka Protocol which sought to bring an end to civil conflict in Angola, called upon ‘all Angolans’ to ‘forgive and forget offenses resulting from the Angolan conflict’ while, on a state level, granting immunity from prosecution commonly associated with amnesty.\(^{40}\) At stake, when states offer forgiveness-as-amnesty, is the sense that wrongdoers are ‘let off the hook’ and that their victims must relinquish the pursuit of justice in response to their suffering.

Forgiveness, Truth and Reconciliation

Although forgiveness has been most prominently associated with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the close association of forgiveness with truth commissions really began in Latin America in the 1980s and early 1990s. This new emphasis on truth emerged in the Latin American context in response to the nature of political repression the region experienced in the 1970s and 1980s. In large part, this was in response to the fact that the military governments of Latin America ‘did not openly kill their opponents’ but rather made them ‘disappear.’\(^{41}\) Following transitions to democracy in many Latin American states, postauthoritarian civilian governments began instituting truth commissions to investigate and document human rights violations that had been kept hidden by previous regimes.\(^{42}\) Rather than simply rendering the truth, however, these early truth commissions revealed just how complicated the relationships between truth, justice and forgiveness could be, particularly when states and institutions imposed forgiveness processes on the victims of gross violations of human rights.

In 1991 a Commission on the Truth for El Salvador was established with a mandate to investigate ‘serious acts of violence’ that had occurred during a civil war fought between the military-led government and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a coalition of five left-wing militia groups. Its report, ‘From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador’ was presented on 15 March 1993. It recommended that members of the Salvadoran armed forces, civil services, and judiciary who were ‘personally implicated in the perpetration or cover-up of serious acts of violence, or who did not fulfil their professional obligation to initiate or cooperate in the investigation and punishment of such acts’ be


\(^{40}\) In Mallinder, *Amnesty, Human Rights, and Political Transitions*, 56.


\(^{42}\) see for example Uruguay and Argentina
dismissed from their positions. Among these acts, the commission documented some twenty-two thousand complaints of extra-judicial killings, disappearances, and torture, including the murders of Monsignor Oscar Romero while conducting Mass in a San Salvador church in 1980 and six Jesuit priests nine years later.

Significantly, El Salvador’s Truth Commission sought to end impunity for human rights violations by naming names. ‘Not to name names,’ it argued in its final report, ‘would reinforce the very impunity to which the parties instructed the Commission to put to an end.’ On 20 March 1993, however, just five days after the commission released its report, the legislative assembly of El Salvador passed ‘a sweeping amnesty law’ that called for the ‘extinction of both criminal and civil liability’ and ‘conferred unconditional amnesty to any individual (including guerrillas) who perpetrated politically motivated crimes prior to 27 October 1987.’ In doing so, President Cristiani, referred to as the ‘peace President’ in the commission’s report, stated that the ‘Salvadoran people need “to forgive and forget this painful past”.’ The ‘immediate, general and total amnesty,’ he argued, would ‘end the temptation to seek revenge’ now that the truth had been revealed. ‘What is important now,’ he said, is ‘to erase, eliminate and forget everything in the past.’ Amnesty-as-forgiveness was thus conceived as the state’s contribution to societal forgiveness and specifically instituted to limit the potential negative effects associated with making the truth about the past public. As subsequent president, Francisco Flores later argued in response to calls to lift the amnesty law thereby allowing criminal trials to take place, ‘amnesty carried with it the concept of forgiveness, which…made national reconciliation possible after the conflict ended.’

In the Salvadoran case, victims were thus simply instructed to forgive and with this, state-enforced amnesia was enacted with little appreciation of a potential disjuncture between the needs of the state and the desires of the primary victims of abuse. As torture survivor, Cecilia Moran Santos explained, ‘We have been forced to forget, to forgive and to reconcile with the idea that there are no rights, that we have to assimilate and recognize that nothing will happen to the perpetrators, that there is no need to impart justice.’ For victims and survivors like Santos, the problem with Cristiani’s amnesty was thus two-fold. First, by defining amnesty in

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47 U.S. Institute of Peace, ‘From Madness to Hope,’ 10; Pope, ‘Convergence of Forgiveness and Justice,’ 815.
49 In Davis, Seeking Human Rights Justice, 76.
terms of forgiveness, the state ignored victims’ rights to choose whether or not to forgive. As Davis argues in this vein, ‘[b]y imposing an amnesty to protect themselves from legal accountability, Salvadoran officials stole the victims’ right to forgive. They merely hid impunity beneath the mask of forgiveness.’ 50 Thus, second, and following from this, was the fact that Cristiani’s amnesty provided impunity for the perpetrators of gross violations of human rights. This, as the colleague of the murdered Jesuit priests, José Maria Tojeira argued, was ‘an insult to the victims of El Salvador…The amnesty law attempts to say that nothing happened here, that the living are the ones who count and the dead don’t matter.’ 51 That is, critics of the Cristiani’s amnesty refuted the claim that forgiveness and reconciliation necessitated the abrogation of justice.

Despite their opposition to the amnesty law then, not all or even most victims and critics were wholly against the idea of forgiving the perpetrators of human rights violations. On the contrary, in the aftermath of the Jesuit murders Tojeira argued that ‘as Christians and as human beings we have the moral obligation to forgive and promote reconciliation.’ 52 However, he explicitly sought to distinguish interpersonal or moral forgiveness from state instituted amnesties or pardons. The second of these forms of forgiveness, Tojeira argued, is only possible when the truth has been revealed and when ‘real reconciliation’ has been achieved in El Salvador. 53 Until then, he argued, to talk about ‘any pardon would be a slap in the face to justice.’ 54 Tojeira thus argued that the perpetrators of human rights violations ought to be presented with two options: ‘confess and ask society for forgiveness, or stand trial.’ 55 Although this ‘truth for pardon’ suggestion ‘was never adopted,’ a modified version of the idea later found form in South Africa’s ‘truth for amnesty’ approach, which combined elements of truth, justice, and forgiveness in the pursuit of reconciliation.

Forgiveness at the South African TRC
It was with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the now commonplace association of forgiveness and TRCs entered international public consciousness. The course of action chosen for South Africa was thus a “third way,” a compromise between the extremes of Nuremberg trials and blanket amnesty or national amnesia. 56 This third way was the agreement that individual conditional amnesties would be granted in exchange for the truth. The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, signed by President Nelson Mandela in mid-1995, which established the South African TRC thus provided for the establishment of an Amnesty Committee, making the TRC the first of

50 Davis, Seeking Human Rights, 24.
51 In Oscar Avila, Chicago Tribune, March 1, 2009.
52 Tojeira, interview in Envio, No.113, (December 1990), http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/2650
53 Interview in Envio
54 Interview in Envio
56 Tutu, No Future, 30.
its kind ‘to be given the power to grant amnesty.’ Here again, amnesty was conceived as state or institutional level forgiveness.

In contrast to the case of El Salvador, in South Africa it was the TRC itself that explicitly promoted forgiveness. In particular, its commissioners promulgated the idea that while forgiveness in the form of amnesty would be forthcoming from the state, it should also be extended to the perpetrators of crimes by their victims and their victims’ families. Thus, although the TRC was more sensitive to victims’ perspectives than had been the case in El Salvador, it nonetheless overtly directed the South African forgiveness agenda. In particular, commissioners not only ‘neglected or denied...[the] legitimacy of victims’ anger and unwillingness to forgive’ and routinely praised ‘witnesses who did not express any desire for revenge’ but explicitly asked testifiers if they were willing to forgive their transgressors. Annelies Verdoolaege thus estimates that in 70% of testimonies heard before the Human Rights Violations hearings, ‘the concept of reconciliation was either evoked by the commissioners themselves or the commissioners urged the victims to express a willingness to forgive and reconcile.’ Thus, while Tutu attempted to reassure victims that ‘in forgiving, people are not being asked to forget’, thereby distancing the South African position from Christiani’s ‘forgive and forget’ policy, it remained the case that forgiveness was an expectation of the TRC process.

Although the South African TRC process was more sensitive to victims’ individual perspectives than had been the case in El Salvador, however, a disjuncture between state and individual forgiveness that quickly emerged as the TRC process unfolded. As du Bois-Pedain notes, the ‘expectation that amnesty applicants would use amnesty hearings to apologise to their victims, and that victims would rise to the occasion by extending their forgiveness to them’ based on Christian ideals or the principle of ubuntu turned out to be ‘naive’. In part, this was due to the fact that the Amnesty Committee did not require an apology or expression or remorse as a prerequisite for amnesty. More serious, however, was the sense that, through the auspices of the TRC, the state was placing undue pressure on victims to forgive serious injustices. As one woman stated:

What makes me really 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

60 Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness, 219.
bad, but what is much worse, what makes me even more angry, is that they are trying to dictate my forgiveness. 62

As another victim said, ‘I refuse not to be angry and cannot forgive. What is even more difficult is to have someone tell me I should not still feel like this’. 63 Thus, while some victims found the experience of forgiving as part of the TRC process cathartic, for others the expectation of forgiveness from the perpetrators of wrongs and those administering the TRC was a further affront to their dignity and self-worth. 64 As Annelies Verdoolaege notes, in the charged context of the TRC, ‘victims had to be very decisive and strong-minded to refuse to reconcile’ or grant forgiveness to a perpetrator. 65

However, many of the victims who testified before the TRC were not opposed to forgiveness per se but rather distinguished between externally mandated forgiveness (which they opposed) and personal choice over whether and when to forgive (which they supported). In particular, for many victims of abuse and their families, the very problem lay with the connection forged by the TRC between state amnesty and personal forgiveness. For some, the granting of amnesty seemed to mandate forgiveness on their part. Indeed, the sense that the granting of amnesties in some way breached the principle that ‘only the victims have the authority to forgive’ was common throughout the TRC process and served to highlight the fact that many participants conceived forgiveness and amnesty as being directly related. For example, in response to an application for amnesty made by the individuals responsible for killing her son, Joyce Mthimkulu objected, ‘They are not asking forgiveness from us, the people who have lost their loved ones. They are asking forgiveness from the government. They did not do nothing [sic] to the government. What they did, they did to us.’ 66 It thus seems that some victims did not accept the idea that the state had something to forgive but rather retained the notion that forgiveness it the sole prerogative of the primary victims and their families.

At the same time, however, others conceived amnesty and forgiveness separately and, in doing so, were able to reconcile in their minds the fact that a perpetrator they were not willing to forgive would, nonetheless, be amnestied. That is, they accepted that the state could grant amnesty, but individual forgiveness would remain their personal prerogative. This was the

64 Tristan Anne Borer, ‘Reconciling South Africa or South Africans? Cautionary Notes from the TRC’, African Studies Quarterly (2004), 824. See also Brudholm, Resentment’s Virtue, 22, on various views on whether or not testifying proved cathartic for those who testified before the TRC.
66 Quoted in Biggar, ‘Conclusion,’ 315.
view expressed in the testimony of Candice van der Linde at the amnesty hearing of Robert McBride, the former member of the ANC responsible for bombing a beachfront bar in Durban in 1986 and, in doing so, killing her mother. McBride was convicted of the attack in 1988 but released in 1992 ‘as one of the few handpicked ANC members whose release was specifically demanded by the ANC as a precondition for continuing their negotiations with the apartheid government.’ In response to McBride’s lack of remorse and failure to attempt to reconcile with her, van der Linde said, ‘The last thing I have to say to you is that you were convicted of murder so whether you get amnesty or not, you are a murderer in my eyes and the only way you can make me forgive you for that is the way you decide to. You’re the only one who can do it, it’s really and truly up to you whether we, the victims and myself, forgive you.’ With this, van der Linde reiterated the point that, whatever the state’s decision regarding amnesty, forgiveness was a purely interpersonal matter to be negotiated by victims and perpetrators. This sentiment, as we will see, was expressed in its strongest terms yet at the Solomon Islands TRC.

Forgiveness at the Solomon Islands TRC

On 28 August 2008, the Parliament of the Solomon Islands passed a bill legislating the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission for the Solomon Islands modelled on the South African TRC. On 29 April 2009, just eight months after the TRC Bill passed into law, Archbishop Desmond Tutu launched the Solomon Islands TRC. As Tutu stated at the opening, ‘Many people didn’t believe that South Africa would ever become a united and peaceful country...but thanks to the prayers of many around the world, people chose forgiveness and reconciliation instead of revenge and retribution’ before adding that ‘what had happened in South Africa would also happen in Solomon Islands.’ As we will see, however, the Solomon Islands TRC departed ways with the South African commission in several important respects.

Unlike the South African TRC, the Solomon Islands TRC is a hybrid commission, presided over by three commissioners from the Solomon Islands and two international commissioners. Its mandate is to investigate and report on human rights violations that took place during the Tensions, to provide ‘opportunities for affected parties...to tell their story,’ and to recommend ‘policy options or measures that may prevent future repetition of similar events.’ Its activities have included public and closed hearings with victims and perpetrators of the Tensions, both in the capital Honiara and the regions, compiling more than 4000 witness statements, exhuming bodies, mapping reconciliation processes already underway,

facilitating additional activities to ‘complement existing reconciliation activities’, and initiating national discussions about reconciliation. Of course, foremost amongst its aims, however, was recovering the truth about what happened during the Solomon Islands’ civil conflict. As the Chairman of the TRC, the Reverend Samuel Ata noted at the end of the first day of public hearings in Honiara, ‘[t]he aim of this public hearing is to put an end to the silence.’

 Forgiveness in TRC Testimonies

Like in the case of South Africa, throughout the TRC’s public hearings talk of forgiveness was a prominent feature. At the regional hearing in Gizo, for example, around one-third of all testimonies included an offer of forgiveness. In this context, victims offered forgiveness for a range of crimes including murder, harassment, forced displacement, assault, extortion, rape and abduction. In his testimony, Felix Kojamana told of how his brother had been shot and killed by militants at Barabararakasa village:

The five men attacked my brother and shot him but my brother tried to escape. There was only one bullet left so they fire at him but missed him. They went back to the canoe and loaded the guns….A militant shot my brother who fell and died instantly. By then the militants took most of our valuable things, burnt most of the houses, including church buildings, and keep shooting at people fleeing into the bush.

In what became an almost standard closing statement at some hearings, Kojamana finished his testimony by appealing ‘to anyone who is not in good terms with me to come forward so I can forgive you, so we can live in peace and harmony.’ Kojamana’s closing statement reflected an often-repeated sentiment at the Solomon Islands TRC that forgiveness is an interpersonal practice that requires the proximate, physical coming together of victims and perpetrators. Thus, although some victims made general statements of forgiveness, calls for perpetrators to come forward to be forgiven were more common. Simeon Vanjua’s testimony captures this idea: ‘For those of you were involved in that incident, wherever you are, whether you’re around in the crowd or somewhere else, I would like to say I forgive you, “Lets forgive and forget the past.” I would like them to come forward, if we meet here in

74 Testimony of Felix Kojamana, p.836.
Gizo, or at home, I forgive you, on whatever you did to me, my family and the people of my village.\textsuperscript{75}

At the same time, recognition that forgiveness may be a mutual or bilateral practice enacted between individuals was expressed in several testimonies. In his testimony, John Fataka told of how he was brutally assaulted, abducted and detained by a militant group during the tensions. Although he did not acknowledge wrongdoing on his own part in his statement, he closed by apologising to those who assaulted him:

I want to tell the people who caused me this pain and, if they are listening today, that I am sorry if I have wronged them in any way. Please forgive me and if they heard my name please if they want to reconcile with me, please come forward. If they want to make reconciliation according to our custom, church or other modes, please do not hesitate to contact me.\textsuperscript{76}

This practice, of simultaneously requesting and offering forgiveness also featured in several testimonies provided by ex-combatants. As an ex-combatant and former member of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force from Malaita, Alick Saeni told the TRC, ‘I am here to forgive and I am here to ask forgiveness from others. That’s the reason why I am here.’\textsuperscript{77} Saeni went on to explicitly forgive his superiors and even the RAMSI personnel who imprisoned him before specifically addressing ‘the people of this nation, especially those in the provinces, especially Malaita.’ He stated:

I humbly ask you to forgive me, for whatever I have done during that time, whatever hatred or what you might have never dreamt that one day something like that was going to happen. Seeing that it has happened already and in the system, I beg you and ask you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive me, please, forgive me. If you forgive me, you also forget what I had done wrong.\textsuperscript{78}

The association of forgiving with forgetting was also prominent in the testimony Daniel Tai Faafunua, a former Minister in the Solomon Islands Government and Malaitan ex-combatant:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{75} Testimony of Simeon Vanjuja, p.844.
\textsuperscript{76} Testimony of John Fataka, p.909.
\textsuperscript{77} Testimony of Alick Saenni, p.1170.
\textsuperscript{78} Testimony of Alick Saenni, p.1171.
\end{flushleft}
I just want to say that I come here to forgive those who did bad things to my relatives; my uncles, my aunties, my cousins and my brothers and sisters. I forgive you with a good heart. When we forgive we forget. I also ask you people around Malaita and Solomon Islands to consider forgiving me too for anything that I did as a person or as a leader I ask you to forgive me.  

More common, among the ex-combatants who appeared before the TRC was, however, a more straightforward plea for forgiveness. Of the 34 ex-combatants who gave testimonies, 22 explicitly asked for forgiveness, while a further three apologised for their actions.

Unlike in the cases of El Salvador and South Africa, however, in the Solomon Islands the nature of the forgiveness being sought and offered appeared to simply be accepted by victims and perpetrators alike. In contrast to the case of South Africa, commissioners of the Solomon Islands TRC did not ask victims if they forgave their assailants. Rather, it seems that offers of and requests for forgiveness were freely tendered. As such, the issue of forced interpersonal forgiveness did not attract significant controversy in this case.

Amnesty

Garnering considerable controversy has, however, been the issue of amnesty. Unlike the South African TRC, the Solomon Islands TRC does not have the power to grant amnesties in exchange for truth. The TRC Act 2008 declares that neither the disclosure of facts or statements made to the TRC nor the ‘findings or recommendations of the Commission’ shall ‘be construed as...qualifying or entitling any person to any amnesty or further amnesty except amnesty or immunity granted in terms of the Amnesty Acts 2000 or 2001.’ The Amnesty Acts of 2000 and 2001 were the result of provisions included in the 2000 Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) which attempted to bring the Solomon Islands conflict to an end. The TPA included a general amnesty for ‘[m]embers, leaders and other civilian advisors associated’ with the warring parties, and any Police, military and prison service officers ‘who participated in military operations during the course of the ethnic crisis.’ The amnesty, formally instituted by the Solomon Islands Government Amnesty Acts of 2000 and 2001, provided immunity from prosecution for criminal acts perpetrated in connection with the

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79 Testimony of Daniel Tai Faafunua, 1184.
80 However, the clustering of forgiveness statements at particular hearings and in particular places – eg. Gizo – gives rise to the suggestion that some other factor may possibly have been at play here. Although there is no systematic evidence to this effect, anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that one of the individuals employed to provide counselling to victims prior to testifying may have encouraged testifiers to forgive. In the absence of reliable information, however, it is impossible to provide an accurate account of what advice was given to testifiers during confidential counselling sessions.
82 Townsville Peace Agreement, 2.3.2.ii(b).
Tensions, including ‘killing in combat conditions or in connection with the armed conflict.’\textsuperscript{83} Controversially, the amnesty law included immunity from prosecution for murder but ‘did not apply to any criminal acts done in violation of international humanitarian laws, [or] human rights violations or abuses.’\textsuperscript{84} However, as precisely what constituted a human rights violation was never specified, the limitations of this amnesty remain unclear.

In 2003, after the TPA had failed to halt the violence, Prime Minister, Sir Allan Kemakeza appealed to the Solomon Islands’ regional neighbours for assistance to quell his country’s increasing insecurity and instability. On 24 July 2003, the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in Honiara, bringing with it a wide reaching mandate to restore public safety and security, and reform the ‘machinery of government’, economic governance, and law and order.\textsuperscript{85} With its strong law and order mandate, RAMSI set about removing weapons from the streets and arresting those suspected of involvement in Tensions-related crimes. Ignoring the terms of the SIG Amnesty Acts, RAMSI officials argued that they could not reliably adjudicate who ought to qualify for amnesty and determined that ‘all allegations of criminal behaviour would be investigated.’\textsuperscript{86} By the end of 2003, just five months after arriving in the Solomon Islands, RAMSI had arrested 1340 individuals, including almost all of the militia leaders.\textsuperscript{87} What became known as the ‘Tensions Trials’ began in 2005 with several high profile figures sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. Although many defendants appealed to the Amnesty Act, the vast majority were denied: the TRC Report notes just one case in which the two co-defendants from Malaita were granted amnesty for abducting a man from Guadalcanal suspected of involvement with a militant group.\textsuperscript{88}

Both the failure of RAMSI to honour the Amnesty Acts and the TRC’s lack of a mandate to award amnesties proved particularly controversial at the commission’s public hearings. As the TRC Act states, although witness statements are ‘inadmissible against the person in any action, suit, or proceeding’, and ‘facts or information disclosed or statements made’ cannot be considered ‘admissible evidence in any processing before a court of law’, the TRC was authorised to recommend criminal proceedings.\textsuperscript{89} At the outset this provision thus left open the possibility that, on the basis of evidence heard, the Commission would refer a new set of cases to the High Court for prosecution. For perpetrators of crimes committed during The Tensions, this lack of immunity proved especially problematic.

\textsuperscript{83} Townsville Peace Agreement, 2.3.2.ii(b).
\textsuperscript{84} Solomon Islands Amnesty Act 2001, 3.5.
\textsuperscript{86} Watson, ‘A Model Pacific Solution?’, 31.
\textsuperscript{88} TRC Report, 328.
\textsuperscript{89} Solomon Islands TRC Act, Articles 7, 5(1) & 20(f)
More than half the ex-combatants from Malaita who testified before the TRC explicitly raised the issue of amnesty, in contrast to the sole Guadalcanal combatant who did so. Criticising the Australian government for its interference in Solomon Island affairs and assumption that its ‘boomerang aid’ had brought peace, Lionel Lapu from Guadalcanal argued that the Amnesty Act ‘belongs to… Solomon Islanders’ and is ‘the very act and agreement that brokered peace and harmony to our nation.’

For Malaitan militants who spoke the promise of amnesty had been central to their agreement to sign the TPA and RAMSI’s failure to uphold the amnesty a cause of ongoing tension. Andrew Fioga thus argued that the TPA:

…was an Agreement which became something like a Constitution of the land; all our hopes were there. Somehow after the TPA, what expected there did not eventuate. We thought amnesty was granted to us; because of that Agreement, all of us signed. We signed this because we thought we were going to be granted amnesty. We fulfilled all those conditions that we were required under the TPA. When the intervention came in, this did not work, we thought this was the Constitution of the land. These were gazetted Acts of the Parliament but they were ignored by the intervention force. This landed us behind bars. When we were behind bars, we tried our best to come out. Why did we have to sign and yet we are put behind bars; where is our amnesty? Our rights have been deprived.

Similarly, Robert Spencer recalled:

When we went to sign the TPA, we were very happy, over happy, all the hard work was over, every sleepless night that we spent out on the boundaries, mosquitoes fed on us until they were satisfied. No, all happiness was turned around; everyone who signed the Agreement went behind bars….What about the amnesty, was it not passed by Parliament?

The ‘point’, as Nick Oxley added in his testimony was that ‘we need amnesty for some of our boys who are still in prison.’ For most of the Malaitan ex-combatants who testified, this failure to uphold the amnesty outlined in the TPA continues to be a significant stumbling block for the achievement of reconciliation in the Solomon Islands. For them, the expectation appears to be that state-level forgiveness is a prerequisite for reconciliation.

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90 Testimony, 1118.
92 Testimony of Robert Spencer, 1153.
93 Testimony of Nick Oxley, 1160.
The Forgiveness Bill

In many ways, the controversy that emerged over the issue of amnesty at the TRC was foreshadowed much earlier. Even before the TRC had begun its hearings, the Solomon Islands Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace, Sam Iduri, proposed the introduction of a ‘Forgiveness Bill’ to provide amnesty for perpetrators giving evidence before the TRC.\(^{94}\) In part, this was proposed to allay fears that testimonies presented before the TRC, though inadmissible in court, would lead to new criminal investigations and trials. As such, the Forgiveness Bill proposed to instate something akin to South Africa’s truth for amnesty provision. By framing the proposed amnesty provision as a ‘Forgiveness Bill’, supporters explicitly conceived amnesty as the state expression of forgiveness, as had been the case in El Salvador and South Africa. However, as critics of the bill highlighted, with this came the same set of problems associated with transposing interpersonal forgiveness to the political realm that marred the reconciliation processes in South Africa and El Salvador. In particular, the Chairman of Transparency International, Australia, Bob Pollard, argued that ‘forgiveness is something that can only be given by the victim to the offender’ and, as such, there is no way ‘to legislate for forgiveness.’ In addition, he suggested that offering amnesties to the perpetrators of serious crimes ‘could actually offend those who suffered during the civil war’ and, in doing so, argued that the Forgiveness Bill may even ‘set the country’s healing process back.’\(^{95}\)

In contrast to Pollard however, the Solomon Islands Western Province Premier, George Solingo Lilo argued that ‘there will be no nation building and reconciliation and our people will forever remain blemished if we fail to forgive each other and forget the past.’ Although he did not explicitly mention the proposed Forgiveness Bill, he alluded to the question of granting amnesties to the perpetrators of serious crimes when he acknowledged the difficulty of the task faced by the TRC in attempting to ‘reconcile discordant elements and make them cling together in one society’. Lilo argued that the members of the TRC ‘may have to put themselves in the position of those perpetrators of these gross human rights violations, who genuinely demonstrates remorse and regret and were willing to ask for forgiveness and help our society move forward.’\(^{96}\) With this, Lilo echoed the sentiment found so offensive to Trojeira, that post-conflict reconciliation processes ought to focus on the needs of living perpetrators rather than dead victims and their surviving relatives.

\(^{94}\) ‘Solomon Islands Government plans Forgiveness Bill’, Solomon Star, (20 July 2009) available at \url{http://www.islandsbusiness.com/news/index_dynamic/containerNameToReplace=MiddleMiddle/focusModuleID=130/focusContentID=16058/tableName=mediaRelease/overrideSkinName=newsArticle-full.tpl} (2/05/2011).


\(^{96}\) ‘Forgive and forget’, Solomon Star, 2 February 2010
The proposed Forgiveness Bill also provoked controversy at the TRC. While several victims criticised the proposed bill, arguing that it would not help the reconciliation process, many ex-combatants from both Guadalcanal and Malaita spoke in favour of its passage and implementation. In his testimony, Joseph Sangu recommended:

The Solomon Islands Government should and [sic] enact the Forgiveness Bill as a means to fast track the healing process that our country is now embarking on. This will also enable more people to come forward and assist in peace and reconciliation and healing processes. A lot of people who were caught up and were labelled by the law as perpetrators or ex-militants – a lot of them want to come forward, but not until this piece of legislation; there must be a Forgiveness Bill if this country is to go forward.

More succinctly, Daniel Tai Faafunua recommended that ‘through the report of the TRC…A Forgiveness bill should be in place and all ethnic-related crimes be forgiven and forgotten, including any criminal records of any individuals affected during the cause of the ethnic tension.’ Of course, ex-combatant support for a proposed amnesty is wholly unsurprising: after all, it is their interests that are best served by the promise of impunity.

Despite the fervent pleas of many ex-combatants, the TRC Report does not support the promotion of the Forgiveness Bill for two main reasons. First, the Commissioners argue that granting impunity to the perpetrators of serious crimes will not help reconciliation:

The Commission considers that a Forgiveness Bill…would be envisaging some kind of process to remove the responsibility for crimes committed during conflict from former militants and perpetrators and rehabilitate them fully into society, without conceding justice to the victims. Impunity is not helpful for reconciliation.

This marks a significant departure from the South African TRC Report which argues that amnesty is not a form of impunity but an element of restorative justice that is concerned with ‘correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships – with healing, harmony and reconciliation.’ In contrast, the Solomon Islands TRC Report makes it clear that although

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97 Testimony of Luke Taula, 981; Testimony of Moses Wakwolly, 991.
98 Testimony of Joseph Sangu, 1097.
99 Testimony of Daniel Tai Faafunua, 1182.
100 TRC Report, Volume 3, 746.
restorative justice is necessary for reconciliation, it does not negate the need for retributive or criminal justice:

For victims who received inhuman treatments or deep wounds to their lives demand restorative justice. This does not evade the legal justice process. The perpetrator must face justice.  

This sentiment directly contradicts Tutu’s statement following a visit to Rwanda quoted in the South African TRC Report: ‘I said to them in Kigali, “unless you move beyond justice in the form of a tribunal, there is no hope for Rwanda.” Confession, forgiveness and reconciliation in the lives of nations are not just airy-fairy religious and spiritual things, nebulous and unrealistic. They are the stuff of practical politics.’ Thus, while both commissions agreed that reconciliation requires justice beyond mere criminal trials, the Solomon Islands commissioners were firm in their view that restorative justice in no way eliminates the need for perpetrators to be held account for their actions in a court of law.

Second, and commenting on the explicit connection made between amnesty and forgiveness by the proposed Bill, the authors of the TRC Report emphasised that forgiveness is a fundamentally personal practice rather than being the business of the state. ‘Forgiveness,’ the Report makes clear, ‘is the sole prerogative and domain of the victims of the conflict, and them alone.’ The idea that forgiveness is personal and, the associated argument that the state and other institutions should therefore leave forgiveness to individuals, is an often-repeated refrain in the TRC Report. For them, forgiveness is a deeply personal practice that cannot be imposed upon victims or, indeed, expected from them. Thus, although the TRC Report cites forgiveness as an important component of reconciliation, it notes that ‘no preconditions’ including that which claims that forgiveness is a prerequisite for reconciliation, should ‘be placed in the path of reconciliation.’ In large part this is due to recognition, on the part of the Commissioners, that reconciliation processes often place an undue or unfair burden on victims:

In the process of national reconciliation it is often the victims, who have suffered the most, who are thought to be the most duty-bund to reconcile. It is their forgiveness

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102 South Africa TRC Report, 713.
103 South African TRC Report, Vol.5, p.400
104 TRC Report, Volume 3,746.
105 TRC Report, Volume 3, 706.
that puts the past to rest. Victims are asked to exchange the recognition of their pain for their rights to justice.\textsuperscript{106}

Thus, while the South African TRC Report acknowledged that forgiveness can be difficult and cautioned against taking forgiveness ‘for granted’, the Solomon Islands commission went one step further in its recognition of the difficulties faced by victims when asked to bear individual responsibility for societal reconciliation.

**Conclusion**

In recent years, forgiveness as an overt, explicit practice has emerged as a key expectation of many notable post-conflict reconciliation processes. Despite controversies surrounding the appropriateness of asking victims of serious human rights violations to forgive their assailants, proponents of the practice continue to promote forgiveness as the means to broader societal reconciliation. In recognition of the fact that to be effective, reconciliation must take place at a range of different levels, forgiveness it thus often pursued simultaneously at the state or societal, institutional and individual or interpersonal levels. As we have seen, however, it is in the relationships between each of these levels of forgiveness that some of the most serious problems associated with the practice are found. From a bottom-up perspective, critics question whether it is in fact meaningful to describe the actions of states in terms of forgiveness and maintain that forgiveness is, by its very nature, an exclusively interpersonal practice. From a top-down perspective, critics also highlight the problems that arise when states and institutions define the parameters of forgiveness and impose the practice on individual victims, whether through encouragement or coercion.

In the cases of El Salvador and South Africa, post-conflict forgiveness was predominantly a top-down phenomenon. In El Salvador, forgiveness-as-amnesty was imposed by the state, bringing with it the expectation that individual victims would simply forgive and forget the crimes of the past. Unlike in the case of South Africa, however, in the absence of any forum at which victims and perpetrators could come together, this individual forgiveness was to be practiced on private, largely unilateral, basis. In the case of South Africa, the provision of an institutional setting in which victims and perpetrators could make statements about their actions and request and offer forgiveness, proved a double-edged sword. On one side, by bringing some victims and perpetrators together, the South African TRC facilitated the practice of genuine, proximate, interpersonal forgiveness. It allowed victims and perpetrators to address one another and, where willing, to begin enacting the process of forgiving in either is minimal or maximal form. On the other side, however, the institutionalisation of interpersonal forgiveness provided a context in which individual victims could be pressured into forgiving. By granting amnesties and promoting interpersonal forgiveness, in practice the

\textsuperscript{106} TRC Report, Volume 3, 712.
South African TRC thus diverged from the view that forgiveness is the sole prerogative of the individual victim.

In the case of the Solomon Islands, tension between bottom-up (victim-led, interpersonal) and top-down (state or institutionally directed) forgiveness has been played out in explicit terms. Supporting a top-down, societal approach, some members of Parliament and ex-combatants have campaigned in favour of state-led forgiveness-as-amnesty. By contrast, the TRC has explicitly moved away from the sort of top-down, state-led model of forgiveness that was implemented in the cases of El Salvador and South Africa. Instead it has promoted a more victim-centred approach that recognises not only that forgiveness is a fundamentally interpersonal practice but that when it is conceived as a core component of reconciliation, can place excessive burdens on victims who are already suffering from the harms they have endured. This is not, however, to suggest that the Solomon Islands TRC finds no place for forgiveness in broader communal or societal reconciliation process. On the contrary, forgiveness is the first aspect of reconciliation discussed in the TRC Report.  

Rather, the Report simply recognises that ‘Forgiveness, healing and reconciliation are deeply personal processes.’ In this, it marks a significant development in the recognition of the needs and right of victims in post-conflict reconciliation processes.

However, as noted earlier, just as victimhood is not the exclusive preserve of the primary victims of human rights violations, so too reconciliation must take place not just between individuals but between groups, communities and societies as a whole. Could it be the case, then, that in conceiving forgiveness as the sole prerogative of individual victims we preclude the possibility of broader societal forgiveness and, indeed, reconciliation? That in pursuing this understanding of forgiveness, we trade the needs of fractured societies off against the needs of individual victims? This, as Bole, Christiansen and Hennemeyer argue, need not be the case. ‘Personal acts,’ they argue, ‘do have political consequences.’ Indeed, it is often ‘personal “prophetic” acts’ that prove ‘the most effectual political gestures of forgiveness.’ After all, who can forget the lasting political impact Nelson Mandela’s decision to forgive those who incarcerated him for almost three decades?

In the end it remains to be seen whether reconciliation processes in the Solomon Islands continue to conceive forgiveness in interpersonal terms or whether the rights of victims to choose to forgive become overrun by demands for a state-led, forgiveness-as-amnesty, reconciliation agenda. In the meantime, the Solomon Islands TRC has avoided significant controversies surrounding the transposition of interpersonal forgiveness to the political realm

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107 TRC Report, Vol.3, 705
109 Bole, Christiansen and Hennemeyer, Forgiveness in International Politics, 76.
by recognising that reconciliation is a multifaceted phenomenon in which addressing the needs of victims plays a crucial role.